The Diamond Cross

by Frank H. Angier

THE most experienced and sagacious of detectives are not always successful. We of the force are, like other men, fallible, and even the best laid and carefully followed plans, sometimes wholly fail to achieve their purpose. I have been many years in the business, and although I have aided in bringing a large number of criminals to justice, there have been several instances in which my better judgment has been blinded and my most elaborate traps eluded by the rascals of whom I was in search. It is a terrible aggravation to a detective to find his labor thus set at naught, but of all my failures I have never had one that so filled me with chagrin and mortification as one that I once made in New York. It made me appear the more ridiculous because the case was a very simple one, and the chief actor in it was a woman. To be taken in by a male sharper is bad enough, but to have yourself and your profession laughed at by a woman, is too much for a detective, proud of his sagacity, to bear with equanimity. I don't often care to speak of it, but as I am not likely to be caught in a similar trap again, I don't mind telling you the story in confidence.

The present fashionable generation may not remember the firm of Stephens & Martley, jewelers, who formerly transacted a large business on Broadway, not far from Duane Street. Their store was entered one day by a very beautiful and richly dressed lady, who had left her carriage waiting at the door, and who asked to be shown some diamond crosses. The salesman exhibited a tray containing a large number of very valuable trinkets of that description, studded with gems of exceeding richness and purity. After considerable hesitation, she finally chose one and inquired the price.

"It is worth thirteen hundred dollars," replied the salesman.

"I will take it," said the lady. "Be good enough to do it up nicely."

"Shall we send it?" asked the salesman, politely.

"No, thank you. I will take it with me."

She tendered in payment two crisp new bills, one of a thousand dollars and one of five hundred. The salesman took them to the cashier, who examined them to see that they were genuine, and opened his drawer to return the necessary change. To his annoyance, he found himself short of small bills, and rather than pay out all his change, he sent the two bills back to the customer to ask if she had not the exact amount. The lady examined her portemonnaie, but was unable to find anything but three bills of five hundred each. These would not help the matter, and the cashier paid out his change with reluctance, dashed the two new bills into his drawer, and slammed it to in no very good humor. The lady took the diamonds, swept gracefully out of the store, entered her carriage and was driven rapidly away. In fifteen minutes afterward the cashier, having occasion to open his drawer, was attracted by a peculiar line on the thousand dollar note. He examined it closely, and at once pronounced both bills to be counterfeit. The lady had cleverly changed the notes when they had been returned to her.

It was then too late to trace the fair swindler. I was sent for by the firm, but an inquiry into the facts of the case did not permit me to offer any strong hope of recovering the diamonds or the two hundred dollars. The salesman was sure that he would know the face again, and he remembered that the lady was dressed in blue silk with a lace shawl. He could recollect nothing more, except that he thought the carriage had wheels with gilded hubs and spokes. This was slight material, but I made the necessary notes in my memorandum book, and left the store.

For several days after that I kept a sharp lookout in the streets for a carriage with gold wheels. I visited all the livery stables and hackney coach stands that I could think of,
but my search was in vain. At last, passing one day through Bleecker Street, I met a carriage driving rapidly toward Broadway. Its description answered very well to that which Stephens & Martley's salesman had given me, but a glance inside showed me that it was empty. I stopped it, however, and cross-questioned the driver. The carriage was a public one, and the driver remembered taking a lady in blue silk, four or five days previously, to Stephens & Martley's. So far, I was on the right track, but the trail was soon lost again. In answer to my questioning the man said that the lady had taken his carriage at Union Square, where it was then standing, and after visiting the jewelry store, had been driven to a dry goods store on Chatham Square, where she dismissed him. He did not notice whether she entered the store or not, and he had never seen her since.

I took the man's number, and looked well at his carriage and horses. Having mentally photographed his establishment, I gave him a quarter and let him go. There was nothing more to be done for the present except to telegraph a general description of the woman and the diamond cross, to the principal cities of the country, and to keep an eye on the outward bound steamers for Europe and elsewhere. This I managed to do without much difficulty while attending to other business. More important cases soon engrossed my attention, and the affair of the cross gradually fell into the background, when, after the lapse of several months, I received a telegram from a detective In Boston, stating that a noted gambler called "Jumping Johnny," who had twice been in State Prison for counterfeiting, had been seen in that city lately in suspiciously intimate relations with a woman residing in Columbus Avenue, who answered in some respects to the description of our heroine. The house in Columbus Avenue and the appearance of the woman were altogether too respectable for such close connection with Jumping Johnny, without mischief being in the wind.

I had not the pleasure of Jumping Johnny's acquaintance, but I started that same night for Boston to look at the woman, taking Stephens & Martley's salesman with me to identify her. I procured a couple of officers from the Boston force and proceeded to the house in Columbus Avenue. It was a large handsome structure of brown stone, and I noticed that the curtains to all except the lower story were closely drawn. I suspected from this that the upper rooms were all unfurnished, and that the lower and basement floors only were occupied by the inmates, who had doubtless their own reasons for choosing an innocent-looking dwelling in a fashionable quarter, for carrying on a business that might not bear the scrutiny it would be subjected to in a more public locality. But this, of course, was all guess-work.

I posted an officer on the curbstone before the house, and another in the rear alley, with instructions to keep his eye on the back gate and the roof.
"I don't want Jumping Johnny," I explained to these sentinels. "I am after the wench who stole our diamonds. If you see a woman come out, detain her."

I did not care to trouble Jumping Johnny because, firstly, I had no evidence whatever that he was implicated in the diamond swindle, and secondly because I was employed to recover Stephens & Marley's property, and to find the party who stole it, and it was not my business to ferret out counterfeiters. I reserved that part of the affair for a separate job.

The name on the doorplate was simply "D'Orsay." I rang the bell, and after some delay, during which I detected a pair of eyes scrutinizing us from behind the basement blinds, the door was partly opened by a very angular servant with a shock of fiery red hair, who placed her anatomy in the aperture and demanded our business.

"I would like to see Madame D'Orsay, if you please. Is she at home?"

"I don't know."

"Be good enough to find out, if you please. Our business is very important."

"What is it?"

I placed my finger on my lips mysteriously.

"It wouldn't do to tell it here in the street," I said. "I saw a cop on the sidewalk out here!'

The girl looked wise and returned my wink; "O! you belong to *them*, do ye?" she observed. "Well, walk in.''

She ushered us into a large parlor, handsomely furnished, and left us alone. In a few moments, we saw through the open door an elegantly dressed lady descending the stairs.

"By heavens!" exclaimed the salesman, starting. "That's the woman who bought the cross."

I was on the right tack then, at last. She entered the room with a queenly step and stood still, looking at us inquiringly. She was certainly the most beautiful woman I ever saw, before or since. She evidently had no remembrance of my companion, or if she did, she concealed her recognition of him admirably.

"This gentleman," I said, rising and pointing to my companion, "is from the firm of Stephens & Martley, of New York."

She turned very pale and grasped the back of a chair quickly for support.

“I, madam,” I continued, “am an officer of the detective police. We have called in relation to a certain diamond cross purchased by you from Stephens & Marley several months ago, which was paid for in counterfeit notes.”

She sank into a chair, pale as death, and trembling in every limb.

“What is the penalty?” she asked.

“We will talk of that afterwards,” I said. “Is the cross still in your possession?”

She brightened up at that, and looked at me eagerly.

“It is,” she said. “Will you let me go if I return the cross and the money? O sir, please let me go. You only want the property back, surely. I will pay that and more too, if you will not take me away.”

It was hard to resist this sort of talk. She sat there wringing her hands, and with her beautiful eyes suffused with tears—a picture to melt a heart of stone.

“You don’t know what it is,” she said, “to be forced to lead a life like mine. You don’t know what it is to be compelled to it by one who owns your body and soul, as mine is owned. God know I would be better if I could.”

“Is Jumping Johnny your husband?”

She looked around her a little fearfully, and answered. “No.”

“Our object,” I said, “is principally to recover our property, but I don’t purpose to make any promises beforehand. Return the cross and the two hundred dollars, and we will consider your case afterward.”

She arose to leave the room, and for the first time it struck me how short she was, even for a woman. Her proud queenly carriage had something to do, perhaps, with my first impression, for I had taken her for a tall woman. I now saw that she was of quite *petite* figure, hardly larger than a girl of twelve.

She passed into a room immediately back of the parlor, and closed the door. I told my companion to step into the hall and keep his eye on the other door, while I remained in the parlor. I had no fear of the bird’s escape, for I had a pretty accurate mental plan of the house in my head, and I knew she could not leave it without being seen by my men outside. She was absent a very long time, during which I heard an animated discussion going on in the adjoining room, in which the shrill tones of a child’s voice could be plainly distinguished. The words, however, were unintelligible.

I had become thoroughly tired of waiting, and was on the point of making a disturbance, when the door opened and a hideously deformed boy appeared, limping on a crutch. He was

humpbacked, and a dreadful scrofulous mark disfigured one half of his ugly face. As he opened and closed the door, I caught a glimpse of Madame D'Orsay seated in an armchair, with a lace handkerchief to her eyes, evidently weeping.

"Mother told me to give this to you," said the dwarf, in the same shrill cracked voice which I had lately overheard. "She will be out herself in a moment. You won't arrest her, will you, sir?"

"I don't know," I answered shortly, taking the diamond cross and putting it in my pocket. "Where are the two hundred dollars?"

"I'm going out to get this changed," said the boy, holding up a five hundred dollar bill. "If you will wait a minute, I will bring back the money."

I let him go, and he limped out the front door and down the street, dragging his club foot painfully after him. I was glad to have the hideous little monster out of my sight.

I waited some fifteen or twenty minutes after that, but neither Madam D'Orsay nor the boy put in an appearance. At last my patience became exhausted, and I tried the door leading into the inner room. It opened readily, but there was no one in the apartment except madame herself, who still sat in the armchair before the dressing-table, with her face buried in her handkerchief.

"Come, come," I said, "this wont do. You've had time enough to cry in. Put on your things and follow me. I've some friends outside who are waiting for you."

A loud coarse laugh greeted this speech, as I tapped the woman gently on the shoulder. The handkerchief fell, and disclosed the features of the bony servant girl who had admitted us to the house. Her lovely person was dressed in her mistress's clothes, and her fiery shock of hair was concealed by a blonde wig, the exact counterpart of the madam's own hair, which was a wig itself, for all I know.

"Ye thought it was the lady of the house, did ye?" exclaimed this interesting female, jumping up. "Well, ye see it isn't. Thanks to your politeness in waiting so long, the madam has got well out of your reach by this time, if her crutch and that beautiful club foot don't interfere with her speed."

"Ten thousand furies!" exclaimed I, seizing her roughly by the arm and shaking her, "do you mean to say—"

"Yes I do," she replied, with a broad grin. "Ye couldn't bring yourself to believe that her pretty ladyship could make herself so ugly, could ye? Mister Policeman, you're nicely sold."

I dropped her arm, and seizing the salesman as I ran through the hall, dragged him out of the house.

"The bird has escaped us," I said, as soon as we reached the sidewalk and I could recover my breath. "Madame D'Orsay has given us the slip, but we have recovered the cross at all events."

I took the jewel from my pocket, and handed it to him. He took it, and turned it over and over in the sunlight.

“It’s a beautiful thing,” I remarked, looking over his shoulder.

“Yes,” he said. “It *is* a beautiful thing.”

“Those diamonds are of unusual brilliancy,” I ventured again; as he continued to examine it.

“Yes,” he replied—” of unusual brilliancy—*for paste*! In fact they are the best imitation I ever saw.”

“Isn’t that your cross?” I exclaimed, in tones of thunder.

“The setting is ours,” he said. “The diamonds are probably of Jumping Johnny’s own manufacture.”

It could not be helped. The clever woman had walked off under my very nose, with her stealings in her pocket. We went back to New York that night, and I gave up all further attempts to trace her. From information that I afterwards received from Jumping Johnny, I suspected that the couple had gone to Europe. Perhaps Madame D’Orsay has ere this found her match among my brother detectives across the water.

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