

Alpine to himself. "I don't know why her voice thrills me so. I have nothing to do with her hogkilling. What in the world makes me so nervous tonight?"

Argue with himself as he might, however, the influence upon him was too strong. Some strange presentiment kept him from going back to the bed. He sat by the window, looking out upon the stars in the sky above and the heavy darkness below. An owl hooted presently in the woods beyond. A few moments later, his great weariness got the better of his present uneasiness, and he sank into a disturbed and dreamy sleep, his head resting on the cushioned back of the chair.

How long he slept he could not tell, but he was roused by the sound of a furtive step outside. Often a whisper will wake one, when a loudly spoken word would fail to do so.

McAlpine was alert at once. A soldier's old habits are very apt to linger long after peace has come. He kept perfectly still, but listened intently. The sounds were catlike, but he thought he could swear to the fact that some one had crept to the door, had tried to look through the keyhole, had listened there for some time and then had stolen softly away. Whoever it was had seen nothing because of the darkness and having heard nothing, had gone away convinced that the traveler was sound asleep.

McAlpine waited now for something—he knew not what to happen. He slipped very cautiously across the room to the seat in which he had placed his clothes. Just as noiselessly he dressed himself, and felt for his holsters and saddlebags so as to be sure that they were in reach. Just then a gleam of moonlight fell within the room. Ah! the moon was rising. He hurried softly to the window, drew out his watch, and ascertained the time. It was just one. Hardly had he put it back into his pocket when a grating noise drew his attention to the bed.

Horror! Below the beadstead flashed for one instant light and steamy vapor, and the next moment the bed