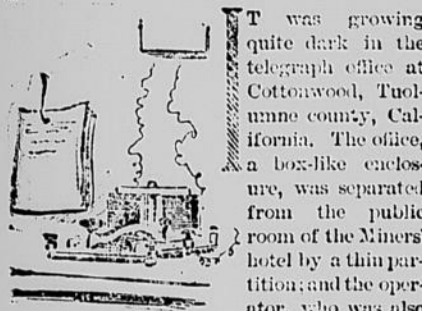


HEAT DEADWOOD MYSTERY.

BY BRET HARTE

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PART I.



It was growing quite dark in the telegraph office at Cottonwood, Tuolumne county, California. The office, a box-like enclosure, was separated from the public room of the Miners' hotel by a thin partition and the operator, who was also news and express agent at Cottonwood, had closed his window, and was lounging by his news stand preparatory to going home. Without, the first monotonous rain of the season was dripping from the porches of the hotel in the waning light of a December day. The operator, accustomed as he was to long intervals of idleness, was fast becoming bored.

The tread of mud-muffled boots on the veranda, and the entrance of two men, offered a momentary excitement. He recognized in the strangers two prominent citizens of Cottonwood; and their manner bespoke business. One of them proceeded to the desk, wrote a dispatch, and handed it to the other interrogatively.

"That's about the way the thing pints," responded his companion assentingly.

"I reckoned it only squar to use his dictional words."

"That's so."

The first speaker turned to the operator with the dispatch.

"How soon can you shove her through?"

The operator glanced professionally over the address and the length of the dispatch.

"Now," he answered promptly.

"And she gets there?"

"To-night. But there's no delivery until to-morrow."

"Shove her through to-night, and say there's an extra twenty left here for delivery."



"Shove her through to-night."

The operator, accustomed to all kinds of extravagant outlay for expedition, replied that he would lay this proposition, with the dispatch, before the San Francisco office. He then took it and read it—and re-read it. He preserved the usual professional apathy—had doubtless sent many more enigmatical and mysterious messages—but nevertheless, when he finished, he raised his eyes inquiringly to his customer. That gentleman, who enjoyed a reputation for equal spontaneity of temper and revolver, met his gaze a little impatiently. The operator had recourse to a trick. Under the pretence of misunderstanding the message, he obliged the sender to repeat it about for the sake of accuracy, and even suggested a few verbal alterations, ostensibly to insure correctness, but really to extract further information. Nevertheless, the man doggedly persisted in a literal transcript of his message. The operator went to his instrument hesitatingly.

"I suppose," he added half questioningly, "there ain't no chance of a mistake. This address is Rightbody, that rich old Bostonian that everybody knows. There ain't but one."

"That's the address," responded the first speaker coolly.

"Didn't know the old chap had investments out here," suggested the operator, lingering at his instrument.

"No more did I," was the insufficient reply.

For some few moments nothing was heard but the click of the instrument, as the operator worked the key, with the usual appearance of imparting confidence to a somewhat reluctant hater who preferred to talk himself. The two men stood by, watching his motions with the usual awe of the unprofessional. When he had finished they had before him two gold pieces. As the operator took them up he could not help saying:

"The old man went off kinder sudden, didn't he? Had no time to write?"

"Not sudden for that kind o' man," was the conspiring reply.

But the speaker was not to be disconcerted. "If there is an answer—" he began.

"There ain't any," replied the first speaker, quietly.

"Why?"

"Because the man ez sent the message is dead."

"But it's signed by you two?"

"Only ez witnesses—eh?" appealed the first speaker to his comrade.

"Only ez witnesses," responded the other.

The operator shrugged his shoulders. The business concluded, the first speaker slightly relaxed. He nodded to the operator, and turned to the bar room with a pleasing social impulse. When their glasses were set down empty the first speaker, with a cheerful con-

demnation of the hard times and the weather, apparently dismissed all previous proceedings from his mind, and lounged out with his companion. At the corner of the street they stopped.

"Well, that job's done," said the first speaker, by way of relieving the slight social embarrassment of parting.

"That's so," rejoined his companion, and shook his hand.

They parted. A gust of wind swept through the pines, and struck a faint, Zeban cry from the wires above their heads; and the rain and the darkness again slowly settled upon Cottonwood.

The message lagged a little at San Francisco, laid over half an hour at Chicago, and fought longitude the whole way; so that it was past midnight when the "all night" operator took it from the wires at Boston. But it was freighted with a mandate from the San Francisco office; and a messenger was procured, who sped with it through dark snow bound streets, between the high walls of close-shuttered rayless houses, to a certain formal square, ghostly with snow covered statues. Here he ascended the broad steps of a reserved and solid looking mansion, and pulled a bronze bell knob, that somewhere within those chaste recesses, after an apparent reflective pause, coldly communicated the fact that a stranger was waiting without—as he ought. Despite the lateness of the hour, there was a slight glow from the windows, clearly not enough to warm the messenger with indications of a festivity within, but yet bespeaking, as it were, some prolonged though subdued excitement. The sober servant who took the dispatch, and receipted for it as gravely as if witnessing a last will and testament, respectfully paused before the entrance of the drawing room. The sound of measured and rhetorical speech, through which the occasional catarrhal cough of the New England coast struggled, as the only effect of nature not wholly repressed, came from its heavily-curtained recesses; for the occasion of the evening had been the reception and entertainment of various distinguished persons, and, as had been epigrammatically expressed by one of the guests, "the history of the country" was taking its leave in phrases more or less memorable and characteristic. Some of these valedictory axioms were clever, some witty, a few profound, but always left as a gentle contribution to the entertainer. Some had been already prepared, and, like a card, had served and identified the guest at other mansions.

The last guest departed, the last carriage rolled away, when the servant ventured to indicate the existence of the dispatch to his master, who was standing on the hearth rug in an attitude of wearied self-righteousness. He took it, opened it, read it, re-read it, and said:

"There must be some mistake! It is not for me. Call the boy, Waters."

Waters, who was perfectly aware that the boy had left, nevertheless obediently walked toward the hall door, but was recalled by his master.

"No matter—at present!"

"It's nothing serious, William?" asked Mrs. Rightbody, with languid worldly concern.

"No, nothing. Is there a light in my study?"

"Yes. But before you go, can you give me a moment or two?"

Mr. Rightbody turned a little impatiently toward his wife. She had thrown herself languidly on the sofa; her hair was slightly disarranged, and part of a slipped foot was visible. She might have been a finely formed woman; but even her careless deshabille left the general impression that she was severely flanneled throughout, and that any ostentation of womanly charm was under vigorous sanitary surveillance.

"Mrs. Marvin told me to-night that her son made no secret of his serious attachment for our Alice, and that, if I was satisfied, Mr. Marvin would be glad to confer with you at once."

The information did not seem to absorb Mr. Rightbody's wandering attention, but rather increased his impatience. He said hastily that he would speak of that to-morrow, and partly by way of reprisal, and partly to dismiss the subject, added:

"Positively James must pay some attention to the register and the thermometer. It was over 70 degs. to-night, and the ventilating draft was closed in the drawing room."

"That was because Professor Ammon sat near it, and the old gentleman's tonsils are so sensitive."

"He ought to know from Dr. Dyer Dot that systematic and regular exposure to draughts stimulates the mucous membrane; while fixed air over sixty degrees invariably—"

"I am afraid, William," interrupted Mrs. Rightbody, with feminine adroitness, adopting her husband's topic with a view of thereby directing him from it; "I am afraid that people do not yet appreciate the substitution of bouillon for punch and ices. I observed that Mr. Spondee declined it, and I fancied looked disappointed. The fibrine and when in liquor glasses passed quite unnoticed, too."

"And yet each half drachm contained the half-digested substance of a pound of beef. I'm surprised at Spondee!" continued Mr. Rightbody, aggrievedly. "Exhausting his brain and nerve force by the highest creative efforts of the Muse, he prefers perfumed and diluted alcohol flavored with carbonic acid gas. Even Mrs. Faringway admitted to me that the sudden lowering of the temperature of the stomach by the introduction of ice—"

"Yes; but she took a lemon ice at the last Dorothea reception, and asked me if I had observed that the lower animals refused their food at a temperature over sixty degrees."

Mr. Rightbody again moved impatiently towards the door. Mrs. Rightbody eyed him curiously.

"You will not write, I hope? Dr. Keppler told me to-night that your cerebral syn-toms interdicted any prolonged mental

strain."

"I must consult a few papers," responded Mr. Rightbody, curtly, as he entered his library.

It was a richly furnished apartment, morbidly severe in its decorations, which were symptomatic of a gloomy dyspepsia of art, then quite prevalent. A few curios, very ugly, but providentially equally rare, were scattered about. There were various bronzes, marbles and casts, all requiring explanation, and so fulfilling their purpose of promoting conversation and exhibiting the erudition of their owner. There were souvenirs of travel with history, old bric-a-brac with pedigree, but little or nothing that challenged attention for itself alone. In all cases the superiority of the owner to his possessions was admitted. As a natural result nobody ever lingered there, the servants avoided the room and no child was ever known to play in it.

Mr. Rightbody turned up the gas and from a cabinet of drawers, precisely labeled, drew a package of letters. These he carefully examined. All were discolored and made dignified by age, but some, in their original freshness, must have appeared trifling, and inconsistent with any correspondent of Mr. Rightbody. Nevertheless, that gentleman spent some moments in carefully perusing them, occasionally referring to the telegram in his hand. Suddenly there was a knock at the door. Mr. Rightbody started, made a half-unconscious movement to return the letters to the drawer, turned the telegram face downwards, and then, somewhat harshly, stammered:

"Eh? Whose there? Come in."

"I beg your pardon, papa," said a very pretty girl, entering, without, however, the slightest trace of apology or awe in her manner, and taking a chair with the self-possession and familiarity of a habitue of the room, "but I knew it was not your habit to write late, so I supposed you were not busy. I am on my way to bed."

She was so very pretty, and withal so utterly unconscious of it, or perhaps so consciously superior to it, that one was provoked into a more critical examination of her face. But this only resulted in a reiteration of her beauty, and perhaps the added fact that her dark eyes were very womanly, her rich complexion eloquent and her chiselled lips full enough to be passionate or capricious, notwithstanding that their general effect suggested neither caprice, womanly weakness nor passion.

With the instinct of an embarrassed man, Mr. Rightbody touched the topic he would have preferred to avoid.

"I suppose we must talk over to-morrow," he hesitated, "this matter of yours and Mr. Marvin's? Mrs. Marvin has formally spoken to your mother."

Miss Alice lifted her bright eyes intelligently, but not joyfully, and the color of action, rather than embarrassment, rose to her round cheeks.

"Yes, he said she would," she answered, simply.

"At present," continued Mr. Rightbody, still awkwardly, "I see no objection to the proposed arrangement."

Miss Alice opened her round eyes at this. "Why, papa, I thought it had been all settled long ago! Mamma knew it, you know it. Last July mamma and you talked it over."

"Yes, yes," returned her father, fumbling his papers; "that is—well, we will talk of it to-morrow." In fact, Mr. Rightbody had intended to give the affair a proper attitude of seriousness and solemnity by the precision of speech and some apposite reflections, when he should impart the news to his daughter, but felt himself unable to do it now. "I am glad, Alice," he said at last, "that you have quite forgotten your previous whims and fancies. You see we are right."

"Oh! I dare say, papa, if I'm to be married at all, that Mr. Marvin is in every way suitable."

Mr. Rightbody looked at his daughter narrowly. There was not the slightest impatience nor bitterness in her manner; it was as well regulated as the sentiment she expressed.

"Mr. Marvin is"—he began.

"I know what Mr. Marvin is," interrupted Miss Alice; "and he has promised me that I shall be allowed to go on with my studies the same as before. I shall graduate with my class; and, if I prefer to practice my profession, I can do so in two years after our marriage."

"In two years?" queried Mr. Rightbody, curiously.

"Yes. You see, in case we should have a child, that would give me time enough to wean it."

Mr. Rightbody looked at this flesh of his flesh, pretty and palpable flesh as it was; but, being confronted as equally with the brain of his brain, all he could do was to say meekly:

"Yes, certainly. We will see about all that to-morrow."

Miss Alice rose. Something in the free, unfettered swing of her arms as she rested them lightly, after a half yawn, on her lithe hips, suggested his next speech, although still distrust and impatient.

"You continue your exercise with the health-lift yet, I see."

"Yes, papa; but I had to give up the flannels. I don't see how mamma could wear them. But my dresses are high-necked, and by bathing I toughen my skin. See?" she added, as with a child-like unconsciousness, she unfastened two or three buttons of her gown, and exposed the white surface of her throat and neck to her father, "I can defy a chill."

Mr. Rightbody, with something akin to a genuine, playful paternal laugh, leaned forward and kissed her forehead.

"It's getting late, Ally," he said parentally, but not dictatorially. "Go to bed."

"I took a nap of three hours this afternoon," said Miss Alice, with a dazzling smile, "to anticipate this dissipation. Good-night, papa. To-morrow, then."

"To-morrow," repeated Mr. Rightbody, with his eyes still fixed upon the girl vaguely, "Good-night."

Miss Alice tripped from the room, possibly a trifle the more light-heartedly that she had

parted from her father in one of his rare moments of illogical human weakness. And perhaps it was well for the poor girl that she kept this single remembrance of him, when, I fear, in after years, his methods, his reasoning and indeed all he had tried to impress upon her childhood, had faded from her memory.

For, when she had left, Mr. Rightbody fell again to the examination of his old letters. This was quite absurdly so much so, that he did not notice the footsteps of Mrs. Rightbody on the staircase as she passed to her chamber, nor that she had paused on the landing to look through the glass half-door on her husband, as he sat there with the letters beside him, and the telegram opened before him. Had she waited a moment later, she would have seen him rise, and walk to the sofa with a disturbed air and a slight confusion; so that, on reaching it, he seemed to hesitate to lie down, although pale and evidently faint. Had she still waited, she would have seen him rise again with an agonized effort, stagger to the table, fumblingly refold and replace the papers in the cabinet, and lock it, and, although now but half conscious, hold the telegram over the gas flame till it was consumed. For, had she waited until this moment, she would have flown unhesitatingly to his aid, as, this act completed, he staggered again, reached his hand toward the bell, but vainly, and then fell prone upon the sofa.

But alas! no providential nor accidental hand was raised to save him or anticipate the progress of this story. And when, half an hour later, Mrs. Rightbody, a little alarmed, and more indignant at his violation of the doctor's rules, appeared upon the threshold, Mr. Rightbody lay upon the sofa dead!

With haste, with thronging feet, with the irruption of strangers and a hurrying to and fro, but, more than all, with an impetuous and emotion unknown to the mansion when its owner was in life, Mrs. Rightbody strove to call back the vanished life, but in vain. The highest medical intelligence, called from its bed at this strange hour, saw only the demonstration of its theories made a year before. Mr. Rightbody was dead—without doubt, without mystery, even as a correct man should die—logically, and indorsed by the highest medical authority.



Mr. Rightbody lay upon the sofa dead.

But, even in the confusion, Mrs. Rightbody managed to speed a messenger to the telegraph office for a copy of the dispatch received by Mr. Rightbody, but now missing.

In the solitude of her own room, and without a confidant, she read these words:

"(Copy.)
"To Mr. Adams Rightbody, Boston, Mass.:
"Joshua Sibley died suddenly this morning. His last request was that you should remember your sacred compact with him of thirty years ago. (Signed)
"SEVENTY-FOUR."
"SEVENTY-FIVE."

In the darkened home, and amid the formal condolences of their friends who had called to gaze upon the scarcely cold features of their late associate, Mrs. Rightbody managed to send another dispatch. It was addressed to "Seventy-four and Seventy-five," Cottonwood. In a few hours she received the following enigmatical response:

"A horse thief named Josh Sibley was lynched yesterday morning by the vigilantes at Deadwood."

ON THE STYLE.



The next time we met

It was in the city. Gracious, what a change! Heavens what a pity! She'd drawn up her hair

Underneath her hat And frizzed her golden curls. Only think of that. Dressed up like a fairy

In a fashion pet. With a yellow pelt. A dog that I do hate. Her pa had come to "York"

To stay a little while.

Though she's left the country Still she's on the style.—Chip in The Judge.

Why George W. Peck Enlisted.

It was in 1864 that I joined a cavalry regiment in the department of the Gulf, a raw recruit in a veteran regiment. It may be asked why I waited so long before enlisting, and why I enlisted at all, when the war was so near over. I know that most of the soldiers enlisted from patriotic motives, and because they wanted to help shed blood, and wind up the war. I did not. I enlisted for the bounty. I thought the war was nearly over, and the probabilities were that the regiment I had enlisted in would be ordered home before I could get to it. In fact, the recruiting officer told me as much, and he said I would get my bounty, and a few months' pay, and it would be just like finding money. He said that at that late day I would never see a rebel, there would be no fighting, and it would be just one continued picnic for two or three months, and there would be no more danger than to go off camping for a duck shoot. At my time of life, now that I have become gray and bald, and my eyesight is failing and I have become a grandfather, I do not want to open the sores of twenty-two years ago. I want a quiet life. So I would not assert that the recruiting officer deliberately lied to me, but I was the worst deceived man that ever enlisted, and if I ever meet that man on this earth it will go hard with him. Of course, if he is dead, that settles it, as I shall not follow any man after death, when I am in doubt as to which road he has taken. As far as the bounty was concerned, I got that all right, but it was only \$300. Within twenty-four hours after I had been credited to the town from which I enlisted I heard of a town that was paying as high as \$1,200 for recruits. I have met with many reverses of fortune in the course of a short but brilliant career, but I never suffered more than I did when I found that I had to go to war for a begrudging \$300 bounty, when I could have had \$1,200 by being credited to another town. I think that during two years and a half of service nothing tended more to dampen my ardor, make me despondent and hate myself, than the loss of that \$900 bounty.—Geo. W. Peck in Peck's Sun.

Where the Minority Won.

The smartest man I ever saw "in charge" of a primary was an old Dutchman (I am not a candidate for anything this year myself, consequently I use the phrase "old Dutchman") "over the Rhine" in Cincinnati. The voice of the meeting was rather against the chairman, and he saw it, but he didn't hear it, and he kept the meeting itself from hearing. I noticed that he managed to defeat all motions offered by the majority and carry all resolutions offered by the minority. Of course, you know a primary "over the Rhine" in the city of McLeansville, is rather more German than a mass meeting in Berlin. Well, every vote was a "ja" and a "nein" vote, and the chairman always contrived to make the majority squeak out the thin "nein," while the minority roared the good, mouth-filling "yaw!" An obnoxious motion would be introduced. Anxious looks on the countenances of the apprehensive minority waiting for the chairman to come to the front. He was always calm, always ready, always "in battery." Rising slowly to his feet he put the question with impressive, honest deliberation. "All dot was in favor of defeating dot raisolution will say ja" "Yaw!" bawled the exultant minority, in a roar that made the gas flicker. "All obossed to defeating der raisolution say nein." "Nein!" thinly squeaked the exasperated majority. "Der raisolution was defeated," calmly announced the chair, and the wrathful howls of the crowd utterly drowned the triumphant shouts of the minority. It was no use to appeal from the chair or call for a division, he always got the "yaws" on his side.—Burdette, in Brooklyn Eagle.

Why Few Women Learn to Swim.

He was teaching his wife to swim. "Wow—wow," she spluttered as she tipped up and got her mouth full of water. "I can't learn." "Oh, yes, you can," he urged; "just keep your mouth shut and persevere." "Can't I learn without keeping my mouth shut?" she asked. "Not very well. You see, if you—"

"George," she interrupted, "take me right out on shore; I didn't want to learn on any such condition, and I ain't surprised that so few women are good swimmers."

George did his subsequent bathing alone.—Tid Bits.

He Wept Scalding Tears.

Arabel Plank is Philadelphia born, and has been educated in a very select school for young ladies. Last week Arabel's dear papa took her to Cape May point, and while there he pointed out to her a flock of birds on the beach. "There," said the old gentleman, as the flock rose in the air, "look at those birds, Arabel. They are curlews." "Oh," cooed the maiden, opening her big, innocent blue eyes, "how lovely! how splendid! Just to think, pa! It was only yesterday that I was reading that dear, delightful poem of Mr. Gray's which begins, 'The curlew tolls the knell of parting day.' Only imagine those tiny creatures, pa, tolling a great bell. How very strange!"

Then the old gentleman sat down on the damp, damp sand and wept scalding tears and howled until the people thought he had the cholera.—Philadelphia News

Two Ways of Courting.

"So you are paying attention to the handsome Miss Dashaway, George? You're lucky. I was making attempts in that direction myself, but my wooing was a failure." "Ah! indeed; how did you proceed with your wooing?" "I told her I loved her." "Yes." "And asked her if she would have me." "Yes." "Twas no good. What did you do?" "Nothing. I simply treated her to ice cream and strawberries. Never spoke a word of love." "And you are solid with her now?" "I am, you bet."—Boston Courier.

The United States Mail February 22. Summer resident—I've an important letter here. What time does the next New York mail go out?

Country postmaster—Wall, yer see my son Jerry, what kerries th' mail ter th' station, 's got a ston' bruise on his heel, 'n I told him he could favor it a leetle 'n stay ter home to-day. Yer letter 'll go to-morrer or next day.—Tid Bits.

W. D. Howells writes all his novels with a type-writer.