

Murder Will Out

by James Dabney

“Yes, sir,” said the policeman, “we officers of the law see many strange sights, and have many strange adventures in the discharge of our duty.”

A parcel of us was sitting around the stove at the Railroad depot, waiting for the down train, and had gotten into conversation with the policeman on duty at the station. He was a good-natured, frank sort of fellow, and did not seem unwilling to make himself agreeable.

“Well,” said I, “I’ll warrant me; you have some good story just on the end of your tongue. So come, now, and let us have it.”

He laughed, and replied, good-humoredly:

“Yes, sir, you are right. I was thinking when you spoke of an occurrence that came under my observation only a few days ago, and which seemed to me one of the strangest things I ever knew.”

“Let us hear it,” chorused the group, and the officer, nothing to relate the story, at once began:

“Well, I am afraid, gentlemen,” he said, “it will be rather a dry story to you, as you don’t, of course, take as much interest in these matters as a man of my profession would. Indeed, it’s not to be expected of you, who only hear of a case of crime one day to forget it the next. We, however, study these things closely, and try to draw from them ideas and experience which will enable us to detect or prevent similar occurrences.

“Sixteen years ago there was a kind of rough tavern down in the lower part of the city, which was intended for sailors and steerage passengers. No respectable person ever thought of stopping there, and the house had scarcely custom enough to keep it going. The tavern was built just on the edge of the water, and its place is now occupied by a warehouse. Its back windows opened right on the harbor, so that anything dropped from them would fall into the water.

“The man who kept this tavern was a rough, fierce-looking fellow of about forty. He had once been a sailor, and his dark, forbidding aspect accorded well with his general reputation. He was well-known at the police-court, where he had often been charged with criminal offences; but by a strange and uniform good fortune he had always contrived to escape punishment.

“Well, gentlemen, not to make my story too long, sixteen years ago there arrived from California a packet ship, which brought, among others, two men who had returned from the diggings. She came in so late at night that she simply dropped anchor in the harbor, without trying to get up to her wharf in the darkness. The two men I have spoken of, being very anxious to get on shore, prevailed upon the captain to land them, and it so happened that he put them ashore right at Jonas

Halsey's tavern. It was after midnight, and Halsey was just closing his house when the men came to him and asked for lodgings until the morning. In a few minutes Halsey, who was a good questioner, gained from them that they had just returned from the gold regions. In reply to his question as to whether they had been successful, they laughed and said 'not very,' which to any man of sense would have been proof that they had plenty of cash with them. Halsey understood it so, and, without more words, he showed his guests to their chamber, which was in the rear of the building, and directly over the water. After this Halsey went back to his bar, and after sitting for a long time in silent thought, closed the house and put out the lights.

"The two men went to bed as soon as they were shown to their room. It might have been an hour, or more, afterwards when one of them was aroused by a heavy noise. Looking up, he saw the landlord striking his companion a heavy blow with an axe. Springing up, he tried to seize his knife, but before he could do so, Halsey, who was a powerful man, clutched him with a death-grip, and wrenched the knife from him. A fierce struggle ensued, the stranger being gradually forced back to the window. Finally Halsey struck the knife into his side with a terrible blow, sending the hot blood spurting all over him, and then hurling the man back, threw him out of the window, which chanced to be raised. In another instant his companion, who had been killed by the first blow of the axe, was flung into the water also. The tide was running out rapidly, and Halsey was sure the bodies would be carried out with it.

"The men had foolishly carried their money on their persons, and when they went to bed had deposited it under their pillows. It amounted to more than twenty thousand dollars in all, and of course it fell into the murderer's possession.

"The next morning Halsey was missing. No one but himself had known anything of the arrival of his unfortunate guests, and the blood upon the floor and window-sill was a great mystery. At last, however, we came to believe that Halsey had been murdered in this room by some unknown party, and thrown into the water.

"I was quite a young chap at that time, and had not then joined the police force, but the affair made a deep impression on me. I had frequently seen Halsey, and I knew him well by sight. As the time passed on, however, I forgot the affair, and would not have remembered it had it not been brought to my mind in a very strange way.

"A few days ago a man came in here to wait for the train. He was such a rascally-looking fellow that he at once attracted my attention. His face seemed very familiar too. I tried to think where or when I had seen him, but for the life of me I could not remember.

"Just then I happened to look up, and saw a man standing in the doorway, looking at my man with a most startled and savage expression. He said nothing, however, but came and sat down by the stove, with his back to the man I had been watching. As he did so, he uttered an expression of pain.

"Anything wrong, sir?" I asked.

“No,” he replied, “I still suffer from a wound in the breast, which I received in this city sixteen years ago.”

“I saw the first man start and turn quickly towards the speaker. He could not see him, however, but although the newcomer had his back to my man I could see that he was watching him closely. In an instant it flashed across me that my man was Jonas Halsey. I kept my coolness, however, and asked, as carelessly as I could:

“Ah! How was that?”

“Well, you see,” said the stranger, and I could see that he was still watching Halsey closely, “sixteen years ago I landed here in company with a friend. We had just come back from California, where we had made a great deal of money, and like fools, we had it all with us. We put up for the night at a sailor’s tavern on the shore, intending to start for an inland town the next day. During the night I was roused by a noise, and jumped up to find the landlord murdering my companion. I tried to defend myself, but after a struggle he stabbed me, and threw me out of the window into the water. The tide carried me out into the harbor, where I was picked up by a brig, and nursed kindly until I was able to go about. I’ve been looking for that landlord ever since.”

“Do you think you’ll ever catch him?” I asked, and for the life of me I couldn’t keep down my excitement.

With the rapidity of light the stranger wheeled around, springing to his feet, and faced Halsey. Laying his hand on his shoulder, he said, coolly:

“I have found him. This is the man. Arrest him, officer.”

“Halsey seemed completely stunned. The shock was so sudden and unexpected that it deprived him of all power of resistance. I secured him while he was in this condition, and soon had him at the station house. The next day he confessed the whole thing. He will be tried at the next court, and I suppose will be hung, as he deserves.”

Just then the whistle of our train called us to the platform, and we hurried off to the cars.

White Cloud Kansas Chief, April 22, 1869