

"Anything in the surgical way?"
I was Police Surgeon as well as Coroner.

"No."
"Well, then, why am I sent for at this time of night?"

"Don't bother, Perfesser; the man ain't dead yet, but they say he will be before morning."

"Are doctors attending him?"

"Oh, he's in good hands."

"What's the matter with him?"

"Well," said the official, "some folks say he's got so much knowledge into him that he can't live under it."

"Cerebral disorder, eh?"

"What?" asked the man.

"Brain disorder, I mean. Something wrong here."

I touched my forehead, and so did he, as he said:

"Ay, and I thought I'd drop in and tell you if you was going to the station to-morrow to take a look and see if it's post mortem or not. Besides, I wanted to see where I could always find you in case of need."

I bowed and attributed his visit to a feeling of curiosity. He sat on the sink, one rubbered foot thrown over the other, and wiped his nose with a dirty handkerchief several times, while his eyes wandered about like Christopher Columbus after discoveries. Finally he spoke like one who felt called upon to say something.

"Perfesser, there has been an accident this afternoon; terrible, too."

"Ah!" said I.

"Awful!" said he.

"What was it?"

"Nitro-glycerin explosion up in the iron mills—a hundred fellow mortals buried."

"Sad!"

"Affecting, very."

Here he rubbed his mouth with the back of his hand.

"Perfesser, what is that nitro-glycerin?"

"It is a very dangerous article," I answered, happy to display my knowledge. It has nearly twice the destructiveness of gunpowder, but, unlike it, does not explode on the application of heat. A red hot coal dropped into it does not explode it. It will freeze. It is yellow and greasy. Its symbols in our nomenclature are, C3, 115 (No. 3) O6."

"You don't mean to say so!" said the officer, interrupting me, in disagreeable tones, in the very middle of a choice extract from one of my lectures. "Why, but you haven't told me how it goes on. If fire won't burst it, what the devil will?"

I told him if it were pressed, or anything fell on it, it would explode."

"Place it under the crusher of a cider mill, strike it with a hammer, let a weight fall on it from a height—"

"Yes," said my man, "and that rouses its volcano, does it? How does it come, perfesser?"

"In little cans—why, like these?" said I, discovering that there was a little can of it on the marble sink, which I had carelessly neglected to replace in the cellar. I then took a little of the glycerin, spread it on an anvil, and struck it with a hammer.

A slight explosion and a flame burst from the paper.

"No, really," said the policeman, starting back. "I suppose, perfesser, that ere can would make a mighty big noise if allowed to explode here all at once?"

"It would blow the entire building to atoms," said I, resuming the analysis of Mrs. Johnson's stomach.

"No!" I heard the policeman remark, in deliberate Yankee tones, "you don't say so!"

The next moment I lay on my back, a gag in my mouth, terribly frightened and sick at heart. Over me stood the policeman, and the first thing the functionary did was, looking me straight in the face, to take off his nose. He then rid himself of his red eyebrows, hair and cap, and became a determined looking fellow, with the eyes of a fiend and the nose of a Roman.

"So you think," said the metamorphosed, in the tones of a gentleman, "that nothing can save Joe Johnson from the rope? Poor fellow! it does look like it. But, my dear Professor, Joe Johnson is fortunate enough to have in me a devoted friend as well as brother. I have undertaken to save him, and he shall be saved. In order to accomplish this end, it will be necessary to remove from the face of the earth not only the stomach of his miserable wife yonder, but also, my dear Professor—I am sorry to be obliged to say it, for I believe you were my brother's teacher and friend—yourself as well." I saw he was in deadly earnest. "Your death must apparently result from accident; at least, so it must seem

to the authorities. My brother is in jail, and they will not suspect him, and they certainly will not suspect me."

What terrible deed was in his brain hatching—was he going to murder me? The hard earned knowledge of a score of years I would have given for power to utter one single cry. He took me in his arms and placed me in a chair, and bound me to it, and then from his side pocket he produced another rope.

Was it myself that was to hang instead of Johnson?

No; yes. He placed the line pulley-like over the arm of a hanging chandelier. This was altogether too slight a support even for one of my slender frame. It was not to be hanging, then. To one end of the rope he attached a weight, and raised it by pulling the other six or eight feet from the floor. The loose end he secured to the sink. Was he mad? Did he mean to draw me under this weight and send me out of the world in a novel way by letting it fall and dash my brains out? To the sink end he attached a long yellow string. Under the weight on the floor he placed the can of nitro-glycerin; I recognized the yellow string, it was a fuse, it would burn in sixty minutes. It would run across the marble slab, there was no hope of igniting any substance that would warn my friends.

"Do you begin to see through it?" asked Joe Johnson's brother.

I believe I cursed him with my eyes. I could only breathe through my nostrils, and great veins were swelling and growing hot in my forehead.

Drawing a match from his pocket, he lighted and applied it to the fuse; that little tyrant that gave a man an hour to live, to kill him at the end of it—that little, irresponsible terror that, less merciful Providence, told a man the second he was to die, if fright and horror spared him to himself. Slowly the flames crept, snake-like, around the twine.

"In one hour," said the prisoner's brother, "you will be in heaven or hell. I will watch with you for half an hour, and the other half you will spend alone."

He sat down some minutes in a chair, watching the flame. Then he rose and took a piece of porcelain with the murderer's name thereon from the table, and shook his head gloomily.

"I am chemist enough to know that it is arsenic," said he. "Yet those bright metallic eyes, a betrayal of the guilty! Science, thou wouldst kill my brother—thou shalt save him. Let us see in whose hand thou art most powerful. Here is a man, who by thy aid, bids the poison sprite surprise, and write in brilliant characters a foul confession on this piece of porcelain. But behold, O science! It is no sooner written than by thy word the whole confession and thy chosen servant are annihilated. Let the good professor use chemicals; the bad brother only asks a little can of nitro-glycerin."

I heard this speech, indeed; but great heavens! it was my eyes and not my ears that was busiest then; for beneath the table, covered by a crimson cloth, and which I faced, appeared the face of a child. The hair was rumpled, and the blue eyes were just opening from sleep. The intelligent forehead was wrinkled strangely. It was my boy Billy. I was afraid he would call "papa." If he did, the implacable man would add the murder of the child to my death.

But my boy had none of this. He had, I suppose, crept under the table unknown to me, and had fallen asleep there. I tried to tell the little fellow to hide again and wait for the final half-hour, when my tormenter would be gone. Whether he understood me or not, aided by what he heard, I do not know, but he quickly withdrew his little head, first kissing his hand slightly to me, and then shaking his fist at the schemer watching so belligerently his dumb fire agents.

The half-hour wore slowly away. O heavens! what agony did I suffer! Not for myself, but for my child. A slight noise might discover his presence; the match might run its tether sooner than was expected; he might be murdered or blown to atoms.

The fuse burned on—on. The half-hour is up. The brother of the murderer arises to go. Jo!

"Commit your soul to God's keeping," he said. "You hold the evidence of my brother's guilt—nothing can save you now."

With that he turned to take his hat from on the table covered with the crimson cloth, beneath which hid my priceless boy. Something attracted his attention! He held out his hands and leaned forward. I thought he discovered my boy. No; he was lifting something in either hand—the wires of the electric battery. In another instant my

boy had leaped from under the table, and was turning the crank fast and furiously.

The murderer's brother was in the power of my boy. He could not drop the wires, he was helpless. How my boy cried for help! The old college rung with his voice. The prisoner's brother added his voice to my boy's in his agony. He begged—he beseeched—all his nerves were racked—great waves of galvanism leaped, surged, trembled and jarred over every sensitive nerve and fibre. Still my boy was inflexible, and shouted and turned faster. Unperceived upon the marble, in the track of the burning fuse, was a pool of inflammable oil. In an instant a great length was burned away. It would last just five minutes, and no more.

"Father!" shouted my boy, "if no assistance comes, this villain must die with us. I dare not free him. Help! Help! Help!"

Alas! I could not answer him.

Thank God! But some one else did. The fuse is burnt up! The rope is on fire—the nitro-glycerin! The door opens. Tom Richards, on a midnight visit to the sick, has heard the cry; he comprehends all; he seizes the can in his hand; the weight descends, but not on the death-dealing oil. No; down it goes, through the office floor—down, down, like an evil spirit, to give back a dull, metallic echo from the cellar beneath.

We were saved!

Joe Johnson, the prisoner, was hanged; but his brother remains unpunished by the law, for he stabbed himself with a knife, and thus escaped the hangman's rope.

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