

Her Clay Idol

A New York Detective's Story

"I can tell you a strange story," said a veteran detective to a Sun reporter. "They say that truth is stranger than fiction, and this story would make a good novel. I've never heard it told before, and the characters are still alive, so I won't mention names. To them it would recall a sad experience.

"It was—let me see—I'm getting old—years ago. I was sent up by the captain of the squad to cover the academy. There was some big singer there then and the house was packed, and pickpockets 'worked' the crowds for all they were worth. When the people came out I had my eyes wide open, and who should I see but one of the cleverest pickpockets in the country—a handsome, gentlemanly fellow of good address—in the company of a lady covered in diamonds and silks. I guess I opened my eyes then, and I looked closely at the woman as she passed under the street light to get into her carriage. It was a face I can't forget—one of those sweet, pure faces that become impressed upon your memory and will haunt you for years; such as a face a painter would take for a model. I stared hard when my old friend, whom I arrested half a dozen times, jumped in and the carriage whirled off. Quickly I revolved matters over in my mind and came to a quick conclusion. That was the face of a pure woman or else I was a fool. I would be a rascal not to try to save her from such a villain as I knew my old friend to be. I jumped into a cab. 'Follow that carriage,' I said to the driver, and the man, who knew me, did so. We drove up town, through to Madison avenue, where the carriage stopped in front of a substantial old mansion. The young lady entered the house, and her escort soon after left her and drove away. The next day I made inquiries and learned that the occupant of the house was a South Street merchant, and that the young lady was his daughter. I called on him, and he looked askance when I told him who I was.

"Do you know that gentleman who took your daughter to the opera last night?" I asked.

"Why do you ask?" he said, in a hurtful tone, as if I had insulted him.

"I told him why, but he only smiled and said:

"You are mistaken, sir; that young man is a member of the firm of so and so, a promising young firm from Cincinnati."

"If he is I am an idiot," I answered. "Come with me and I'll satisfy you."

"My earnestness at last resulted in his reluctantly calling a cab and going to headquarters with me. I showed him No.—well, never mind, in the Rogue's Gallery. The old man staggered back and said: 'It can't be him; but what a resemblance.' At last when I told him who the man was, and that he had served two terms in State prison, the old merchant broke down, and all he could say was 'my poor daughter.'"

“Then he told me he had been imposed upon. The fellow had evidently seen his daughter on the street and been struck with her beauty. He contrived to have business with her father, showed him letters to prove his identity and took the old man in so completely that he invited him to dinner where he met his daughter and was introduced. Courtship followed, and my glib-tongued friend made an impression—the girl fell dead in love with him, and at last the old man was won over and gave his consent to their marriage.

“The old father went home that night sad and heavy-hearted to break the news to his daughter. An hour afterward a carriage rattled up outside the station-house, and in came the girl and her father.

“‘Show me the picture,’ she said. I opened the gallery. The next instant she fell back as if dead in a deep swoon. She was taken home and the following day a note arrived asking me to call at the house. I responded and was told that the girl could not believe that her lover was a thief, and that I had been sent for to confront him that night. The girl was sitting in the parlor, deathly pale, when the fellow entered with a big bouquet of flowers. He came forward toward her, when I stepped out of the back room and said:

“‘How do you do, Mr. —, alias So-and-so, alias SO-and-so?’ Have you ever seen a man shot? That man acted like one who had just received a bullet. Not a word was said to him, and it was a scene I shall long remember. He hung his head, and the old father pointed toward the door.

“‘Go,’ I whispered; ‘go, or go with me; you know for what?’ He went out without a syllable, except a broken ‘good-by’ to the girl, who looked scornfully at him, and then, when the door shut, she fell back in a hysterical fit. She was sick for months, and her father took her to Europe, where she recovered her health, and is now living in this city a happy mother and wife. She married a handsome young business man.”

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