

A NIGHT EDITOR'S STORY.

My story is a ghost story and one of the genuine articles I conclude, from putting together my preconceived ideas of ghosts, and the particular experience I have to relate on this occasion. It was an experience so strange, so terrible, and so fraught with poignant grief, that for a long time after the occurrence I shrink from all mention of it; but time, the great alleviator, enables me now to sit down and give a calm account of the events to which I refer.

I was night editor on the *Hawbuck Morning Sentinel*. My associate in the local department was Ward Suttin, a young fellow of keen perceptions, ready wit and active ability. He had clear eyes, a conciliatory brow, a rather pale complexion, a long, flaring, jet-black moustache and an open, wide-awake look that was a perfect index to his character. Nothing escaped his observation. He was indefatigably industrious, and picked out all the news delving out items from the most apparently barren ground. He was the best local we ever had, and our department, soon after his advent, outstripped all contemporaries in the variety and spice of our city news.

Ward had one fault, however. The social bowl possessed powerful attractions for him, and it was too often evident that he had imbibed more freely than a sound judgment would dictate. To be sure he was seldom unfit for business—not more than once in three or four months—but he was pursuing a course which, if persisted in, must have endeavored to persuade him, result in his downfall. I talked to him often about it, but, although he listened pleasantly, my words seemed to be uselessly expended. He was the same frolicsome, light-hearted, convivial fellow; and hard-working and valuable assistant.

He would frequently choose a topic of popular interest and write thereon a series of descriptive articles in a free, gossipy vein, just calculated to catch the public attention. This was in addition to his regular work as city editor. The amount of labor he accomplished and the ease with which he performed it, frequently filled me with astonishment.

Well do I remember when he chose for his theme "Dregs and Scum." He penetrated the lowest haunts of the lowest classes, and described their habits in a wonderfully vivid manner. Their vices, their misfortunes, the bright spots in their lives, together with scraps of adventure and incident—exciting, amusing and pathetic—were all treated with rare spirit and grace by his ready pen.

Of course in this pursuit he visited the resorts of thieves, villains and desperadoes, and plunged into scenes against his safe exit from which there were many chances.

"No will see what can be fished up from the slum," he would say, with a mocking laugh, and start off on one of his midnight excursions. Or again, he would announce that he had an appointment to meet some distinguished friends, the true purport of which remark we all well understood.

Ward and I, when at work, occupied a room by ourselves, while the managing editor, and Bailey, his assistant, had another apartment, just across the hall.

One night, about half-past eleven, Ward said to me:

"Well, Peck, I guess I'll go out and see what I can see. I've sent in a couple of columns, and Dobbin will be on the look-out to report if anything turns up. I'll be back by half-past one or two."

Dobbin was a middle aged, seedy individual, of some ability, but no particular occupation, who loitered around the office most of the time, in readiness to assist, for a small remuneration, in any department that happened to be crowded. He frequently lent his aid to Ward in reporting police cases, accidents, rows, and the like.

"Hold on, Ward," I said, looking him in the face; hadn't you better wait until to-morrow night?"

"Why? Oh! I know; you think I'm not exactly well balanced. But I'm all right. I'm in just the mood for it to-night, too."

"Yes, you always are, for that matter. Where do you propose to go to-night?"

"Down to Muggins' Forks."

The very worst place in the city! The concentration of vice and desperate lawlessness.

"You're not in earnest, Ward? You're not going there to-night, are you?"

"That's just where I am going. You know their great mogul, Barney Buck, is awaiting for trial for that highway robbery scrape, and I want to hear their comments. Jove! won't it be a rich treat?"

"I heard they were going to have a talk about it."

"Yes, Muggins' Forks is to hold an indignation meeting. Ha! ha!"

"Well, Ward, I wouldn't go, that's all."

"Well, Peck, I don't want you to go, but I'm going."

"You may take this, if you want it," and I unlocked a drawer, and drew out a six-shooter.

"No!" he exclaimed, laughing in scorn.

"You had better take it."

But he persisted in declining.

"Very well; have your own way. But, be cool, and keep a sharp look out. And promise me one thing, Ward; that you will not drink anything more to-night—at least till you get back."

He had been slowly moving toward the door, and now rushed out suddenly, exclaiming with a laugh:

"All right; I guess not."

After he was gone, I moved uneasily in my chair for some moments, and at last, with an effort, bent myself to the work before me. Presently Bailey came in on an errand.

"Where's Suttin?" he said.

"Don't ask," I replied.

"Oh!" he exclaimed with a scowl. "Be gone long?"

"Till half past one," I said.

"Well, I hope he'll get back." And with the last word the door swung shut, as Bailey retired.

I echoed an am—"his wish. We all liked Ward and felt an interest in him. He was young, so bright, and capable of so much.

My head was not clear that night. I could not think straight, nor bring my energy to bear on the task before me. So I took my meerschaum down from the shelf, scraped it out carefully, went to a private drawer, and filled the pipe with genuine Turkish tobacco that I kept on hand for rare occasions like the present one.

For it was not often that my brain baffled me, and, when it did, a pipe full of this tobacco would invariably set things going swimmingly. I suspect it contained a liberal admixture of those insinuating, treacherous drugs for which the east is famous, for its effect was always indescribably exhilarating. It gave me new energy, new life and a quick, far-sighted penetration that could grapple with any problem within the scope of my learning or information.

Perhaps I took a more liberal allowance than usual that time. I do not know that I did; but I never felt so keen or so fascinated by any work as, on that particular night. I worked steadily and unflinchingly, conscious of no effort, and completely absorbed in the tasks before me.

I do not know how long I had thus sat when a very strange incident occurred. It was the beginning of the strongest experience of my life—an experience whose parallel I hope and expect never to pass through again.

My tasks were completed, with the exception of one or two trifles, and I leaned back in my chair and yawned. Happening to look around, I knew not what impelled me to look around, at that particular moment—I beheld the door open noiselessly, and Ward Suttin enter. It was about two o'clock, or after.

"What is the matter, Ward?" I cried; for, there was a bright red wound on his forehead, and every vestige of color seemed to be faded from his face.

He paid no attention to my inquiry, but proceeded direct to his desk and sat down. He walked with his usual quiet step, and immediately on seating himself took pencil and paper and began to write:

"Ward! I say."

Still he did not reply. His pencil travelled over the paper rapidly.

"Ward!" I spoke loudly and sharply.

But he paid no attention to my voice. I concluded he was so absorbed as not to hear me, though that would not be like him. I felt curious to know how he had received the wound on his forehead, which, however, I concluded from his cool behavior could be nothing serious.

I took a newspaper, rolled it up into a bunch and threw it at his head, thinking to startle him.

Horror! It seemed to go through him, and he went on writing, apparently undisturbed.

"What is it?"

"What of him?"

"He is killed."

"Ward killed? How? When? Who brought the news?"

"I suddenly paused in my search, and stared at him blankly, as he asked the last question.

"Why don't you answer me?" His voice was full of harshness and distress.

"Who told you? Where is he?"

"In a cellar-way on Pine's alley."

"Who brought the news? Will you answer that?"

"He brought it himself—or rather his ghost did," I answered doggedly.

"See here, Peck," said Bailey sharply, "don't have any fooling on such a subject. Are you joking, or are you not?"

"Joking! No, no! I wish I was! But come out!" I seized him by the shoulder and endeavored to drag him toward the door. "We must find his body."

Bailey thought I was out of my head, and I do not blame him. He disengaged himself from my grasp, and wheeled about, facing me.

"Now tell me what you mean?" he said, sternly, with a voice and manner that brought the wind on his forehead, which, however, I concluded from his cool behavior could be nothing serious.

In as calm a manner as possible, I related to him the events of the few moments just passed.

When I had concluded, he eyed me narrowly and his face bore an incredulous look.

"You don't believe me," I said. "But be

kind enough to help me for a moment, and we will soon find the paper. The wind blew it on the floor."

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was extinct. The physician said he must have been dead an hour.

I thought, when I returned to the office, that Bailey looked upon me with an expression akin to awe. But I was in a mood far from triumphant. I had loved Ward dearly, and was bowed down with grief at his untimely and terrible death.

I spare all sickening details of the excitement that followed, of the talk about my part in the tragedy, of the fruitless search for the murderer.

Afterwards Bailey made me give a more explicit account of the strange manner in which I received information of this tragic event.

And, as I minutely described each circumstance, he alternately opened his eyes wide, scowled, laughed, and looked wise. What else could he do?

I do not attempt to give any explanation of what I have related. The facts, or my memory of them, have been laid before the reader. But, as I think them over, questions obtrude themselves upon each other.

Was I dreaming? If so, is there method in a dreamer? And can a stimulated brain receive an impression from a dream so vivid and indelible as to be indistinguishable from a memory of an actual fact? If so, what is memory but a delusion, and to what extent can we trust our recollections of the past? But why pursue the subject?

SOME men use words as riflemen use bullets. They say but little, but their words go to the mark. To them truth is more valuable than gold, while pretension is too gaudy to deceive them.



GATHERING WATER LILIES.

I gazed at him spell-bound. Finally he threw down his pencil and arose. "See here, old boy!" I exclaimed, springing up and starting toward him.

But, without even so much as looking at me, he walked quickly to the door, opened it, and seemed to glide out, and closed it noiselessly after him.

I followed him hastily, going into the outer hall, I expected to overtake him, but he was not in sight. I ran across an office boy.

"Did you see Mr. Suttin, just now?" I asked.

"No, sir."

"You did not?"

"No, sir. There hasn't been nobody here."

"How long have you been here?"

"A few minutes. I was waiting for Sim."

"Ward certainly just came out here from my room."

"Guess not, leastwise I didn't see him."

I went to the desk, and, to my intense astonishment and horror, read the following:

"MURDER.—Mr. Ward Suttin, local editor of this paper came to his death at the hand of assassins shortly before 2 o'clock this morning. He had been attending, as a spectator, an indignation meeting at Muggins' Forks, and while leaving was set upon by three ruffians, and severely beaten. One of the trio accomplished their murderous design by striking a fearful blow on his forehead with a small bar of iron. They left his body in a cellar way in Pine's alley."

At first I was so transfixed as to be able only to hold the paper in my hand and stare at it. I read it thrice over, scanning each word and letter in a horrible fascination. It was Ward's handwriting—there was no mistake about that; and Ward had written it, for I had seen him.

Strange to say no suspicion of a practical joke entered my head for an instant. Calm reflection would doubtless have suggested that explanation of the affair. But I did not reflect calmly. I pointed upon a conclusion without delay, and that was that Ward had been murdered, and that I had seen his ghost!

Strange proceeding, would it not be, for a man to appear after being killed, and write his own obituary? However, the strangeness nor the preposterousness of the idea did not enter my mind then. I simply accepted it at once, with all its horror and wildness.

As I said, I held the paper in my hand, and read it carefully. I was in a sort of stupor for a few seconds, and then came suddenly the desire to act. The place mentioned as the receptacle of Ward's body must be searched immediately.

I laid the paper down and went to the door. As I opened it, a gust of wind swept in, creating quite a commotion among the papers. I sprang back to the table. Ward's manuscript had blown off with rest, and I stooped down to look for it. Just then I heard Bailey's step in the outer hall, and I called out:

"Bailey! Bailey! Come in here, for God's sake!"

"What's up, Peck?"

He entered hastily, and spoke with surprised anxiety. I can't distinctly recollect, much less account for, my manner on that night.

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live as long as you may, the first twenty years form the greater part of your life. They appear so when we look back to them, and they take up more room in our memory than all the years that succeed them.

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