

The Daily Short Story

MY ADVENTURE.

TEN years ago found the net with the snug business I now possess, but employed a commercial traveller in the primary line. My duties frequently took me to Birmingham, and, if I am to tell my story truthfully, I must say I was at that period of my history, to put it mildly, no better than I ought to have been. The life of a commercial traveller is one fraught with very great temptation, and I was not always strong enough to keep my feet out of the midst of the bribes which then beset my path, with which statement, my readers will readily agree when they read the strange incident I am now going to relate.

It was 6 o'clock on an autumn evening. The streets of Birmingham were swept with rain. I had had a tolerably successful day, and there reposed in my pockets the sum of £20 which I had collected from my firm's customers. Having nothing particular to do, and the torrents of rain absolutely prohibiting all open air enjoyment, I went to the hotel I was staying at, and, although I had already drunk during the afternoon more than I ought and much more than I needed, I called for a further supply of brandy, and while sipping it was joined by a stranger, who seemed eager to enter into conversation with me.

Nothing backward, and with tongue fairly set a-wagging, I talked too, and I believe that before many moments he had ascertained that I had £20 belonging to my employer in my possession.

The brandy finished, nothing would satisfy my new found friend but that he should take me to the theatre, where the well-known play, "Drift," was being performed. I remember well how, half tipsy as I was, I shuddered at the realistic portraiture by one of the artists of a victim to delirium tremens. I remember how the horrors of drink were delineated and

was sane enough to remark to my companion:

"Bosh! They are overdrawing it!"

"Certainly," he replied, "they are overdrawing it. But it's only a play, here are drinking bars here; they are a reality. Come let's go and get some filling."

So we went and "got something," and, to cut a long story short, when I left the theatre, leaning on the arm of my friend, I was hopelessly intoxicated.

The next thing I knew was this: The rainclouds had rolled away, and fitful gleams of moonlight revealed to me the fact that I was in a strange room, lying on a strange bed. Two o'clock chimed out from a neighboring steeple. Sobered with fright, I raised myself, and then, quick as a lightning flash, came the thought—my money! My clothes were thrown across the bottom of the bed. I searched the trousers pocket. The gold was there.

Then I heard voices in soft conversation coming up from below. Noiselessly I opened the bedroom door and listened.

"Sure he's all serene?" queried the voice, to which another responded, "He won't wake till 6, at the earliest."

"Very good," said the first voice. "Mind, if he wakes while your doing it!"

The sentence was punctuated by the unmistakable click of a pistol, and I shivered—not from cold.

"And at 6 or 7, or whenever he does wake," continued the voice, "tell him you picked him up drunk in the street and carried him in here out of compassion for safety, and you will easily convince him that he was robbed out of doors. But, mind, I have done my part in playing him with drink and in deceiving him here. See you do yours in gracefully relieving the poor fool of his £20!"

Here a stop on the stairs warned me to close the door, and I got back to bed. Hearing the knob of the door turn, I began to breathe heavily after



the fashion of a drunken man, and the next instant, shading the candle with his hand, there appeared the form of a strange man, who was soon peeping fixedly upon my face.

Satisfied apparently with his examination, my visitor searched my pockets, pounced upon the gold, of course, and quickly transferred it from its erstwhile resting place to where do you guess? He went to a birdcage, which now for the first time I observed hanging up, drew out its sliding door, quietly emptied my gold into it, replaced the slide and undressed and lay down beside me. He was soon asleep, and hope sprang up within me, but, alas, of all the light sleepers, he was the lightest I ever knew! Whenever I moved, he appeared to be on the alert. It was impossible to crawl out of bed without his being conscious of the fact. Besides, under his pillow I knew was the pistol, and in despair, I had reluctantly to rest on as calm and unconcerned as I possibly could.

All wakeful I passed that horrible night, and the slow hours dragged on interminably. But at length a project presented itself to my now sharpened senses, which project I put into execution when 6 o'clock struck.

"Failure," said to myself, "means simply death. Success means a saved

reputation with my employers and a vow of strictest sobriety."

Everything being perfectly quiet, I simulated a gradual waking up, and my first yawn opened the eyes of my bedfellow. The second had the effect of raising him from his recumbent position in the bed, and when I slowly and painfully awoke he was bending over me, all solicitude.

Daylight was now stealing into the room.

"My poor fellow," exclaimed the assiduous one, "how do you feel now? You will wonder, no doubt, at being in my bed, but the fact is you were ill last night, were you not?"

"Ill?" I said. "Ill?" And I put my hand mechanically to my head. "Well, I think I must have been. My head does ache so!"

He smiled and replied, "Well, my dear fellow, not to put too fine a point upon it, I found you late last night in their utor, just a little bit the worse for liquor, and two somewhat disreputable looking men who were with you asked me if I could manage to look after you for the night."

I expressed my profound thanks to my good friend for his unselfish kindness, but he modestly waved them aside, saying deprecatingly:

"Duty, sir, duty! I cannot neglect a genuine case of human suffering or danger without some attempt, however slight, at succour."

I thanked him again.

"I am ill," I said. "I had too much brandy yesterday. I must have a hair of the dog that bit me. I must have a nip now. It is the only thing which will put me right. If you have any brandy in the house, for heaven's sake sir, bring me a drop!"

He hesitated a moment, then rejoined:

"Certainly. Lie there and I'll be back with it in a moment," and disappeared.

Much quicker than I can relate it, I sprang out of bed, went to the birdcage, drew the sliding tray, transferred all the contents into my handkerchief and thence into my coat pocket, finally replacing the tray. Not a moment too soon was I back between the sheets, for in an instant my good Samaritan arrived with the brandy. I

drank and professed to be much better. I dressed; so did he.

Would I have breakfast? No! I most reluctantly asked to be excused, being in haste to catch the first train I possibly could back to town, and I pointed out, to my noble host that either breakfast or train must of necessity be given up. Would he forgive me if I felt compelled to choose the train?

I searched in my trousers pocket for my money, gave a start of surprise, shrieked out: "They have robbed me, those villains. Robbed me last night!" And I simulated as ably as I could a most woeful expression of grief and despair. My good friend sympathised deeply with me. He invoked maledictions on the head of anyone who could be base enough to rob an unfortunate stranger, and with a generosity well nigh unparalleled he pressed upon me to accept, seeing I was penniless, as a temporary loan if I liked, the sum of ten shillings.

"Do take it," he urged. "It is more blessed to give than to receive, you know. I am not rich myself, but a few shillings in the cause of philanthropy I shall not, cannot miss."

So, with renewed assurances of indebtedness, I wished my estimable benefactor adieu, told him I should never forget him as long as I lived (here I really was speaking the truth) and I departed. What the locality was I know not, but I wandered—nay, I rushed on and on—until I saw a sleepy looking Jehu, whom I bade drive me with all possible speed to the station. The train was just starting, and I jumped into an empty compartment. Hastily I untied the bag and scanned the contents. Lo and behold! I found that I had swept the birdcage clean, for when I had counted the money there were £42 in gold and two £5 Bank of England notes, making very respectably total of £52.

Now I am happily and peacefully settled in life, and when round the fireside at night I am called on for a story, nothing delights me better than to tell my tale of how the trappers were trapped.

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