

## *Missing – A Young Lady* *A Detective Story*

Among the potentates of Wall street, few held a higher position in the estimation of all than Messrs. Archbold and Horton, and great was the sympathy universally expressed when the former, a man of middle age only, died suddenly in his residence, in the vicinity of Fifth avenue.

For years previously to this occurrence Mr. Horton had dwelt with his partner and his family, and Mrs. Archbold, on her husband's demise, could look to no firmer friend than he; so, after the accounts of the firm had been settled, and she knew the amount of the income she would be entitled to enjoy, she begged him still to remain at her house on the same footing as of yore. The arrangement would be all the more pleasing to her, inasmuch as she was the mother of three daughters, who were just ripening into womanhood, and would feel the benefit of a male friend, almost old enough to be their father, and who had so long been associated with them by terms of closest intimacy. Mr. Horton was a man of about forty-five years, who had been long separated from his wife by mutual agreement, but did not suffer the esteem of his neighbors on this account, as it was generally conceded that the fault lay entirely with the lady, and he invariably himself deplored the misunderstanding that had arisen. In a word, Mrs. Horton was jealous, and yet was unable to assign any cause for being so. During the few years in which she and her husband lived as man and wife, she was continually accusing him of infidelities, of which she could produce no proof, and their lives had been rendered so miserable by this continual bickering that they had decided to live apart for the future. As they were separated by no judicial degree, it was not legally incumbent on her husband to provide for his wife's maintenance, still he did so, although the lady described the sum paid her as being totally inadequate to her condition, and was ever striving to collect evidence of Mr. Horton's irregularities, that she might be able to procure a divorce or compel him by law to contribute more bounteously to her support. This evidence, however, was not forthcoming, and Mr. Horton was accounted a man of excellent moral character and behavior by the society in which he moved, and was blamed by none, but pitied by all. Personally he was handsome, of tall stature and good presence, and possessed of a most winning tongue, which was not only of the greatest service to him in business, but made him a universal favorite with the fair sex.

When Mrs. Archbold represented her forlorn condition to him, heat once entered fully into her plans. Anything that he could do, he averred, to serve the widow and orphans of his lamented friend, would afford him heartfelt joy, and as he was unblessed with children of his own, in consequence of the unhappy relations existing between his wife and himself, he would, to the best of his powers, save Mrs. Archbold every unnecessary trouble, and stand as far as possible in the place of a father to the three girls. – Matters were thus amicably arranged, and Mr. Horton in time came to be recognized as master of the house, and whispers were circulated abroad, that, were it not for the obstacle in the shape of his wife, he would have actually become so by contracting a marriage with the relict of his deceased partner.

As we have only to deal with the oldest daughter, Mary Archbold, it is needless to introduce her sisters, or their uncle, who likewise formed one of the household. Mary was a charming girl of twenty, who had been completing her education abroad at the time of her father's death, and had only recently returned. As it was known that she would inherit a considerable sum on her marriage, she was much sought after, and no dance or reception was thoroughly successful unless she were present. More than one gentleman was pointed at by rumors as likely to win the prize, and the home circle were ever urging her to make her choice quickly. That her heart was engaged in one quarter or other was the universal belief, as her manner was strangely altered since her arrival from the Continent. She grew thoughtful, and not unfrequently was discovered in tears, but ever refused to give any clue to the why or the wherefore; attributing her sadness to her not feeling quite well, or some other equally trivial excuse. Thinking that it would be best to allow matters to take their own course, and totally unsuspecting of any impending evil, her mother ceased to speak with her on the subject, and endeavored to dissipate her melancholy by providing all kinds of amusements to divert her. All was in vain, and one day the house was thrown into the greatest grief and alarm by her disappearance. She had gone out, she said, to post a letter, and nothing unusual was noted in her manner, but from that errand she did not return, and her distracted mother was almost heart-broken.

No one felt the blow more than Mr. Horton. After she had been absent some hours he had been sent for from his office, and his pale looks and evident agitation, proved that he feared the worst. But he did not at all waste time. The evil was done and the remedy was to be found.

"It may be," he said, "only a girlish freak. She may have run away to some of her friends. Let us immediately communicate with all to whom she is in the least likely to go." He assured Mrs. Archbold that all would yet be well, and asserted that it was preposterous to think of any great harm to one brought up with so much care. "You must scold her finely, when she comes back, for giving us such a fright."

All he could say or do, however, led to no good result, and he was at last unwillingly compelled by the constant entreaties of the mother to call in the aid of the police. Against this step he had protested most emphatically; he was afraid of the publicity that must inevitably ensue, and of the consequent scandal. His objections were overruled one by one, and the case was entrusted to a well-known detective of this city with full power and authority to act in it as he thought best.

The gentleman crediting the old adage that "two heads are better than one," procured the service of a companion who had often been specially detailed for cases of this kind. After having been put in possession of all of the information that could be given him, the character of the young lady, her portrait, her dress, the names of her companions with their addresses, and her admirers and sundry little peculiar characteristics, he set himself to work to solve the problem.

Both the detectives agreed at once on one point, although they carefully kept it to themselves. As the officer in question remarked to the writer of these lines – "Whenever

a girl suddenly runs away in this fashion, a man is at the bottom of it. – Let us only find the man, and the rest will be easy.” He thereupon cautiously questioned her sisters, and even the domestics, as to whether any one gentleman had appeared to be more agreeable than any other. No; she had never exhibited any decided preference. Did anyone see to whom the letter was directed which she carried to the post on the day of her leaving home? No; it was not even certain that she had a letter at all. Could he see any of her handwriting? Yes, plenty of it; and he thereupon secured a specimen.

He then prepared a carefully-written description, and forwarded it, together with her likeness, to the various police stations in this city and other large towns. He visited every hole and corner of New York, watched the railway depots, and interrogated the clerks. The hue-and-cry was raised everywhere, but raised in vain.

Now and again a message would be sent to him, saying that a young lady answering the description of the truant was at some distant town, and thither at once would the detective repair, only to find that he had his journey for his pains, and that he was at much at sea as ever. Once he fancied that he saw Miss Archbold in a carriage in Broadway, and followed it for a long time, only to acknowledge himself again mistaken; but he was convinced, nevertheless, that she had not left the country, and he much doubted whether she had left the town.

He had carefully examined, or caused to be examined, all the books of the various steamship companies, and “interviewed” their agents, to no purpose. The girl had melted into the air without leaving a trace behind her, and the trail was about as difficult to follow up as that of a mosquito over a rock.

An unusually liberal reward had been offered by Mr. Horton for any information that could lead to her recovery, and constant applications were made by individuals who professed either to have seen her themselves or to have heard from some friend who had seen her and many a wild goose chase was the result, until at last the detective began to fear that she had made away with herself, and actually visited the Morgue more than once when the body of a dead woman was advertised. Still, he did not relinquish his original idea, and when pressed by his companion to try some other track, only repeated what he had said before:

“Depend upon it, a man is at the bottom of it.” One day a new thought struck him, and absurd as it appeared, even to himself, he determined in giving it a fair trial, and startled his brother officer by remarking, “Dave, I am going to watch old Horton.” The other laughed at him, but did not oppose his suggestions, as it gave at least a promise of something to do. Mr. Horton, in common with many other gentlemen, was extremely fond of driving, and an afternoon rarely passed without his ordering his buggy. He had, of late, been much worked at the office, and frequently slept at a hotel when he found it too late to enjoy an evening at home. There was nothing extraordinary in all this – more particularly as that home was no longer as cheerful as it used to be before the death of the father and the loss of the daughter – and no one had paid any attention to his conduct.

The detective commenced his espionage immediately, and Mr. Horton was carefully followed wherever he went. His drives were usually in the direction of Harlem: and as he was but little learned in horses, and would have as soon thought of driving a locomotive as a fast trotter, the officer became curious to see what it was that induced him to so constantly patronize that road. He, therefore, hired a vehicle, and having instructed his coachman to follow Mr. Horton's buggy, waited patiently for the upshot, whatever it might be.

Of one thing he was soon convinced. Wherever Mr. Horton drove, it was not to Harlem, for after pursuing that direction for a short distance he turned his horse's head and drove back toward the city. Closely followed by the detective in the fly, he drove to a house in the immediate neighborhood of the New York Hotel. Here he drew up, and having rung the bell, entered with the air of a man who was perfectly at home. The detective, in the meantime, left his carriage and took up a position where he could command everything without being himself visible. Nearly an hour elapsed, and Mr. Horton did not reappear. What on earth is he up to? thought the detective; there must be some great attraction here; and he congratulated himself on the step he had taken.

Presently the front door opened and Mr. Horton stepped into the street with a lady on his arm, whom he tenderly assisted into the buggy. The lady's face was thickly veiled, and the looker-on could not guess even at her age, except that her movements seemed those of a young woman. Mr. Horton seated himself by her side and drove off, and the detective, his curiosity now excited to the top pitch, again started on his trail. This led him straight to the Jersey Ferry, and in course of time he alighted, carriage and all in Jersey City. The chase set off without delay towards Newark, in happy ignorance of the presence of a pursuer. When Newark was reached, Mr. Horton stopped at an hotel, and, accompanied by the lady, went in, after ordering his horse to be put up for an hour or two. The detective soon learned that he had ordered dinner, and, as his own appetite was good, resolved to imitate this example. While his meal was preparing, he loitered about the passage in hope of obtaining a peep at the fair unknown. Presently the opportunity came. One of the waiters left the door open, and through the crack the lady was distinctly visible.

The detective fell back as if he had been shot; plunged his hands into his pockets to find the portrait of Miss Archbold; presently he pulled it out, looked at it attentively, and took another peep through the crack in the door. Apparently satisfied, he slowly walked away, his countenance exhibiting a mixture of the greatest surprise, indignation and self satisfaction. At this moment a waiter met him.

"Hallo!" said he. "Do that gentleman and lady often come here?"

"Two or three times a week, sir," was the reply.

"The deuce they do," said the detective, slowly. "Well, I am —" what he did not say, for, chuckling to himself, he went out, jumped into the hack, and returned at full speed to New York. He was conveyed straight to Mrs. Archbold, and demanded to see her alone.

His manner was so constrained that she instantly divined that something most startling had happened.

“You have news – news of Mary.”

“Yes, Mrs. Archbold, I have, but I don’t exactly know how I’m to tell you.”

“Where is she! What is she doing? Speak, man, speak!”

“Mrs. Archbold, you ask Mr. Horton, he’ll tell you better than I can.”

“Mr. Horton? What do you mean – does he know where she is?”

“I guess so – he ought to.”

“What is this mystery? Tell me all you have to tell me plainly. I can bear all.”

“Well, don’t blame me. Mrs. Archbold – if you will have the truth – Mr. Horton has known all along where your daughter has been.”

“How dare you tell me so – how dare you hint –?”

“It’s no use being angry, madam, with me – I have only done my duty. I tell you I have seen your daughter and Mr. Horton together this afternoon, have but just left them, and can take you to the house which I saw them leave.”

Mrs. Archbold did not faint or scream, but her features grew rigid with anger and pale with agitation. She left the room and in a very few minutes re-entered it, dressed and ready to go out.

“Come,” she said; and the two silently started on their errand. When they arrived at the house the detective rang the bell, and asked the servant if Miss Archbold lived there.

“No sir, we have none but married people here.”

“Well,” showing the portrait, “does this lady live here?”

“Yes sir, but she is not in at present.”

“Very well, then; we will come in and wait for her; but you need not tell her that any one is here.”

The hours passed very tediously, and the fortitude of Mrs. Archbold had almost given way, when a carriage drove up to the door, and immediately afterward her daughter’s voice was heard bidding some one “good night.” The carriage slowly departed, and the

detective, bidding the mother to keep close behind him, stepped quietly into the hall, and stood face to face with the girl he had so long been looking for.

“Good evening, Miss Archbold.”

“That is not my name,” and she looked him full in the face.

“Indeed. Do you not, then, know this lady?”

Her bravado was all gone then, and uttering a scream that made even the experienced police officer wince, she covered her face with her hands, and fell fainting to the floor.

The detective, raising the young lady in his arms, carried her out, and placed her by her weeping mother’s side in a carriage he had procured. It is no intention of mine to recount the scene he then witnessed between Mrs. Archbold and her child. The detective in all his experiences had never met the like, and hopes never to meet it again. They were both somewhat more composed before they reached home, and the mother had again nerved herself to meet the snake whom she had so long called friend. Mr. Horton had come in, and was in the dining room, where he had been told by the other two daughters, who had been previously instructed, that Mrs. Archbold had gone to take tea with an acquaintance.

He turned quickly round, smiling blandly as the handle of the door was turned, and was about to advance when he stood transfixed with terror, and grasped the table for support.

Mrs. Archbold never spoke, but drawing herself up to her full height, pointed to her daughter, who had sunk into a chair and was sobbing convulsively. Her sisters, rushing to her side, fondled and embraced her, calling her by name and entreating her to be calm. Presently Mr. Horton staggered, rather than walked, out, without breaking the silence, the street door was opened and shut and he was gone.

“Well,” said I, “and how did it all end?”

“Oh! It was hushed up, as well as it could be, though scores of people in New York will recognize the story, and know the actors in it. Horton had fascinated the girl, I suppose: he certainly was a very pleasant man. He flattered her, and filled her head with rubbish, and I have no doubt had an eye to her money eventually. I was the means of his wife obtaining a divorce from him; and I believe he is going to marry Miss Archbold, but I doubt if her mother will ever speak to him again, although they often meet.”

“What! Is he in the city still?”

“Certainly, and doing a good business. – He is a clever fellow. He knew that he had a much better chance of being unsuspected if the girl remained close at home; and I must confess that if it had not been for a whim I should never have caught him.”

*The Fremont [OH] Weekly Journal*, March 4, 1870

*New Hampshire Patriot*, March 16, 1870

*The Wheeling [WV] Daily Intelligencer*, March 18, 1870

*The Manitowoc [WI] Pilot*, March 24, 1870

*The Tipton [IA] Advertiser*, February 16, 1871