

Sheer Luck

A Detective's Adventure With a Criminal
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ONE pleasant evening recently two men were seated in a cozy little room not far from St. Louis, engaged in conversation concerning criminals. One was a detective connected with a Chicago agency. "Well," remarked the detective, after a pause in the conversation, "I will tell you a peculiar little incident that happened several years ago to a brother detective, which will illustrate how luck sometimes assists us in accomplishing an object which otherwise might be unattainable.

"Several years ago," he continued, as he ejected a cloud of smoke from his mouth, "a noted forger was wanted very badly in Chicago, where he had been indulging in such crookedness as rendered him liable to occupy the Penitentiary for a term of years if he were caught. The case was placed in Pinkerton's hands and one of his men detailed to work it up. He was fortunate enough to obtain a clew to the much-wanted individual's whereabouts, and following it up he at length spotted his man at Toronto, Can., which you know is on Lake Ontario. The detective threw himself in the way of the forger, became acquainted with him under an assumed name, and gradually ingratiated himself in his favor. Forgery not being an extraditable offense, it was impossible to make the arrest in Canada, so the detective was obliged to adopt another line of tactics. He made known his intention of crossing over into the States, and the forger determined to go to the boat and see him off. Once on board the detective kept him engrossed in interesting conversation, and with such consummate tact did he play his part that the crooked gentleman did not notice that the boat had started until it was far out in the lake, for they had gone below to take a social glass at parting. When the forger found the boat gradually receding from the Canadian shore, with no possibility of getting back immediately, he fumed and swore for a time, but seeing that that did not better matters in the least, cooled down and determined to make the best of a bad job.

"As soon as that imaginary line in the middle of the lake which divides the two countries had been passed, the detective revealed himself, and, clapping on the nippers, arrested his man. They arrived on the other shore at length without adventure, and boarding the lightning express on the Lake Shore & Michigan Southern that night, they started on their journey. There happened to be few persons in the cab in which the two sat. The detective was almost completely worn out from loss of sleep, and as it was a through train he determined to obtain a little Morpheus. Placing the prisoner on the inner side of the seat, he so disposed himself next him that he imagined the slightest move would awake him. These arrangements completed, he fell asleep in an easy state of mind. He does not know how long he slept until he awoke suddenly and found to his chagrin that the forger was gone. It is a rule of our agency that if a man is sent upon the trail of a depredator, and fails in bringing him back, he loses his place; so you see that his reputation as well as his position depended upon his prompt action. He quickly decided upon his line of action, and, walking with assumed carelessness through the entire train, he examined every nook and corner that the prisoner could possibly be stowed away in. His search was fruitless. On his return he was accosted by a brakeman, who inquired:

"Are you looking for your friend?"

“The detective answered in the affirmative.

“‘Oh,’ said the brakeman, ‘he got off at the last station where we stopped for water. He seemed as if he didn’t want to disturb your sleep—for he got out over the back of the seat.’

“The detective then made known who he was, and inquired of the brakeman whether there was any possible chance of his getting back to the town that night. Very fortunately the train stopped a short distance ahead on a siding in order to allow a freight train going in the direction of this particular town to pass them. The conductor signaled it to stop, the detective got aboard, and in the course of an hour or so was standing in the little village where he desired to be. It was a primitive Ohio hamlet, and the only alleged hotel it could boast of was of the most wretched description. The detective concluded that he could do nothing at that late hour and in his exhausted condition; so he determined to obtain a little sleep and scour the country in the morning. With infinite difficulty he succeeded in arousing the sleepy landlord of the hostlery. ‘There were no accommodations,’ he said, in reply to the detective’s question, ‘unless he was willing to occupy the same room and bed with another man.’

“The detective thought it was better than sleeping out, so he asked to be shown the room. He had just disrobed and was about to extinguish the tallow dip, when something prompted him to take a look at his bedfellow. He did so, and what was his surprise to find his whilom prisoner snuggled up in the bedclothes. Accustomed as he was to repressing his feelings upon all occasions, he could scarcely refrain from a joyful shout at his good fortune, and it was some time before he recovered sufficient calmness to act with coolness. After much self-congratulation he secured the forger’s clothing to a piece of twine and suspended them from the window. He then resumed a portion of his own clothing and hid the remainder, locked the door and placed the key in his pocket, and getting into bed he placed his revolver in such a position that, although out of sight, it was within easy reach, and sank into peaceful slumber. In the morning he was awakened by the sound of someone talking in the room, and peering cautiously around he noticed the forger rummaging about, clothed only in an abbreviated under-garment and endeavoring manfully to give proper vent to his feelings in choice but emphatic expletives. His search for his clothing proving unavailing, he approached the bed opposite to investigate. As he did so, ‘click’ went the revolver, and the detective stood revealed to his astonished gaze. He started as if he had been struck, and before he could recover from his astonishment he was properly handcuffed and at the detective’s mercy.

“He was soon assisted into his clothing, the next passing train was hailed and they arrived at their destination without further adventure.”

“What became of the forger?” inquired the reporter, as the detective applied a lighted match to his cigar.

“Oh, he was tried soon afterward,” was the reply, “and the evidence against him was of such an overwhelming character that he was convicted and sent up for a long time.”

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