

THE HARDEST TIME OF ALL.

There are days of deepest sorrow
In the seasons of our life;
There are wild, despairing moments,
There are hours of mental strife.
There are times of stony anguish,
When the tears refuse to fall.
But the waiting time, my brothers,
Is the hardest time of all.

Youth and love are oft impatient,
Seeking things beyond their reach;
And the heart grows sick with hoping,
Ere it learns what life can teach.
For, before the fruit be gathered,
We must see the blossoms fall;
And the waiting time, my brothers,
Is the hardest time of all.

Loving once, and loving ever,
It is sad to watch for years
For the light whose fitful shining
Makes a rainbow of our tears.
It is sad to count at morning
All the hours to evenfall;
O the waiting time, my brothers,
Is the hardest time of all.

We can bear the heat of conflict,
Though the sudden crushing blow,
Beating back our gathered forces,
For a moment lay us low.
We may rise again beneath it,
None the weaker for our fall;
But the waiting time, my brothers,
Is the hardest time of all.

For it wears the eager spirit,
As the salt waves wear the stone,
And hope's gorgeous garb grows threadbare,
Till its brightest tints are gone.
Then amid youth's radiant tresses,
Silent snows begin to fall;
O the waiting time, my brothers,
Is the hardest time of all.

Yet at last we learn the lesson,
That God knoweth what is best,
And a silent resignation
Makes the spirit calm and blest;
For, perchance, a day is coming,
Coming, though it may be late,
When our hearts will thank Him meekly
That he taught us how to wait.

A NIGHT EDITOR'S STORY.

My story is a ghost story, and one of the genuine articles, I conclude, from putting together my pre-conceived ideas of ghosts, and the particular experience I have to relate on this occasion. It is an experience so strange, so terrible, and so fraught with poignant grief, that for a long time after its occurrence I shrank 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 Sutfin, a young fellow of keen perceptions, ready wit and active ability. He had clear eyes, a concentrative brow, a rather pale complexion, a long, flaring, jet-black moustache, and an open, wide-awake look that was a faithful index of his character. Nothing escaped his observation. He was indefatigably industrious, and picked up all the news, delving out items from the most apparently barren ground. He was the best local we had ever had, and our department of city news, soon after his advent, outstripped those of all our contemporaries in variety and spice.

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

"We will see what we can fish up from the slime," 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 11, 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 1 or 2."

Dobbin was a middle-aged, seedy individual, of some ability, but no particular occupation, who loafed 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 just in 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 vile and desperate lawlessness.

"You are not in earnest, Ward. You are 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 lookout. And, promise me one thing, Ward; that you will not drink anything more to-night—at least until 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 minutes, and at last with an effort, bent myself to the work before me. Presently Bailey came in on an errand.

"Where's Sutfin?" 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 amen to his wish. We all liked Ward, and felt an interest in him. He was so young, so bright, and capable of so much.

My head was not clear that night. I could not think straight, nor bring my energies to bear on the tasks 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 invariably set things going swimmingly. I suspect it contained a liberal admixture of those fascinating, 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 don't know that I did, but I never felt so

keen or so fascinated by any work as on that particular night. I worked on steadily and untiringly, 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 strangest experience of my life—an experience through whose parallel I hope and expect never to pass 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 know not what impelled me to look around at that particular moment—I beheld the door open noiselessly, and Ward Sutfin enter. It was about 2 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 have 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 quick step, and immediately on seating himself took pencil and paper and began to write.

"Ward! I say."

Still he did not reply. His pencil traveled 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.

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, 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. Sutfin, just now?" I asked.

"No, sir."

"You did not?"

"No, sir, there hain'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 was bewildered. I returned to my room, and was just about to sit down to my table, when I bethought myself to examine what Ward had written.

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

"MURDER.—Mr. Ward Sutfin, 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 Pinche'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 and writing—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 pounced 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 the 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.

"It's just as I feared," I said, still searching for the missing paper.

"What is it?"

"Ward—"

"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 Pinche'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 on!" 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 me back to coherency.

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."

We searched for some time, but in vain. I felt rather chagrined, and was doubly anxious to find it. But it was not to be found. We searched every stray scrap.

"It must have fallen into the fireplace," I said. "See—there are its charred remains now."

"Yes, I see," said Bailey looking at me, pityingly. "But never mind to-night, Peck. You had better go home and get rested."

This infuriated me.

"You are trifling!" I ejaculated.

"You don't believe me. But I am neither drunk nor crazy. I have spoken the truth, and you or some one else must go with me immediately to Muggins' Forks."

Bailey poohed, and endeavored to persuade me out of this idea, whereat I left him without ceremony.

I made my way into the street and walked swiftly to the police headquarters.

I was well acquainted there, and without being obliged to enter into minute explanations, was furnished with an escort of two officers.

"Been a fuss at the Forks, did you say?" remarked one of them, after we had got well on our way.

"Yes—in fact there has been a murder—"

"Whew! That's coming it pretty strong."

"No. I might not have been believed if I had. It is rather a singular affair, take it all through. But if we search the cellar-ways, in Pinche's alley, it's my opinion that we'll find the dead body of Ward Sutfin."

Both men uttered startled exclamations at this, and demanded to know my reasons for thus speaking.

I then detailed to them the particulars that have already been related, at which they uttered sundry expressions of surprise and incredulity.

But we hurried on faster than ever and in due course of time reached that quarter of the city known as Muggins' Forks. It was in a state of comparative quietude, being dark and silent, lights glimmering only occasionally here and there out of low groggeries.

Soon we turned on Pinche's alley, a narrow, dirty, dark lane, from various quarters of which arose stench almost