

[CONCLUDED.]

Quick as thought I perceived the faint moment had come. But I was prepared for it, and, looking him steadily in the eye, replied in a calm tone as I could summon. "If you mean my money, it is all in my saddle-bags, and you will have to find my horse before you can get it," he demanded, doubtingly.

I did so, but only a few pieces of silver and pennies rewarded him.

"Take off your coat and waistcoat," he bellowed forth. "I've seen such chickens as you afore; but you can't get Asa Graves' coat!"

"I cannot," I remonstrated. "My coat is—"

With a single effort he seized me by the back of the collar and rent my garment in twain. Then, while he kept me cowering with the pistol, he searched the pockets and lining. A haggard, like from a wild beast, came from his throat, as he found his search unsuccessful.

"Now your shirt," he roared in drunken rage.

"I cannot," I replied, and, pressing the gold steel against my temple, shouted:

"Quick, or by—"

At that instant a step was heard approaching the hut. Simultaneously we both glanced at the little window. To my surprise it was broad daylight. I almost shrieked with ecstasy at the discovery. But what was the approaching footstep? Was it desire and death? As if by mutual consent we awaited the sequel. Nearer and nearer came the slow, regular tread. It passed the rear, around the corner, by the door, up the stairs, and finally stopped on my part had wholly ceased. Great beads of agony stood on my forehead. My eyes dilated until the iris and pupil were blended in one indistinct hazy haze.

An exclamation of surprise came from the lips of the ruffian at my side, followed by a striding motion toward the door of the hut. His sudden departure brought back my eyesight, and looking again toward the window, I saw a sight which deprived me of all reason.

There my horse.

As I comprehended the whole situation, my heart sank within me, and I uttered an involuntary cry of anguish. The cry had a two-fold effect. It attracted the attention of my horse and brought the robber back to my side. With an oath, he again raised the murderous weapon, and, as he raised it, he firmly expelling my time had come.

"Bah!" he muttered, "he isn't worth the powder; and, besides, if he tells the truth, there is money enough to keep the rest of my life. I'll try it."

A moment after and I heard him at the cupboard. I opened my eyes.

Presently he came back with a strong cord, and catching hold of my wrist, he dragged me to the window, also made large purchases in the East, are now prepared to show the

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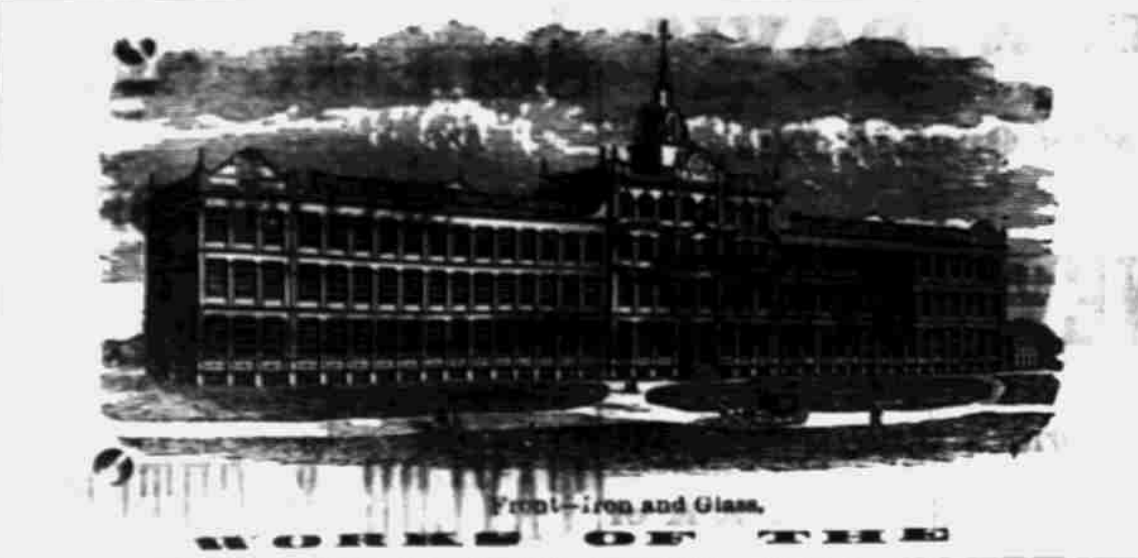
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