

## The Detective's Story

From the Springfield (Mass.) Daily Republican

Late in the Autumn of 1856 I was going home to Vermont for a short visit. Just as I stepped on to the warf at Buffalo, a gentleman tapped me on the shoulder, and said:

“This way, if you please.”

As I did not happen to please, but was turning to look after my baggage, he seized hold of me, and said, “Come along, sir.”

I said, “Don't be rude, my man. I am not on duty now, and cannot attend to your case, whatever it may be.”

“But I can to yours,” retorted he, “so come along without any more ado.”

“Claim your baggage! Train leaves here in five minutes!” shouted the porter.

“My trunk! A check for Burlington!” said I.

“Check for the station house,” put in my pertinacious, new-made friend.

“What on earth do you mean? You will make me miss the train,” said I.

“But not the station,” he replied dryly, “so come along.”

“Will you please introduce yourself before we proceed with our acquaintance?”

“I am Deputy Crane, of Buffalo,” he answered.

“And I am Deputy Wood, of Chicago. But train's off. I will see you on my return to Buffalo.”

There was a little confusion. “All aboard!” shouted the conductor. And all aboard they got, excepting Deputy Wood and his trunk, which, to my certain knowledge, were left standing in the depot—the one for a moment about as speechless as the other. Deputy Crane presently remarked that he had never before had the pleasure of meeting Deputy Wood of Chicago: but he thought his friends Smith, Jones & Co., might have been more fortunate, and if I would have the goodness to walk up to the City Hotel, where they boarded such as me for nothing, he would send for them. I knew there was some mistake; but I thought it would hinder me only one train, and, as the adventure might be worth all it cost, I would go along without further explanation.

We were soon at the iron gate and gratings of the “City Hotel,” as Crane facetiously termed it; and, while he was gone for Smith & Co., I had time to reflect. “Great Robbery in Buffalo. The store of Smith, Jones & Co. robbed of some thousand dollars worth of

silks, besides notes and drafts for some thousand more. One thousand dollars reward for detection of the thief, &c.” This notice had been published so long before, that I should never have thought of it again, had not the present episode refreshed my memory. But I had not long to meditate before Smith, Jones & Co., with half-a-dozen clerks, were on hand—all identifying me, from Smith down to the errand boy, as being the identical man who was lurking around the premises in a suspicious manner the day before the robbery.

“Well, my man,” said Deputy Crane, patting me on the shoulder, “guilty or not guilty?”

“Hungry,” I replied; “and, if you please, we will go and get some breakfast.”

“There is ice in that. But could you feed yourself with your hands tied together? That is according to the rules of the house,” answered Crane.

“Now hold on Crane,” I exclaimed— “this joke has gone about far enough. We can telegraph to the chief in Chicago, and get our answer in half an hour, which will put the matter all right; and in the meantime I will eat some breakfast, and be ready for the noon express.”

Tearing a leaf from my memorandum book, I wrote:

“Chief Detective Police, Chicago: Describe Deputy Wood, and say where he is.”

Crane took the dispatch, signed his own name to it, and sent it forward immediately. Shortly the answer returned:

“Deputy Wood, thirty-five years, red hair, freckled face, five feet eleven, dressed in full suit sheep’s gray. On way to Vermont, and probably passed Buffalo this morning. Has any accident happened?”

Signed “-----, Chief Detective Police, Chicago.”

This was conclusive, and I was straightway escorted, with many apologies, by my new friend, from the “City Hotel” to the American, where I was invited to eat and drink—not at the expense of the city, but of my humble servant. While the chicken was boiling we talked over matters, and came to the conclusion that as I had not been in Buffalo before for more than a year, somebody had who looked wonderfully like me; and a thousand dollars was offered to any one who would produce him—which reward Deputy Crane almost felt in his pocket when he nabbed me at the station.

After breakfast we walked down to the store of Smith, Jones and co., and talked over the affair. Jones apologized, and said he supposed they “must have been mistaken in the man, which perhaps was not strange, seeing our attention was not called to you particularly at that time, and several months had intervened; mistakes will happen in very good families, however.”

Having delivered himself of this doubtful admission of my honesty, and entirely original joke, Mr. Jones retired into the counting-room, looking very unconvinced; and the clerks, as if by common instinct, began to put back all the loose goods on the counter, as though they feared I would grab them on my way out of the store. Crane, I think, was thoroughly convinced, before I bade him good-bye at the depot, that, so far as I was concerned, it was all right; but persisted that it was a very natural mistake—begged my pardon, and hoped I would see him on my return.

For a month or more, while among my friends in Vermont, I thought little of the occurrence. It is true the thousand dollar reward would occasionally come into my mind; but as I was not employed in the case, the prospect of getting it was exceedingly small. On my return I spent a few days in New York, visiting old acquaintances, and making new ones, mostly among the detective branch of the police, as the line of business to which I was devoted can best be learned by mingling with adepts.

One day, while passing down West Street, some person slapped me on the shoulder in a familiar manner, saying at the same time:

“How are you, old fellow? When did you get back? Wasn’t you going to speak to a fellow ’cause you got a new suit? Made the thing pay, eh?”

Quick as thought, the Buffalo adventure came into my mind, and I resolved at once to follow up the advantage.

“Mum’s the word,” said I, clapping my lips at the same time to indicate that mum *was* the word; but also more effectually to change my voice.

“Come in, Joe,” said my new acquaintance, pointing down the stairs to a drinking saloon. “Nobody here but Bill and the boy. We’ve had some fine pickings since you left. Didn’t expect you back until tomorrow; but come in and have a drink anyway.”

Clapping my lips again, I blurted out:

“Business; but I’ll be around tomorrow. Have all the boys in at four.”

So saying, I dashed on as if I had a thousand stores to rob and several men to murder before I could stop to talk. My friend in utter amazement was still standing where I left him when I turned the corner, thinking no doubt that it was very strange, but apparently having no suspicion of identity.

I was certain as I went to my hotel that I had got hold of a string which, followed up, might lead to at least a thousand dollars, and may be much valuable property and still greater rewards. As the key to the situation was evidently my resemblance to some rascal, I thought it right as I had to bear the resemblance that I should have all the benefit that was to come of it, or at least the lion’s share; so I resolved to keep my own counsel, and make up the case as best I could in my own room.

Joe was coming back on the next day; Bill (my new acquaintance) and the boys had been having good pickings, and they would probably be there tomorrow at four, if the real Joe did not come round before and clear up, or add to, the mystery of today. Joe evidently must be headed off, or the other pigeons would scatter before they could be bagged. It was my main interest, having no local responsibility in the matter, to bag the thousand dollars and Joe. But as the street had two ends to it, and the bagging must not be done where it would frighten the other game, I began to see I must have help even in the onset; so I sensibly concluded to lay the whole affair before the chief, and have men enough detailed to ensure success. The case was so plain that there seemed to be but one plan, and in that we were all agreed, namely: to make arrangements that evening to have me stationed in a grocery store on the first corner of the street from the saloon, with two or three assistants, and as many more placed in the corner drug store down the street, so as to arrest Joe before he met his pals, and by putting him in a close carriage we might take him off so quietly that nobody would hear it. A few men were to be stationed in a private house opposite the saloon, to make a descent if they saw any unnatural commotion about there before the appointed hour. But otherwise all were to concentrate when the hour arrived, and arrest whoever might be present.

One hour before daylight we were in our places, not to attract attention by going there afterward. It was a long, dreary afternoon. We fancied we saw now and then a suspicious person passing; but no more perhaps than we might expect to see on any other street in the city. Noon came. Crackers and raisins had been disposed of at our grocery store, and yet my double had not made his appearance. Whether they had taken him at the drug store we did not know; but supposed our chance to be much the best.

While we were discussing these probabilities, with eyes all the time directed to the street, my comrades in one voice called out, "There he comes!" and dashed out to arrest him—I meantime persisting it was "not the man—no resemblance—hold on!"

But it was of no use. They had him in the carriage in a twinkling, and all but two were back in the store so soon that our conversation need hardly have been interrupted—only as this episode served to give it a new direction.

"As near alike as twin brothers, except the clothes. No doubt about it," they all averred.

But I had still to confess a great many doubts, as I did not see the slightest resemblance. I, who had seen myself for thirty-odd years, ought to know better how I looked than they who had not seen me so many hours. But the sequel will tell who knew best. Four o'clock came, and, as by agreement, we concentrated in front and rear of Hanseomb's saloon. I took my place in the rear, while most of the local stars dashed into the den. We had only a moment to wait before six or eight of the gang came rushing past us in their efforts to escape. Our squad gave instant chase. My friend of yesterday being the only one I recognized received my especial attention. Following him around the corner at the top of my speed, I was surprised for the instant to see him slacken his pace, as though waiting for me to come up.

“Bully, Joe! We’ve dodged them this time anyhow.”

The precise state of the case was evident. Without waiting for an answer, he went on hurriedly:

“Jenks saw me, and he knows where I live, and this will arouse his suspicions. I’ll wager he’ll be around to No. 37 before night; and those traps must be moved, or we’ll be certain to lose ’em.”

“Move ’em tis,” said I; and on we went, running where we thought it was safe, and making good time all the way—my companion a little in advance, and wondering what made me so laggard.

We were not long in reaching No. 37 Grove Street. My friend had the latch key in his hand and was on the point of entering, when I proceeded to dispel his illusion by exhibiting my star and demanding an unconditional surrender. He was belligerent—a tussle ensued, and for a moment it seemed doubtful which would win, Polly or the bear; but the disturbance soon brought several policemen to my aid, and my late associate was taken off the lock-up.

Hearing a commotion indoors, I thought it best to proceed at once to make an examination. So we turned the key, which was still in the lock, and walked in, without saying, “by your leave madam.”

Madam met us in the hall, and demanded our business. We blandly informed her that we knew something of her beautiful mansion by reputation, and were anxious to examine it ourselves by gaslight, if she would be so good as to show us around. She protested that they were honest people, that her husband was out, the hour was late, we were no gentlemen, and finally that she would thank us to leave, just as any honest woman would.

But I cannot go into details. Suffice it to say, we went up stairs, down stairs, and in the lady’s chamber: and wherever we went we found more goods than the most thrifty housekeeper could need. Down stairs especially there was a perfect store of valuables—enough to stock two or three variety shops of moderate pretensions, besides one jewelry store. In the morning I sent to Smith & Company, to come and identify their property. In course of the next two days, not only Smith, but the representatives of a dozen other stores which had been robbed, were there. Smith found nearly all his lost silks, many others identified the whole or part of theirs, while much remained that was not claimed by anyone.

There were more than a dozen taken at the saloon, most of whom were known to the police; the matter was vigorously prosecuted, and I believe more than half were duly convicted and sentenced in New York.

But what became of my twin brother Joe, who had unconsciously got these, his particular friends, into trouble.

The conclusion of the whole matter can be told briefly.

Joe was induced to accompany me so far as Buffalo on my return home, where I introduced him to my friend Deputy Crane, who immediately escorted him to the “City Hotel,” with which I had once had made slight acquaintance. Smith & Co., and the clerks, recognized him at once, and volunteered to see that he had justice. Deputy Crane, Smith, Jones, and all my persistent acquaintances of a month before, begged a thousand pardons for their stupidity in thinking I resembled the thief. But more acceptable was Smith’s check for the promised reward, and I was more than willing to forgive Deputy Crane; for it was owing to his blunder that much valuable property was returned to the rightful owners, many rascals made to suffer the penalty for their crimes, and one honest man handsomely paid for looking like a rogue.

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