

AN ESCAPE WINKED AT

By JOHN D. JAMIESON

I have often been asked if in my detective work I had sheered off from the wrong trail when I was about to nab a criminal through sympathy. I never did that, but I once lost a woman whom I had under arrest because I had become convinced that she was innocent. I did not tell her that she might escape, but pretended to trust her. I was sorry afterward that I didn't let her know that I was willing she should go, for I saw her do something to gain her freedom that made my blood curdle.

A cashier of a bank had been convicted of defalcation, had been sent to the penitentiary and by means of steel saws sent him by his wife had cut the bars of a window of his cell. She had also provided him with a rope, on which he had lowered himself to the ground and had then thrown it over the prison wall, she being outside to catch it and secure the end. He then climbed on to the wall, and his wife and three of his friends had held a blanket, into which he had jumped. Then, getting into a carriage, he had been driven away.

The warden was quite sure that the escaped man's wife had secured his freedom, but had no evidence to support the charge. Some time after the escape I was ordered by my chief to go to Albany, where the woman was living, arrest her on a trumped up charge and bring her to Philadelphia, where the crime of which her husband had been convicted was committed. The object was to force her to betray his whereabouts, or, rather, to force him to give himself up to secure his wife's freedom.

I found the lady—she was a lady, and a refined lady, too—living in seclusion. She doubtless surmised what kind of a game was to be played on her, for I saw her face set with resolution. I did not believe anything could be forced out of her. She went with me without making any ado, and I refrained from the indignity of placing handcuffs on her. I took a seat beside her in the train, resolving to make the journey as easy for her as possible.

During the ride to New York she told me one of the most interesting stories of how a man's ruin may be planned to save another that I ever listened to. If the person who laid the scheme had devoted his genius to writing detective stories he might have made a large fortune. The most ingenious part of it was that he fixed on an innocent man so that there was no way that he could prove his innocence without casting an aspersion on his own wife.

Not only did the lady make the different steps in the plot plain to me, but by the artless way she told her story convinced me that she had not invented it and was telling the truth. And when she told me that she and her husband had intended to start for Brazil with her children in a few days to begin life anew under a different name I completely soured on my job.

On reaching New York we took supper together in a restaurant, crossed the river and boarded a train for Philadelphia. Having told me her story, the lady sat silently weeping. Her arrest had spoiled a plan that she and her husband had been working and waiting for for several months. If her story and my faith in its truth had not conquered me her tears would have done so—that is, being convinced of her innocence. After leaving Trenton

I told her that I was going into the smoking car.

"Aren't you afraid I'll escape?" she asked.

"I don't see how you can," I replied. "This train doesn't stop till we reach Philadelphia, and before that I'll be back."

I did not intend to return to her till we were in the station at Philadelphia, hoping that she would find a way of giving me the slip there, and thought it possible that the train might pull up on the way and go slow enough for her to jump off.

I smoked several cigars. At one of the towns through which we passed where there were many tracks I noticed that we were running beside a train moving in the same direction as ourselves and on the next track. The two trains were so near together that I could put my hand in at the window of the one beside us. Both trains were going at pretty good speed.

Presently the other train began to pull ahead of mine. I was sitting in the front seat of the smoking car on the side next the other train. Suddenly as the platform of the rear car of the other trains caught and passed the platform of my car I saw my prisoner bend forward, grasp the rail of the platform beside her and step on to the other train. She missed the rail she tried for, and I thought it was all up with her, but she caught the rear rail and succeeded in clambering on to the platform. That's all I saw, for the train she was on passed out of sight.

I thanked heaven that I had been spared sending the poor woman to her death and that she had escaped me. Just before reaching Philadelphia I went into the car where I had left my prisoner and, not finding her, on reaching the hotel at which I put up notified my chief of the woman's escape, telling him exactly how she had effected it.

It is needless to say I was discharged. After some difficulty I found another berth and never regretted what I had done. Many years after the lady's husband was exonerated, and the story just as she told it to me came out in the newspapers.

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