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THE ROAD AGENT.

The four horse mud wagon, called by courtesy of stage, which ran between Bobey's and Logtown, was crawling up the long grade which corkscrewed around to the summit of Pilot Knob. It was necessary to do this in order that a good preparatory start might be had for the succeeding rattling plunge down the other corkscrew road, which led to Logtown.

By the side of Black Pete, the driver, sat an eastern importation of the genus "drummer." Pete rolled his tobacco into his cheek, snapped a fly off the ear of his leader and said:

"No, sir. I don't git no pay for fightin, and I don't do no fightin for ther company. If any galoot stops this here stage and politely like asks for the cash box, he's a gwine ter git it. 'Taint no use, no ways, to fight them fellers; they always hev ther drap on ye."

"But," said the drummer, "were you ever robbed on this road?"

"Wal, no, but I've seed fellers loafing round here as I've thought meant to do it some time or other."

"And if they did stop you, you would give them the express box and drive on, eh?"

"You bet! If ther express company wants to pertect ther box they must send a messenger along with it."

The stage crawled slowly up to the top of the hill, and Black Pete settled his feet firmly on the brake strap, and with a "Get up, boys!" the sweating horses started to investigate the mysteries of the almost invisible road below them on a keen gallop.

Round and round the rapidly varying road the stage and passengers whirled, sometimes losing sight of the horses around the sharp turns and again slewing sharply outward toward the dangerous edge of the canyon, which yawned below them. The sun was down and the moon was painting weird shadows on the powdered dust of the grade.

It was just the time for the imagination to picture scenes of violence, robbery and blood. Suddenly the chaparral bushes by the roadside slightly parted, and a long, shining, black object was waved over them toward the stage. A shadowy figure rose in the moonlight among the bushes, and from behind a black veil, which smothered the voice somewhat, came the hoarse command:

"Stop! Stop!"

Black Pete hurriedly pushed his foot heavily down upon the brake, reached down into the bottom of the stage, pulled out the express box and threw it into the road, muttering:

"Thar ye, take it!"

The restless horses immediately plunged away into the shadows of the forest.

"Wa—was that a highwayman?" gasped the drummer.

"In course it was," answered Pete. "Didn't yer see ther shooting iron? Thar goes a cool thousand dollars, as I knows how. You bet ther boys'll be out arter him tonight. I shouldn't wonder if that war old Bart himself. He's a cool one, he is. He always shoots his mouth off in some poetry. He leaves it in the box when he goes through with it. Didn't yer notice how keen he held that thar shooting iron right toward me?"

The lights of Logtown now glistened below them, and a few turns of the corkscrew road brought the stage up to the hotel porch where it stopped with a loud "Whoa!" from Pete.

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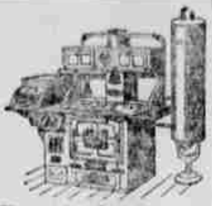

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