The Legend of the Purple Bishop

During the late 1880's and early 1890's, when silver was the latest boom in Colorado mining, Ward was a large center of activity. The population was in the thousands and the town was exploding with wealth and business. The people of Ward were accustomed to seeing many strange drifters pass through town.

One day, however, a most unusual man came to Ward. He rode in a large covered wagon. The cloth canopy was purple and it was pulled by one very large and powerful black horse. The man driving this wagon was clothed in a long, flowing purple robe, with a hood covering his face.

In Ward, the man stopped first at the General Store where he purchased food and similar items paying with gold coins. He then went to the Hardware Store, buying lumber, nails and tools, again paying with gold coins. As he left the hardware store, a townsman accidentally bumped into him, glimpsing into this strange man's hood. The townsman fell backwards, his face paralyzed in fear. The man in the purple robe quickly left town in his purple-covered wagon, as concerned people took the stricken man to his home.

Next morning, the townsman had vanished, leaving no trace, but for a pile of the clothes he had been wearing, neatly stacked in a pile on his bed, and they were covered by a purple cloth.

The stories, rumors, and gossip of this man's disappearance had barely quieted down, when the stranger came back to town. Once again he wore the purple robe with hood covering his face. He made stops at the General Store and the Hardware Store, paying with gold coins each time. A woman stopped him to ask if he knew of the man that had disappeared and she glanced into the hood. Before a scream could pass thru her lips, she fell backwards, her face paralyzed in fear. The man in the purple robe quickly left town in his purple wagon, easily pulled by the large black horse.

The next morning, the woman had vanished from the room where concerned friends had placed her. The only thing that remained were her clothes, neatly stacked in a pile on her bed, and they were covered by a purple cloth.

The men of Ward had seen enough. While they had no proof, they felt that the strange man in the purple robe was somehow responsible for their friends' disappearance. They intended to drive him away, killing him if necessary. They named this man in purple robes "The Purple Bishop".

The people of Ward had heard rumors that the Purple Bishop lived a few miles north of town by a lake that fed the South Saint Vrain river. Twenty men left on a Tuesday morning to find this man and make sure that he never rode into town again. They hiked through the rugged mountains for a number of hours before coming to a lake named Tumblesom Lake. At dusk, on a hill west of the lake, the men noticed a strange and eerie purple light shining through the trees. The closer they got, the louder became the sound of organ music. Upon reaching the site they found a huge cabin, newly built, with tremendous rafters inside. They found no one inside; in fact there was no sign of anyone nearby. Nor did they find the source of the purple light or music. The men waited for an hour, and then finally decided to burn the cabin down. They thought this might convince the Purple Bishop to leave the area. The flames from the cabin burned a deep purple as they danced thru the night sky. Soon the fire spread to nearby trees, causing a small forest fire. The resulting scar is now known as the Camp Tahosa Upper Meadow.

Throughout the following day, the townspeople of Ward waited for some word from the twenty men who left to rid them of the Purple Bishop. But these men never returned. That night, that terrible Wednesday night, something horrible and very strange occurred in Ward that people in these mountains still talk about.

It was a night of a full moon. A light covering of clouds gently drifted across the summer skies, yet you could still see the moon and the stars. The air was quiet, deafly quiet without even a gentle breeze. Suddenly, lightning streaked through the sky, bolting through the hills, changing night into day. Yet, the air was still quiet, for there was no thunder and no wind. Soon the entire town of Ward was ablaze, the flames a deep purple. Over five hundred men, women and children lost their lives in that purple inferno. Deep purple smoke and organ music lingered in the air.

After the survivors had buried the dead, a small group of men went searching for the Purple Bishop to get revenge and put the souls of the dead at ease. They hunted throughout the forest north of Ward. Finally, they found the scarred remains of a cabin west of a small lake. They continued to search the hills and valleys, at one point finding the fresh diggings of a mine above what is now the Camp Tahosa rifle range.

Further down that valley, a large barn was discovered. Behind the barn, the men found twenty slabs of quartz rock, large enough to bury a man beneath. But, this was not ordinary quartz. It was quartz so pure and white that it has never been discovered since then. This quartz had vivid, purple stripes running throughout it, like veins filled with purple blood.

The men quickly set fire to the barn and watched as its purple flames spread to nearby trees, creating what we now know as the Lower Meadow. They continued down the valley until they came to another cabin by a small marsh. Outside this cabin was a large, jet black horse standing by a purple-covered wagon. Quietly the men crept up to the horse and killed it, each man taking a turn firing his rifle into the huge, devilish creature.

As silence swept the small valley again, the men slowly moved toward the cabin. Inside they heard organ music, and they saw the figure of a man in a purple, hooded robe. Quickly the men reloaded their rifles and fired upon the building. For half an hour, they continued their assault upon the small log cabin. Finally, when they stopped, the men of Ward set fire to the cabin, burning it until nothing remained but ashes. They were certain that the Purple Bishop could not have escaped, and yet these men too never returned.

Since that time, many questions have been raised about the Purple Bishop, chief among them is what did these people see when they looked inside his hood. No one ever lived who could tell for sure, but stories say that inside the hood was nothing, a vacuum of space, except for two eyes of red-hot coals, much like those in an eternally-burning fire.

Also there still exist some small fragments of the purple-striped quartz rock behind the storage barn in the lower meadow. But, Scouts have long been discouraged from picking up pieces of this strange rock, for fear of bringing a visit from the Purple Bishop.

And it is true that many strange sightings have occurred at Tahosa since it became a Scout camp. Most sightings have been reported in the Lower and Upper Meadows and along the south shore of Tumblesom Lake. Some nights, when it is very still, you can hear organ music coming from the upper meadow, near where the Purple Bishop's cabin was burned.

The most tragic sighting occurred in the early fifties, during summer camp. One night as the staff was settling down for the evening, a number of them staying in the cabins by the lake, reported to the camp director that they saw some purple lights floating through the forest on the other side of the lake. The lights moved quickly and seemed to dance from tree to tree. The camp director decided to investigate in the morning. But then they heard muffled screams of two Scouts who were fishing on Liberty Rock. The screams were just slightly heard above organ music coming from the west end of the lake. Quickly gathering lanterns and torches, the staff ran to the rocks. Their search found nothing until one staff member came across an unmistakable sign. Two piles of clothes covered by purple cloth were found near the shore.

The entire camp was searched and the lake was dragged the next morning with no results. Neither the Scouts, nor their bodies, were found and Liberty Rock has been off limits to Scouts ever since, as has the lake at night.

The most recent reported sighting occurred in 1976 by members of Troop 366 who were staying at the Pawnee campsite. The Scoutmaster reported that his troop was playing a flashlight war by the Council Fire Ring, Smugglers Cliffs and the storage barn. Several members of the troop, including the Scoutmaster, saw purple lights floating through the trees behind the barn. The next morning, several pieces of purple cloth were found hanging in a number of trees between the barn and the Council Ring. Troop 366 has never returned to Camp Tahosa.

Finally, it should be noted that no trace of the Purple Bishop was ever found in the ruins of the cabin in the valley. This site has become the camp dump. If he did exist, we can only assume that he is now dead. But of the Purple Bishop's spirit and those of his victims, we dare not assume anything we have not yet come to understand. Beware that his spirit still walks the property at night, looking for victims.

Over the years, there have been many reports of bright lights flickering through the forest, and organ music, echoing across the lake at night, seemingly coming from nowhere. And to remind us of his presence, you will always see purple licks of flame at each and every campfire burned at Camp Tahosa.