

The Silver Arrow

A Page from the Criminal Calendar

“Were you ever in the Tombs?”

Such was the salutation of my friend, Charles Mack, a rising young lawyer, as I encountered him upon the corner of Broadway and Leonard Street.

“Never,” I replied.

“Do you want a new idea—a strange insight into the mysteries of human nature?”

“By all means.”

“Come with me, then. I am going to see a young girl in the Tombs accused of murder.”

“A murderess! What could have induced her to commit the dreadful act?”

“My dear fellow, how rapidly you jump to a conclusion. I did not say a murderess, but a young girl accused of murder. I have every reason to believe her innocent, otherwise I should not have undertaken to defend her, which I have done at the request of her employer.”

“What are the facts in the case, as far as they have come to your knowledge?”

“Simply these:— The girl’s name is Sybil Clarke, some nineteen years of age, and said to be very beautiful. I have not seen her yet. She is an artificial flower maker and being all alone here, occupied a furnished room on Crosby Street—a not unusual style of living among girls of her class.— Last night, about ten o’clock, the neighbors were aroused by the cry of “murder” proceeding from her apartment, and upon entering discovered her kneeling over the body of a young man, which lay upon the floor weltering in blood. He was quite dead—stabbed to the heart with some sharp instrument. He was recognized as a person, Richard Baker by name, who occupied a chamber above, in the same building. He had been quite familiar with Sybil, and was supposed to be her lover. The neighbors, charitable souls, at once said that Sybil had killed him in a fit of jealousy. The girl was at once taken into custody and conveyed to the Tombs.— The coroner will render his verdict this morning, and her examination take place.

“Circumstances are certainly against her,” I suggested.

“I do not think so,” returned my friend. “My opinion is that she had rejected Baker and the silly fool put an end to his existence. But the most remarkable part of the whole affair is, that the weapon with which the crime was committed has not been discovered. In fact, no weapon more dangerous than a pair of scissors could be discovered in the apartment.”

“I do not wish to discourage you,” I remarked, “but that certainly has a bad look for your client. If the lover—if he was such, indeed—committed suicide, the weapon would have been found, as she would have had no motive in concealing it; whereas if guilty of the crime, that would, intuitively, have been her first act.”

He shook his head gravely as he listened to my words.

“There is much force in your reasoning,” he said, “and I fear the case will prove a difficult one; but ‘*nil desperandum!*’ as we used to say at school—‘never despair’ is my motto. Let’s attend the examination. After that I will have an interview with the girl herself, and then I shall be able to shape a course for her defence. Can you spare the time?”

Of course I could, and was delighted with the opportunity of getting a fresh subject.

The court room was quite crowded when we entered, there being a peculiar interest in this case. The morbid taste of a certain portion of the public runs strongly to murder, and when that is combined with love it becomes perfectly irresistible.

The coroner’s verdict was handed in. It was the usual formula. “We (the coroner’s jury) find that Richard Baker came to his death from some sharp instrument in the hands of some person unknown.” After a long preamble, it designated Sybil Clarke as the suspected personage.

The witnesses were called, the prisoner placed upon the stand, and examination commenced.

There was a buzz of curiosity as the prisoner took her place and modestly raised the green veil from her face. By Jove! She was pretty, and I was not the only one in the court who thought so.

She was plainly but neatly attired in a calico frock, which revealed a form of classic proportions. A little chip bonnet set back upon her head, (this was before the coal scuttles came in) disclosed her face very cleverly.— She had a clear red and white complexion, a little nose and mouth, just the right size to kiss, a wealth of dark brown hair, and a clear gray eye.— That was another bad sign. I have always discovered that the [gray-eyed] women are inclined to jealousy. How did I find that out? As the learned judge has just remarked, that question is irrelevant. I am telling somebody else’s story.

The result of the examination may be summed up in a few words. The testimony of the witnesses bore strongly against the girl. Her story was this—For months she had been annoyed by a gentleman, whom she had accidentally met one evening while returning to her home from the store, whither she had been to carry some work. Struck with her appearance, he had followed her home, and accosted her as she was about entering the house. Frightened at the stranger’s freedom, she had, without returning his salutation, fled precipitately to her own apartment, and fastened herself in. In the morning she had almost forgotten the circumstance, and pursued her avocation as usual, but in the evening, after carrying back the work and returning, she was again followed by the stranger. He had again accosted her, but without receiving an answer. This was repeated day after day, until at last, wearied by the man’s pertinacity, she had resolved to speak to him and put an end to the persecution.

As she expected, he made a passionate declaration of love, and told her he was a gentleman, a Southerner, of wealth and high standing in society. It was the old story repeated, riches seeking a victim in the ranks of poverty. She indignantly refused the splendid infamy he offered, and dismissed him in terms calculated to wound his self love, and free her from further pursuit. But the stranger was either as madly in love with her as he professed to be, or else obstinately bent upon accomplishing his ends, for he still followed her like her shadow.

So matters continued until the night of the murder. That night he had grown more audacious, and boldly entered her chamber. She saw at a glance that he was under the influence of liquor, and became alarmed.— She threatened to call for aid if he did not instantly retire, but he implored her to listen to him. He repeated his protestations of love, nay, even offered to marry her. As an earnest of his affection, he showed her a present he had brought her, a silver arrow about six inches in length the feathered end heavily studded with diamonds. It was intended to be worn as a hair pin. It appeared to her to be of great value. But she was not to be dazzled by its magnificence, and she rejected his offer as firmly as before.

He became enraged at her refusal, threatened violence, and seized her arm. She shrieked aloud for help, when Richard Baker, who probably was going up stairs to his room and heard her cries, burst into the apartment. He immediately closed with the intruder; there was a confused struggle, and the next moment the stranger was gone, and Richard Baker lay dead upon the floor.

She was bending over him, endeavoring to ascertain the extent of his injury. When the neighbors came thronging in the chamber.

Such was the girl's simple story. It was told in a voice choking with sobs, but with a sad earnestness which convinced me at once of her innocence. Unfortunately for her, the stern officials of the law were not so susceptible as I am. The witnesses were recalled and questioned. None had ever seen the stranger—at least they had not noticed him. That was to be expected. New York is a city of strangers. Who remembers the thousand faces we meet daily up on Broadway? And yet this evidence had a damaging effect upon the girl's case. She was fully committed to answer the charge made against her, and was remanded to prison.

Mack, as her lawyer, and I, as his friend and a member of the press, were permitted to visit her in her cell.

We found her the very picture of despair. She had been weeping, but as we entered she dried her tears and endeavored to look calm. A vain effort. The anguish of a broken heart was imprinted upon her sweet face. Tears are becoming to most ladies, but the sad despair she endeavored to veil beneath a forced smile made her beauty perfectly ravishing.

“Courage, young lady,” said Mack, in his cheering tone, “we'll get you safely out of this sad scrape, be assured.”

“Oh,” she cried, fervently, “I hope so. But the worst is over. I care not what becomes of me now. Innocent as I am, my character is forever blackened. To think that I should ever be accused of

such a crime! Even if my innocence should be proven, my good name is forever tarnished. Will not people point at me all the days of my life, and say ‘There goes the girl who was accused of murder’?”

“My dear young lady,” said honest Mack, in his straightforward, matter of fact way, “this world—and when I say this world, I mean the people in it—is entirely too selfish to waste so much time on you as you seem to imagine. In a week’s time you and the murder will be forgotten. You have only to move in the next street—that is, as soon as we can move you out of this—to be unknown. A few personal friends may perhaps remember the affair for six months. Besides, if you consider your present name to be damaged—tarnished, I believe was your word; excuse me if I have not put so nice a point to it—you have only to change it, and I need scarcely inform you that you will not have much difficulty in doing that—in a *legal* manner.”

The girl smiled, notwithstanding her grief, at Mack’s homely argument, and I could but notice that his plain common sense had done her good.— She began to brighten wonderfully. The blank despair faded from her face, and her features assumed a hopeful expression.

She told us the little story of her life. She was of humble parentage and a native of Bridgeport, Connecticut. Her parents dying when she was quite young, she had been “brought up” by an uncle. An orphan with neither brother nor sister, she had found the home afforded her by her uncle quite irksome. Heaven had blessed him with a large family, and she, as usual in such cases, was converted into a household drudge. Her parents had left her some little money, and when she arrived at the age of eighteen, which gave her a legal right to claim it of her uncle, she bade him and her native town farewell, and came to New York to work out her own destiny. Having a taste that way, she had engaged in the making of artificial flowers. She had been little over a year in New York when this sad affliction overtook her.

At his invitation I accompanied him to the house in Crosby Street, where the body of Richard Baker lay. A surgeon had just completed an examination of the wound as we entered, (being privileged, to the great disgust of the crowd who were kept without by the police.) The object of the surgeon’s examination was to ascertain what kind of instrument had committed the wound. That it was not a knife the ragged orifice proclaimed at first glance. It was upon the breast, directly over the heart, and that organ had evidently been pierced.

I spare my readers the sickening details, and come at once to the result. The surgeon drew from the wound the barbed point of a silver arrow!

Here was a confirmation of Sybil Clarke’s story. Mack enjoined secrecy upon the surgeon and the reporters for twenty four hours, and, with the consent of the police, who was present, started off, accompanied by myself and a detective, to ferret out the murderer.

I confess I was as eager for the chase as he was, but not quite so sanguine of success. “Do you think any man would be fool enough, after committing such a crime, to remain in the city? He’s far enough off by this time.”

“I differ with you, my boy,” returned Mack, as we walked rapidly along; “I have had some experience in criminal cases, which has given me a strange insight into human nature. Most people would imagine as you do, but I tell you there is a fascination, a horrible magnetism, as it were, that chains a murderer to the locality of his crime. Besides, this man evidently thinks himself secure. He thinks there is no proof against him, and, to his mind, a hurried departure would be suspicious.— No, sir, that man was at the examination this morning, and he is still in the city.”

I stopped short, and stared at Mack in open mouthed wonder.

“At the examination?” I exclaimed. “What makes you think so?”

“I saw him there.”

“What! do you know him?”

“No.”

“Saw a man you do not know? My dear Mack, what are you driving at?”

“How innocent you are! I live by wits, old fellow, and constant practice has made them tolerably sharp. This is September—only a Southerner would think of wearing a talma this early in the fall. Besides, there were other proofs—his broad leafed Kossuth, his sallow complexion, and full, tawny beard. I had my eye on the man when the girl was describing his appearance. Do you remember her description?”

I replied that I did. It was in answer to a question from the magistrate, but I forgot to chronicle it in its proper place.

“Well,” proceeded Mack, “my eye was on this man as she was speaking, and as I noticed his restless motions, and as I caught the stealthy glances of his sunken eyes, I said, mentally, to myself, “My head against a bushel basket but that is the very man.”

“In the name of all that’s stupid why did let him escape? Why did you not have him arrested?”

“Softly! Softly! What proof had I against him? If I had singled him out, and Sybil recognized him, it would have been considered a trick. We could not have held him—he would have been suffered to depart, for, of course, he would have sworn that he never set eyes on her before—and we should never have been able to lay hands on him again—He would have been off to Cuba or England at his first opportunity.”

I began to have a great opinion of my friend Mack’s penetration and ingenuity. We stopped before the largest jewelry establishment in the city. I shall not mention any names here, as advertisements are not admitted to this paper, gratuitously.”

“What are you going to do here?” I inquired.

“Find out where the silver arrow came from, and who purchased it!” answered Mack.

“How will you be able to do that?”

“By description, and show the remaining half.”

“Well, even if you discover the purchaser, what then? If he has thrown away the shaft, where is our proof?”

“The shaft was heavily studded with diamonds, according to Sybil’s description,” replied Mack, dryly, “and a man does not throw away fifteen hundred or two thousand dollars worth of property, though he is a Southerner.”

The detective, who had been quietly jogging at our heels, and now stood beside us, nodded his head approvingly.

We entered the jewelry store, and Mack requested to be furnished with a view of various articles of jewelry adapted for ladies head dresses. After a lengthy examination we found nothing of the kind there.

At the third establishment we visited we gained all the information we desired. The jeweler recognized the broken arrow, and remembered to whom he had sold it two days previous. Clement Bastow (the reader will, of course, understand that I am using fictitious names entirely in this sketch,) a Southern gentleman, stopping at the Metropolitan Hotel.

A warrant was procured and we proceeded to the Metropolitan. Mack ascertained that Bastow was in his room, without exciting suspicion, and quietly made our way thither.

We knocked, and were invited to enter.—We did so. A gentlemanly dressed man, with sandy hair, a tawny beard, and a restless eye, arose to receive us. It was the man Mack had described.

“All right, by the shade of Blackstone!” cried Mack.

The guilty are ever suspicious. Bastow had his revolver out in an instant, but he was seized and disarmed before he could use it, and accommodated with a pair of handcuffs. The jeweled shaft of the arrow was found upon his person. He passed that night in the Tombs. He was found the next morning dead in his cell. He had taken poison to avoid the ignominy of a trial.

Sybil was released, her innocence being fully established. Mack got a glorious fee, for she was married to him six months after. I gave away the bride.

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