

The Daily Astorian

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ASTORIA, OREGON, THURSDAY, DECEMBER 25, 1884.

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A SWIFT RETRIBUTION.
A Christmas Tale of Twenty Years Ago.
BY JOB TOPLOFT.
Oregon, twenty years ago, was not what it now is. There were scarcely the conveniences for making a living open to all like there are at present. Many of the men who had no homes spent the winter in the mountains hunting and trapping and it was nothing new for parties to go out for months at a stretch during the winters preceding and for many after the one in which my story begins.

Very little snow had fallen that winter in the Cascades and the prospect for game was discouraging, but as the times were dull in the city the three young men whose fortunes are cast in my story and who were to make their living by hunting and trapping from harvest time until spring, determined to go out to the eastern part of the county and do the best they could until colder weather offered them a chance to hunt larger game in the very heart of the Cascade mountains.

So much for a beginning. The three men were ordinary persons; good friends; good hunters; had been together two years before and were intending to make that winter a final one of the business.
John Osborn, Hiram Gray and Seth Moore were their names and their ages were anywhere between twenty and thirty.

It was just a month before Christmas that they left East Portland with their traps and a couple of horses, walking and shooting small game as they went. They passed out what now is known as the Base Line road, on through Powell's valley and camped for a few weeks on the banks of the Sandy.

There, as the weeks passed, they hunted and trapped and caught fish until two days before Christmas a snow storm farther east in the mountains decided them to move camp and go into the wilds of the Cascades for bear and elk.

They broke camp on the morning of the twenty-third and crossed the Sandy at a fording place about two miles below Reveaux's and taking up the line of march were soon in the trackless forests.

Here we will leave them for awhile and go ahead to the rocky passes lying beyond the summit, where an immigrant family was struggling over boulders and logs to the promised land in the Willamette valley.

The family consisted of four persons, the father, mother, son and daughter. The latter was about eighteen, the son a mere boy of twelve.

They had come a long, weary journey that year, over the plains and mountains for months; and now they expected to get to their journey's end in a few days.

"Yes, if she'll have me."
"Which she never will," remarked Moore in a significant tone which neither of the two understood but remembered afterward.
The trio went to sleep, apparently, but neither slept.
They feigned sleep, each revolving in his mind the strange meeting there in the Cascade wilderness.

About two hours afterward the moon struggled to shed its radiance through the trees and Moore raised himself quietly from the ground and listened.
He was apparently satisfied that his companions were soundly sleeping, and they were as intently regarding his movements.

He got up and noiselessly made his way in the direction of the Wharton's cabin.
Gray arose to follow him and was surprised to hear Osborn speak:
"What is that devil up to, anyhow?"
"Blasphemy, but there is something strange going to happen and we must await it if possible."
"Where is he now?"
"Over yonder by Wharton's tent."
Gray and Osborn followed silently and watched as they stood far enough away not to be seen.

Moore went straight to the tent and called Wharton who came out asking what was up.
"But you see that gray yonder, the one with the large boulder lying ready to topple over into the hollow below it?"
"Yes."
"Well, under that boulder is a cache of the Indians which I discovered there last year. I have kept the matter from Gray and Osborn and if you want to go with me we will examine it."
"I am ready to go," answered the old man.

The two went out, Wharton first telling his wife that he would return in a short time.
Arrived at the hollow beneath the boulder, Moore began digging away some loose sand and in a short while exposed a lot of trinkets and furs, besides considerable money.
He exhibited the whole treasure, amounting to over ten thousand dollars, to Wharton and then said:
"That is what I wanted you to see, and now leave an offer to make."
"Proceed."
"Give me your daughter and I will give you half of this treasure."
"I cannot."
"Why not?"
"I am not the keeper of my daughter's happiness."
"But I will make her happy."
"I cannot exchange."
"If by so doing you will be wealthy and your daughter also?"
"Such wealth would do no good to either of us. Keep your treasure."
Moore was livid with rage at the rejection of his proposal. He went close by the side of the old man and said, hoarsely:
"Jensen, or I will kill you."
"Never, you dare not."
He grabbed Wharton by the collar and raised his hand to smite him, when a pair of heavy hands seized him from behind and his wrath was stayed.

It had been livid before he was wild, and struggled to escape. He knew, as well as his captor, who held him, and he tried to free himself. Gray, for it was he, only held him the firmer and aided in a moment by Osborn subdued his wildness.
"Let me go," raved Moore.
"To kill the old man? Not quite."
"I will be peaceable."
"And not try any more of your murderous feats?"
"I will promise to behave and we will divide the plunder between us."
The others did not place much faith in his word, but knowing that they could watch him they let him go.

It was very late they all returned to camp and once more to bed, after the two rescuers cautioning Wharton not to go out again with Moore or to let him get any advantage.
They all went to sleep and woke the next morning as usual, but the others noticed that Moore was preoccupied and sulky.

He was evidently making up his mind to something desperate or absurd but as nothing was said about the adventure of the night before he grew more pleasant as the morning advanced.
It was Christmas, a glorious day, for the sun shone and the air was crisp.

Wharton had decided with his wife to remain in camp that day and invite the three hunters to a Christmas dinner with them.
The men agreed to stay, and while the forenoon was passing away Moore took his gun and started out, saying he would be back in time for dinner with some game.
He had been gone about an hour when the other men concluded to investigate the cache under the boulder.
The three started out and had reached the low hollow below the rock when a rifle shot rang out and Wharton fell on his face.
The other two understood that Moore was there and that he had completed his design.
In a moment more he appeared in sight and shouted:
"Go back and take your old man with you or I will shoot again. This is my treasure and I will guard it."
The two men picked up the old man's body and laid it slowly down the hill to camp and laid it down among his wife, son and daughter, who broke forth in a wail of sorrow that was not feigned.

What to do they scarcely knew. Moore was above them armed and doubtless provisioned, for he had been to camp and taken away some cooked meats, besides matches, ammunition and other articles of his own. One horse was missing also, and he had deserted, it was plain.

While revolving in their minds what to do about the matter the bright day of sunshine suddenly changed to one of shadow and gloom, as had the hearts of the little company surrounding the dead immigrant.
In an hour the sky became overcast and it was certain that a heavy storm was imminent.

The place where Moore was at work in the cache could be seen by the others, although Moore himself was invisible, or kept himself so.
In a few moments after the first shriek of the tempest had echoed through the woods the winds began their revels, and several forest giants snapped off or were torn up by the roots.

Just above the boulder a large pine grew alone and a sudden gust of the hurricane bent it over until it was loosened and it fell with a terrible crash.
It struck the boulder as it fell and starting that mighty rock from its long resting place sent it downward into the hollow below.

It fell where Moore was busy digging up the cache and buried him from sight forever.
The watcher below of this tragedy fancied they heard above the din of the storm and the crashing of the trees the agonizing shriek of the buried man as he foresaw his certain doom, but they could not help him neither could they pity.

In an hour the storm had passed and the men started out to see what damage had been done to their own camp, and then they dug a grave for poor Wharton, who was laid to rest on that Christmas day amid the solitudes of the mountains.
His funeral was attended by sincere mourners who all shed tears as they laid him away forever.

Gray and Osborn went up to the grave to look at the lying grave of Moore but all they could see was a huge stone resting in newly torn up earth, surrounded by broken logs and fallen timber. The hollow had disappeared and with it the assassin Moore.
The horse that Moore had taken was found farther away, unburied, and led back to camp.

The next day both camps joined as one and started for this city, where they arrived in two days.
Hiram Gray and Annie Wharton were married with the opening of the spring and live here several years.

When the Northern Pacific was finished last year they returned to the scenes of their first days in the east but are expected to come back here sometime the coming summer.
Gray and Osborn never went back to the mountains to hunt, but once they made a pilgrimage and returned with the remains of Annie's father, which now rest beneath a marble slab in Lone Fir.

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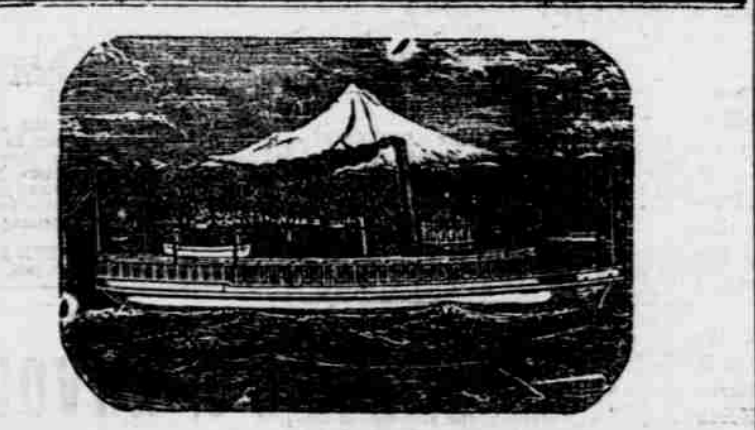
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