

**THE METAMORPHOSIS
OF CORPUS DELICTI.**

Herr Smithson, manager of the prima donna Madame Del Sarto, was returning East with his star from a somewhat unprofitable tour on the Pacific slope. They gave concerts at various places along the route, but fortune remained cool. At last at Sagetown, the manager hatched a scheme for raising the wind of Bismarckian size and audacity. Its nature may be guessed from the concluding passages of a conversation that occurred between the manager and a dark-skinned, long-haired citizen in a big sombrero and wearing a belt in which was stuck a revolver and a long knife. This ominously equipped individual was tall of stature, long-limbed, gaunt and long. His eyes were dark and sullen with drooping lids. His long moustache was also dark and drooping, and his voice was of a pitch so subterranean that it seemed to come from at less half a mile under ground, and of such a quality and tone that its faintest breathings would bring any stage team to a dead halt and elevate the hands of all the passengers. Anyone familiar with Western mythology, will understand at once that this brief description can apply to but one person, the noted Bill Deathburrow, the promoter of cemeteries and patron saint of undertakers, popularly known as "Corpus," and sometimes as "Corpus Delicti."

"That's your lay-out, is it?" said Delicti, speaking in a kind of pianissimo double bass; "I'm to hold up the stage this side of Hogsnot, unload the lady and take her over to the crossroad by the Dogbranch; and you will come out there and recapture her?"

"That's it," said Smithson.
"And the stuff?"
"That's all right. I'll pay you the money when I get the lady—fifty dollars."
"Fifty won't do; the ante will have to be a hundred."

"A hundred! Why we've been talking fifty. The job won't take over half a day, and fifty for half a day is good business."

"Ordinarily, maybe; but there's things to be considered. There's my character. I've got a reputation, and it won't sound well that Corpus Delicti surrendered to a tenderfoot. Then there's expenses. I've got to hire a burro for the lady, and my helper will have to see com. I'll take the Kiote with me; he hasn't sand to shoot a hen, but he can hold a gun on the driver while I work the passengers." Here he beckoned to a red-haired, wizened little fellow with bandy legs, one shorter than the other, who came see-sawing across the room and was introduced as the "Lame Kiote," or "Limpy," and who embraced with enthusiasm the manager's proposition to take a drink.

"That's the terms," said Corpus, after the refreshments had been absorbed. "We couldn't do this job for less, could we 'Limpy'?"

"No," promptly answered the Kiote, who knew nothing about the job or the proposed terms.

"All right," said Smithson, who found himself outvoted. "A hundred it is, then. And now understand. It is the first stage that goes over the road tomorrow—the Sagetown stage. The one from Violet comes over, and passes through Sagetown, and goes on to Hogsnot about two hours later; but our stage is the first one in the morning."

"That's all clear," said Delicti; "the particulars are comprehended."

"There may be a little delay," added Smithson, "in my getting to the rescue. The people at Hogsnot may turn out to assist me; but if they do, I'll lead the crowd off and dodge away from them."

"Don't let that thought disturb your mind," answered Corpus. "I know the crowd over there, and when they hear that Corpus Delicti is at the other end of the trail, you won't be incommoded by no volunteers."

Bidding his confederates good-bye until the morning, the manager sought the hotel, to hold counsel with Madame Del Sarto.

"I say, Sally, I've got a big scheme," said he, bustling into the parlor where she was sitting alone; "something to wake the dead and get them scrambling to get to the box-office."

"What do you mean?" asked the lady, in a tone somewhat of contempt.

"Listen!" replied Smithson, eagerly. "You take the stage in the morning. Somewhere between here and Hogsnot, Delicti, the man you saw me talking with just now, will hold up the whole business, and take you out. He will be accompanied by a citizen of this place, a very fine man, and they will escort you to a place we have agreed on. Delicti is a perfect gentleman, and you will be treated with the greatest consideration."

I will go to Hogsnot to meet the stage when it reaches there with the news of your capture. Then I'll rip and tear like mad, borrow a revolver, and start out to the rescue. In an hour I shall bring you back to Hogsnot in triumph, and we'll go right to Golden Desire, where the story will have preceded us. There the whole population will turn out to get a sight of you. The opera house will be jammed and the pecuniary results enormous. And that is only the

beginning. The story of the abduction of the great prima donna by the famous desperado Corpus Delicti, and of her rescue single-handed, after a desperate battle with knives and revolvers, by her plucky manager, Herr Smithson, will be telegraphed over the world and when we get East, there will be no theatres large enough to hold the crowds, and men will fight like bull-dog for standing room in the lobby." Madame Del Sarto saw the point. The few details to be settled between them were soon disposed of, and with a parting "Au revoir" the manager went away to take his piece for the evening drama and to wait for his cue from Hogsnot.

Everybody knows that the best-laid schemes often go wrong. On the morning, at the hour scheduled for the departure of the first stage, there was an unexpected delay. The passengers, including Madame Del Sarto, were all aboard and their fares paid, but "six-fingered" Joe, the driver, was missing. After half an hour's waiting it was learned that he had gone into a saloon, presumably to take a drink, but had got into an argument with the bartender, and had had a 44-slug blown into his stomach instead. To find a substitute and get him ready to start took time, and, in the meanwhile, the stage from Violet came along, and halting only long enough to give drink to the thirsty horses and driver, went on ahead. And so it happened that, instead of being the first over the road, the vehicle that carried the prima donna stood idle at Sagetown, while its Violet rival was jogging merrily along the road toward the point of vantage where Corpus Delicti and the Lame Kiote awaited the coming of their victim.

There were four passengers in the Violet stage—three men and a woman. The men were a Presbyterian minister, a Pinkerton detective, and a "traveller" from a Chicago shoe house. Anyone would have written down the woman as "spinster" at first sight, and we here introduce her as Miss Lorena Lorena June, of Currency, Kansas, and we hope the reader will take a good look at her, for she is well worth it.

Miss June's age was, of course uncertain, but she must have been quite a slip of a girl when Lee surrendered. She was tall and rather lean, not very angular, but large-boned and strong looking. Her hair was black, coarse, and brushed well back; her face long and narrow, her mouth wide with thin lips that shut tight together. She used spectacles with very large glasses, and wore a plain, dark-coloured dress, and a brown straw hat with pink ribbons. She was sitting—and had sat all day—erect, motionless, and silent, holding in her lap a large bandbox across the top of which was an umbrella, sil kept in place by her brown, ungloved hands.

Conversation had been slack in the stage. The lady had kept her eyes fixed on the faces of her fellow-travellers with an expression that implied disapproval, and they all thought they could read in those steadfast orbs a suspicion that they were confidence men and had designs on the bandbox. Once the detective started to tell a story, but Miss June levelled her spectacles at his face with a persistent certainty of aim that was disconcerting, and the story dwindled, and became innocuous and meagre of detail, and finally finished without coming to anything.

The horses were running at a brisk trot, when suddenly the vehicle stopped with an abruptness that made the passengers lurch forward on their seats—all but Miss June, the rigidity of whose position was not easily disturbed. Simultaneously there was a vibration, a shuddering of the air, and then the ventral tones of Corpus Delicti, "Hands up!"

This invitation was addressed to the driver, but the men inside waited no second call; their three pairs of hands went into the air with a celerity and force of action that jerked their shirt collars up against their ears. Miss June looked surprised, but said nothing and clutched her bandbox with a firmer grip. Then the door was opened and the muzzle of a revolver appeared, backed by a face the aspect of which sent the three men into a frantic struggle to get their hands through the top of the stage. Slowly the ominous eyes passed over the group and rested on Miss June.

"A fine day, lady and gents," said the deep voice.

"See here, mister," said the lady, "you can't come in here. I won't have tramps ridin' with me. There's suspicious-lookin' characters enough in here now, and I won't have no more of 'em. Make him git outside, driver."

"You're dead right, miss," said Corpus; "they are a bad-lookin' lot, and we'll shake their company. Just shut yourself this way and I'll help you out."

"Help me out? I ain't goin' to git out; and if I was I would do it without your help. Go away, you nasty-lookin' villain. Driver, why don't you go on?"

"The lady doesn't understand the situation, colonel," said the detective. "You see, miss, this is a hold-up; and you see—"

"Yes, I see a fool. I'm lookin' at him now. If it's a hold-up, you'd better keep your mouth shut, and you can hold up your hands all the easier. Your a purty-lookin' specimen. You look gay, settin' there all humped up and your paws in the air. You'd

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better tell another funny story, hadn't you?"
"Bully for you me-lady," said Dick Delicti.
"You're as good as a circus with a bull fight attachment; but business is business, and time is flowing, so have the kindness to step this way. Never mind the bandbox; leave it right there; it'll be safe; the company is responsible."

"I tell you I ain't goin' to git out! I've said it twice now, and that's enough, and if I was, I wouldn't leave my bandbox. Where I go that goes, and where I stay that stays. And I can tell you something else; if you p'int that pistol at me, I'll—I'll swat ye."

She gripped the handle of her umbrella with both hands, braced herself, and awaited developments.

"Madam," said the clergyman, in a quavering voice, "I do not believe this good gentleman has any evil intentions towards you, and I think that under the circumstances, and to avoid the possible effusion of blood, it would be advisable for you to alight."

"What do you know about it, you bald-headed old poke? He's about as much a gentleman as you are a man, I reckon. Why don't you get out and go along with him yourself, if you think so much of him? I declare, if it ain't enough to forever disgust everybody with the whole sex. Three great lumuxes afraid of one mean-lookin' old vagabone. Why don't you pitch at him and make him go away? Put that down!"

The last remark was caused by an adroit movement on the part of Delicti. Taking advantage of a movement when her attention was on the clergyman, he had silly reached his disengaged hand inside and got possession of the bandbox. "Put it down, I say. You won't, eh?" She rose to her feet and the light of battle was in her eyes as she made for the door, through which her property was disappearing. "You git out of my way, Smarty. Let me git out; then, I'll show him. I think you'd all better git petticoats the first thing after you git home."

"I concur in the resolution of the House," shouted the Kiote, who was shaking with laughter to a degree that rendered the aim of the gun he was holding on the driver very uncertain.

"What are you laughin' about, you little red-headed monkey?" said Miss June, as she bounded from the stage.

All clear, drive on, said Delicti.
Go ahead, driver, you are discharged," yelled the Kiote.

"Don't you dare to stir a step till I get my bandbox and get back into the waggon," said Miss June.

These conflicting instructions confused the driver and he remained stationary. Then ensued a battle royal. Delicti with the bandbox, like a lion bearing off his prey, with eye alert, backed slowly away from his approaching foe. She, like a lioness springing to the rescue of her cub went at him with a rush, and delivered a sweeping blow with her umbrella, which he avoided by ducking, but which sent his sombrero into the sand. Then followed, in quick succession, upper cut, under cut, jaw and side swing—he dodging, ducking, parrying, and still backing off, she cutting and thrusting and pressing him hotly in front. The Kiote was now in the sand, rolling about and howling, and the three men in the stage, their hands still up, were looking out with staring eyes upon the combat.

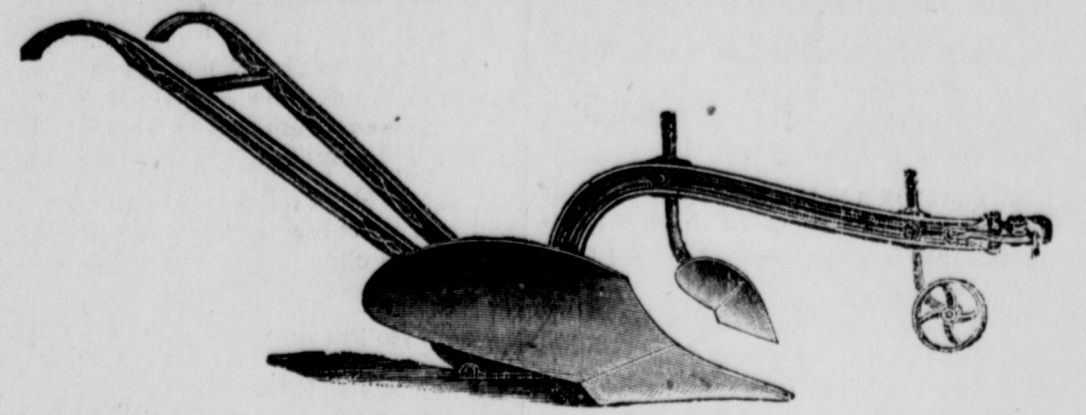
"Drive ahead there, you lump-jawed son of a jack rabbit!" roared Corpus, who, sore pressed, was doing his best to make his hands keep his head. This order galvanized the driver into life, and he brought his heavy whip across the horses with a crack that sent them off at a gallop.

[To be concluded next week.]

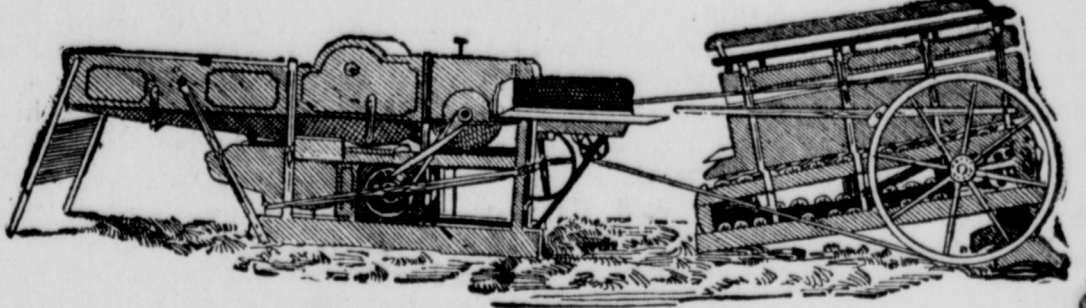
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CENTRAL SOUTHAMPTON, York Co., 17th Dec. 1898.

MESSRS. CONNELL BROS., WOODSTOCK, N. B.
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He walked.—Time, 11 p. m. "They tell me your gait was esteemed one of the finest in the regiment." "You flatter me," "No; Lieutenant Wagstaff said you marched magnificently." "The lieutenant may not be a good judge." "I fancy he is. To my mind there is nothing that makes a man more presentable and really attractive than a

graceful walk. My curiosity is greatly aroused. May I ask a favour of you?" "Certainly." Then I would like to see you walk." And she handed him his hat.

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