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A Shot at a Murderer

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In the fall of 1873 (September, I think it was) I took a trip on the old Fairplay stage road from Denver to Slaghts, that came near ending in a tragedy; and so far as my information, to the present time, is concerned it did so end. My companion was Judge J.B. Belford; our intention was to fish a day or two at Slaghts or thereabouts, in the South Platte—then teeming with native trout—and, on our return, to stop at Bradford Junction and get a deer. We varied the program by stopping at Bradford first; and the result of our first day in the woods was a royal buck. The following day we took the up-coach to the first-named station and fished down stream until we heard the rumble of the old "Concord," when we struck for the road and held up Ike Perley, who was pounding four mules with all the might of his mighty left arm—Ike had several idiosyncrasies besides the handling of the whip with his "south paw." He was, for instance, the most fascinating liar living at that time, and he could hold a gallon of

whiskey without perceptible effect on his locomotive or loquacious powers. When he drew up at our call, and we got to the coach, we found it occupied by two persons, viz.: Geo. Twibell, sheriff of Clear Creek county, and the biggest and most villainous looking Mexican I ever saw. * * * I will now have to take the reader back from the above point to the town of Georgetown. But a few days before this time there came to Georgetown two "tenderfeet," who were anxious to get, by nearest route, to Montezuma. In making inquiries for some one to guide them they ran across this Mexican, who offered, for a consideration, to take them to their destination by a short cut, and the following day the three left Georgetown. The next morning there came, post haste, into town, a man who had just come over the trail from Montezuma. He had met the Mexican on the way, and, but a few minutes afterward, came upon the bodies of the two white men, stabbed to death, and with their throats cut. Apparently,

the murderer had killed them as they slept; had made no effort to conceal their bodies, and had cooked his breakfast from their supplies. He took what money they had and one pair of their blankets and started westward. Sheriff Twibell, feeling certain that the fellow would strike for the South, lost no time in getting to Denver and taking passage by coach to Fairplay. There he intercepted Mr. Mexican and was on his way with his captive to Denver when we met the "mud-wagon." I remember distinctly that Twibell rubbed his eyes as I came to the coach door, and remarked: "Well, I guess I must a beensnoozin'." He sat on the back seat; had his coat unbuttoned and the handle of two big revolvers stuck out invitingly toward the Mexican, who was on the front seat, and without a shackle or handcuff on him. Why he had not snatched a pistol and blown the sheriff's brains out was a mystery to me. I got in alongside of Twibell, but the Judge, for some reason, preferred the seat with the driver. We stopped at Junction for supper, and on preparing to resume our journey, both Belford and myself suggested the propriety of putting irons on the criminal. Twibell had no shackles, but produced bracelets and applied them. All things went well until we reached Stubbs, just below Morrison, on Bear Creek, where horses were changed for the final spurt into Denver. When the coach stopped, I got out to "stretch my legs" and had hardly struck the ground when the Mexican darted past me and up the road. I had on a Smith & Wesson pistol, with which I could, at that time, hit the size of a dollar every time at forty feet, and the fellow had not gotten that far before I took two deliberate shots at him.

Twibell got out and managed to fire one shot, just as the fugitive dived over the bank and into the creek. Then there was hurrying to and fro; we got a lantern and looked for blood, but found none. Twibell was nearly crazy over the escape of his prisoner and saying that he must remain and make a search, begged us to report to the sheriff (then Dave Cook) in Denver and ask him to send help. I sought General Cook, on reaching Denver, and before going to my home, and I think he and Frank Smith went to Bear Creek at once. They organized a posse and scoured the country around Stubbs, but found no trace of the villain. Word was sent to all officers in the southern counties and to the professional catchers of bad men in New Mexico. The search was kept up for months, but no trace has ever been found of this cold-blooded killer. Poor Twibell, who was a candidate for re-election that fall, lost his job, nearly lost his mind and died the following year. Old Perley is dead; but during his life he never met me without designating me, to any company that happened to be present, as "the crack pistol shot, who could not hit the back of a six-foot man at forty feet."