

A Clever Capture

by F.B.

A well-known inspector of the detective force once related to us a clever capture, effected by himself, of a daring thief, who had more than once escaped from prison. The inspector himself had considerable experience, and tracked his man to a public house; and, under the pretense of being an old thief himself threw his companion off his guard by relating anecdotes. He was unarmed himself, and knew that the real burglar—who was known to the fraternity as Bill the Cracksman—had a revolver in his breast pocket, with the use of which he was thoroughly acquainted; and the question was how to arrest him single-handed. Story followed story and reminiscence, till Bill and his companion—who called himself Jerry Blake—became as thick as members of the former's profession are proverbially supposed to become.

'Now,' said Mr. Blake, after a pause as a last bit of anecdote. 'I'll show how Joe the Tinman was took. He'd sworn how as there wasn't a man in the colony or out of it as would take him single-handed. Well, as the reward for his capture was a heavy one, a chap named Simmons, who was then one of the mounted police, determined to try it on. So what does he do, knowing some of Joe's haunts, but bribes a stockman, who lived in a lonely hut, on the side of a deep gully among the hills, to let him take possession of the place a week or so. It was a hut where Joe was accustomed to call when he wanted to pick up news, or to get a fresh supply of rum, for the stockman had been a convict like himself, and a pal of his; but pal or no pal, he sold Joe this time, and no mistake.'

'I'd have blown his brains out, if I'd been Joe,' observed the cracksman, with a savage oath.

'I honor your sentiments,' responded Mr. Blake; 'and from what I know of Joe, he shared them. But, you see, when he looked in one night at the hut, no stockman was there; but in his place Simmons, looking the very pictur' of a rough shepherd, was seated over the fire, making his tea and cooking damper.'

'Hello! where's the stockman here?' asked Joe, stalking into the hut and approaching the fire; for Joe wasn't afraid of the devil himself. Besides, he was all stuck round with six-shooters and bowie-knives, so that he was a caution to look at.

'Where's the stockman?' said he.

'He's gone.'

'Gone where—dead?'

'Pretty nigh it. He's down at the station with the marsh fever. I've been ordered up here in his place.'

'And who may you be, mate, when you are at home?' asked Joe, savagely, for he was disappointed at losing his friend.

‘When I’m at home,’ said Simmons, still busy with his damper, ‘if home mean England, I might be Lord Mayor or Chancellor of the Exchequer, for any chance I have of getting back there; but being where I am, I’m only a jail-bird, like you, mate.’

‘Joe, who wasn’t accustomed to bold speaking of this kind, stepped back a pace or two and laid his hand on a six-shooter.’

‘Who do you take me for?’ he asked with an oath.

‘Don’t take you for anyone but your proper or improper self,’ said Simmons, quite unmoved, and filling two tin mugs with the sweetened tea.

‘And who am I?’

‘Joe the Tinman.’

Joe handled his pistol as one prepared for action, but Simmons burst into a laugh.

‘Leave off handling your barking-iron,’ he said, ‘and take this mug of tea. I’d advise you to put a taste of rum in it, for the night is a nipper. You know where the bottle is, so make no bones about it. When Old Mike (that was the name of the stockman) sent me up here in his place, he did not forget to say who was his friends and best customers.’

All this was said in so easy and comfortable a way that the bushranger was thrown off his guard; and no wonder, for Simmons was a tall, thin, young feller at that time, and the Tinman, besides being armed to the teeth, was middle-aged, short, thickset, and with the muscular development of a bull. The hut was miles from any other habitation, and the night, what with wind and rain, was a screamer.

So Joe the Tinman and Simmons ‘the [xxx]’ sat down to their tea together, and a [jolly] night, I’ve heard, they had of it. The pitcher of spirits was filled and emptied again, again and again. Songs were sung and tales were told till the noisy revelry within rivaled the dash of the rain and the scream of the blast without.

Toward morning each took to boasting of his powers of doing this thing or that thing, and among other things, Simmons, who’d been, when a mere boy, a sort acrobat at a circus, boasted of his powers of jumping.

‘Now,’ he said, ‘supposing the traps were about me, and you was one of ‘em, I’d clear a short man like you at a bound; and, provided you weren’t armed, I’d defy a dozen like you to catch me.’

The Tinman who was bumptious in his cups, denied this.

‘Why,’ said he, ‘if you was to try to leap over me as you say, I’d just up with my arms and pin your two thread-paper legs so.

He illustrated his words by action, but Simmons only laughed.

‘Nonsense! I’d skim over you as a swallow skims over a bit o’ water. You wouldn’t even touch my shadder as I passed.’

The Tinman, drinking more rum, grew angry.

‘I’d like to see you try it. You’re more of a grasshopper than a properly built man, that’s what you are! Come, I’ll bet you this gold watch that you don’t jump clean over me as I stand now, back toward you.’

‘Watch be hanged!’ says Simmons. ‘I bet you a bottle of rum against that bowie you’ve got in your belt that I clear a short chap like you, hold up your hands as high as you can, at a jump only give me the run of a few yards.’

‘‘Done.’ And drawing the bowie-knife from his belt, the bushranger laid it on the table.’

‘Gammon!’ observed Bill, who had listened with much attention to the story. ‘It’s a thing a leopard, or any one o’ them springy chaps, couldn’t do.’

‘It’s only a trick,’ replied Mr. Blake—a mere circus trick—which every clown in the ring understands. Here, I’ll show you how it’s done in a minute—that is, I’ll show you how Simmons must have done it, according to mv belief.’

With ready obedience Bill stood up, and turned his back to the operator.

‘I suppose that’s how the Tinman stood?’

‘I should fancy just so. Raise your arms a little above the level of your head. That’s it. Throw them back a little, and I’ll show you how the trick was done.’

Bill, following every direction, raised his hands high over his head, then let them decline slightly in the direction of his new friend.

The latter taking Bill’s wrists in his hand, brought them gently together.

‘This is how the thing must have been done,’ he said. ‘Simmons must have taken advantage of a position that placed the bushranger absolutely in his power to draw a pair of handcuffs from his pocket, and before the other could make a movement slip them on so.’

The thing was done in an instant, and before the cracksman could well realize the fact, he found himself seated in one of the chairs, his hands fettered, and his captor calm and smiling, standing over him.

‘What do you mean by all this?’ Bill gasped out at last, looking about him with bewildered amazement. ‘Is it a joke?’

‘A capital joke!’ replied the other. ‘It was I who tried the same joke on the Tinman, and it succeeded capitally.’

‘You?’

‘At that time I belonged to the Colonial police. Now I’m Mr. Inspector Simmons. My address is Scotland Yard, and I’m very much at your service.’

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