

## *The Counterfeiters*

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“The thing can be done easy enough!”

“I doubt it!”

“What! you are not afraid?”

The last question was uttered in a tone of apparent surprise, but had a tinge of sarcasm in it.

“No, not afraid!” was the somewhat angry reply, “but I look at all the chances, and want to see before I leap.”

“That is right!”

“I have always found it advisable[,]” the speaker continued, “to look at an enterprise in all its bearings before going into it.”

The appearance of the speaker indicated a man slow in his resolutions, but persistent in carrying them out when once he had formed them. He had a piercing black eye, a bronzed face, and threads of silver [string] in and out of his black hair. The face was heavy and impassive, but the thick sensual lips and habitual sneer, evinced a disposition rarely influenced by other than evil passions.

His companion was a much younger man, but if the face be an index of the heart, was swayed by impulses differing but little from those of his friend. There was about his looks a dash of recklessness not to be seen upon the other, but even an ordinary observer would not have given him credit for the shrewd sagacity—the fixed purpose and iron will that distinguished his friend.

They were seated in the rotunda of the St. Charles Hotel, and were discussing a deed of lawlessness, which, if matured and carried out as they proposed, would have set the city wild with excitement. They were strangers, evidently, but it did not need the purport of their low-voiced conversation to show to the men who sat near them what and who they were. There is something about the skillful and experienced detective which enables him to discern his prey almost by intuition.

These two last sat a little apart from the others, apparently deeply absorbed in thought. To the casual observer they appeared as strangers to each other[.] The smallest but eldest of the two one would have thought asleep, but for the occasional flash of a glittering eye, and a meaning smile that hovered around the corners of the mouth. It was a sign that his larger and younger companion noticed well and interpreted as correctly as if his meaning had been disclosed in words. Not a syllable of that low-voiced conversation escaped them. There was not an expression they had not noted and understood. The conversation went on, and the night deepened, and rushing throng in the streets grew less. The hour of midnight tolled from the church tower, and the strangers rose to go.

“Shall we go together?” said the younger.

“No, separately. We’ll meet in half an hour.”

And they walked leisurely into the street.

Their backs were hardly turned before the two men sprang to their feet, every nerve thrilling with excitement, the repose and indifference of their manner changed to intense and absorbing interest.

“You take the younger, F——, and I will follow the other,” said Mr. I——, and the two detectives were a moment afterward on the track of the criminals. A few days before they had received intelligence that two Canadian counterfeiters with an immense sum of money, were on their way to this city to dispose of it.

It did not take these men long, experienced in the detection of criminals as they were, to get upon the track of the guilty parties. Although disguised, it was easy for them to discern the fraudulent artifice under which they had concealed their identity. But the object they had in view was the arrest of the men under circumstances that would manifest their guilt. This count not be done in the open street. It was not likely they would carry about with them evidence of the object that brought them here. It was necessary, therefore, to find out where they lived, and surprise them in their own rooms. It was for this they followed them. By many devious windings and turnings they came to the place at last. It was a large three-story boarding-house on Baroune [street]. The place was well selected, and had evidently been searched out to prevent surprise.

Gaining the opposite side of the street the detectives watched patiently for a light to appear in one of the rooms. It was but a few moments. Suddenly a light streamed through one of the upper windows, and the shadows of the two men were defined against the wall.

“We have them now!” said Mr. F.

“Yes; shall we go to work at once?”

“The sooner the better. Do you wait here till I go to the station and get an outsider; we must enter that house burglar fashion.”

He was gone but a few moments, and when he returned the men proceeded at once with their hazardous enterprise. They soon reached the room and knocked for admittance.

“Who’s there?”

“A servant, sir.”

The door was swung open and a hoarse voice demanded—

“What do you want?”

“You!” was the reply, and before resistance could be concerted or attempted, the counterfeiters were manacled and disarmed. It took but an instant to put the detectives in complete possession of the room and all it contained. This proved to be nearly a million of dollars in counterfeit money, besides dies and plates for manufacturing more.

It exhibits one of the many perils to which the life of a detective is incident; and at the same time shows how little society is prepared to guard itself from the practices of the evil and the lawless. It may not disclose the romantic features too commonly interwoven with transactions of this sort; but it none the less exhibits the shrewd sagacity and skill which united in preventing a great wrong to society, and an outrage upon its laws.

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This story was part of a series titled “A Detective’s Experience” and featuring detectives Mr. F— — and Mr. I—— that was published in the Sunday *Daily Picayune* from August 1868 to November 1869.