

The Clever Detective

Although of Wood He was Worth a
Dozen of the Ordinary Kind

“Who is the new man on the force?”

There was no answer. None of the officers assembled at headquarters knew [anything] concerning him except that the inspector had brought him in quietly a few evenings before and introduced him as Sergeant Fetchem. The strange inappropriateness of such a name for a detective had struck them at once, but the new man had gone to work without a word as if thoroughly familiar with his duties, and his first job had been the arrest of a burglar whom he had caught in the act and overpowered, bringing him to the station alone, despite the fact that the prisoner was a burly, powerful fellow nearly twice the size of his captor.

Every day since his accession to the force he had signalized himself by some unheard-of exploit. He had discovered a nest of counterfeiters, arrested and put in jail a hitherto unsuspected Anarchist whose attic was full of dynamite bombs, and located a bank embezzler who had eluded the police for two whole years. All this he had done as a matter of course, and had listened impassively to the encomiums passed upon his singular skill and adroitness. The other members of the detective corps began to grow jealous, and a watch was put upon his actions. He had no difficulty in evading them in the performance of his duties, but they made the discovery that he was closeted with the inspector for about five minutes every Monday morning. The most diligent effort failed to discover the object of these conferences, if such they were, for no conversation between the chief and the new detective ever reached the ears of the listeners on the outside.

One Monday morning, immediately after one of these secret interviews, Sergeant Fetchem was seen to leave the office and board an outward-bound train. He was not seen again during the week. Monday morning came again and he had not yet turned up. The inspector was visibly uneasy.

“If he is not here in less than an hour all is lost!” he muttered, as he glanced at his watch and went to the door to look up and down the street. It was snowing furiously.

Seized with a sudden impulse, he hailed a passing cab and was driven rapidly to a railway station in the suburbs, reaching it just in time to get aboard a train coming into the city. As he entered the forward door of a car he saw a man rapidly go out through the rear door, jump off the train, and disappear in the blinding snow-storm.

With a cry of dismay the inspector rushed down the aisle. When halfway through the car he stopped suddenly. In one of the seats was the motionless figure of Sergeant Fetchem. It was in a half erect position, with one arm extended. The eyes were gazing into vacancy with a lack luster expression.

“Too late!” exclaimed the inspector, bitterly. “Fifty thousand dollars gone! That man who left the car a moment ago was Tascott!”

The passengers crowded around. They explained that the sergeant a few minutes before had made a sudden but apparently weak effort to fasten himself with a chain to the prisoner, but that the latter had quickly risen and grappled with him. The sergeant had nearly succeeded in his design when suddenly he seemed to stiffen. His grasp relaxed, his arm remained stretched out, a glassy look came into his eyes, and his whole frame became motionless. The prisoner broke away from him and was out of the car before the spectators had recovered from their surprise.

Such was the story they told the inspector.

“What is the matter with the officer? Is he dead?” they inquired.

“He has run down!” groaned the inspector. “Fool! Idiot that I was not to have met him one station beyond here! This detective,” he explained, “was a cunning piece of machinery. It took Edison a year to manufacture him, and I paid him ten thousand dollars. He warned me that if I ever failed to wind him up at the regular hour he would be ruined. Sergeant Fetchem was a seven-day detective. I wound him up as usual last Monday morning and sent him out to search for Tascott. I might have known,” he added, bitterly, “that if he hadn’t caught him he would have reported on time. This failure is all owing to my blind neglect. Tascott’s gone again now and he’ll stay gone!”

The inspector looked long and mournfully at the wonderful and costly piece of machinery, now ruined forever.

“He was a wooden detective,” he said at last, “but he was worth a dozen of the ordinary kind.”
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