

THE WESTERN HOME MONTHLY

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A MISTAKEN IDENTITY

The Flyer was pounding over the country at the rate of nearly sixty miles an hour, when four men, strangers all, drifted together in the smoker, and, after an informal introduction, engaged in an animated conversation concerning a recent train robbery. Of the four men one was a prosperous looking broker, the second a "drummer," and the third a contractor. The remaining individual might have been anything from a private detective to a cobbler so far as his personal appearance betokened and he did not enlighten them as to his occupation.

All had related a reminiscence in connection with a train hold-up with the single exception of this silent, uncommunicative personage who all evening had maintained the strictest silence. Presently he was requested to tell a story. To the unbounded surprise and gratification of the entire party he readily assented, and communicated the following particulars of a train robbery in which he himself had participated.

I presume you gentlemen are not aware that I was at one time supposed to be the greatest desperado in the West. You are surprised? Well, I must admit that I was rather astonished myself, especially when I found myself under lock and key. However, to my tale.

Twenty years ago this country was vastly different in every respect from conditions existing at the present time. Hold-ups and murders were of almost daily occurrence. It was about that time, early in the summer, that my most intimate friend, Robert Calton, and I, came west with a little capital, intending to invest in mining stock. Calton commenced prospecting near an out-of-the-way village called Brisban, while I found employment both congenial and remunerative in a town about fifty miles distant from Brisban. Being total strangers in the country, Calton and I corresponded regularly. Consequently when one morning I remembered that for three days there had been no word from Calton, I confess I felt rather uneasy.

While waiting for breakfast to be served I picked up a daily paper, and on glancing through its columns a heading "Fatal Mishap" caught my eye. A second glance almost took my breath away for there in black and white was the account of a young mining prospector's accidental death while blasting rock.

Although deceased's name was not known for certain, it was surmised that he was one, Robert Calton, a wealthy stranger from the States. Remains were at the parlors of an undertaking establishment awaiting identification.

I was horrified. Robert was the last person I would have expected to be killed in so sudden and unexpected a manner.

Although no clue, such as papers, were found on the body, there could be no other person than Robert a total stranger in the district, who would

be unknown. We had always been chums, and now he had died a stranger in a strange land. Besides, being younger than I, he had been, after a manner, entrusted to my care.

Realizing my responsibility as poor Robert's only friend, I managed to board a train bound for Brisban just as it was pulling out, and arrived there, wired Robert's father in Chicago, informing him of his son's sad and untimely death. I had forgotten to telegraph before leaving home in the hurry and bustle of a hasty departure.

important point, and would not return until evening. This circumstance was a great inconvenience since I could not communicate with the Caltons and would be compelled to wait until near train time to purchase tickets. To increase my chagrin, I found all the station doors locked, so the only course was to leave my charge on the open platform and await the station agent's coming, and the train was not due till 10 p.m.

I found the afternoon long and dreary. Having no company, I began to ask myself whether I had not acted too impulsively. Should I not have awaited instructions from the Caltons? Perplexed and disconsolate, I sauntered back to the village and spent the afternoon as best I might.

Shortly after dark I returned to the

had unduly wrought upon my nerves. I was almost convinced that my senses had played me false, when a half suppressed gasp, as of one in the last stages of strangulation, from inside the coffin, rendered me so weak between fright and horror that I stood as if rooted to the spot.

But I was not superstitious. Then, like a flash it dawned upon my muddled brain, was it possible that life was not entirely extinct in Robert. There was a remote possibility that he was in a comatose state and was yet with a spark of life in him. In an instant I was frantically tearing with my bare hands at the rough box lid. To my surprise the lid fell off with scarcely any effort, and we had screwed it down firmly. I was in the act of turning round and rushing for assistance and a light, when a gang of armed men rushed in from all directions and in an instant surrounded me.

"Hands up!"

My first impulse was to knock down the nearest man and run. I vaguely remembered a flash, a report, a sharp stinging pain in my shoulder and an awful weight upon my head.

When I opened my eyes and came to my senses I found myself in a small room, as I afterwards learned, the strongest room in the Brisban jail or lock-up. How I came here I could not conceive. I attempted to move, but an awful pain shot through my body and I sank back helpless. After a few moments my senses cleared and I recollected the exciting events of the preceding day or days, for I had not the remotest idea of how long I had lain thus. I felt weak and feverish, so called for water. Fortunately this was soon forthcoming, and it was then I was informed that I was a guest at the expense of the state.

My feelings can better be imagined than described at this intimation. I, Elmer Middleton, actually inside a jail for the first time in my life, it is true. For what crime I was here I could not imagine. I had been causelessly and furiously attacked by a gang of ruffians, and to crown all these outrages, I was imprisoned instead of the perpetrators of a violent assault. My indignation knew no bounds. I peremptorily demanded release. The turnkey informed me, with a sardonic smile, that once outside the jail a mob would deprive the hangman of the pleasure of hanging me.

Before I could give a suitable reply to the insult, a medical practitioner and his assistant entered the cell and proceeded to dress the wound in my shoulder, which occasioned excruciating pain. However, the operation was skillfully performed. No other person was admitted to my cell. I felt so weak and helpless that I did not so much as inquire into the cause of my detention here, or demand the warrant for my arrest, if, indeed, such had been issued.

Presently I was left alone, my only company being a newspaper. At first I felt no ambition to read. Nevertheless any diversion was better than contemplating the prospects of being hung, for I knew not what crime.

The first heading in that newspaper gave me the greatest shock I ever sustained in my lifetime. It read as fol-

Look at the date of the label on this paper. It denotes the time to which the subscription is paid. It goes forward to you until that date, and may be stopped if renewal is not in by that time. If the date is back of this month you are in arrears and should renew at once, in order that there may be no break in your receiving it. **RENEW AT ONCE** if you wish to receive THE WESTERN HOME MONTHLY regularly. The paper will be even better the coming year than it has been during the past. 50c gets it for one year together with a copy of the "Farmers' and Ranchers' Business Guide."

I then repaired to the village, which was situated in a valley nearly a mile from the railway and station house, to make all necessary arrangements for sending the remains of my friend, Robert Calton, to Chicago, where his relatives all resided. Now I have always had a peculiar and unaccountable aversion to viewing the dead. So, when I was shown the remains of poor Robert, his features mutilated beyond recognition, I just took one hurried fearful glance and passed on without a minute examination. By noon all arrangements were completed and the body was then conveyed to the station. The station agent, it seems, had obtained leave of absence for the afternoon, which is readily granted an agent in a small, un-

station. Everything was precisely as I left it. The night was dark and cloudy and the wind wailed disconsolately through the telegraph wires, making weird, awesome music, which increased my loneliness and melancholy.

It was nearing train time, however, so I went to examine my sad charge to see that all was secure. Just as I was about to feel the firmness of the outer rough box lid, a movement, unmistakably from inside the coffin, almost caused my heart to stop beating, and terrified me to such an extent that I was paralyzed for a moment. Still, having always suffered from sensitive nerves, and when I recovered my senses sufficiently to reason, I persuaded myself that the excitement and loneliness

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