

A Detective's Story
by Frank Foxcroft

“Yes sir, as you say, a detective's life is full of danger, and often accompanied with something not unlike romance. Perhaps you would like to hear a short narration of one of my experiences in the work?”

“Certainly,” said I, “that was the point I was coming at.”

“Well, sir, you must excuse me if I seem to go back too far in my history, and tell you how I became a detective, before I narrate any of my adventures as such. My father, sir, was a country squire, in England, in comfortable circumstances. At an early age I was sent to school, and all along up, great care was taken with my education. When suitably fitted, I entered college, with the bar as my final destination. Not liking the closed confinement and application to study, I left the college in less than a year, determined to enter upon some employment better fitted to my naturally venturesome disposition. Not to be too long, sir, after trying several occupations, I finally settled down as a detective, on the French side of the Channel, which profession I have now followed for nearly twenty years. The occurrence I was about to narrate, took place in the year 1849, when I had been in the work only about two years. Although quite young at the time, my superiors placed considerable confidence in me, because I had taken hold with so much earnestness, and had already distinguished myself in several minor cases that had been given over to me. This was probably the reason I was summoned to headquarters one morning in March, 1849, ‘on important business.’ On entering the room of the prefect, I was made acquainted with the fact that a murder had been committed in a certain street on the outskirts of Paris, and that I was to investigate the matter, and, if possible, ferret out the criminal. Only the bare fact, with no details, save the street and number, was communicated to me; but I was expected to ascertain the rest. I reached the place designated as soon as possible, and found, of course, much excitement prevailing, for it was one of the most quiet neighborhoods in the whole city of Paris.

“The occupant of the house, which was quite a small one, and situated somewhat apart from the rest, was a certain Madame Girardin, and old lady of about sixty. For nearly five years she had lived here, keeping only one servant, a young girl, and living in great retirement. She seemed to have been perfectly inoffensive and harmless, and was rarely seen outside the walls of her home. On this particular morning in question, the neighbors had been alarmed by seeing no signs of life about the house—the curtains remaining down, and the door closed at quite a late hour. At length, one more daring than the rest, suspecting foul play, proposed to enter the house, forcibly, if necessary, and see if all was right. Where there was one to lead, the rest were willing enough to follow. The door was soon broken in, and a few entered. Their worst suspicions were confirmed. The bodies of the woman and her girl were both found, lying in their own blood, the one on the lower, the other on the second floor.

“Having learned these facts from the excited crowd outside, I took possession of the house in the name of the prefect, and cleared it of the men and women who had thronged it on the first intimation of crime. This done, I commenced my investigation at once. The instrument of the murder had apparently been a small dirk-knife, and the deed itself had been very brutally and

clumsily done. I found no less than eleven stabs on the person of the woman, and nearly as many on the girl. Now any experienced workman would have finished the job with one, and I knew from this that it must have been the work of a new hand. Still, this afforded me small consolation, for the utmost care had been taken, evidently, in the concealment of everything that could serve as a clue, and I could find absolutely nothing on which to base action. It had plainly not been done for plunder, since the general state of the house was undisturbed. The old lady's watch, a valuable gold one, hung on the wall over her bed, and on the bureau near by was a purse well-filled with coin. It was impossible to conceive of an object for the murder, unless, indeed, it was prompted by some deeper motive than passion or plunder. I was about to leave the house, disconsolate with my poor success, when my eye was arrested by a sudden sparkle of light from the floor beneath. Stooping, I found it came from a diamond of unusual brilliancy, and most peculiar form, that had evidently become loosened from a ring, and had rolled into this corner of the room. I examined it more carefully, and found it was cut in the form of an irregular decagon, and that there must be peculiarities in the setting, and in the ring, to correspond with the unusual form of the diamond itself. Better satisfied now, I left the premises, determined to make some outside inquiries. I found the opposite neighbor perfectly willing to communicate all that he knew, which seemed to be, in truth, very little. I commenced by informing him of my business, and cautioned him to be careful as to the correctness of his statements. The poor fellow was actually in a tremble lest all he might say should not prove correct, and he himself be called to account for it. I found out all the facts that I have previously narrated, and one or two in addition.

"She lived nearly alone, did she not?" I asked.

"Yes, sir," he replied, "There were only herself and the girl in the house."

"Did she receive much or any company?"

"None at all, sir; or rather, none except her nephew, who called occasionally on her."

"Ah! Then she had a nephew?"

"Yes, sir; a young man of twenty-five or so."

"Please describe him."

"I have seen him very little, sir. He is dark complexioned, with brown hair, nearly black. Eyes also very dark. In height rather short, but well-proportioned. Features all very sharp indeed. The chief peculiarity of his appearance is a sort of twist in one eye, giving it the appearance of looking inward."

"Thank you," said I. "Is there anything noticeable about the manner of his dress? Is he what you would call 'fast'?"

"Not exactly, sir, and yet there is a kind of flashiness in his dress, and particularly in his jewelry. He is very fond of the latter, and displays a good deal of it."

“Indeed! And his name you say is—?”

“Pierre St. Blas, sir.”

I went away with a sort of indefinable suspicion that this Pierre St. Blas, whoever he might be, knew more than he ought of the tragical occurrence, and that, could I find him, ‘startling developments’ might be made. For three weeks I haunted the streets of Paris. I went to all places, and at all times. Not a saloon or gambling-hell in the city escaped me, but still nothing could I see of my man. At the end of this time, I had occasion to visit Marseilles. While here, I chanced to enter a jeweler’s on private business of my own, and waited at the back of the shop, while he attended a customer in front. This customer, a young man, so far as I could tell, for his back was turned to me, was giving his directions to the jeweler as I entered. It was a ring, he said, he wanted repaired. The setting was rich, and the ring itself costly, but the central stone had been lost out, and he wished it replaced by one as near like it as possible. These words attracted my attention, and lounging leisurely forward, I asked to look at it. It was handed me by the jeweler.

“The setting is peculiar,” I said, “how would *this* do?” drawing from my pocket the diamond, and placing it carefully in.

“The man turned his face broadly toward me then, and the look in his eye told me I was right, and emboldened me to proceed. Walking towards him, and speaking with all the firmness and coolness I could command, I said, in loud tones:

“Pierre St. Blas, I arrest you for the murder of Marguerite Girardin and Madelein Crosser!”

“I had not been altogether sure of my man before, much less of his guilt, but as I saw the ashy look of despair in that man’s face, I knew that the random shot had gone home. It was such a look as I never wish to see again, sir, the look of a man hunted to death, with no hope left.”

“Before I could see the act or prevent it, he drew a small pistol from his pocket, placed it to his head, and fired. There was only his dead body now for me to take charge of—he had anticipated the action of the law. God only knows his object in the murder of those two defenseless women. It has never been found out, and never will be till the day when all things are known.”

The Flag of Our Union, June 1, 1867