

## *The Mystery*

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by A Detective

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In an out of the way place on —— street, is an old building whose ruined gables and quaint architecture tell of a period lone gone by. The columns that sustain the old galleries are stained with age, and the wild creepers in many a curious twine have crept around its arches, and shadow half the roof. In the corner of the flagged court-yard is a fountain, or rather the remains of one, for the waters have long ceased to play, and the marble urn is dry. But the orange trees are fresh and green, and their scented blossoms fill the air with perfume.

Like most old houses, it has a history; and like age usually has, it has been sometimes bright with sunshine and then sad with tears. I knew it first a few years since but the circumstance that caused it to attract my attention led me to learn its legend.

It was then occupied by an old man and his wife. They had lived alone for years. They were not childless, but people said that trouble had come upon the family, and that their young daughter had been driven out from the shelter of the old roof tree. Be that as it may, they had lived alone, their rooms sometimes rented out to lodgers, and in the summer excluded from all intrusion.

But at the time to which I refer, a lady lodger with a little girl had come to them in the spring and secured an apartment. Her life was far more retired than theirs, and at very rare intervals was the lady seen by either the old man or his wife. She went out daily, however, thickly veiled, and remaining several hours, returned generally in tears, as her sobbings would tell the old people, who could hear her sounds and cries of distress. This life went on for weeks, and spring at last mellowed into summer.

But one day a change was noted in the lodger's conduct. From sadness she passed to the extremes of lightheartedness and joy. The exuberance of her spirits found vent in song, and the old rooms, so long silent to the sound of pleasure and delight, grew vocal with her melody.

That evening she had a visitor. He came thoroughly disguised, and none in the house save the lady was permitted to see his face. How long he stayed the old people could not tell, but late in the night the screams of the lady's child – the little girl – awakened them. Proceeding to the apartment of their guest they found the door locked upon the inside. Fearing that some evil had befallen the little one or its mother, the door was finally forced, and a spectacle of horror was presented which well might chill the aged hearts that looked upon it.

The lady lay dead on the floor.

Her throat was literally cut from ear to ear, and the blood forming a wide pool around her head, stained her white dress and yellow hair, which lay dabbled in the gore. There was no knife or weapon in the room with which the deed could have been done. The child could only tell that she

had gone to sleep leaving her mother and papa talking, and that she awakened to find her parent dead.

The glitter and glare of the gaslight added horror to the spectacle.

“Who is your papa, child?” I inquired, for I already suspected that the nameless visitor was the homicide.

“He came last night,” she said.

“What is his name?”

“Papa, sir.”

She knew no other.

And this was all we could learn. But in preparing the body for the grave a startling discovery was made.

The strange lady was the banished daughter. There could be no mistake, the wanderer, exiled so long, had indeed perished beneath the roof where she was born. Of course this augmented the excitement already, at fever heat. People talked of the strange occurrence and shook their heads mysteriously.

What could it mean?

Many even suspected that the story of the strange visitor was untrue, and that [maybe] the old man had taken his child’s life.

The strangeness of the affair perplexed every one. Who the murderer was could not be conjectured. There was not the shadow of a clue left to trace him. Days and weeks went by in fruitless search, and the circumstances finally faded out of the public mind. And at last more than a year was gone, when one day I was sent for to the Charity Hospital to see a dying man.

“Are you ——?” he inquired, as I entered the room.

“I am.”

“You were the detective who was entrusted with the case of the murdered lady on —— street?”

“Yes.”

“You have found no clue?”

“Not the least shadow of one.”

“Your search will end here, then, for I am the man.”

To my start of astonishment, he waved his hand and continued:

“Do not speak. I have but little strength left, and life is waning fast. The woman was my wife. I first led her astray and then abandoned her. Years after we met, and I married her. She had a marriage certificate. I again left her; and but for the proof of this marriage with her I could have formed a wealthy alliance. It was to get this certificate that I went to see her that night. I could not, however, persuade her to give it to me. She would not tell me where it was. Maddened almost to frenzy, I struck her down at my feet, and prompted by insanity, I believe I killed her.”

This was all. The man looked as if he would say more; but his speech failed him and he died.

This was all I ever knew.

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