

A COMMERCIAL TRAVELLER'S ADVENTURE.

I had finished my business with the jewellers in the town of B——, about five o'clock one afternoon, and, finding I had plenty of time before the train started, I took a comfortable tea to fortify myself against the cold ride before me. Reaching the station in good time, I looked for the up express, and, having seen the bulk of my luggage safely deposited in the guard's van, got into an empty compartment of a second-class carriage, taking with me a leathern case and a dressing-bag.

The case, which contained the most valuable of my diamond rings, etc., I placed under the seat, and the bag, containing articles of toilet, and, amongst other things, an unloaded pistol, I put under the seat opposite me. I had carried this pistol for several years primed and loaded, but, never having had occasion to use it, I had latterly grown careless, and on this occasion it was not loaded.

Just before the train started a man entered the carriage and seated himself opposite me. He was tall and muscular, rather shabbily dressed, and with a countenance furtive and sinister in expression. After taking a quick survey of me, he presently remarked, "A very cold night, sir."

"It is," I replied; and these were the only words that passed between us before reaching W—— Junction. No one entered our carriage at the latter place, and when the train again started we were still alone.

"We don't stop till we get to L—— now, and we shall be just twenty minutes going," remarked my companion.

"Oh, indeed," I replied, feeling rather uneasy at the significant tones in which he spoke.

"You are in the jewellery line, I think," said he glancing down at the case under my seat.

"How do you know that?" I exclaimed, my suspicions fully aroused by his inquiry, and by the evil looks and insolent manner of the fellow.

"Oh, I saw you showing your stuff to a jeweller in B——."

"And if I am in the jewellery line, what then?"

"Simply this," he replied. "I wish to purchase a gold watch, which I thought perhaps you would sell me at a wholesale price. Do you mind showing me a few to select from?"

"I not only object, but I absolutely refuse to do so," I replied; but noticing the murderous look that my refusal called to his face, I added, "but even if I were willing I could not grant your request, as my watches are all in the luggage van."

"Then what is that?" said he kicking the case under my seat.

"That is my dressing case, said I, a falsehood coming involuntarily to my lips.

"You lie," he shouted; "I saw you open it at your customer's, and it contains rings and breastpins."

Diving his hand into his pocket, he drew out a murderous looking clasp-knife, with a long blade, opened it, and drew his fingers along the edge.

"Sharp enough, I'll warrant," he muttered looking threateningly at me.

Never shall I forget the sickening terror which stole over me, as I watched the wretch making the deliberate preparations for what I quite believe would be a work of blood. Without any weapon of defence and very much inferior in physical strength to my antagonist, I felt that it would be madness to attempt resistance.

"Now," continued he, "don't trifle with me. I ride with you to night to transact a little business. Out with your order book, and I will give you the best line you ever took in your life; I will give you an order for the whole contents of that case. It's true I don't mean to pay for them, but still I am in that no worse than many of your customers, eh?" and he chuckled grimly at his own wit.

How terribly helpless I felt at that moment, shut up in a narrow box with a human tiger ready to pounce upon me should I make any effort to escape or summon assistance. Tearing along at such fearful speed in that express train, how I mentally railed

at the stupidity of a railway system which prevented a wretch in my position from obtaining any assistance from fellow passengers, though only separated from them by a wooden partition.

In the intensity of my excitement, hardly knowing what I did, I rushed to the window at the further end of the carriage, but my companion darted after me, dragged me to my seat, and pressed the flat of the knife to the back of my neck. Feeling the steel against my neck, and fully believing that my last moment had come, in the agony of my fear I uttered a cry.

"Another sound and I will put this through your jugular," he whispered, hoarsely, tightening his grasp upon my throat. "fool, you are helpless as a babe in my hands. Which do you value most, your life or your property? Give me the key?"

"Never," I gasped.

"Then I will do for you," he cried, at the same time inflicting a gash on my neck, which drew from me a sharp cry of pain.

"That's but a taste of it. Will you give me the key now?"

A vision of home, far away, rose before me, of wife and child dependent on me for support, and I felt a desperate clutch at life.

"Spare my life and you shall have the key," I cried.

"Put the case on the seat and unlock it," he commanded.

I tremblingly obeyed, and opening the case displayed a confusion of jewellery sparkling with precious stones. His eyes glistened at the sight, and he locked the case, putting the key in his pocket.

"Ten minutes gone," he said, consulting his watch: "your spirits must be low," he continued, pulling a bottle from the pocket of his coat, "take a drink of this, it will revive your courage."

I shuddered at the sight of the bottle. There could be no doubt that its contents were drugged, and that the wretch wished to stupefy me in order the more easily to rifle my pockets, and perhaps give me my quietus.

But a thought seemed to strike him, and replacing the bottle in his pocket, he said, "Stop a moment: business before pleasure is my motto. Have you any other article of value about you?"

The thought that but ten short minutes intervened between life and safety made me feel the madness of desperation. A wild rush through my brain, and the hot blood coming to my face, have no doubt turned it scarlet.

"No lies, now," he cried, before I could answer; "I see your face you have something else; give it me instantly."

The oil lamp in the carriage had for several moments been growing dimmer, and my companion had noticed this with evil



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