

## *A Detective's Story*

The following is a true story, by a late well-known member of the detective service, and, with the exception of some names of persons and places, is given precisely as he himself related it.

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Late on Friday afternoon, in the latter part of November, 18—, I was sent for by the chief of the New York police, and was told there was a case for me. It was a counterfeiting affair. Notes had been forged on a Pennsylvania bank; two men had been apprehended, and were in custody. The first, Springer, had turned State's evidence on his accomplice, who, according to his account was the prime mover in the business. This man—Daniel Hawes by name – had transferred the notes to a third party, of whom nothing had been ascertained except that he was a young man, wrote a beautiful hand, and had been in town the Monday before. He was the man I was to catch.

It was sundown when I left the superintendent's office. I had not much to guide me; there were hundreds of young men who wrote a beautiful hand, and had been in town last Monday. But I did not trouble myself about what I did not know; I confined myself to what I did know. Upon reflection I thought it probable that *my man* had been in intimate relations with Hawes for the last few days—probably since the preceding Monday—although it was not known that he had been in town since that day. He might not be a resident in the city; but I determined to seek him here—since, if he had not left town before the arrest of Springer and Hawes, he would not just now run the risk of falling into the hands of the police by going to any railroad station or steamer wharf.

I determined, therefore, to follow up the track of Hawes, and thereby, if possible, strike that of his confederate—which was, in fact, all that could be done.

Hawes was a small broker. He lived in Eighteenth Street, and had an office in Wall Street.

He lived too far up town, I thought, to go home every day to his dinner; he went, then, most probably, always to the same eating-house and one not far from his office.

After inquiring at several restaurants near by, I came to one in Liberty street, where, on asking if Mr. Hawes was in the habit of dining there, the waiter said yes.

“Have you seen a young man here with him lately?” I inquired.

“No—no one in particular,” replied the waiter.

“Are you sure of it? Come, think.”

After scratching his head for a moment, he said:

“Yes, there has been a young man here speaking to him once or twice.”

“How did he look?”

“He was short, and had black hair and eyes.”

“Who is he? What did he do?”

“He is clerk to Mr. L—, the linen importer.”

“Where does Mr. L— live?”

The waiter did not know. Looking into a directory, I ascertained his residence to be in Fourteenth Street. The stores by this time were closed; so I went immediately to Mr. L—’s house, and asked to see him. He was at dinner.

“I am sorry to disturb him,” said I to the servant; “but I wish to speak with him a moment on a matter of importance, and cannot wait.”

Mr. L— came out, evidently annoyed at the intrusion.

“Have you such a person in your employment?” said I describing him.

“No, sir; I have not.”

“You had such a person?”

“I have not now.”

“Did you discharge him?”

“Yes.”

“Why?”

“What business is that of yours?” he asked rather huffily.

“My name, sir, is M—, of the detective police. I am after this fellow—that’s all. Tell me, if you please, why you discharged him?”

“Oh, I beg your pardon,” said Mr. L— “I took you for one of his rascally associates. I discharged him a week or ten days ago. He was a very dissipated, good for nothing fellow.”

“Was he your bookkeeper?”

“No; he was a junior clerk.”

“Have you any of his hand writing that you can show me?”

He fumbled in a side pocket and drew out a pocketbook, from which he took a memorandum of agreement, or some paper of the sort, to the bottom of which a signature was attached as witness.

“That’s his writing,” said he.

It was a stiff schoolboy’s scrawl.

This was not my man then. I apologized to Mr. L— for the trouble I had given him, and withdrew.

Lost time, said I to myself. I am on the wrong track. I must back to the eating-house and begin the chase again from the point where I left off.

I saw the same waiter.

“I want you to think again,” said I. “Try hard to remember whether there never was any other man here with Hawes on any occasion.”

After reflecting for a little while, he said he thought he recollected his going up-stairs not long ago with another man to a private room.

“Did you wait on him yourself at the time you speak of?” I asked.

“No; most likely it was Joe Harris.”

“Will you send for him, if you please?”

Joe Harris came.

“You waited on Mr. Hawes a few days ago, when he dined with another gentleman in a private room up-stairs, didn’t you?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Who was that other man?”

“He is a young man who is clerk in a livery stable in Sullivan Street.”

“What are his looks?”

“He is tall and light-haired.”

“Do you know his name?”

“His name is Edgar.”

I hurried up to Sullivan street, went into the first livery stable I came to, and inquired for the proprietor, and asked him if he had a young man in his stable of the name of Edgar.

He said he had.

“Does he keep your books?”

“Yes—he takes orders for me.”

“Let me see some of his hand writing; if you please.”

He stepped back into the office and took from a desk a little order book. I opened it; there were some orders—hastily written, no doubt; but in a hand almost like beautiful copperplate.

This was my man—I felt nearly certain of it. I asked where he lived, and was told with his mother, a widow woman, at such a number in Hudson Street. I started for the place. It was now nine o'clock. Arriving at the house, I rang the bell. It was answered by a servant girl.

“Does Mr. Edgar live here?” I inquired.

“Yes, sir.”

“Is he at home?”

“No, sir.”

“When will he come home?”

“I don't know.”

“Does he sleep here?”

“Sometimes he does, and sometimes he doesn't.”

“Where is he likely to be found? I should like to see him.”

She said she really did not know, unless perhaps it might be at a billiard saloon not far off.

I went there. A noisy crowd was around the bar. I looked round the room, and closely scrutinized every face. No tall, light-haired young man was there. I asked the barkeeper if Mr. Edgar had been there that evening. He said no; he had not seen anything of him for two or three days. I asked him if there was any other places that he knew of that Edgar frequented, and was told he went a good deal to a bowling alley in West Broadway, near Duane street. Not much yet, I

thought, as I hurried on to West Broadway. Descending a few steps into a basement, I entered a sort of vestibule or office to the Bowling saloon.

“Has Mr. Edgar been here this evening?” I inquired of the man in attendance.

“He is here now,” was the reply; “in the other room, through that door.”

I passed through the door indicated into the bowling alley, and accosted the marker:

“Is Mr. Edgar here?”

“He has just gone—not more than fifteen minutes ago.”

“Do you know where he went to?”

“It seems to me that some of them said something about going to the Lafayette theatre.”

I am on his track now, I said to myself—only fifteen minutes behind him.

I bent my steps to theatre, taking with me a comrade in the police service, whom I encountered as I was leaving the saloon. We hurried on with the utmost rapidity; but, on reaching the theatre, found to my disgust, what I had already feared, that the play was over, and the theatre just closed.

“Better give it up for tonight,” said my companion; “we know enough about him now, and can take up the search again tomorrow.”

“It won’t do, Clarke,” said I; “we have inquired for him at too many places. Stay—I’ve a notion he may be heard of at some of these oyster cellars hereabouts.”

I went down into one of them, and asked if a tall young man, with light hair, had been there that evening.

A tall young man, with light hair and moustache, had come in from the theatre with a lady, and had just left.

I asked my informant if he knew the lady.

She was a Miss Kearney, he answered.

“What?” I continued, “didn’t her sister marry the actor Levison?”

“Yes; the same person.”

“He lives in Walker street, near Bowery, I believe?”

“Yes—I think so,” replied the man.

I considered a moment. Of course no one could tell me where Edgar had gone to; but I was tolerable certain he had gone home with the girl. Where she lived I did not know; but I thought it probable the actor could tell me. So we started on to Walker Street. There are—or were at the time I speak of—several boarding-houses in Walker Street. We passed one or two three-story houses with marble steps.

“Shall I ask along here?”

“No,” I answered; “poor actors don’t board there—we must look farther on.

We kept on, and after a little while we found one that seemed to me to be likely to be the house we were looking for. I rang the bell and inquired for Mr. Levison. He was gone to bed. It was now twelve o’clock. I desired the man that opened the door to tell him that somebody was below who wished to see him immediately. He soon returned, saying that Mr. Levison was in bed, and could not be disturbed; I must leave my business, or call again next day.

I thought it necessary to frighten him a little; so I sent up word that I was an officer of police, and he must come down immediately, or I should go up and fetch him. In a few moments the actor made his appearance, terribly frightened. Before I could say anything, he began to pour out such a flood of questions and asservations that I could not get a word in.

What did I want of him? I had come to the wrong man. He hadn’t been doing anything, etc., etc.

“I don’t want you,” I began—

But it was of no use—I could not stop him; his character was excellent; anybody would vouch for him; I ought to be more sure what I was about before I roused people from their beds at midnight, etc., etc.

His huddled words and apprehensive looks made me suspect there was something wrong with him; but it was no concern of mine then. I seized him by the shoulder and ordered him to be quiet.

“Don’t utter another word,” said I, “except to answer my questions, or I’ll carry you off and lock you up. I have not come to arrest you—I only want to ask you a few questions. Haven’t you a sister-in-law named Miss Kearney?”

“Yes; what do you want with her?”

“I am not going to do her any harm. I only want to know where she lives.”

“Oh, she lives in—street.”

“Do you know the number?”

“Goodness, yes; it is number 34. I have boarded there myself until only a little while ago.”

“Indeed!”

“Yes; I’ve got a dead-latch key somewhere about.”

“The deuce you have! Give it to me; it is just what I want.”

“Give you a dead-latch key?—a pretty notion! I would not give it to any man—not to all the detective squad in New York.”

“Look here, my friend: I am M—, pretty well known in this town. I have a good many opportunities, in the course of my business, to do people good turns; and not a few to do them ill turns. It is a convenient vocation to pay off scores—particularly to persons of your sort. If you will give me that key, I’ll make it worth your while the first chance I have. If you don’t you’ll be sorry—that’s all.”

I gave him a significant look as I concluded. He looked me in the face a minute, as if to see how much I meant, or if I suspected anything; then he turned and ran quickly up stairs. In a few moments he came down and handed me the key. I took it with satisfaction.

“Now,” said I, “you’ll have no objections to telling me where your sister-in-law’s room in the house is?”

“Third story, back room, second door to the left from the head of the stairs.”

“Thank you—good night.”

We walked rapidly to—street, and, reaching the house I stopped a moment to examine my pistols, by the street lamp, and then softly opened the door. Clarke and I stepped in, and shut the door.

Leaving my comrade in the hall, I crept noiselessly upstairs, and tapped at the door of the room.

“Who is there?” called out a woman’s voice.

“Open the door, “I replied, “and I’ll tell you what I want.”

“You can’t come in—I’ve gone to bed.”

“Oh, well, I’m a married man—I’ll do you no harm; but you must let me in, or I shall force the door.”

After a moment's delay, the door was opened by a young woman in a morning wrapper, who stood as if waiting for an explanation of the intrusion. I passed by her, and walked up to a young man sitting in a low chair by the fire, and tapping him on the shoulder, said:

“You are my prisoner?”

He raised his head and looked up.

“Why, Bill,” I exclaimed, “is this you? I have been looking for you all night under a wrong name. If I had known it was you, I'd have caught you in an hour.”

And so I would.

It is only necessary to say, further, that he was the man I was set to catch. I may add, however, that a large amount of the counterfeit notes, and the plates on which they were printed, were secured, and the criminal sent to Sing Sing in due course of law.

*Cedar Valley Times* [Vinton, IA], November 19, 1863

*Columbia Democrat and Bloomsburg* [PA] *General Advertiser*, November 28, 1863

*Joliet* [IL] *Signal*, January 5, 1864

*Green-Mountain Freeman* [Montpelier, VT], January 26, 1864