

After Those Seven-Thirties

A Simple Job

Well, Sir, there is a certain amount of interest attaching to the commonest jobs in our line, as you say. But the detective system in this country ain't what it is in Old England: it's younger, you know. There is some smart fellows among us, though; not that *I'm* one of 'em. I'm modest, I am. But I'll tell you how I done up that Osdell job, if you care to hear it. I dare say it'll sound simple enough to you, Sir. It does to me.

Osdell's banking house in the village of L—, in this State, was cracked some three months ago, and one thousand four hundred and twenty dollars in Seven-Thirties was carried off. Mr. Osdell sent to us for a detective, and I went down to L—. It was a simple enough state of things. A young fellow by the name of Lawrence Haight had left town immediately after the robbery, and inquiries at his boarding house showed that he left without giving any notice of his intention. He had been idling around the village for some weeks, and the woman he boarded with said he had been pretty hard up for funds, but had told her he expected some money from his uncle; and the day after the robbery he had paid her up and left town. I called at the post office and found that no letter had come for Haight; those country postmasters know every letter that passes through their hands, you see; and at the express office the same tidings were rendered. Haight was no doubt the robber. I set out to find him.

The ticket agent and the baggage man at the little railroad dépôt were positive Haight had not left town that way. Nothing had been seen of him at the dépôt.

I went back to the village—half a mile or so off from the railroad it was; railroads don't turn out much for little places like that—and found that my man had probably thought to hide his trail a little by walking to the next station—about six miles away. I took a horse and rode over there. At the hotel where I took dinner I found that a man answering the description exactly had stopped there to supper the day after the robbery, registering his name as Barton Love. As soon as I saw that I knew the fellow must be a flat, for he couldn't have picked out a more suspicious name than that to travel on, could he? ha, ha! I've known hate to disguise itself as love often before that, you see; it's a common game enough!

Well, with that clew I just followed my man right over his ground. There wasn't a hotel he stopped at for the next week but had a dozen people in it who had noticed that young man with the queer name. So I followed him easy enough through the States of Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Vermont, back again into Northern New York, and across the St. Lawrence River into that mouldy old town of Kingston in Canada West. But there I lost sight of him. I visited every hotel in the place, high and low, and got many a trace of him here and there; but what way he went from there I found it impossible to learn. So after beating about the bush for a few days, I reluctantly gave up the search, and returned home, where I had other business to attend to at the time.

About two weeks ago I had a call to Chicago in the course of another job I was working up, and after attending to that affair it just occurred to me that I would take a look after the Osdell fellow.

I set out then to search all the hotel registers in town, and I wasn't long in finding the name I wanted. The second house I visited—the Tremont—had the name of “Barton Love and lady” on the register. I talked with the clerk about it, and learned that my man had stayed in the city over night, and had taken passage on one of the railroads running out of the Great Central dépôt. There are three roads that run out of that dépôt—the Illinois Central, the Michigan Central, and the Burlington and Quincy. So I was about in the fix of the man at three crossroads, uncertain which of them leads to the place he wants to go to. In such a case as that, Sir, when there seems to be no kind of a choice in the matter, my rule is to always take the least likely route. Because, don't you see, a thief who had fears of being followed would do that very thing to throw his pursuers off the scent. Now of these three railroads, one was the very road I had reason to believe my man had come to Chicago over when he left Canada, and that was the Michigan Central road. So it being least likely that a man would come to Chicago and then go right back on the same road he come on, that was my route. Not much keen judgment to brag on about that, you'll say; and you're right, there wasn't. It was about like flipping up a copper and crying “Tails this way, heads that way.”

I stopped at the first station I came to, on the Michigan Central road, and made inquiries for my man and woman. It's any quantity easier to follow a man and a woman together than either of 'em separate. I was two days going that way from town to town, talking with every man that would talk with me, not in a way to let 'em know my business, you see; I'm not such a fool as that, though I don't profess any particular smartness. I generally took occasion to mention the subject of the Seven-Thirty loan, in the first place, thinking I might happen to hit on something that way; and from that leading up to any topic I smelt ahead that had any show of meat in it.

About dark of the second day I came to that little place they call—Well, blow me, Sir, if I ever can remember the name of that place when I want to. It's a God forsaken little hole a few miles west of Kalamazoo, in the State of Michigan. It was raining like spouts when I got off the train, and the first place I headed for was a little liquor saloon a few rods from the place where the cars stopped—for the railroad dépôt was shut up. I ought to have mentioned, perhaps, that it was a freight train I came in on, which accounts for the dépôt being shut, you know. So I put my head down and cut through the rain and mud for the liquor saloon.

It was half full of loafers, drying themselves at a pot of a stove, where a fire of that dirty, smoky Western coal was burning.

“Nasty weather,” says I to my nearest neighbor, as I pulled a stool under me by the stove.

“Yas,” says he.

“Any hotel around here?” says I, for I hadn't seen any signs of one.

“Thar's one up to th'Square,” says my neighbor.

“How far is it?”

“Oh, half a mile er so when it's good goin'. Must be nigh on to a mile tonight, I'd say. Awful

muddy. Sticks ye right in. Cale Smith left 'is butes in th' mud this art'noon. This 'ere rain'll make it wuss 'n 'twas. Whar d'ye com frum?"

"I'm down from Chicago," says I. "Why don't this saloon keeper take lodgers? He's got a big enough building, I should say."

"Yas, he hes. But he hain't got no furnitur' yit. He's a goin' ter hev."

"New hand?" says I. I'm a telling you this conversation, Sir, only to show you how I led along when I commenced; since you asked it, you know; there don't seem to be much sense in a talk of this kind though, I'll admit.

"Yas," says my neighbor, "he's jest bought. Love was agoin' ter fix up an' put in beds, but he got sick on't sudden, an' sold out to this man— name's Harris. I don't know much about him. You're a stranger then?"

"Rather. And so Love sold out, did he? What's he gone at?"

"Who, Love? Oh, I don' know. He didn't b'long here. He's left ag'in."

"Ah!" says I, thinking there never was such a dodger as this fellow any how. Every time I got my finger on him he "wasn't thar," as the man said of the flea, you know.

"Love had a young wife," the man went on, "kind of a `stylish creature'—dressed high, you know—loud colors, green and red and yaller. I expeck she didn't fancy the saloon business. I expeck that's what made Love clear out so sudden. Ever been in these parts afore?"

"No, I never have," said I. "Come up and drink."

"Wa'al, I don't mind 'f I do."

"Why, Harris!" says I, as I came up to the bar "is this you?" and I stretched out my hand cordially.

"Wa'al now," says Harris, shaking my hand slowly up and down, "I know your face just as well's my brother, but I can't call ye by name."

"Hain't forgot Jo Smith, have ye?" says I.

"Oh—certainly—you used to be up to Kalamazoo."

"Of course. Thought you'd recollect me. Well, friend, what's yours?"

I never saw this Harris before in my life, Sir, but men in his business don't stickle much about accepting an old acquaintance; 'tain't to be supposed a toddy-mixer will remember his customers as they remember him, you know; so I was all right with Harris in no time.

“Been buying something new, eh?” says I, by way of opening a conversation. “Good thing?”

“Yas, I made a good think on’t,” says he.

“How’s that?”

“Wa’al, tell ye! I bought this place of old Meggs two weeks ago for \$400, and the very next day, afore I took possession, this feller Love came along, and seein’ the old bill ‘For Sale’ still up, for I’d forgot to take it down, he come in to buy it, an’ I bein’ here I sold it to him right off the handle, and he paid me \$650 on the nail, all in Seven-Thirties.”

“That’s good money.”

“Yes. He had plenty of ‘em, too. But he got tired of it right along, and I bought the place back of him for \$300. Made \$350 clean. That’ll do, eh? Ha, ha! Have a drink, Jo?”

When he spoke about those Seven-Thirties I felt a little surer of my man than ever before—for it was still further evidence that he was really the thief.

Well, Harris didn’t know where Love had gone to, further than that he took the road for Chemunk, a place about forty miles back in the country, on the shore of Lake Michigan; and there were half-a-dozen villages along the route. So the next morning I hired a horse and buggy to go to Chemunk and back, and started off. I stopped in all those villages along the way, but got no sight of him. I reached Chemunk on a Saturday, and as it was a mighty pleasant little place on the lake shore, I took a notion to stay over Sunday, and go to church.

I saw my man at that church, Sir, with his wife, looking as demure as you please, though the woman had every appearance of being a bad character, and I thought she looked very much out of place there. Of course I wouldn’t arrest him on Sunday, and there was no use now, for he was safe enough.

I had no trouble in taking him the next day. The woman carried on high, but I told her it was no use. I took him in my buggy and started on my way home. His wife insisted on going too, but I told her she couldn’t go in my buggy; if she wanted to follow me in another buggy she could do that, but I’d have to have a constable to drive it for her, for fear of accidents. She agreed, and she followed me all the way back to that village that I can’t remember the name of, and took the same train with us—that is me and my man.

She was ten years older than he was, I should say, and she was very devoted to him. She waited on him like a servant, and was continually doing something for him—buying him oranges and things, slipping her handkerchiefs under his darbies to ease his wrists, and so on.

The young man denied the bank robbery up and down, and told a very neat story to clear it up. He said his real name was Love, and that he took the name of Haight as a disguise while he was hiding from his father in L—. He had run away from his father, who lived in New York City, out

of love for the woman that was with him. He said she was a married woman, but was suing for a divorce at the time he was boarding in L—, and he was waiting for the result of the trial. She lived with her parents on a farm half-way between L—and the next station, and he used to go to see her evenings—meeting her in the road by her father’s house. After she got the divorce she came into her money, and that was where he got his money to pay his board and his traveling expenses. Her folks were respectable old people, and he and his lady-love arranged between ‘em to save scandal by his going off alone and traveling about for a week or two, and at the end of that time they met in Toronto and were married. Then they came on West, and finally had settled down at Chemunk. All they wanted was a home by themselves, they cared not how humble, where they could live and love in peace, away from all their old acquaintances.

A very nice yarn, wasn’t it?

Very well got up it was, Sir, and that’s a fact— very well got up. But the best of it was, that it was all true from beginning to end, as I found when I got to L—with my prisoner last Wednesday night.

The real burglar had been caught that very day, and had confessed his crime. So the first thing I had to do was to take off young Love’s handcuffs and ask him what he wanted of me in the way of satisfaction. He and his wife were overjoyed at the new turn of affairs; and as it was night when we got in, all they asked of me was liberty to leave town by the midnight train west, and a promise that I would not tell the L— people who they really were. The woman had acquaintances in L—.

So that was the way I worked that job up. Simple, eh? That was just what ailed it. If the thing hadn’t been so perfectly plain and simple every way, it wouldn’t have led me so far astray, you see.

Harper’s Weekly, July 8, 1865