

How I Won My Wife

by L.B. Angell

“Did I ever tell you how I won my wife?” inquired Paul R---, the famous detective, as we were taking a quiet stroll in the park.

“No,” I said eagerly, “let’s hear it, please.”

“Well, you must know that my business as a detective brings me in daily contact with all kinds of people, and I learn their inmost family details and troubles. So much by the way of explanation, now to my story. Just two years ago this month, an old gentleman from Chichester, came to the department in great distress. He wanted the services of the best detective to be had, and as I bear that distinction, he sent me. Just here let me mention that the whole force, myself excepted, were trying to catch a notorious house-breaker and thief called ‘Dandy Jim,’ but without success so far; the fellow was as keen as a weasel to scent danger, and he possessed a wonderful faculty of slipping through the police. You may wonder what he has to do with my story. Just wait and see.

As soon as the old gentleman, Pierce was his name, was closeted with me, he told me his trouble. He had come to the city to try and find his only child, who had eloped with a stranger. The facts of the case were briefly stated as follows:

Dellie, his daughter, was, by the will of her mother’s only brother, left the sole heiress of sixty thousand dollars, and at the age of eighteen, she was to come into full possession of the property. In just one week she would be eighteen, but in the meantime she had become acquainted with a young fellow from the City, and fallen in love with him or thought she had, which is just the same with a young girl, and when her father who did not fancy him, ordered him to keep away from his house, the fellow persuaded her to elope to New York with him. Dellie had left a note for her parents, telling them where she had gone, and that she should not return until she was Mrs. Edward Percy, that was the fellow’s name.

I asked Mr. Pierce what sort of a looking chap this Percy was.

“Tall, with light brown hair, and side whiskers, and a moustache, worn in the English style.”

I shook my head thoughtfully.

“There was one queer thing about his looks,” continued Mr. Pierce. His eyes are the blackest I ever saw, and one of them turns in a great deal, and makes him look very wicked, I think.”

I could have hugged the old gentleman, for unknowingly he was putting me on the track of Dandy Jim. After I had heard him through with his story, I said:

“Your daughter is probably in the city and may even now be the wife of a villain if my suspicions are right.”

“She may be in the city,” replied her father, “but by her uncle’s will, she can not marry until she is eighteen, under penalty of losing her property, and that scamp actually made her think, that I wanted to keep her from marrying, in order to have control of her income. And she’s my only child too, and I’m well to do, if I do say it!”

“Have you a photograph of the young lady?” I asked.

Mr. Pierce handed me a picture of as lovely a girl as I ever saw. There was such an expression of innocent goodness in the young face, that, cold police officer as I was, my heart warmed towards her.

“She’s a lovely girl, is Dellie,” said the old gentleman, “and that’s a good picture. I guess you’ll find her by that.”

After ascertaining that the girl was hazel eyed, and golden haired, I dismissed Mr. Pierce, promising to let him know how I was getting along; then I started for Central Park, feeling sure that I should find the couple I was after billing and cooing in some secluded spot. I lounged around the Park half the afternoon, without meeting with any success. There were lovers enough, but none bore any resemblance to the photograph in my possession.

At last weary of looking around, I threw myself down under a large tree, and drawing my hat over my eyes, prepared to take a rest. I had just disposed myself comfortably, when I became aware that under the shade of another large tree, just a few feet from me, a couple were seated, who, by their actions, seemed to be lovers. I might not have discovered who they were so soon, had not the young lady turned her face towards me, while she said:

“Do you suppose that man will over hear us, Edward?”

At the moment that her companion looked around, I was to all appearances sound asleep, and after looking at me an instant he replied:

“No, Dellie, he’s sound asleep; never mind him, but tell me where we shall spend our honeymoon?”

I felt tempted to answer the scamp – for I had recognized Dandy Jim’s voice – “In Sing Sing, you rascal,” but I didn’t, I only remained silent watching the couple until they left the seat; then noiselessly I glided unseen after them. They left the park, and entered a South Avenue car. I knew that Mag Harris kept a sort of low [boarding]-house for loose gentry on this street, I waited a few seconds, then I entered the car, they were too busily engaged in talking to notice me, but the girl kept a thick veil over her face, as if afraid of being seen. The car stopped at the corner of --- street, and seeing them rise I hurried out and was walking quietly along, when they went by me and I saw them enter Mag’s house.

Then I hurried to headquarters for help. I never said a word about Dandy Jim. I merely said that I had found the game that I was hunting after, and taking a couple of policemen with me, I led the

way to --- street. On reaching Mag's shanty I placed one of my men at the door, and bidding the other follow me I rang for admittance. Mag herself opened the door, and she turned white with fear as, opening my coat, I permitted her to see the police badge, for she knew her house had been watched of late. She led us into the parlor, and respectfully waited for me to tell my errand, which I proceeded to do by demanding to be shown to Miss Dellie Pierce's room.

Mag was game to the last, and firmly denied all knowledge of the whereabouts of Dandy Jim; but the mention of my name, coupled with a gentle hint of a visit to the tombs, conquered her, and after telling me that Dandy Jim was then with Miss Pierce in her own private parlor, where she took her meals to avoid meeting the other inmates of the house, she led the way to the girl's apartment.

Opening the door so softly that we were undiscovered, I glided quietly into the chamber.

"Dandy Jim, your little game is blocked," said I, "and if you attempt to give me any trouble, I'll blow your brains out in an instant."

Dandy Jim was no coward, but a revolver close to your head, with the certainty of its going off without any notice if you stir hand or foot, is enough to tame any man, and before the fellow could move, my man had the ruffles on, and he was powerless.

Directing the policeman to stand guard over him, I turned to the lovely girl who, pale as a corpse, stood with clasped hands and eyes like a wounded deer, staring at me.

"Do not be alarmed at me, my dear young lady. We intend you no harm, but we've been looking for that scamp some time," I said, indicating Dandy Jim.

"Isn't there some mistake, sir?" she faltered; "that gentleman's name is Edward Percy, and that lady" – pointing to Mag, who stood in the door – "is his aunt, Mrs. Bacon. Won't you please let him go? There is some mistake, sir."

"My poor child," I said, "Dandy Jim has as many names as he has disguises. This is one of them," and I turned, and pulling off the false hair and whiskers, left the sinister countenance and coal black hair of the prisoner visible. "As to that creature," I continued, "she knows that to a pure woman her very presence is pollution. Her name is Mag Harris, and you can see how you have been deceived."

The words were hardly uttered before the girl lay insensible in my arms, completely overcome with shame and grief. The usual remedies were applied and she soon came to herself again, and telling me who she was, begged piteously to be sent back to her parents. Her delight knew no bounds when she found that her father was in the city, and that he in reality had been searching for her, when I discovered that Dandy Jim and her lover were one and the same person. Having seen that gentleman start for the tombs, attended by the policemen, I procured a carriage and accompanied Miss Pierce to the hotel where her father was staying.

On the way she asked my name.

“Paul K---, at your service, Miss,” I answered, bowing, as politely as I could.

Leaving Miss Pierce and her father with the promise to call on them in the morning, before they returned home, I hastened down to headquarters. On reaching it I was made quite a hero, and received a great many congratulations and compliments for my detective skill, which I scarcely heard, so busily was I thinking of the lovely girl I had saved from ruin, perhaps death. Next day I attended the fair Dellie and her father to the depot, promising to run down and see them, and strange to say, there was scarcely a week that I did not have business in Chichester, and, of course, I went to see Miss Dellie and her father. I was so warmly welcomed, and Dellie blushed so prettily as she timidly echoed her father’s invitation to come up whenever I could, that it is no wonder I was deeper in love than ever, and every time I could get a holiday I spent it in Chichester.

Matters went on this way for three months; then I put the all important question, and Dellie said she would be my wife, if I wanted such a silly creature.

Three months later we were married, with the full consent of her parents, and Dellie makes the dearest little wife in the world; but though my wife is wealthy and often urges me to give up my position on the secret service, I can’t bear to do it, as it has become a second nature, and I shall follow it as long as I am able.

Dandy Jim is working out his time in Sing Sing, and Dellie often tells her young lady friends her adventure, as a warning against trusting strangers.

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