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THE TRAP-DOOR.

It was late in the evening of a certain day, some years since, that I found myself traveling in one of the wildest portions of the great west. The road—or apology for one, for it scarcely deserved the name—wound through a lonely forest, which a concourse of hoarse sounds served to make anything but agreeable or enlivening to my spirits, worn-out as I was by a hard day's travel.

To mend matters, it began to rain, not moderately and leisurely, but with such good earnest that I was soon wet to the skin. In this dilemma, I looked round anxiously for shelter of some kind.

It was with a sense of relief that I beheld at a little distance in front of me a small house, the home, doubtless, of an adventurous farmer who, for the sake of more elbow room, had located himself on the very outskirts of civilization.

I rode up to the house, and, tapping at the door with my riding-whip, requested admittance. My call was answered by a woman of middle age, in whom I noticed little more than an anxious, care-worn expression, of which, at the time, I did not take particular notice.

"Can you accommodate me for to-night?" I asked. "I am wet to the skin with the rain, and it is impossible for me to go further. My horse, too, is worn-out with fatigue, as he has been on his feet all day."

The woman paused, and I saw a shade of reluctance pass over her countenance.

"You could be better accommodated," she said, at length, "at the tavern, about four miles from here."

"It might as well be forty," said I, with decision. "As for accommodations, anything will suit me. A bed on the straw or rug, with a cup of tea and a piece of bread, if

you have them, will strengthen me for to-morrow's ride."

Apparently, this removed the woman's objections, for without further opposition she led the way into the common sitting-room, in which were seated two rough, shock-headed youngsters, and an infant who seemed ailing: at least, so I inferred from the squalls which it poured forth with a compass of voice truly astonishing in a creature so young.

The master of the house apparently was not at home. A plain repast was speedily set before me, and partaken of with an appetite which could not by any means be called "poor." I did not attempt to engage my hostess in conversation. She appeared disinclined to it, and, even if she had not been, the cries of the child, which she was striving in vain to quiet, would have effectually prevented it. As for the two boys they stared at me with an intensity that showed their determination to know me again.

After supper I took my lamp, and was ushered into a large, low room on the second floor, in one corner of which was a plain bedstead, which, with four chairs and a looking-glass, ten inches by twelve, completed its arrangements so far as furniture went.

"I hope you will rest quietly," said the woman, as she withdrew.

Left to myself, I first bolted the door, and then, disarraying myself, leaped into bed, where I was soon buried in an uneasy slumber—uneasy because I could not throw off some anxious thoughts which had obtruded upon me during the day.

It might have been twelve o'clock when I awoke from my troubled sleep, and became conscious of a conference which was being held just outside my door.

One voice I at once recognized as that of

the farmer's wife; the other I conjectured to be her husband's.

"Have you killed him?" asked she, softly.

"Yes," said the man.

"And where did you bury him?"

"In the swamp, about a mile distant."

"Did he make much resistance?"

"No; I didn't give him a chance. I raised my gun and struck him on the head with it, so that he was stunned at once."

I listened intently to these few words. I was convinced that they referred to the murder of some unsuspecting person, with what purpose I could not gather, by the master of the house.

My blood ran cold at the coolness with which it was detailed. I determined, if I ever got out of this den of murderers, I would secure his arrest.

But the conversation was resumed, and I listened once more.

"How shall we get in?" inquired the farmer.

"Not by the door, for I've tried it, and found it bolted."

I perceived they were now speaking of entering my chamber, doubtless with the same design of murdering me and possessing themselves of my property.

"Try the trap-door."

"Yes, but if he should wake up?"

"O, no fear of that."

The steps receded.

"So," thought I, "there is a trap-door. Well, I will be prepared for them."

I grasped my pistols convulsively, determined that if I gave up my life it would not be without resistance.

I waited a few moments, listening intently. At length I could hear a slight rustling beneath the floor, which was succeeded by the cautious lifting up of a trap-door in the centre of the apartment, which I had not noticed. The farmer slowly

emerged with a lantern in his hand.

"Now," thought I, "is my time."

Leaping from the bed, I exclaimed, aiming a pistol at the intruder:

"Not a step further, or you are a dead man!"

The farmer recoiled, while, as I conjectured, the surprise of detected villainy filled him with confusion.

"Villian, your base designs are fathomed. With your hands red with a murder which you have already perpetrated this day, you would attempt another?"

"Is the man mad?" muttered my host.

"Can you deny that you have to-day committed murder? Can you deny that within the last few minutes you have declared the manner in which you did it, and for which villain that you are, you shall receive full punishment?"

To my astonishment, the farmer burst into a hearty laugh. When the "fit" was over, he spoke:

"You are right, sir, I have committed murder to-day. I have killed no less a person than my dog, Sack, who has lately shown signs of being mad."

At this ludicrous interpretation my dignified sternness fell apace, I managed to proceed with some severity:

"This may be true, but why do I find you entering my chamber at dead of night? What is your purpose, I demand?"

"Sir, my reason for entering by the trap-door is that the door is bolted. My reason for entering it at all is to seek some camomile in yonder closet, to make tea for sick child. In the surprise of your coming it was forgotten. If you will take away your pistol, I will search for it."

I began to be sensible that I had made a fool of myself. Without a word more, I jumped into bed. I rose at an early hour the next morning and left before the family was up, first laying a piece of money on the table to pay for my entertainment.

How could I have the face to meet the family at breakfast after what had happened? —By Gerald Grayson.