

Trapping a Detective by Allan Pinkerton

THE “smart boy” of the period is sometimes very smart indeed. There seems to be a period in the life of every boy when he naturally becomes this “smart boy of the period,” and takes to tricks of a brilliant character as naturally as a young miss takes to beaux. Philadelphia had one of these smart boys recently, and he showed, under the pressing necessity of the occasion, an ingenuity and shrewdness which would have much more become the Philadelphia city detective whom he outwitted.

A Brook Street grocer lost fifty dollars from his till, and a lad named Falvey was suspected of the theft. His father very commendably took him to the police-station, and put him in charge of an officer pending an investigation of the matter. After young Falvey was placed in a cell, Detective Swan, of the city force, was ordered to enter and “break him down,” which is the detective parlance for securing a confession from a supposed criminal.

The boy did finally confess to the theft with loud protestations of grief and repentance, and finally told the officer a regular “Tom Sawyer” story of having hidden it in a certain coal-yard along the docks, and promised to go with the detective and show him where he had secreted the bills.

The two sallied forth in quest of the treasure, the detective triumphant in his reflections of his ability to get at such things speedily, and the boy humble and demure as the picture of the typical good boy in the Sunday-school books. At last they reached the docks and the particular coal-yard where the stolen money had been hidden.

Now these docks, or yards, are all provided with great numbers of elevated “shutes” used in discharging coal. To one of these the guileful youth led the satisfied detective, where they found a hole just large enough for one person to crawl into. He said the money was hidden in this hole; and the officer, not suspecting the youth was playing any game upon him to escape, directed him to “go along in.”:

The boy did go in; but that same boy came out at the large instead of the small end of the horn—and that end, it is certain, was not in the immediate vicinity of the detective.

The detective soon began to think that it required a long time for the boy to get out of so small a place. He accordingly put his head into the dark orifice and shouted lustily.

There was no response but the sepulchral echo of his own voice, and besides, it seemed to him that he had drawn a bucketful of cinders into his lungs, while his entire features were eclipsed with the richest possible quality of coal-smut.

Again he hallooed, and threatened to shoot into the hole should the boy not make his appearance immediately at the expiration of one minute. The detective held his watch and cursed his luck; but this threat was of no avail. Finally he did shoot into the dark hole, and trembled a little at the risk he was taking; but it brought no boy and no sound to indicate his whereabouts.

While standing there cogitating what should be the next move, he suddenly heard the sound of some heavy object dropping below. He directly inferred that the keen youngster had outwitted him, and had jumped into the bins below; and he accordingly made all haste to follow, making quite a daring swinging leap over the side of the “shute,” landing in the bottom of a huge bin, and where he would rather have given a ten-dollar bill than to have been.

He found to his chagrin that he and the deceitful youth had gone to very different places. The detective was in the bottom of a coal-bin, and nobody within hearing to help him out.

In this miserable position the detective remained several hours, with the sun blazing down upon him. He would yell for assistance for a time, and then he would vary this amusement by cursing, and it is thought that some of the choicest swearing ever done in the Quaker City was executed on this momentous occasion.

At last some laborers came that way, and pulled up the unfortunate officer with a rope, setting him at liberty; but he was wholly unrecognizable, and returned to headquarters without his boy or money, to receive the derisive shouts of his companions, and to be known among them to this day as the “coal-heaver detective.”

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