

Dock, the Moonshiner.

How I Aided Him in Escaping From Jail

Col. G. W. Symonds

I had been so hospitably entertained by Moonshiner Dock Davis, and his invitation to call again upon him at his wildcat still had been so cordially given that I could not resist the temptation to saddle my mare and ride over on Lonesome one bright sparkling day about a week after the fox hunt. I found without difficulty the little blind canyon at the head of which was the "spring branch" whose pure water was so necessary to the manufacture of "mountain dew" and my horse picked his way over the rocky creek bed at a quick walk. Dock was at home and I saw the barrel of his long rifle protruding from a clump of bushes before I saw him.

He welcomed me cheerily and I "lited" and tied my horse to a sapling while he brought out a rough bench from his little cabin and filled a gourd with moonshine from the barrel alongside the door. I was deeply interested in his description of the mysteries of wildent 'stilling, and he had just finished telling me how on a certain occasion he had "plumb fooled the ma'shals" while "blockading" a half-dozen barrels of whisky into Dahlenega, when, with an exclamation of alarm, he sprang to his feet and reached for his rifle, which was resting against the trunk of a big oak tree. His hands were already grasping the weapon, when I heard a sharp click, click, and a man with a double-barreled shot-gun in his hands leaped into the little clearing and by a quick movement covered us both.

"Throw up!" was his curt command, and whilst I was quick to obey, the moonshiner's arms were raised slowly above his head and he watched the interloper keenly, watching for a loophole of escape.

"It's no use, Dock," said the stranger, "I've got the drop."

He whistled shrilly, and after a moment's silence there was a hurried trampling among the brushwood and two men armed like the first came into sight. One of them produced a pair of handcuffs and snapped them on the moonshiner's wrists. He stepped forward to do a like service for me.

"He'un's not wanted by you'uns," said Dock, shaking his head. "He'un air a stranger in this *settlement!*"

Thus prompted I introduced myself, and the man who had covered us with the shot-gun held out his hand.

"I heard from the marshal the other day in Atlanta that you were up here," he said, "and I promised him to look after you. He said you were 'studying the people.' I presume Dock is giving you a lesson in moonshining. I think you'd travel a long ways before finding a better teacher or one who understands his business better. Eh, Dock?"

The manacled moonshiner laughed proudly at this compliment and nodded his head.

“I ’low that you’uns shore b’lieve thet o’ me,” he said, drily, and then lauging again, continued: “You’uns hev caught me fa’r an’ squar’ this a-time, an’ I reckon thar’s no use’n bawlin’ over spilt milk. Thar’s the bar’l an’ thar’s the gourd. Take suthin’, *gentlemen*, et my expense.”

The “ma’shals” were not slow to accept the prisoner’s invitation, and he bowed gravely when they drank his health and wished him “better luck next time.” The balance of the liquor in the barrel was emptied upon the ground and two barrels of “swizzlings,” a big hogshead of beer and another of “mash,” just beginning to ferment, met with a like fate. The revenue officers tore the little copper still from the mud-daubed fire-place and one of the men chopped it into bits with Dock’s axe. The “goose-neck” and the “worm” were also destroyed, and then the little cabin was set on fire. Dock exhibited no emotion and uttered no protest while the work of devastation was going on, but sat on a log meditatively chewing a maple twig.

“Well, that seemed to be a satisfactory clean-up,” said the head marshal as the flames began to lick the shingles of the cabin. “Bring up the horses, boys, and we’ll get back to Dahlenega.”

“Look a-hyar, cap’n,” said Dock, “my place air rite on yore road. I’d like to stop an’ bid the ole woman howdy. ’Sides I hev a likely saddle mare, an’ ’twill make hit easy on you-un’s horse critters ef I ride her to town.”

“Very well, Dock,” said the marshal, “you shall stop and see your wife.”

He started to climb the sloping canyon wall and Dock and I followed, the marshal’s two assistants, with the horses, bringing up the rear. But for the handcuffs on the prisoner’s wrists one would have thought us a party of friends out for a stroll. We chatted together unreservedly, and Dock was in the best of spirits. His wife, almost a child in years, but quite pretty, though her dull face lacked expression, came out to meet us as we neared the pine-pole cabin in which the moonshiner lived. She wore a “linsey-woolsey” gown and a faded calico sun-bonnet. Her red lips were closed tightly about a snuff-brush, which she removed when she greeted her husband.

“So they’uns hev trapped ye et last, Dock?” she said, in a very matter-of-fact tone. “Reckon thar hev been spy work in this *settlement*,” and she darted a swift, suspicious glance at me.

“No, Mrs. Davis,” said the marshal, “you are wrong. We had no information. I located the still this morning by watching for smoke signs from the top of a big pine on Wildcat Ridge.”

“Oh, I beg parding,” she said, and inclined her head toward me, as though apologizing for a natural suspicion.

“The ma’shal’s plumb rite,” corroborated the prisoner. “The captur’ waire fa’r an’ squar’, Elmiry. Saddle the mare. I’ll ride her to town an’ ye kin hoof hit in to-morrer an’ bring her back.”

Thus directed Mrs. Davis started toward the shelter in the rear of the cabin, where the mare was stabled. One of the marshal's assistants had saddled the animal, and Mrs. Davis thanked him curtly for the service. Dock asked for a clean shirt to put on in the "jail-house," and she made up a little bundle of clothing for him. Husband and wife held a short whispered conversation inaudible to us, and finally Elmiry clasped her arms about Dock's neck and they kissed. I had stepped to the rear of the house to get a drink of water, and as I walked through the cabin Mrs. Davis came swiftly toward me. We met in the middle of the floor.

"Dock say you'n air his fren," she whispered, "an' air a mitey clever man. Ef you'n low, to ride to town with the ma'shal, stop thar to-nite an' keep the saddle on Dock's mare."

She pressed my hand, her dull face lit up eagerly, and when I nodded a promise to do as she requested, an expression of joyous triumph for a moment flashed in her eyes.

"We're ready, Colonel," cried the marshal, and I hurried out and mounted my horse. We made the ride to Dahlonga at a swinging gallop. Once I found myself beside the prisoner.

"Did Elmiry tell ye?" he whispered.

I nodded, and a smile of grim pleasure swept across his face. He found no occasion to refer to the matter again, but there was something mysteriously significant in the expression of his face when he bade me good-bye at the jail door.

The marshal searched him, but the bundle of clothes put up by Elmiry was not molested. The Dahlonga jail, like the majority of mountain prisons, is hardly "burglar proof," and its heavy air of solidity is very deceptive. I was tossing upon my bed at the hotel thinking over the events of the day and wondering what meaning to take out of Elmiry's request to "keep Dock's mare saddled," when I heard the quick tread of a horse's hoofs gradually receding and finally ceasing altogether. A clock somewhere about the building struck twelve, and then I fell asleep. The noise of the deputy marshal awoke me.

"We had hard luck last night," he said. "Our prisoner cut out of jail, and it's doubtful if we ever recapture him. His wife must have secreted a saw and some flies in those clean clothes that she bundled up for him. Stupid of me not to have examined the bundle, but she looked so guilelessly innocent and Dock was so good natured."

I dressed and walked with him around to the jail. There was a little crowd of curious villagers gathered about the structure, and they were all sympathizers with the escaped man. He had cut away two heavy iron bars that protected the single window of the jail dungeon, and he must have worked systematically and with considerable industry, for now I knew why Elmiry wanted the mare left saddled. It was the escaped moonshiner who had galloped out of town just before the clock struck twelve.

Several weeks elapsed before I again visited Lonesome. I was not far from the dismantled still-house when a familiar voice hailed me from the brush, and when I reined up Dock Davis, with a

pair of Colt revolvers tucked in his belt and his long rifle thrown over his shoulder, stepped into the road and held out his hand.

“I’m obleeged to you’n for the favor ye did me,” he said, “an’ you’n made a shure enuff friend o’ Elmiry. Ef you’n aim to go up the crick stop off et the cabin. She’ll be monstr’uss glad to see you’n, an’ thar’s a jug o’ moonshine under the floor thet I hid from them cussed ma’shals.”

“Are you not afraid of recapture?” I asked. “The marshal came up in this neighborhood yesterday with a large posse.”

“I seed they’uns an’ ef I’d been so minded I’u’d ’a dropped every one uv ’em as they’uns rid past. I don’t allow to stay in these hyar settlements much longer. Elmiry air tryin’ to sell the cow-critters an’ a right smart choice ’o hogs what air on the range. When that air business ’s settled we’uns ’ll pull up stakes an’ scoot fur Texas.”

It is fair to presume that “we’uns scooted” for a week afterward I passed Dock’s cabin and it was empty. — Col. G.W. Symonds, in *Detroit Free Press*.

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