

How I Was Deceived

It was just eleven o'clock, and I was standing at the foot of the stairs, with my lamp light in my hand, giving some final directions about breakfast to my servant, Rosy, who was slowly ascending on her way to bed, and was immediately followed by a peal at the bell.

Rosy set her lamp on the stairs, and came down again, curious as well as astonished at the late summons.

"This is Mrs. Darley's?" a musical female voice asked in quick accents, as the door opened; and on receiving a reply in the affirmative, the owner of said voice stepped into the hall and addressed herself to me.

"Mrs. Darley, I presume?"

She bowed as with a graceful gesture she swept back a heavy black crepe veil that partially shrouded her tall, queenly form.

"I am Miss Fahntassie," she continued, after my affirmative reply. "On my way to this place I noticed your advertisement in a morning paper; and knowing the locality to be good I drove immediately here from the station. You have a pleasant room, I presume?"

"Yes, very pleasant; a second story front room, opening on a large balcony by a bay window. But—"

I never finished the sentence. I was about to add that it was contrary to my custom to receive total strangers. But Miss Fahntassie looked at me, and the declaration died on my lips. How did she look? To save my life I could not say, but, nevertheless, it was a look that ruled me.

So Miss Fahntassie slept in my best room that night, and sat down to my breakfast table in the morning. At the latter she proved herself not only a woman of remarkable grace and beauty, but great intellectual culture; and within twenty minutes she had completely charmed every one at the table.

In the midst of this pleasant state of affairs, Rosy whispered in my ear that a gentleman wished to see me without delay. I excused myself and went at once to the parlor. Immediately on my appearance the gentleman said, in a quick and excited tone—

"I beg your pardon, madam, but allow me to enquire whether you have received any strange boarders within the last twelve hours? I am a detective."

"A detective?" I echoed aghast, adding hastily, "I have no one under my roof to whom you could lay claim. I certainly did receive a strange lady last night, but she is highly cultivated, and—"

"Beg your pardon," he interrupted, hastily, "what's that lady's appearance? Is she tall?"

“Yes, she is tall, and her appearance highly prepossessing.”

“What’s the color of her dress? But, confound it, there’s no use asking that; she has as many dresses and as many wigs and complexions as an actress.”

And the detective wiped the perspiration from his frowning brow in annoyed perplexity.

“I must see this lady,” he said, firmly. “I may be on the wrong track, but an apology will cover all that.”

“Certainly,” I replied; “and in order to avoid anything like a scene I will at once tell her a gentleman wants to see her. But what is the lady’s offense, supposing this be the one you desire to secure, which I do not for a moment believe.”

“Robbery of her husband, and reckless squandering of his property. She’s a regular adventuress, and he wants her.”

“Oh, then, this lady is not the one you are in search of. Her name is Miss Fahntassie.”

The detective laughed.

“She has scores of names, madame.”

Notwithstanding this piece of information I returned to the breakfast room and whispered in Miss Fahntassie’s ear quite unconcerned as to results. Two vivid crimson spots glowed at once on her cheeks, but aside from that she displayed no emotions.

“You must excuse my accompanying,” I said, as we entered the hall together. “I promised the gentleman I would do so, and also remain during your interview.”

She thanked me as if I was conferring a favor upon her, and we entered the parlor together. The detective stood with his eyes fixed upon the door.

“Hah!” he exclaimed, laying his hand on Miss Fahntassie’s arm. “So we have met again, Mrs. Barbarliere. You shall not escape me this time. You will therefore send for your hat and accompany me at once.”

Miss Fahntassie stood quite composed, the crimson spots a little deeper, perhaps, but that was all. Looking down at her full morning negligee, she said, in her rich voice—

“Of course, you do not propose to take me into the street in such a guise as this?”

“Oh, it can’t be possible!” I cried.—“You must be mistaken, sir!”

“Unfortunately I am not,” replied the officer.

“Oh, no; he is not mistaken, Mrs. Darley,” she coolly remarked. “But you know I can’t go into the street in this,” pointing to her dress.

“She is correct,” I said to the detective. “You must allow her to put on a walking dress. I will attend her to her room and remain with her until she is ready to return to you.”

The detective yielded a reluctant consent and I attended her to her room. I locked the door, took the key out, and then turned my back to her while she disrobed.

I once made some comment calculated to draw her out, but she only said, quietly, “It’s life, Mrs. Darley, it’s the way the world goes.”

After she had resumed the dress worn the previous night she packed the hand satchel which comprised her luggage. But as she was about to place her bonnet on her head she sank into an easy chair, her face convulsed with pain, and her body bent nearly double.

“What is the matter?” I cried in alarm, fearing that she had taken poison.

“Cramp!” she gasped. “Cramp; I am subject to it. I shall die! I shall die!”

“Oh, tell me what I can do,” I cried, my heart torn at the sight of her agony.

“Hot whiskey and flannels,” she gasped.

I started up, and, remembering my office, cried frantically, “But how shall I leave you after my promise?”

“Oh, madame,” she wailed rather than said, “do you think I could escape in such anguish as this? But to ensure my safety, please lock the door.”

“So I can!” I cried, and in a minute’s time I was on my way to the kitchen.

I hurried, feeling that life and death were at stake, but the water would not boil. At last, all was ready, and I hurried up to my patient. I unlocked the door and turned the knob, I dropped my load—the door was bolted! Fearing everything, I called gently, and then ran frantically down to the detective.

He heard my story and dashed angrily up the stairs. One blow of his shoulder and the door flew open. One glance told the story. A heavy rope was fastened to the bedstead, and it dangled outside the bay window. With an expletive more forcible than polite, the detective leaned out of the window and looked into the garden. Then turning to me he said—

“How was she dressed? You said she was ready.”

“In a suit of deep mourning,” I answered.

He waited to hear no more but dashed down stairs again and presently the front door banged heavily after him.—But if he depended on her mourning suit he never found her, for that same afternoon I found it thrust into a dark corner of the closet—hat and all were there. About fifteen months later I received the following missive:

“MRS. DARLEY.—

Dear Madame:—In view of the little trick I played upon you, I feel that I owe you something. You will, therefore, please accept the enclosed five pounds, with my best wishes.

“My husband did me the kindness to make me a widow quite unexpectedly to us both, and this being the case I received my thirds, and am quite a wealthy woman.

“I sustained no damage under your bay window, but made my way to the street as a red-headed, freckled-faced servant-girl; and, better than that, I met our mutual friend, and drawled a deal of false intelligence into his attentive ear concerning a certain lady in deep mourning of whom he told me he was in request. I enjoyed that. Ah, me! I sigh whenever I remember that I’m a woman. Nature meant me for a man.

Respectfully,

MISS FAHNTASSIE.”

Published in

- *Mexico* [NY] *Independent*, February 6, 1878
- *Newport Daily News* [RI], February 16, 1878