

## *How I Captured the Burglars*

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I had said that I did not believe in any danger from burglars, but after the worry of the day and the fatigue of my unwonted vigil, I myself began to feel a little dull and out of sorts, and found myself dwelling on the possibilities of our house being attempted. We were a family of women exclusively; our gardener came daily from the village, and did not sleep on the premises, although, in any case, an old man would have been a poor help in danger. The game keeper and his son were our nearest protectors, and I must own that I rather wished their cottage was nearer.

“I am getting as silly as Maggie,” I said to myself, as I resolutely drew the bedclothes over my ears to stop myself listening for imaginary voices. “I do think fancies are infectious.” And so moralizing, I fell asleep.

I suppose I had slept some hours, when I was awakened by a terrified whisper at my ear, “Miss Jane, Miss Jane, they are trying our back door!”

I started up, and beheld the nurse and nursery maid in a strange and wondrous *dishabille*, standing by my bed.

“It’s gospel truth what Maria says, miss,” gasped the nurse, a portly woman, who looked white with terror: “you can see them with your own eyes out of the day nursery window—two horrid-looking ruffians as ever came to murder poor, innocent women. Ugh! ugh!”

“Don’t wake your mistress, woman!” I cried. “In her delicate state, it might nearly kill her.”

“That’s what I said, miss,” struck in Maria. “I says, come to Miss Jane, she ain’t afraid of anything.”

This estimate of my courage was very flattering, but at the present moment hardly true, for I did feel terribly afraid. My only hope was that the women were mistaken.

“Come and see for yourself, miss,” sobbed the nurse. “I had got up to give baby his bottle, and went into the day nursery to fetch the matches, which Maria had forgot, and there, under the window, I heard voices.”

“Men’s voices, miss,” put in Maria, who seemed to act the part of a chorus. “And nurse she comes back and wakes me, and both of us look out of the front window, and there we see two men trying the kitchen door.”

By this time I had made a hasty toilet, and was ready to investigate for myself. It was with a very quaking heart that I crept noiselessly to the nursery window and peeped behind the blind. Alas! the terrible news was too true; two men, whose faces I could not distinguish in the dim light, but who certainly looked disreputable enough to my alarmed eyes, were cautiously trying the kitchen door. At their feet lay a long, dark object, apparently a sack, doubtless designed to carry off any

plunder they could obtain.

It is all very well to talk of not being afraid of burglars, but such an apparition at 5 o'clock in the morning was enough to startle the strongest-minded person. All the horrible stories I had ever heard of robberies and murders rushed across my excited brain. There was not much worth taking in the house; would the burglars kill us in their disappointment? Was it wise to let them in peaceably, and give them everything we had, on condition that they did not molest us, or could we give an alarm?

At this moment, I remembered the game-keeper's cottage. If we could only summon him to our aid. But how escape to do so? All the doors were in front of the house, and it was impossible to get out that way without being seen by the burglars. I peeped out again, evidently the kitchen door was too strongly fastened to give way readily, for the men seemed baffled in their efforts to open it. And as I listened, I heard one say in a gruff voice—exactly the tones of an orthodox ruffian—“T'aint no good, Jem; better wait half an hour!”

“Till the rest of your gang come up, and you have more tools to work with,” I thought to myself. “Now, if we could only let the game-keeper know—”

I returned to my room, with a project in my head. There was a staircase window at the back of the house, not very high from the ground, and I thought if I could only get out there, I might manage to give the alarm. Luckily, the road to the game-keeper's cottage lay behind the house. Nurse was too stupefied with terror to be of any use, but Maria entered into the scheme at once.

Maggie still slept, and I trusted to return with help before she awoke.

I don't know how I got out of that window and alighted on a bed of wet garden mold. I have often heard that one never knows what one can do till one tries. I certainly had no idea that I, or any one else, could run as fast as I did, as soon as I got on my feet. In a very short time, I was drumming at the game-keeper's door.

I found both the men up and dressed; they were just starting on one of those nocturnal expeditions for the detection of possible poachers in which conscientious game-keepers delight. They were rather startled at my appearance in a toilet that was certainly peculiar, and not improved by a quantity of mud it had gathered during my run. But they soon comprehended my breathless tale.

“A trying your back door, miss!” said the father, a fine, stalwart man who looked fit to engage a couple of burglars in a single conflict; “bless you, we'll soon settle them gentry. Hand along the guns, Bill, and look alive. I'm mistaken if them men don't sleep in Settlebourne jail [tonight].”

The sight of two resolute armed champions was an encouraging spectacle, and as I hurried back, I began to feel myself indeed a heroine. The game-keeper was outspoken in his admiration of my courage in coming for him, and I thought, with some satisfaction, that when Maggie awoke and learned how I had preserved the household, she would understand what a valuable thing it was to

have nerves and courage in face of danger.

“If I had sat down to cry, as poor, dear Maggie would have done, we should certainly have been robbed, and perhaps murdered,” I reflected, as we sped along the road.

The game-keeper checked our pace as we neared the house.

“You’d best keep this side, miss, out o’ harm’s way, and Bill and I’ll slip round by the hedge and tackle our men afore they sees us. Don’t you be afeerd; burglars is the biggest cowards when they’ve a man to do with;” and leaving me under the very window by which I had escaped, our two protectors stole noiselessly round to the front of the house. In another moment there was a cry, and I saw Bill dash across the garden and over the hedge in hot pursuit of one of the burglars, while a scuffle and loud voices told that his father was engaged in “tackling” the other. Curiosity prevailed over fear; I ran around the house, and beheld the game-keeper in the act of bearing his antagonist to the ground.

“Tain’t no use struggling, and you may just as well come along quietly,” said the conqueror; “we’ve fire-arms here, and there’s two of us.”

“I’ve nought in my pocket but fivepence in coppers,” quivered the other, in a voice nearly inaudible with terror; “you may take ‘em without murdering of me. Oh, dear! oh, dear! here I’ve lived in Settlebourne, man and boy, nigh fifty years, and to come to this at last!”

“Snakes alive!” exclaimed the game-keeper, relaxing his hold, “you’re never Tom Bates, the sweep?”

“And who else should I be?” said the injured Bates, slowly rising from the ground.

“And I’d like to know who you are that comes a rushing down like this on an honest man, as is waiting to sweep the kitchen chimney?”

“I took you for a house-breaker,” said the game-keeper, and proceeded to explain matters. Bates shook his head doggedly. “No house breakers has been here this last hour or more, as I knows well, having been a-waiting under this blessed window all the time.”

A horrible suspicion began to dawn upon me—had I, the wise, strong-minded, actually given a false alarm?

The game-keeper was a civil man, but he had a sly twinkle in his eye as he turned on me and said: “I think there is a little mistake here, miss.”

“I should rather think there was,” grumbled Bates, who by no means forgave the assault upon him.

“If you came to sweep the chimneys,” said I, endeavoring to assume an air of dignity, “why did

you not ring the bell or try to wake the servants, instead of endeavoring to open the door for yourself?”

“Cooks mostly leave the door on the latch when the sweep is ordered early,” replied Bates—a fact, by the way, that perhaps explained the facility with which some of our neighbors’ houses had been entered by thieves.

“But when you found the door bolted, why did you not ring the bell instead of lingering about in a most suspicious manner?”

“Why,” said Bates, scratching his head, “cooks is often short—very short; Mrs. Sinclair’s cook is partickler so. She orders me to come at 7 o’clock this morning—‘not before 7, nor yet after,’ were her words.”

“And you came about 5?”

“Well, madam, you see I had another job at ‘Squire Hardy’s along the road. So, knowing as cook here mostly leaves the door on the latch, I thought I might slip in and do the climbing on my way. But when I found the door locked, I daren’t ring the bell at 5 in the morning—I might ha’ tried it an hour later—so I was obliged to wait.”

I understood it all now. Our exhortations to fasten up carefully that night had been duly obeyed by the cook, who doubtless intended to rise in time to admit the sweep on this occasion. Graylauds was a rambling old house, and she slept in quite a different quarter from that occupied by ourselves and the nursery establishment, consequently they had escaped hearing our nocturnal alarm. But what a terrible “lame and impotent conclusion” to my deed of heroism.

“You have given us all a great deal of alarm,” I said severely to the unlucky Bates, acting on the proverbial legal maxim, “No case, then abuse the plaintiff’s attorney.”

“I don’t see as how I gave alarm by waiting here on my honest business,” replied the injured sweep, sulkily. “And I’d like to know who’s a-going to pay me for my cap as is spoiled by rolling in the mud, and my bones as is all shook into a jelly, and my ‘prentice as has been chased out of sight, and frightened most into fits.”

At this juncture the door opened and disclosed a group of servants, with Maggie, serene and smiling, at their head.

“My darling Jane,” she exclaimed, clasping me in her arms. “I have only just heard what an alarm you have had. But then, my dear girl, why did you not wake me? I could have told you we expected the sweeps this morning. I suppose, however, you were too frightened to think it might be only Bates.”

This was too much for Maggie, timid Maggie, to be preaching coolness and presence of mind to me. And yet, what an egregious goose I had been.

Kind little Maggie saw my look of mortification, and kissing me again, whispered: “Dear, brave, unselfish Jane, you only thought of saving us all from danger. I am sure few girls would have done what you did.”

Peace was made with Bates by means of an excellent breakfast, which cook improvised on the spot, for the sweeps and game-keepers, and I emptied my purse in “tips” for very shame. But of course the absurd story travelled abroad, and all of the neighborhood heard that I had run two miles in the airiest of costumes, because the sweep had come rather earlier than was expected. I am afraid my reputation for good sense hardly stood high in the vicinity of Graylands. The actual thieves were taken a few days afterwards, and this fact, added to the absurdity of our—or rather my—false alarm, effectually cured Maggie of her terrors.

We were better friends from that night. I began to see that the most sensible folks are liable to lose their heads under the influence of panic, and that I was, after all, not so much wiser than my neighbors—impressions that doubtless made me a more agreeable companion than I had been heretofore. Maggie, on her side, was all gratitude for my well-meant, if mistaken zeal, and I dated the beginning of a friendship that has brightened many years of my life from the adventures of that December night.

*The Weekly Kansas Chief*, September 30, 1880