

from Grass Valley. The prospect of a several days' sojourn here was more pleasing with such varied company, for I saw at once that they were all men who could relate an interesting chapter or two from their own experience if they chose to; and there is nothing like a snug fireside and a pipe to draw such men out. But the most interesting chapter—in fact, one of the strangest tales I ever heard—came from quite an unexpected source. However, I must not anticipate. When we had partaken of the well-prepared supper, which Jackson's worthy better half finally set before us, we all felt very contented and comfortable, and drew up to the fire with our pipes. The storm augmented with the darkness and swept through the valley with increasing violence.

Jackson ventured out for a final inspection of his stable, and when he returned he closed the door and locked it with a positive air that plainly indicated that he did not expect to open it again before morning. But he was mistaken. For scarcely had he pulled a chair into our group when there was a sudden barking of the dogs.

"Another benighted cuss wants to come in probably," said the old miner, with a grin.

Expressing great surprise, Jackson went to the door to obtain a view, if possible, of the approaching individual, or learn the cause of the disturbance, and out of curiosity I followed him. As he opened the door a terrific blast of cold and snow swept in, so that the men by the fire shouted good naturedly:

"Shut the door—shut the door, old man."

Jackson laughed at this, and stepped outside, closing the door behind us—for I kept beside him. He stood peering into the chaos of storm for some moments unable to distinguish a single object. Then, shouting for the dogs to be quiet, he said:

"I don't believe there's any one or anything; let's go in."

Almost instantly there loomed up before us like a phantom, under the light, a muffled figure on horseback.

"Hullo, the house there!" the person shouted, not perceiving us as we stood shivering beside the door.

"Hullo," replied Jackson, through his chattering teeth, brushing the accumulating snow off his bare head at the same time.

"Can I have accommodation here?"

"Yes, of course; you couldn't go on nohow," yelled the old man.

"No, you're right—you're right. I couldn't go on, for the excellent reason that I wouldn't know where to go, even if I could see a rod ahead of my nose. The truth is I'm lost, and I've stumbled on your place by pure accident. Ugh! I'm cold, and—"

The remainder of his sentence was torn off and swept away by the gale as the stranger dismounted, and shook himself to dislodge the snow which had packed itself in a thick coating all over him.

"Go in—go in," said Jackson, taking the bridle, "you are freezing here."

The stranger entered as Jackson threw open the door, and called his boy Tom to come and put up the horse.

"Good evening," the man said quietly to those inside, as he stepped over the threshold. "No, I'm not so very cold—not so very cold," he replied to my inquiries.

I poured him out a large glass of brandy. He swallowed it eagerly. Then he took off his wraps and hung them on the pegs by the door, stamped his feet to shake off the snow which still clung to his heavy boots, and advanced to the fire. He stood sadly regarding it, and his thoughts appeared to be far away.

"Rough night outside," remarked one of the group, with the plain intention of drawing the stranger into conversation.

"Y-e-s—very—rough—very," he answered, absently.

"Come far?" inquired another.

"Seemed a long way to me with that dreadful thing always confronting me," and a perceptible tremor passed over the stranger's frame.

We looked from one to the other for some explanation of this curious remark.

The stranger meanwhile continued to gaze steadily into the glowing fire. Evidently he was not in a communicative mood, and after his last words no one knew what to say to him, so we said nothing. I occupied myself with examining his appearance more closely. He was dark, and swarthy, and weather-beaten, I noticed, and though his jet black hair was streaked with gray, his face seemed strangely youthful. His eye was roving and restless. His stature was below the average, and his frame was slender—I might almost say delicate. A slight accent in the few words he had spoken seemed to betray a foreign origin, and there was a trace of Jewish blood apparent in the general cast of his features. His whole manner was that of a man wholly absorbed in thought, or brooding over some deep and secret trouble.

As I made a remark he turned his head deliberately and looked me straight in the face for a moment. At the same instant some object beyond me which came in the line of his vision caused him to spring up, and he exclaimed hoarsely:

"That clock—did it stop to-day?"

Every glance was turned toward the clock which rested quietly on its shelf at the further end of the room, and was brightly illuminated by the ruddy glare of the fire. The hands pointed to ten minutes past five, though the actual time must have been about nine o'clock. The clock was stopped.

"Yes," replied Jackson, "the durned thing's stopped sure—but it's the first time for weeks."

The stranger groaned.

"My God!" he exclaimed, and he appeared much agitated.

There was a dead silence, and then Jackson said in a soothing tone:

"Tell us what it's all about, stranger—it'll do ye good."

"Perhaps," the man replied mournfully, with a deep-drawn sigh. "But it's a very strange story."

"All the better," said Jackson.

"Well, well," the man said absently, "it can do me no