

How I Got Promoted

A Detective's Story

“Tom,” said the chief, “there has been a rather mysterious robbery at Barrowtown, and it’s likely to give the ‘locals’ some trouble. So I wish you to go down there as soon as possible.”

This order I received one hot day in August, on the day after the robbery had taken place. Of course I did not let much time pass before I was at the station and fairly started. Once there, Barrowtown is a quaint, picturesque little town, like many another in goodly England. It seemed almost too dull to be able to boast the doubtful honor of having had a full-grown robbery. Still, I like the quiet little town, for it was there that I gained my first promotion.

I was met at the station by the local inspector, a stout, pompous, excitable little man, who looked doubtful as to the prudence of the Scotland Yard authorities in sending down such an ordinary-looking mortal as myself.

“Oh,” he remarked at last, “so it’s you, young man, is it? I don’t think we are likely to trouble you much this time. The fact is—ahem—we have caught the culprit ourselves.”

I merely bowed, and expressed a wish to see the prisoner, and we both set off for the county jail, perhaps a mile or so away.

Well, it certainly seemed as plain as day to me that the unhappy wretch Inspector Muggridge had in his fell grasp could easily have proved an alibi had not that worthy officer continually interrupted him with:

“Better keep all that for your examination, my good fellow, or it’ll be brought up against you, my man, you know.”

I told him seriously, as soon as I could, in private, that the man he had arrested was no more guilty than I was; but he simply smiled incredulously, and asked who else could be the culprit, as this was the only really abandoned character of the town, and it was plainly the work of some one who knew the place.

“Besides,” he added, “it isn’t very likely that any one could beat me on my own ground, where I know everybody, you know; and if he didn’t do it, who did?” With which really unanswerable argument he accompanied me to the scene of the robbery, where we were shown over the premises by the mistress of the house.

When I saw the ground-floor window by which access had been gained to the house, I quite agreed with the worthy “local” that it was the work of a “new hand;” and that the fact that his footprints, wherever we could trace them, showed no hesitation, but rather a thorough acquaintance with the grounds; the culprit, whoever he was, must have had some opportunity of visiting the scene of operations and probably lived somewhere in the neighborhood.

It seemed that the thief had entered the house by a window in the rear, and carried off a small box of valuables from the room of the master of the house, who had been staying at a friend's on that night. Both these facts showed an intimate knowledge of the premises on the part of the culprit, and strengthened our former belief. We were informed that the lost casket—an ordinary tin cash-box—had been almost filled with various articles of jewelry, and therefore the loss was rather heavy. Of course the knowledge that there would be a good reward for the recovery of the missing property did not abate my zeal. Still, in spite of my eagerness to discover the culprit, I could make but little of the case, and might even have come over to the opinion of the “local,” but for one very important fact, namely, the footprints in the garden bed were smaller than those of the prisoner! Now, although a man may wear boots several sizes too large for him on occasion, yet he can hardly walk with comfort in shoes an inch or so too short.

Very much annoyed of my want of success, and dreading the chaff I would be sure to get when compelled to give it up, I should return to town, I was not particularly delighted next morning to see Mr. Muggridge coming up the road to the house, accompanied by the editor of the *Barrowtown Weekly Banner*, who had determined, he said, to write up the account of the robbery himself. But there was no escape; and so, prepared for a host of questions, I was walking slowly to meet him, when my eye was caught by something bright among the bushes by the roadside. Yes, there could be no doubt of it; there lay the lost box, empty of course. Without stopping, however, I walked as calmly as possible on to the Inspector and was introduced to Mr. Shears, the editor. It was simply wonderful how obliging I had become. I even, when Mr. Muggridge hinted that he was pressed for time, volunteered myself to give Mr. Shears the information he wished, and to go over the premises with him. Once left alone with the zealous representative of the press, I gave that gentleman all the points of the case, and a few more, as you shall see.

The next forenoon, as soon as a copy of the *Banner* came to the house where the robbery had occurred—I had for the last two days spent from the forenoon until dusk there—I turned to the end of the column devoted to the “Great Robbery,” and read, with a chuckle, the announcement “the loss of the jewels would be less felt had there not been between the two bottoms of the box almost two hundred pounds in bank notes, of which, unfortunately, the numbers had not been taken.

Probably the intelligent reader sees my plan, but certainly I did not choose to explain it to Mr. Muggridge, when, an hour later, that worthy but excitable gentleman rode, very hot and very red, up the shadeless road, to complain of my having “made a confounded mess of the account, you know.” I simply advised him to wait for a very few days, and then I would be happy to explain everything.

That evening, as usual, I left the grounds at dusk, after spending most of the day in watching—though apparently engaged in something else—whether any one went near the spot, a few hundred yards from the grounds, where lay the box on which I especially depended as a bait to hook the thief. By walking slowly, I managed to let the shades of evening close around me before I was far beyond the spot where I had made up my mind to watch and wait.

Eight! Nine! Were they never coming? And was my trap laid and baited in vain? Ten! Surely they should have come by this time. Still—Was that a sound on the road? Yes, and coming from

the village, too. There were evidently several of them, and I began to regret not having brought some help. Nearer they came, laughing and taking, as I cautiously drew further back from the road. And now they were opposite the spot where the box lay hid. But—what? They’ve gone by, and in the hearty guffaw of the man furthest away of the three I recognize Farmer Lobbins, an honest fellow, whose acquaintance I had made during my short stay.

After this sell, I had almost given up, and had actually made up my mind to abandon the affair, when a faint sound from down the road made me crouch as low as possible once more. It was no hoax this time. A short, thin man, whom I easily recognized as a man-of-all-work who had been helping the gardener that day, was creeping stealthily down the road, close to the bushes. As soon as he reached the spot where the box had been thrown, he lit a small lantern to aid him in his search. This time I felt sure and so when the man blew out the light, after securing the supposed treasure, the capture was made.

“Oh! Why, yes,” observed the worthy Mr. Muggridge, who was in the office when I brought in the prisoner that night; “I thought as much; I’ve had my eye on that fellow all along.”

The man made a confession—indeed he was caught in the act, and could not deny it. The jewels were all recovered, and the reward proved very useful in helping me to marry and settle down quietly, when one month later, I received my promotion.—*Chamber’s Journal*

The Daily Gazette [NY], July 17, 1880

The Daily Evening Bulletin, July 31, 1880

Mexico [MO] *Weekly Ledger*, August 5, 1880

Corvallis [OR] *Gazette-Times*, August 20, 1880

Shelbina [MO] *Democrat*, August 25, 1880

The Canton [PA] *Independent-Sentinel*, September 10, 1880

Logansport [IN] *Journal*, October 6, 1880

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Hermann [MO] *Advertiser and Advertiser-Courier*, Wednesday, October 13, 1880

The Marion [OH] *Star*, September 13, 1880

The Eau Claire [WI] *News*, September 18, 1880

The Marion [AL] *Times-Standard*, October 27, 1880

The Vancouver [WA] *Independent*, October 28, 1880

The Index [Hermitage, MO], November 13, 1890

The Decatur [IL] *Review*, December 20, 1880

The Douglas [OR] *Independent*, December 25, 1880

The Omaha Bee, December 25, 1885

The Laredo [TX] *Times*, March 29, 1891

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