

# *Trapping the Burglars*

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## A Detective's Story

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WE WERE on the railroad train, Johnson and I, rushing west at the rate of thirty miles an hour. Johnson was a detective, and he and I had known each other from boyhood. We talked over our school days as we sat on the seat together; we discussed the crops; we urged the moral, social, intellectual and political questions of the day; we speculated on the weather; we brought forth every subject we could think of until, at last, there came a lull in the conversation. Then I said, as a sudden thought struck me:

“Johnson, don't you ever have any exciting adventures in your line of business? Tell us a story of your experience, will you?”

My friend laughed, and, fixing his keen gray eyes upon my face, answered, musingly:

“Exciting adventures? Hum—yes—I suppose they would be called so. There are a good many occurrences that I might relate, but I don't generally care to speak of them; however, as it is you, Reade, I will tell of a curious capture that I made a few weeks ago—on one condition.”

“Name it.”

“That if I break off suddenly in the middle of my story you will not be displeased.”

I knew he had some good reason for his proviso, so I said:

“Certainly not. I accept the condition.

“Last spring,” he began, “I had occasion to track a noted burglar from our city to Chicago, and back, and I did not catch him after all. I almost had the clutches of the law upon him several times, but I think he must have got wind that he was pursued, for he did a number of sharp things, and assumed a number of strange disguises which baffled my every attempt. Still I determined he should not elude me by any mere subterfuge, and though many times thrown off the trail I entered B—— a few hours after the fellow himself. I don't think he suspected he could be followed so closely, for he grew careless and soon I knew his whereabouts. I knew the man personally. We were long acquainted before I discovered his character, for he was a person of education, and in his deportment a perfect gentleman. A man whom you would never suspect of being guilty of the crime which disgraced his career.

“Well, as I said, I found out where he was, and about nine o'clock one moonlight night, Detective Davis and myself, disguised, went in search of him. It was at a house in the worst quarter of the city we expected to find him, but he was not there. We made a search, but our eel had once more slipped through our fingers. Foiled again, we turned our steps homeward. We

parted at the corner, and I was proceeding up through the business streets, alone, when, passing the door of a flashy saloon, I was surprised to hear the sound of a familiar voice. It was my man engaged in an earnest conversation.

“It was not discreet to take him just there, so, trusting to my disguise, I entered the place. There was a crowd around the bar, eating and drinking. They stopped their loud talking and laughing for a moment to gaze at me as I entered, and immediately resumed their hilarity.

“By and by the two came in from the doorway, went into one of the curtained recesses, and ordered oysters. Their earnest conversation had the effect of arousing my curiosity, and here was the opportunity to learn what mischief was brewing.

I bought some little things, a doughnut or two, and left the saloon. Between this building and the next was a passageway about four-feet wide. Into this I went and reached the window of the stall where the burglars were. It was a warm evening in the last of May, and the window was open. I crouched down and listened, and recognized the deep bass voice of my criminal in a moment.

“What I learned that night surprised and astounded me, and I don’t need to tell you all, to tell what has a bearing on this case. They were indeed plotting mischief. However, I discovered, among other things, that they were going to Nova Scotia and Canada to join a gang of thieves, that my gentleman was the leading spirit, and that a wealthy city in Northern Massachusetts was also to be a scene of their depredations, where the whole would appear.

“I learned the whole plan, the whole procedure, before I left the spot. This question presented itself to me. ‘Would it not be better to let this fellow alone for the present, and, by so doing, capture the whole band? I thought it would, and notwithstanding the large amount offered for his arrest, I resolved to keep my own secret and let him depart in peace.

“The next day I discovered he took passage in a vessel bound for Halifax. I proceeded at once to S——, the city which they proposed to visit. I had many acquaintances in this place, and, without telling my object, I gave a description of my man to several whom I knew I could trust. I also notified the police to look out for him about the first of September. I directed each of these person to telegraph me a short message if they should see a man who answered to the description. Still I was afraid he would disguise himself and foil me again.

“One day in the latter part of August I received a telegram, which besides the address and signature, contained just one word—‘Come.’ I was surprised at this and rather provoked, for I felt sure my friend had made a mistake. I had expected no such message until September and I intended to remain in S—— during the greater part of that month and watch myself.

“I concluded to go, however, more because I had been sent for than because I had any hope of success. The friend who sent me the message was a keeper of an eating-house, a prompt, honest man, with a brisk, keen way about him that I had always admired. I had thought him very

observant, but I jumped to the conclusion that he had been fooled this time. I reached S—— early that afternoon and went at once to the saloon of my friend.

“Well, what’s the news, Jim?” said I, as I entered.

“I’ve seen your man,” said he positively.

“Sure?” I asked, incredulously.

“I’m sure he answered your description. I’ve watched for him every day.”

“Tell me what you know?” said I. “What kind of a looking man was he?”

“He was a tall, good-looking, well-dressed, had a slight scar over his left eye, a splendid bass voice, and appeared like a perfect gentleman.”

“Good! that’s him,” said I, exultingly. “Did he want to put a patent spring on your door?”

“That’s exactly what he wanted to do. He came in at noon, walked up and asked me if I was the proprietor. I told him I was. Then he wanted to know if he couldn’t sell me one of the best door springs ever invented. I told him I did not think I needed one, and I noticed that he didn’t urge me much. He said he should call around again by next spring, and perhaps I’d want one of [them]. He got his dinner, paid for it, and departed, and appeared like a gentleman, as I said before. Now, Johnson, what do you want him for? What’s he been doing? Will you tell me?”

“Feeling sure that I could trust the man, I told him in a few brief words what I have told you, and this besides; that the gang were intending to rob three banks in this city, all in one night; that the ‘gentleman’ of the party with the door-springs went ahead to examine the doors and fastenings and take the impression of the key-holes, in short to make the way clear for the rest of the party.

“I now went directly to the banks, and found that my enterprising thief had his springs on the inner doors of all. On inquiry I learned that he had put them on without compensation, for a month’s trial. I thought the bank officials pretty green, for they didn’t have any idea that anything was wrong, and I took pains not to excite any such. He had been to nearly all the principal stores in the city, but this was only to allay suspicion. I notified the police of the whole plot and they promised to be on hand when I wanted them.

“I stopped three weeks in this place, waiting around the depots, hoping to get a sight of the men I wanted, but they came not. I was fast getting discouraged, when one afternoon I saw a familiar face at the car window as a train from the East rolled into the station. I had seen it once before, and that in the evening, but I knew it immediately. It was the face of one of the plotters whom I had overheard in the saloon. It was not the ‘chief,’ however. He left the train and I followed him up the street.

“When he got opposite the City Bank he stopped. I did the same. He took a long look, and then walked on to the Independence. I followed. Then he went to the Orient, and then walked backward and forward all the afternoon, with me following behind. This man was a ‘spotter,’ I knew, but his precise object I couldn’t surmise. I went up behind him, quietly, and laid my hand upon his arm.

“‘You are my prisoner,’ I said, sharply.

“The man turned with a scornful laugh.

“‘What do you charge me with,’ he sneeringly said. ‘Perhaps you mistake your man.’

“‘There is no mistake,’ said I, ‘you will come with me.’

“‘What do you charge me with?’ he repeated with an oath.

“‘I will tell you what,’ said I, drawing a revolver as I saw a threatening demonstration on his part, “with an intended robbery in this city and with crimes committed in Canada. Make any resistance, or attempt to escape and you are a dead man.’

“A frightened look came over his countenance and he turned so pale I thought he was about to faint. I took advantage of this momentary agitation to slip a pair of bracelets on to his wrists. He soon recovered himself, the crimson tide came back into his face, and he said, in a husky voice:

“‘I have been betrayed, but they shall suffer for this yet, the mean traitors!’

“I was willing he should think his friends had been false, so I didn’t undeceive him. I led him to the stationhouse, where he was safely lodged for the night. Then I left him for some hours. When I came back, he was bending forward, his head resting on his hands, apparently in great distress of mind. He was young, and I felt sorry for him.

“‘I have come,’” said I, ‘to give you a chance. We know all about your gang. We know your leader well. We understand the door-spring game perfectly. We shall probably have all of them very soon, it depends upon you how soon. Now, if you want a chance for revenge, you can have it, and serve yourself, too. You are young, and it is hard to spend thirty years of life in a prison. I will use my influence for you, if you will help me.

“To make a long story short, after much persuasion, and many threats, and after copious appeals to his selfishness and suspiciousness, he confessed all. He gave me information that led, two nights afterward, to the arrest of ten as desperate villains, as there is in Massachusetts.

“We had a hard tussle, and had to shoot one fellow before we captured them; but we took them

three or four at a time, in different parts of the city, so that made the matter easier. But Haldeman, the man I had wanted so long, the gentlemanly leader, was once more lucky enough to make his escape. The bank folks raised a thousand dollars for me, in consideration of my services, and I made my friend a present of a gold watch for his valuable assistance. The criminals will all get a heavy sentence but the one who confessed. I shall make another thousand when I capture Haldeman, and so shall get handsomely paid for my trouble.”

“Have you not given up hope of ever getting him?” I inquired, as Johnson finished his story.

“No, sir, I guess not,” replied he. “To tell you the truth, Reade,” said he, lowering his voice, “I expect to take him this very night. I expect him to get aboard this train at some country station. That’s why I told you I might end my story suddenly. That’s why I’m traveling on this train at all. The conductor is looking for the other cars and I’m watching this myself.”

We rode on for a long time in silence, I pondering over the strange story of my friend, which was to prove such a wonderful sequel, he with hat pulled over his eyes, apparently asleep. The train stopped at several way stations and a number of persons got in and out, but my friend appeared to take no notice of this fact. By and by he bent over me and asked quietly:

“Reade, do you see that fine-looking man at the further end of the car?”

“That clerical-looking gentleman do you mean, with the book in his hand?”

“The same! Well, he’s the fellow I want. He got in at the last station. I’ve got to arrest him.”

“Not that noble-looking man, surely,” said I.

“The very one!” he answered, with a smile, as he rose from his seat and walked toward him.

My friend laid his hand on the man’s shoulder and said something. The villain sprung quickly to his feet and tried to pull out a pistol, but Johnson sprang upon him like a tiger. The conductor came in just here, and both together they overpowered the rascal.

When the train stopped at the next station, I saw Johnson leading the fellow, handcuffed from the train.

Some time after this I learned by the newspapers that the whole gang were convicted, and my cool friend, the detective, had made another thousand dollars.

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