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**OUR
DISCOVERY AT
LATHROP**



HAD just graduated as a student, from the Long Island medical college, in Brooklyn, and as I needed some recreation after my long course of study in that institution, I determined to take a

trip across the Western plains, my ultimate destination being San Francisco.

To a bosom friend, Geoffrey Dennin, a young lawyer I described the prospective pleasure of such a trip, and he at length consented to become my traveling companion.

About three weeks later, after various unimportant experiences, Dennin and I found ourselves in a small mining town which I shall call Lathrop, about 130 miles west of Denver.

We had just registered at the chief "hotel" of which the place boasted—a rude two-story frame structure, and were at once keenly eyed by the loungers and guests, who evidently considered us very stupid specimens of the "tenderfoot" variety.

The most important servant of the house was a stalwart, full-bearded man of thirty-five, whose garb denoted him to be a miner, and whom everybody addressed as "Ike."

It was just dark when we signified our intention to visit the apartment assigned to us, and Ike was deputed to escort us thither.

Ascending a dark flight of stairs, he led us into a passage, at the end of which was our room, a medium-sized, carpetless apartment, containing two small cots, a couple of dilapidated chairs, a wash-stand and a little round table, upon which he placed the candle, saying to me, in a low, mysterious tone, his impudent manner changed suddenly to one of a certain respect:

"We looked for you two days ago, doctor—you and your friend here—and had begun to get pretty skeery when we found you didn't show up. Everything's all right, so far; there's no suspicion. 'You've got what you need in them things there'—pointing to our valises—"and you'll not set to work till the house's all quiet, for walls have ears. Pete'll close up to-night extra early in order to give you more time to do the job. You'll find it there," he concluded, indicating with a jerk of his thumb a side door in the room, and at the same time backing suddenly to the entrance with an expression of fear in his ugly face, while his owl eyes kept constantly winking.

Utterly amazed, I tried to speak, tried to find voice to ask him what he was driving at. Indeed, Dennin's tongue seemed tied too, and the fellow had already backed out of the room, and shut the door quickly, and we heard him go bounding down the dark stairs as if a ghost was after him, before either of us could open our mouths to articulate a sound.

"Well," said I, finally, turning to Dennin, who appeared to be coming out of a stupor, "What do you make out of this experience?"

"I make out of it," he replied, with an effort, "that we are in for some strange adventure. What did he mean by it? 'Setting to work'—'doing the job'—to say nothing of what else he said."

"Evidently we had that out by opening that side door which he indicated. And he called me doctor. All this looks like a real mystery, Dennin. Shall we follow it up?"

"I'm with you," said Dennin, starting toward the side door.

I caught him by the arm.

"Go slow, my boy. Remember his warning about walls having ears and not going to work till the house was quiet. Let's wait and ask no questions, lest we betray ourselves. The more I think of it the more I am con-

vinced that he has in some unaccountable way mistaken us for other people. Who? What sort? Of course I cannot conjecture. But certain it is, we are not supposed to be here for any good purpose. Didn't you notice how frightened he looked when he spoke of it?"

"Yes," said Dennin, "and that leads me to believe we are on the point of making some important discovery—I cannot imagine what—but which will bring that villain, and perhaps the landlord himself, into trouble."

Having delivered himself of this sage conclusion, Dennin washed himself, and after I had done likewise we went below to see about supper.

Ike was not visible, and the landlord, who was waiting on some new customers, directed us to the dining-room, slyly handing me, as he did so, something wrapped in paper, which felt like a key.

On sitting down to supper I opened



A MURDERED WOMAN.

the paper, and, sure enough, I found it contained a door key, while on the paper were scrawled several lines, which I made out to read as follows:

"This Key fits the Dore between the rooms—don't kum to the Bar agin to-nite, and luk out for people in Room on t'other side of Partition—you will find Bags in Closet in Room."

After supper we went directly to our room, taking with us a large lamp which had been lighted for our use. It was then eleven o'clock.

Through the partition on the right, opposite the door opening into the other room, we heard voices, and listened. It was some miners, judging by their talk, discussing business matters.

Soon after we heard them go out; the house became as still as death. Then, with a strange feeling creeping over me, I bade Dennin take up the lamp, and, going on tiptoe to the side door, I unlocked it very carefully, so as not to make the slightest noise, and slowly opened it.

We entered. There was no carpet on the floor, and no furniture save a long deal table in the middle of the room. To the right, in the farther corner was a cot, with a blanket thrown over it; to the left a closet.

"Well," I was on the point of saying, "I see no mystery in this," when Dennin, who was between me and the farther corner, holding the lamp suddenly started back and clutched my arm.

"Heavens, Joe!" he said in a hoarse whisper, "there's something covered up on the cot!"

The hand with which he held the lamp shook so that, fearing he would drop it, I took it from him; and, in breathless suspense, we went on tiptoe to the cot.

Yes; there was certainly something under the blanket. Something that looked like the top of a human head peeped out.

I pulled down the blanket a little, and a ghastly face, framed by long, brown hair, stared up at us with glassy eyes.

Horrified, I recoiled and set the lamp upon the table, while Dennin staggered back against the wall, murmuring:

"For God's sake, Joe, what does this mean?"