The Wave

The Automatic Executioner.

BY C.P. ADELE DANNIGER.

"Mr. Giers, Feldon has gone and left things there in confusion. I have just received a dispatch; he has taken the key, seals, and private papers. You must go down at once and look the matter up, those papers at all hazards. As the confirmation, I bring you a note from Feldon. My private car will take you as far as the City of Mexico; it is a narrow gauge to Orizaba. Mr. Giers. I am your old friend, Jackson. I have left a station and assist you. Get ready. Steam is up; in fifteen minutes you will be there."--Telegram.

"The morrow was to be my wedding day. I was sorry to think of the sannoyance which this sudden departure caused my bride and her family. I had long learned to make the interests of my chief my own; delay was impossible; I could not even hint at the thought of flying.

With feelings in which bitterness was curiously blended with satisfaction-satisfy in with the new evidence of confidence that I was giving--I said that I would be ready.

Returning to my office, I hastily wrote a note to Mr. Jackson, telling him that I would be ready in fifteen minutes, found myself in the chief's private car. He handed me written instructions and a check-book, and wished me a safe journey, and the signal to the engineer. A shrill whistle, and away we sped at a tremendous rate.

I had the sensations carefully. Special stress was laid upon the recovery of those private papers which the chief had mentioned. Being acquainted with the country, I had little fear that I could be held of Feldon, although I did not know him personally.

We reached El Paso almost before I knew it. On we sped through Mexico, until we arrived at Queretaro, where an accident happened to the car. Fortunately we were within twenty minutes of the express from Aguas Calientes to the City of Mexico, which stops in Queretaro.

While waiting, the chief regarding the accident, I ordered the car and the engine side-tracked until the next day, and procured a ticket for a first-class compartment of the night train to Mexico. I said "I'll have a first-class compartment because the ticket-agent had informed me that the express was made up of English cars, and I don't feel myself called upon to discuss the differences between English coaches and American cars, but although the English cars are not the equal of the American coaches, owing to the fact that the passengers face each other, a first-class compartment, when occupied by one or two passengers, is certainly far more convenient than the American car, with its two-seat chairs. The seats, which run the whole width of the English car, afford more elbow-room, are upholstered with soft arm-rests and head-cushions."

I was talking with the engineer, who swore at the Mexican inns in my hearing. He knew nothing about the express except when it expressed into the station. I was ushered into a compartment by the conductor, the engine gave a start, and away we went. The light in the compartment being rather dim, I did not, on entering, observe the presence of any other passenger. But I was made aware that I had a fellow-traveler by something like a growl. My companion had evidently been disturbed in his slumber, and did not greatly relish it. As I looked more closely, I saw that he was well dressed, of gigantic size, and evidently an American. I apologized for the intrusion, but he informed me he was only traveling alone the whole day, and was inclined to talk to some one, so, nothing daunted, I stepped across to him. He shook his head; he refused, and turned his head to the window.

I said no more; and drawing my left over my eyes, I tried to go to sleep, but my mysterious power seemed to keep me awake. Opening my eyes, I met the steady gaze of the stranger. Then, as I closed my eyes in the expectation of a snore, while I looked at him through half-closed lids.

The gale was still upon me; turn as I might, my eyes reverted to his, and the annoyance with which I felt at first, soon changed into horror, for suddenly his eyes took on a raving intensity, and the expression of a maniac, who had lost the self-control of reason. I tried to explain a situation of a snore, while I looked at him through half-closed lids.

The gale was still upon me; turn as I might, my eyes reverted to his, and the annoyance with which I felt at first, soon changed into horror, for suddenly his eyes took on a raving intensity, and the expression of a maniac, who had lost the self-control of reason. I tried to explain to him the nature of my situation, the innocence of the maniac, the intensity of his passion, and the expression of a maniac, who had lost the self-control of reason. I tried to explain to him the nature of my situation, the innocence of the maniac, the intensity of his passion, and the precious value of the papers I was carrying.

"It is useless to look for that rope there; this train does not stop at any of the way-stations, nor would Heaven permit this work to be interrupted, and when we reach the Gulf of Mexico, I shall be famous and you in Heaven!"

"For a moment I thought of jumping at the door, opening the compartment, and being all the more safe, because, at the rate the train was moving, I would be dashed to death, were I lucky enough to escape the grasp of the powerful machine.

"Make haste," said he, drawing his watch, "the execution must be completed before five, and it is now twenty minutes to five."

"I am ready, and I hope the thrill of joy; since force would only hasten my awful end, I must seek to gain time. The train was due in the City of Mexico at five o'clock; if I could divert him for that length of time, I could save myself."

"My dear sir," said I, "I am quite willing that you should try your invention on me, but before I die, I have something to say.

"What is it, speak; it is granted."

"I wish to write my will, and a letter to a lady to whom I am betrothed, and would ask you to mail the heroic deed."

"WithoutURT, sir, I said, "I am one of the few trained for the work, and you cannot use me; but you can use a sheet of paper?"

"Certainly, with pleasure; only be quick about it."

"I thank you very much, Ah, how provoking," said I, searching in my pockets. I have no paper."

"You have plenty of that," said he, extracting from his breast-pocket a tablet of paper and two envelopes.

"By the time I was getting the paper from his pocket, I managed to break the point of my pencil.

"Just see how troublesome I am. The point of my pencil has broken off, and I have no knife to sharpen it!"

"Oh, no trouble at all," he replied. "Just hand me the pencil and I will sharpen it for you." With my pen in his hand, he took a keen-edged dagger from the belt under his cost and sharpened the pencil. He was evidently a man of force. The moment the tip of the knife touched the blade of the pencil, it was sharpened, he sheathed his dagger, and told me to go on. I thought of writing a letter of no small importance, and that my handwriting was at stake-compose a simple sentence. In my despair I copied the alphabet. I drew the characters in the air, and wrote a few vague words, and then received the approval of the craft. At last the sheet was full, and my executioner asked me, if I were ready.

"Yes, I am ready, but I have not written the letter to my affianced.

"Well, write quickly," said he, and his look was threatening.

"I should like to describe to her your wonderful invention. Can you show me how it works, so that I may be able to explain it correctly.

"Decidedly, I will; you are a good fellow, entirely unlike those cowards in Montreal."

"That is a compliment, I suppose?" I asked.

"Nothing easier; I slip the end through that lamp bracket in the ceiling, just for the place.

"But where does it come from, and how is it that you so suddenly occupied, I cast a glance at the window, and my heart gave a leap, for I saw the first houses of the great Mexican city. To gain a little more time was all that I needed, but my life depended on my doing so.

"Behold how it is done," said he, holding the cord in one hand, and the letter in the other.

"Ah, but you would have to engage a living executioner to slip the noose over the criminal's head."

"There is where you are at fault. You need no one at all to assist in the execution. The criminal who has this invention being so charged with electricity, that it no sooner touches his neck than it kills him."

"I became frightfully excited and in his rage did not hear the whistle of the locomotive; the sound inspired me with hope and courage. Now, another cord, and I am safe!"

"This is indeed the greatest invention of the age," said I.

"The only thing that perplexes me, is how you prevent the criminal from slipping out of the noose; you would then need a man after all to keep the noose tight."

"There is the great point of my invention: The electricity draws the noose together instant it is released."

"Good; you don't mean to do it," he interrupted me.

"No," he replied. "Why?"

"Because, I should like to propose an innovation. I would have the criminal himself do the executioner; she would enjoy it. But as you cannot draw, and as I, who am a first-class seeker, could, it is quite as easy to cut, she has nothing to do with it. She will be doubly sorry, because she edits a newspaper."
his head, but quicker than thought I was at the door, opened it and jumped. I fell into a crowd of people—we were at the station of the City of Mexico. As I jumped I heard the gurgling sounds of the strangling maniac. I was not hurt by my fall, and was I regained my feet I hastened to the compartment, anticipating the horrible sight of the madman, strangled by the invention of his diseased mind. But imagine my surprise, when on reaching the place of my late adventure, I found it—vacant.

Had I been dreaming or was I mad? Had all that I suffered been a hallucination?

The curious crowd made such a noise, that the conductor came forward, eager to know the cause of the tumult. I asked him if he knew my traveling companion, if he had seen him leave? He looked at me in amazement; he had seen no one leave the compartment except myself—in the peculiar manner described. He said that I was the sole occupant of that compartment from Queretaro, and turning to the crowd, said in Spanish: "The American is crazy," which caused the crowd to disperse panic-stricken. Seeing that I could get no satisfactory explanation from the conductor, I took my overcoat and bought a ticket for Oaxaca. At the station there I was met by Jackson, who received me very cordially, and informed me that Peldon had been found. I had experienced some shocks in the last few hours, and this news hardly surprised me. Still I asked: "Where was he found?"

"In JIapa," was Jackson's reply.

"When was that?" I queried.

"Last night," said Jackson.

"What has he got to say?" I sternly cried Jackson. "To say!" the poor fellow has nothing to say; he is as crazy as a loon; I pity him. It took six men to manage him last night!

We had just arrived at the Quartz mill, and Jackson conducted me into the room, where Peldon was strapped to an iron bedstead, a raving maniac. As I looked into his face, I nearly fell, the shock was so tremendous; great God! it was my traveling companion of the night before!

When I told Jackson the cause of my agitation, he was perplexed. "The automatic executioner is the very thing he raved about. We found him half dead, with a rush around his neck. This is very strange!" said Jackson.

My story met with many incredulous smiles in San Francisco. My dear wife alone believes it, and shudders when I relate it to others. To me, it remains a psychological mystery.