

Detective Detected

—
by Alexander Ross
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I.

I had been a clerk in the Bristol bank, in Providence for eighteen years, and had gained the confidence of the president and cashier by uniform good behavior and close attention to my work. Other clerks had come and gone; some to more lucrative positions, and some I know not where, discharged as they had been for inaccuracies in their books. One of them, James Petrie, who had left us about a year before the events happened which I am about to relate, had been on friendly terms with me, and I had always found him an obliging, kind-hearted fellow. He had been rather too fond of a glass, however, and I had frequently warned him that it would injure him in the opinion of the officers of the bank, if it should be discovered that he drank so freely. He had always promised me that he would reform, and had always failed to do so.

At last he came in the bank one day in a state which certainly would betray him if he should have to speak to the Cashier, which he had often to do, and I was urging him to leave on the plea of sickness, when the Cashier, who saw us talking, called him to his room on some matter of business. He went, and on entering the room stumbled against a chair and fell. The Cashier discovered his condition, and when the President arrived, poor Petrie was at once discharged. It was a custom, when an employee left the bank, for the President to give him a statement of his conduct while there, and what was the cause of his dismissal. Such a statement was handed to Petrie, as he left the office ruined to any prospect of getting a position in a banking-house afterward. I had never seen or heard of him from that time.

About a year after, I was summoned into the President's room, and informed that I had to start that evening for New Hampshire.—He stated that Mr. Hardie, a very eccentric man, who did a large business with the bank, had written him to send on a check to Keene, a town in New Hampshire, with one hundred fifty thousand dollars, to pay for a large amount of property which he had bought there. It would have been easy for Mr. Hardie to have given a check on the bank for the sum specified, but he had a habit of always paying the money down, and he now proposed to pay a clerk's expenses to Keene and back rather than dabble with checks, as he called it. I had been chosen for the work and a telegram was to be forwarded to Mr. Hardie to tell him that I would start by the 7:40 train that night.

The money was ready, and I went home to prepare for my journey, taking it along with me. I had scarcely arrived at home when I was attacked by a complaint from which I occasionally suffered, and which completely prostrated me for the time. It was nine o'clock before I got over the attack, and then I was too late to get a train that night. I did not think however, that it was of much consequence, as I could start by the 4:20 A.M. express train, and be in time for the 7:00 A.M. train from Boston to Keene. This arrangement I carried out without thinking it necessary to inform my employers, since Mr. Hardie would have the money within a few hours of the time notified by telegram.

In due time I reached Boston, and was passing up Tremont street on my way to the Fitchburg Depot, when a hand was laid on my shoulder, and a voice quietly said:

“You must be new to the business, Mr. Glover.”

“What business?” I inquired, as I turned round and faced the man who had addressed me. There was something in the tone of his voice which made me think I had heard it before; but on looking at his face I perceived that he was a stranger to me.

“Ah! beginning to act,” he said, looking steadily at me. “There is no use, however, trying that on,” he continued. “You were missed last night; and as you had such a large sum of money it was strange, and word was sent on here. I have been on the lookout for you since, and now you had better accompany me to the office without making any disturbance.”

“What office?” I inquired, with more and more amazement, for he was speaking in parables to me.

“To my office,” he replied. “I am detective Steel, and have to arrest you on the charge of attempting to make off with a large sum of money from the Bristol Bank of Providence.”

I was completely stunned. Surely I must be dreaming. But no: there was the detective, of whom I had so often heard, with his hand on my shoulder and looking into my face with calm satisfaction. There could be no doubt of that. And he must have been instructed to arrest me. Otherwise, how could he have known my errand so accurately? I thought quiet submission was the best course, as I could easily clear up any doubt which might be cast upon me by telegraphing to the President of the Bank how I had been prevented from starting the preceding night. I, therefore, walked quietly along with him till we came to a house in Hanover street where he said the Superintendent of Police lived, from whom he wished to get instructions regarding me. He had a pass-key by which he admitted himself and we went into a room where a gentlemanly looking man was writing.

“Well, Steel,” said this person, “is this your man?”

“Yes, sir,” was the detective’s reply. “He is quite green, or very deep.”

“Has he got the money?” inquired the Superintendent.

“I left the matter of searching for that till we should come here,” said Steel. Then turning to me, and looking at the valise in which I had the money, he added, “I suppose you have it all. Open it.”

I did as he directed, and the bundle of bills was produced. I observed a glance of satisfaction pass between the Chief and his subordinate; but thinking nothing of the circumstance, I proceeded to state how I had been detained, and that I had been crossing to the Fitchburg Depot to take the train when Mr. Steel had arrested me.

“Well, my friend,” said the Chief “the truth of your statement will soon be known. It is suspicious, however, that your mother should have told the President’s messenger that you started last evening, when you did not come by the train specified. In the meantime, I shall telegraph to our people in Providence to make inquiries, and you will have to be confined until their reply arrives. Mr. Steel, will you show him down stairs to the floor below. I do not wish to make his case a public one until we ascertain whether there be any truth in his statement. He does not look as if he were guilty.”

As the detective requested me to follow him, I thanked the Superintendent for his courtesy, and requested him to let me go on the 11 A.M. train, as I had lost too much time already. He said he would do what he could, and with a courteous bow to him, I followed the detective. He conducted me to the cellars of the building, and after turning several corners, ushered me into a room in which there was no window. He left a lamp with me, and telling me that he would return or send some breakfast to me, he departed, locking the door behind him.

What followed seems to me even now like a hideous dream. As the detective’s footsteps receded beyond hearing, a cold shiver passed through me as if I were being shut out from the world and had taken my last look of the sun. This feeling I tried to cast off as being without foundation, since I would certainly be released within a few hours.—But ever and anon an agonizing gloom would come across my soul as I listened to catch the noises which I knew the traffic of the city beginning for the day must be causing, and failed to hear the slightest murmur of a voice, or the faintest roll of a wheel. As time wore on and nine o’clock approached, I began to be impatient for the detective’s return; but nine o’clock came and went, and yet he did not make his appearance. At first I had seated myself on the bench which I found in the room; but my impatience had soon caused me to pace from end to end of the apartment, chafing in spirit at the disgrace which my employer’s suspicion had brought upon me.

Eleven o’clock passed away, and yet no release. The ticking of my watch alone broke the intense stillness around me, and the watch continued its sharp click, till I knew that the afternoon had passed and that night was closing upon the city. Night had come, but it had brought with it no new prospect of escape from the solitary cellar in which I was confined. For a time my anxiety about the result had prevented me from feeling hunger or thirst, but by degrees these two enemies attacked me with full vigor. I had eaten nothing since my usual dinner hour of the previous day, the illness which had attacked me having made me think nothing of supper, and the haste which had I left Providence in the morning having precluded the possibility of my eating anything then. But hunger and thirst were alike forgotten for a time as the night rolled away and another morning found me still a prisoner. The lamp still burnt, but the flame was waning and another hour would leave me in darkness.

I took the lamp and with it examined every corner of the room, that I might ascertain whether there was any way of escape. But, though I found no crevice by which I might effect egress, I made a discovery which sent an appalling thrill of terror through my heart. In a sort of cupboard I found three or four loaves of bread and a large pitcher of water. As soon as I found them a terrible suspicion struck me that I had been inveigled into this den by some clever scoundrel who had known of my having the money, and that he and his accomplice had locked me up here to

prevent my being able to give information of the robbery. They had left me a little food to prevent my dying for some days; but whether they had made any arrangement for my final release was of course unknown to me. Probably not, for “dead men tell no tales,” and possibly they had hoped for my death, though they had made a compromise with conscience by leaving me what would keep me in life for a time.

These thoughts passed through my mind with the speed and overwhelming force of a thunderbolt. What if I should never escape! And if this should happen, not only would I lose my life, but my good name would also be destroyed; for my employers would never doubt that I had fled with the money. The sickening terror that came over me unmanned me for a time; but after a little I recovered my fortitude, and uttering a short prayer for support, I shouted for help at the pitch of my voice, and hammered with my hand at the door. After I had made as much noise as I could for several minutes, I stopped to listen, but all was silent as the grave. At intervals I repeated my endeavors to make myself heard; but no reply came to my calls, nor did any sound indicate that I had succeeded in drawing attention to my place of confinement. Faint and weary, I again bethought me of the food, and groping my way to the place where it had been left (for my light was now gone) I ate and drank ravenously.

For days and nights this weary, terrible captivity continued. How time was passed I could not tell. I had no light to let me see my watch. I called for help till my voice grew hoarse from the continued shouting. I battered the door with my clenched fists till the skin was peeled off them in flakes. I prayed for help till my heart was weary with the unanswered cry, “Lord help and deliver me.” In vain did I shout; in vain did I wildly rush against the unyielding door; in vain did I send up my cry to Heaven. No help came; and I was almost tempted to curse God and die. At last there came a time when consciousness departed from me, and at that darkest hour, when hope had given way within me, the prayer which I had thought unanswered was heard, and the help of which I had despaired arrived.

II.

When I recovered consciousness, I was lying on a sofa in a handsomely furnished room. There were three persons around the sofa, two gentlemen, one of whom was a doctor, and a young lady. The lustrous eyes of the latter were filled with tears; and, though she did not know that I heard her, she muttered words of deepest and most earnest sympathy. I had again shut my eyes after a single glance at those bright orbs of hers, and now again I opened them much to the satisfaction of the Æsculapius who had been laboring to restore me to life. After a little I was able to sit up, and the Doctor, seeing that I was very weak, asked the other gentleman if he could give me a glass of wine. Scarcely had he uttered the request when my fair friend bounded from the room, and presently returned with some sherry.—The wine revived me so much that I was able again to speak, and to thank them for their kindness. Naturally enough they inquired how I had come to be in the cellar, and I at once told them my story.

“You have to thank God, my friend,” said the gentleman, “that my daughter there is gifted with the faculty of acute hearing.—Two days ago, she returned from the country where she had been visiting; and on going into the yard behind the house yesterday morning, she heard a voice, as if down in the bowels of the earth, calling for help. She listened for a little without being able to

distinguish from what direction the noise proceeded, and presently the sounds ceased.—This morning she heard them again, and after a little hesitation decided that they came from the cellars of the neighboring house which had been untenanted for some time back. She told me of the matter and prevailed upon me—for I can refuse her nothing—to get the house searched. Procuring a couple of policemen and the necessary authority, we entered the house, and, after searching a number of small closets, at last came to the one where you were confined.—We had to break open the door, as we had no key, and this we hesitated about doing; but Annie was so sure that she was correct as to the locality, and I had previously got so many proofs of the extreme acuteness of her hearing, that I consented at last to yield to her entreaties, and I thank God that we did so, for we found you lying in a stupor from which you would probably have never recovered without assistance.”

When he ceased speaking, I turned my grateful eyes upon the beautiful girl who had served me, and the broken words of gratitude uttered my thanks. A woman feels a greater interest in a man whose life she has saved than in one who has saved hers, and therefore my thanks were to her more than a reward for what she had done.

Mr. Le Baw, her father, told me that he had heard of my disappearance and the loss of the money, and he most kindly proposed that he and Dr. Swinton should telegraph to the officers of the bank what had happened to me. At the same I communicated with the Police of Boston, and a detective officer soon arrived at Mr. Le Baw’s house, to whom I related what had happened to me.

“This detective must himself be detected somehow,” said the officer, laughing. “It will never do to allow any person who chooses to assume the functions of the office and escape scatheless. Can you give any clue to the persons who robbed you?”

I could not anything definite, but the conviction had grown upon me that the man who had represented Steel was known to me.

“Think of all that he said to you,” said the detective, “and try to fix upon some particular word, and then recall the voices of all the people you can remember. Ah!” he half shouted, “I see you have it already.”

And, indeed, I thought so myself, for the man had pronounced the word “money” in a peculiar manner, as if it were “munee.” I stated this to him, saying that a clerk who had formerly been in our bank had pronounced it in the same manner, and that when I met the pretended detective, I had a vague conviction of having heard the voice before.

“He’s our man!” said the detective, triumphantly. “Now we have only to find him. Description, please.”

Though I could not convince myself that Petrie, my old friend, could be the offender, I was in justice compelled to give his description; and as soon as he had got it in full, the detective left, saying he would again call in the course of the day. When he left I was glad to sleep, and sleep I did till seven o’clock, when I was aroused to have another interview with the detective, whom I

found accompanied by the *bona fide* Steel this time. The latter was hot with ire that he should have been represented so successfully for such a purpose.

They had discovered that Petrie had been a clerk in the telegraph office, and that he had resigned his situation the day I had been immured in the cellar. They found, too, that he had been living a very fast life, and that the manager at the office had not been sorry when he left, for he had often been under the influence of liquor, and scarcely to be trusted about important work. They had further ascertained that two men had taken two furnished rooms in the vacant house adjoining Mr. Le Baw's, on the evening before, and though neither of them resembled Petrie in appearance, they had no doubt that it was he in disguise. They had telegraphed also to New York, inquiring whether a person of Petrie's description, either as he really was or as appeared with the disguise, had been seen there, and they hoped to have some correct information for me in the morning. I spent the rest of the evening in the society of Annie Le Baw and her father, and considered it the happiest of my life. Her pure heart rejoiced that she had done me good, and her eyes beamed with pity as she talked of the tortures I must have undergone. In short, I loved her, and unconsciously to herself the feeling, which began as mere sympathy, deepened into love on her part, though I did not know it then.

Two weeks passed before any trace was found of Petrie. At last it was discovered that a passenger resembling him had crossed in the steerage of one of the Inman steamers, and detective Steel and myself were dispatched in pursuit. At Liverpool we were somewhat at fault; but by dint of close, untiring search on our own part and that of a Scotch detective of the name of McLevy, we at last hunted our prey down in the city of Edinburgh. Having ascertained that Petrie was a common name in Scotland, we got good assistance. Petrie had dropped the character of a poor man, which he had sustained while on board the steamer, and was now sustaining that of a millionaire, who had made a fortune in America. The detectives pounced upon him as he was going to church and we brought him back to this country to pay the penalty of his crime.

At his trial he pleaded guilty, and said that he had seen the telegram to Mr. Hardie, as it was being changed from one line to another at Boston; and feeling persuaded I would be the bearer of the money, he determined to make a bold attempt at getting possession, and adopted the plan which was so successfully carried out. He had got two-thirds of the money, the accomplice whom he had found it necessary to employ having been satisfied with fifty thousand dollars as his share of the prize. He, too was captured by Petrie's description of him, and both are now serving their time in prison.

The cashier of the bank retiring soon after, the directors were kind enough to bestow that position on me, in reward, they said, for the sufferings I had undergone in their service. About a year after my return from Scotland I paid a visit to Boston—not the first since I had met the pretend detective there by any means—but I mention this one particularly, because then I took home Annie with me as my wife; and she has since proved herself the dearest and best wife in Providence, her only fault being that she occasionally laughs at me for having been so easily deceived by Petrie. I meekly reply that I do not care now, since my captivity brought me the good fortune of meeting her.

The Rockland County Journal, November 21, 1868