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UNCLE WINTHROP'S WATCH.

CONCLUDED.

SHORTLY after entering the street Henry imagined that his steps were dogged. Street assaults and robberies had been alarmingly frequent of late, and on ascertaining that he was persistently followed by some one, he became not a little apprehensive of an attack. There was but little passing on the street; now and then a solitary individual would hurry along the pavement, as if aware that it was a suspicious neighborhood. Henry was far from being a timid man; if anything, he was over-daring. Still, the thought of a sudden attack, of being taken at advantage, awoke any but agreeable feelings, sensations, indeed, akin to fear. Save his watch he bore no valuables about him.—He had too much good sense to venture abroad in a strange and crowded city, especially in the night, with more than a trifling sum of money. It was not robbery that he feared so much as personal injury, for he well knew that these desperadoes thought but little of taking human life. He had nothing with which to defend himself, being opposed to the carrying of weapons about the person. With a six-barrelled revolver in his breast pocket he would have felt decidedly more comfortable.

It was not the hearing of footsteps behind him that first led Henry to suspect that he was dogged, but a certain intuition which men sometimes have as a warning of impending danger. Influenced by this mystical impression, all of his senses were on the alert. Glancing frequently behind him it was not long ere he detected a man noiselessly following him. What assured him of this was that when he slackened his pace his follower did the same; when he quickened it, the unknown increased his; when he paused, so did his pursuer. Twice Henry retraced his steps for a short distance, but the man had vanished, disappeared like a phantom; yet the moment he resumed his walk, stealth-hood like, the man was on his track. Henry came to the conclusion that the fellow was shod with felt or rubber, as night-watchmen often are, to prevent their approach being heard. This by no means tended to allay the suspicion that he had evil designs on him. He could do nothing, however, but continue on his way, which he did with an accelerated pace, hoping that he might fall in with the police, or reach a less deserted locality.

Hurrying along in this manner, he came to a neighborhood where the lamps were far apart. He had left the last some distance behind, and about the same distance ahead was to be seen the feeble glimmer of another. Just then a sharp short whistle sounded in his rear, which was immediately followed by a similar one in front. Rightly suspecting that they were signals of confederates, Henry slackened his pace, and was in the act of stepping off the walk to cross the street, when a man sprang out from an adjoining alley or court and threateningly confronted him.

Had Peabody taken a moment for reflection, which men seldom do in such an emergency, he would not have attempted resistance, but he passively allowed the fellow to go "through with him," as the newspapers phrase it; but being muscular and plucky, he was not disposed to succumb without a struggle. As he was about making some demonstrations of defence, another man stepped softly up behind him, and with a blow from a slung-shot laid him insensible on the walk.

"That's the best way to settle the hash," said the assailant, with a coarse laugh.

In a moment the two men were bending over the prostrate form. But few words

were said as, with a dexterity that showed long practice in the business, the ruffians "went through" their victim.

"Nothing but this ticker," said one of them, as he pocketed Henry's watch; "a poor hand we've made this bout!"

Having finished their job, they roughly tumbled the still insensible body down a short flight of steps leading to a basement story of a building in front of which the attack had been made, and then hastily took themselves off.

A moment after, the men left their victim whether dead or alive, little cared they, the blind of the window directly over the steps down which the body had been flung was cautiously opened, and a head furtively protruded.

"I know'd their voices," was whispered in a woman's tone, as the speaker glanced in the direction the two men had taken; "'twas Dick Cadger, him that struck the blow, and his pal Bowlegged Billy. Hush! they're coming back! No; all right. I see'd 'em skulking by the lamp-post yonder. Now we'll go and see if there's any life in the poor soul, arter which, Joe, you must hurry and bring the police." So saying, the head was withdrawn.

In a few minutes the basement door at the foot of the steps was opened, and a man and woman lifted the body that was pressing against it, and carefully took it to a little back room and deposited it upon a bed. The woman took a lamp from a table and flashed the light on Peabody's face, then placing her hand on his heart, she said:

"He's alive; I can feel a flutter like here. Off with you, Joe, to the station, while I see to his hurts."

The man, who was the woman's husband rather rough in his appearance, though his face wore a kindly expression, immediately set forth on his errand, while the woman turned her attention to Peabody.

She was a woman of middle age, evidently inured to hard work. Her features were very plain, and she would have been considered ill-favored, were it not for the gentle pitying expression of her countenance as she examined the wound on Peabody's head.

"It was a cruel ugly blow," she said, as she carefully removed the hair from the bruised part, "and it's a mercy it didn't kill him outright. But he is only stunned like, and will soon come to his senses. Let me think now; wormwood steeped in vinegar is the best thing I know on for wounds like this." And setting down the lamp, she immediately busied herself in preparing the lotion.

The scene revealed to Henry when at last consciousness returned and he gazed bewilderingly around him, led him to question whether he was in the body or out of the body. From the small bedroom in which he found himself he looked into another and larger apartment, used evidently as a barroom and small huckster shop. In the dim light he saw figures moving to and fro, two or three of them with stars on their breasts, while a murmur of conversation met his ears. Was all this a dream, or was it a reality?

As he gradually collected his scattered senses the truth slowly dawned upon him—the fact of his being waylaid and suddenly stricken down. But where was he now? How came he in this small room—on this bed? Some slight movement made by him drew the attention of those in the outer room towards him. They immediately gathered about the bed, on which, by an effort, Henry managed to assume a sitting posture. Two of them, members of the police, as once questioned him in regard to the assault, and he related to them succinctly as he could the facts in the case. Mrs. Regan, the name of the good Samaritan who had taken him in and bound up his wounds, also told what she knew of the affair, repeating what she had intimated to her husband, that the blow was given by Dick Cadger, a notorious offender, and that his pal was Bowlegged Billy, as he was called, one equally well known to the police force.

Fortunately, the wound Henry had received proved not a very serious one, the pain from which had been greatly mitigated by the timely appliances of Mrs. Regan. On examination, it was found that he had been gone through with most thoroughly; but the only article the loss of which he especially regretted was his watch, which was the gift of the stranger. The police, however, informed him that if Mrs. Regan was correct in her recognition, by their voices, of the party who took it, in a few days they would probably be able to restore it to him, in which case he promised them a liberal reward.

Engaging one of the officers to accompany him to his hotel, as soon as his condition permitted, Henry took his leave of those who had so kindly succored him, with assurances that he should not forget their services, and which he subsequently took care to make good, eliciting by his liberality the remark from the gratified woman, that there was no "sham" about him, but that he was a "perfect gentleman."

At a late hour in the night, or rather, we should say early in the morning, Henry, was glad to find himself once more safe, though sorely bruised, in his hotel. Before parting with the officer he took his address and gave his own, and instructions to recover the watch, if possible, at whatever cost.

For some days Peabody suffered from the effects of the blow and the rough treatment to which he had been subjected, scarcely leaving his boarding-place. An account of the affair appeared in all of the papers, as a matter of course, more or less exaggerated.

The third day after the assault Henry was requested to call at the office of the chief of police. On going there he was shown a watch, which he immediately recognized as the one taken from him. Dick Cadger and his pal Bowlegged Billy were then brought before him, but he was unable to recognize them as his assailants. However, to have done with them, on the strength of Mrs. Regan's testimony, that she fully recognized their voices at the time of the attack, and of a pawnbroker where they had "put up" the watch, they were in due time tried, convicted and sentenced to serve the State for a prescribed number of years. This, we may as well mention in passing, was in those forgotten days when justice was not wholly ignored in the courts of New York.

On Henry's stating that he was willing to pay liberally for the restoration of the watch, the officer, after a little hesitation, said he wished to make a few inquiries in regard to it. Thereupon he questioned him as to how the article came into his possession originally. Though somewhat surprised at the question and the manner in which it was put, Henry frankly related the circumstances connected with his ownership of it.

"Will you inform me of the name of the donor?" asked the officer.

"That I cannot do," was Henry's reply. "The gentleman was an entire stranger to me."

The chief shook his head as if the answer was not entirely satisfactory.

"Well, young man," the officer rejoined, looking Henry keenly in the eye, "I may as well be plain with you. Information has been lodged at this office that a watch similar to this in every respect, was stolen from a gentleman when the disaster you mentioned occurred."

"That watch stolen, and I suspected of being the thief!" said Henry, flushing with astonishment and indignation.

"One answering to your name and description," replied the chief, ascribing Henry's rising color to conscious guilt, "is said to be the one who took it, and I have been requested to detain the watch and the person who should claim it, until a full inquiry was made into the matter."

"Then, Mr. Officer," said Henry, who had recovered from his surprise, "I suppose that I am to consider myself your prisoner?"

The officer smiled blandly upon his interlocutor.

"Have you any objections to inform me of the name of the gentleman from whom the watch is supposed to be stolen?" again asked Henry.

"Not in the least. The gentleman's name is Charles Winthrop, a well-known merchant of this city."

"And did he state to you that the watch was stolen, and request my detention?"

"O no; he is still confined at home by his injuries. It was a young man connected with the family, I think."

"Will you oblige me with Mr. Winthrop's address?"

"Certainly," replied the officer; "I will look for it in the directory." While he is consulting that ponderous volume, we will turn to other scenes and characters connected with our story, leaving Henry to meditate—and a bitter smile came with the reflection—on the inauspicious events attending his starting in life. First, a railroad "smash-up" and a broken arm; second, an assault, robbery and a broken head; third, a prisoner accused of theft. No marvel that his mental query should be—what next?

Severe were the sufferings, and long and tedious the illness of Mr. Winthrop, consequent upon the injuries he had received. For a time life and death hung in the balance, which preponderated almost hopelessly in the direction of the latter; but careful nursing and a good constitution turned the scales favorably, and when he became convalescent he rallied more speedily, taking his age into consideration, than the most sanguine hopes had anticipated.

It was nearly six months before he was able to leave his sick chamber, and, for a change of scene, to hobble with the aid of crutches into his sitting-room and library. During all his confinement Clara had been a "ministering angel" indeed to him, assiduous in her attentions, and by her constant care anticipating his every wish. If it had been possible to more closely cement the hearts of uncle and niece, the intercourse and experiences of that sick room most surely perfected the union.

Mr. Winthrop had explained to Clara all the circumstances relating to his watch being in Peabody's possession, and was never tired of eulogizing the latter's conduct at the time of the disaster, and of acknowledging the obligations under which he rested to him, insisting that but for the aid he rendered, his life would have been sacrificed. To all this she was very sure Clara lent not an impatient or unwilling ear.

She had mentioned to her uncle the circumstance of her meeting with Mr. Peabody in the cars, and of the suspicions which the sight of his watch had raised in the mind of Edward Perham. She frankly acknowledged how strongly from the first she was prepossessed with the former, nor did she withhold the fact that she had defended him when the latter avowed his belief that he had stolen the watch. The old gentleman cordially commended her for so doing, and was highly indignant that any one should mistake the young man for a rogue.

Perham had been absent from the city most of the time of Mr. Winthrop's confinement. When in town he had called two or three times on Clara, who, glad of the pretext, excused herself from seeing him on the plea of being engaged in attending on her uncle. On his last visit he sent word to her that he was on the eve of leaving town for a time, and wished particularly to see her; but surmising his object, Clara was more particularly bent on not seeing him, and was obdurate in refusing him an interview.

In former years, during his frequent absences, Perham had been in the habit of occasionally writing to her, although Clara never encouraged the correspondence; but of late no letters had passed between them, and she had hoped that the correspondence would not be renewed. It was greatly to her surprise, therefore, that she one day received a letter addressed in his well known handwriting. But she was vastly more surprised at its contents.

The letter commenced with a reiteration of his love for her, and ended with a formal proffer of his hand. The former he had frequently manifested more plainly than was agreeable to her, but this was the first time he had made an outright proposition for marriage. There was something in the phraseology of the letter which irritated Clara and yet provoked a smile. It evinced a ridiculous assurance of the favorable reception of his suit, at least, so it struck Clara, while the offer was made as if he was conferring rather than seeking a favor.

A scornful flush passed over Clara's face as she finished the perusal of the letter and tossed it somewhat contemptuously aside, which boded any but a favorable rejoinder to the offer it contained.

"The letter seems to disturb you; what is it, my child?" said Mr. Winthrop, who sat opposite to her comfortably bolstered in his sick-chair, and who was struck with the effect produced by the letter.

Clara had no secrets from her uncle, but she hesitated a moment before replying to his remark. She had received the impression that her uncle rather countenanced the addresses of Perham, although not a word had passed between them on the subject.

"Will you please read it, uncle?" she said, taking the letter from the table and passing it to him.

The old gentleman put on his spectacles and read the letter through.

"The young man seems to be very confident," said Mr. Winthrop, with a grave smile, as he handed back the letter. "Have you given him any reason for being so?"

"Say presumptuous, uncle!" was the quick reply; "no sir, I have not."

"And I am very glad to hear you say so,

Clara!" rejoined her uncle, emphatically, much to her surprise. "I once entertained a very favorable opinion of Edward Perham, but it has materially changed."

Then, as if in reply to an inquiring look of his niece, he went on to say:

"When I was jammed in the wreck of the cars I called upon a young man sitting at the foot of a tree for assistance, but he took no notice of me. Presently the young man Peabody came along, and, espying me, came to my aid. Partly disabled himself, he found that he could not effect my release. He appealed also to the young man for help, instead of rendering which, he started to move off, pretending to be lame. Peabody followed him, and forced him reluctantly to return with him. It was then I first discovered that this young man, who seemed to lack the common feelings of humanity, was Edward Perham."

"Why, did he not know you, uncle?" asked Clara.

"No, my child, neither would you have recognized me, my features were so disguised by the blood from the wound in my forehead, and soot and dirt."

"But why did you not make yourself known?"

"It was my first impulse, but I was so disgusted with the spirit he manifested that I refrained; besides, before I was fairly extricated, he took himself off. His contemptible conduct brought out in stronger light the noble actions of Peabody. Although suffering from a severe wound, he behaved heroically from the first occurrence of the disaster; and from the time he fell in with me until we parted, he did not for a moment relax in his attentions to me. I am glad, my child," concluded Mr. Winthrop, "to know that you have not placed your affections on one so utterly unworthy of them as Edward Perham."

Some two or three weeks after the conversation between Clara and her uncle, Perham returned to the city. On the day of his return he had read in the papers an account of the waylaying of Peabody, and the robbery of his watch. Smarting under the peremptory refusal of his suit by Clara, received but a short time before, and believing, from what he had observed in the cars, and from Clara's subsequent defence of him, that Peabody stood high in her favor, he thought that now was the opportunity to prove that his suspicions were well founded. He thought, moreover, if he could bring about Peabody's conviction for robbing her uncle, the mortification it would occasion her would be some slight revenge for Clara's rejection of him. Without consulting Mr. Winthrop in the matter he had lodged the information and request with the chief of police already alluded to.

In the afternoon of the day of his arrest Henry appeared in a justice court, to answer to the charge preferred against him. As Mr. Perham took the stand, Henry was surprised to find that his former fellow-passenger in the cars was his accuser.—Could it be that Miss Weston also believed him guilty? The possibility that such might be the case pained him not a little.

This being but a preliminary examination, the full merits of the case were not entered into, the main object being to elicit evidence sufficient to hold the accused for future trial.

Mr. Perham's statement was, that to the best of his belief the watch belonged to Mr. Charles Winthrop; that it was in his possession at the time of the railroad disaster, but when he was brought home the watch was not to be found; that the day after the accident he saw the watch in the possession of the accused, which watch was now on his honor's desk. The chief of police stated that the prisoner's account of the watch being in his possession was, that it was given to him soon after the accident occurred; that the donor of it was a perfect stranger to him—that he did not even know his name.

Robberies of the unfortunate victims of railroad disasters had become of such frequency that the public mind was keenly excited on the subject. Strenuous efforts had been made to secure some one implicated in the crime, that an example might be made of him to deter others from such heinous acts. An arrest on a charge of this kind was sufficient to create a prejudice against the accused, and there were but few, if any, then present in the court room who were not perfectly satisfied of Henry's guilt.

Peabody had let matters take their course—asking no questions, making no remark, his silence telling against him—until the justice asked him if he had anything to say in his defence. Very calm, very deliberate was Henry's reply:

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