

*The Face in the Glass*  
by Caroline Conrad

The morning express from New York arrived at Chicago at eight o'clock, and brought its usual medley of passengers, among them one very strange one. A dead woman was found in one of the sleeping-cars—a young and exceedingly lovely girl, with hair like silk and features exquisitely perfect and fair.

She lay on the lower berth of a section as if asleep; only when they turned her and looked in her face, the large, black eyes were wide and staring with a look of agony and horror in them that even death had not been able to remove.

The upper berth, did not seem to be occupied, and there was nothing about her to indicate that she had died by violence, except that look in her fixed eyes and a slight distortion of her lovely features.

Upon one of the long, silky curls which lay across her throat, was a small piece of soft, slightly adhesive wax, which, finding it impossible to remove otherwise, the curl containing it was severed, and laid aside for future examination.

It was learned upon inquiry that she had come upon the train at Detroit, in the night, and alone.

The section had been engaged for her beforehand, by a woman of middle age seemingly, though none of the officials at the ticket-office could give more than a general description of her, she having worn a veil, and only partially lifted it at any time. Nothing was discovered to really excite suspicion of unfairness, though an uncomfortable air of mystery hung about the affair.

The exceeding beauty of the dead girl, the richness of her clothing, the costly jewels in her ears and upon her hands, the absence of any baggage, even a traveling-bag, the fact that an elegant portemonnaie containing notes to a considerable amount was found in the pocket of her dress, but no papers or address of any sort, no name—these circumstances were discussed and commented upon, until curiosity grew weary.

At the inquest the jury gave in their verdict in accordance with the report of the doctors—"Died of congestion of the lungs." Many came to look upon the beautiful dead face, drawn by the noise the papers made about the affair; and she was at last recognized by friends from Detroit, whom she had lately been visiting, as a Miss Tracey, from California. But they could give no explanation of the mysterious circumstances attending and preceding her death. She had left them without telling them where she was going—had gone out that afternoon ostensibly to call upon an acquaintance, and had not returned. That was all they could tell.

The body was sent to her father in San Francisco, and the matter dropped. But there was a general feeling that a mystery remained back of all; it might be a black and terrible one.

I was a young girl of seventeen at this time, and chanced to be on the same train, and the very car, with the dead girl, though I did not know it till long afterward.

It happened in this way:

I was visiting a school friend, and was summoned home suddenly by telegraph to attend the wedding of a sister, whose betrothed, being called abroad unexpectedly, wished to take his bride with him. Hence the sudden marriage. I got aboard the train at a town about six hours' ride from Chicago, at three o'clock in the morning; and not feeling inclined to sleep, took a seat in the small compartment of a palace-car, called the drawing-room. I sat with my back to the main portion of the car, and so close to the door on the side by which passengers entered, that so no one would be likely to know I was there, except by actually looking inside.

The lights were turned low, but sufficient remained to enable me to see in the mirrors about me most of the interior of the car outside of my own retreat. There was not much to see, the berths being mostly all closed. But for that very reason, perhaps, I noticed a hand which was holding slightly apart the draperies of a section half way down the car. The hand glittered with several evidently costly stones upon the small fingers, and that was enough of itself to attract my attention.

When a face, the most beautiful I had ever seen in my life, presently followed the hand, looking cautiously out, and quickly retreating, my interest increased; the face was so white, the large eyes so anxious.

Her anxiety, though seen but for a moment, infected me. I could not help wondering what she was looking for, and I watched her berth constantly (in the mirror) to see if she would look out again. She did repeatedly.

At last I saw her face brighten into an ecstasy of joy, and at the same moment the figure of a man slipped swiftly along the aisle, and stopped beside her an instant. I could not see his face. He climbed instantly to the upper berth, without even removing the cap which he wore instead of a hat, close down over his forehead.

I could not see his face then, but after a time, when the cars stopped about twenty miles from Chicago, I saw the same man, with his cap still on, coming back along the aisle.

I had one glimpse of his face in the mirror—a brief one—but in that instant he lifted his eyes, and in the glass our eyes met. He stood staring a moment, and then, with a glance around him of savage bewilderment, dashed by and disappeared.

I cannot describe the creeping, icy thrill which that one look, encountered only in a glass, sent through me.

The face, too, haunted me, more by its expression than its features—a handsome, wicked, sneering face, that fascinated and repelled at the same moment—a face whose ghostly, livid whiteness it sickened me to remember, whose terrible eyes in that one flash of meeting had seemed to look abject fear and savage threatening at once.

I cowered down in my seat, and covered my face with my shawl, afraid to look lest I should meet that awful glance again, and finally fell asleep, not waking till we were entering Chicago.

I had no baggage—I had left my trunk to be sent in the next train—and I got off at Twenty-second street.

As I left the car, I remembered noticing that one section in the middle of the car remained undisturbed and closely curtained still. The conductor had addressed the occupant several times, but when she did not answer, supposed her still to be sleeping, and did not discover that it was the sleep of death until after the arrival of the train at the depot.

In consequence perhaps of my having left the car at Twenty-second street, I was not remembered, or called as a witness at the inquest, and as my sister was married at twelve o'clock that day, and I went away with her to New York and remained there some weeks after she had sailed with her husband, I did not happen to hear of the finding of that dead girl in a sleeping-car, in a long time.

A year passed. My sister was still abroad. I was having a good time in society, of which I was extremely fond.

I had lately formed the acquaintance of a gentleman who brought a letter of introduction from my sister. He was an Englishman, but had lived much in Paris, and had met my sister there, and had been able to extend her and her husband some courtesies, which she in her letter asked me to return as far as lay in my power.

I was obliged, therefore, to be polite to the gentleman, though I had taken a violent dislike to him. I could not account to myself for my aversion, but it was insurmountable.

He was very handsome and distinguished looking, but I never met him suddenly without a start, and a chilly shrinking as if I had met him somewhere before, under painful and terrifying circumstances. He seemed very rich, and I am ashamed to say that, in spite of my dislike, when he asked me to marry him I hesitated about refusing him, because I did not like to lose the *éclat* of being attended by him—an attendance which I knew the girls generally envied me. I did not give him a decided answer.

About this time, Ralph Winston came home from California. Ralph and I had been children together, and very easily grew the best of friends now. The Englishman chanced to be in New York when Ralph first came. The two met at our house and in my presence, and it was evident at sight that this was not the first time they had met; and that they entertained a mutual dislike for each other, though both acknowledged the introduction like strangers.

“Have you ever met Mr. Byers before?” I asked Ralph, at the first opportunity.

“Yes.”

“And don't you like him?”

Ralph shook his head emphatically.

“Why not?”

“Do you know how he got his money?”

“No.”

“Well, I’ll tell you. One of the prettiest girls in San Francisco fell in love with his handsome face. She was a rich heiress, and as good and true a girl as she knew how to be. Her father hated Byers, and would never consent to her marrying him. She would not marry him without her father’s consent. But just as soon as she came of legal age to do so, she made her will, and gave all her money to Byers, at her death. She was visiting in Detroit afterwards, and went away without telling her friends there where she was going, or even taking a trunk with her. The next they heard of her was she was found dead in a sleeping-car at Chicago.”

Here Ralph repeated to me those particulars of the tragedy which I recounted at the beginning of this recital.

“Byers of course got all the money.” Ralph went on, “and took it so greedily and unscrupulously that everybody who knew the circumstances was disgusted. He was in Europe at the time of her death, and came posting to California after the money as soon as he heard of it; and when he had got it, went posting back again. Everybody in San Francisco despised him.”

Ralph’s story affected me very strangely.

“Was Byers suspected of knowing anything about her death?” I asked.

“There was some mystery about it. But the inquest had decided that she died a natural death, and Byers was abroad at the time, so they could not connect him with it. But I have always suspected, and so have many, that he knew more than he was willing to tell.”

Ralph and I were sitting at one extremity of the two parlors. A large mirror was near us, and exactly opposite this mirror in the other parlor was another.

As Ralph said these words, I looked round the rooms involuntarily in search of Mr. Byers.

He was nowhere to be seen, but glancing accidentally in the glass near me, as I turned to address Ralph again, my words froze on my lips. For there, staring at me from the mirror, was the very face whose reflection had scared me so in the drawing-room of the sleeping-car a year before. The very same—handsome, wicked, sneering—in the eyes the same expression of mingled fear and threatening, on the face the same livid and horrible whiteness, and as our eyes met in the mirror he knew me again, as I knew him.

I could not look away. I thought I beheld a vision. It was only by a supreme effort that I kept my senses, so strongly did the old horror and terror of that face, which had held me once, hold me again now.

“Ralph,” I said in a low voice, “look where I am looking, and tell me if you see anything.”

Ralph obeyed.

“I see Cecil Byers glowering at us like a demon,” he said. “He hates me for loving you, I suppose; and let him, only don’t you marry him, Lou. I could bear to lose you myself better than to see you the wife of that devil.”

Cecil Byers! Odd as it may seem, I had not recognized that awful face in the glass as his, till Ralph named him. I put my hand in Ralph’s arm.

“Take me away out of this room, quick,” I said. “I never want to meet Cecil Byers again. I am sure I shall scream or faint, or do something dreadful if I do.”

Ralph got me out of the room by the nearest door, one which led out upon the terrace, and then I quietly fainted away, a thing which I never did before or since. At the moment I recognized the face in the glass as the face of Cecil Byers, that moment the whole circumstances of the strange story Ralph had just told me, seemed to rise before me like monsters. I was back in the drawing-room of the sleeping-car again, I was watching in the mirror opposite me that section half way down the car from which I beheld the palest and loveliest of faces look with anxious eyes. I was recalling the figure of the man I had seen go gliding toward her, and I remembered now, though it had scarcely occurred to me at the time, and never been recalled since, that as I left the car at Twenty-second street, that very section remained shut in by its draping curtains, just as it had all night. Suddenly the awful conviction burst in upon me that Cecil Byers was a murderer, and that I had almost seen him do the deed.

Was it any wonder I fainted? The next day I went with my father before a magistrate and told my story. I *had* to do it. The angel face of that poor murdered girl would have haunted me till I did, if I had not, for I believe she had been murdered. My story seemed very little when it was told, but when it was proved that I was on the car that very night, or rather morning, on which the dead girl was found, and when I swore positively that it was Cecil Byers I saw go to her berth and come away from it, the matter began to look worthy of investigation.

It was found that Byers had been seen both in Chicago and Detroit before and after that poor girl’s death.

He must have scented danger, for he had left Chicago, they found, when they went to arrest him for the murder. They followed him, however, and captured him in New York. He was very bold and defiant at first, but ultimately confessed the cruel deed.

He had met the unfortunate girl out walking, and had persuaded her at last to consent to a secret marriage. She had always been firm enough in her refusal before, but now she had not seen him

in a long time and he was very eloquent, and she did love him and she was of age. Besides, he promised never to claim her as long as her father lived, unless by her consent; so she yielded. They went on the cars separately, he joining her afterward.

He watched from the upper berth till she fell asleep, and then creeping down, smothered her by holding a plaster of thick wax over her mouth and nostrils. No wonder her eyes wore such a look of agony and horror even in death. When Byers was asked why he killed her, he answered almost coolly:

“I needed the money, and I knew it might be a long time before I got the handling of it if she lived.”

“But when she was your wife you could have claimed it.”

“Ah, that was just it. She could not be my wife, because I was already married. It was my wife who engaged the section in the sleeping-car for her.”

“Where is your wife now?”

“Dead,” was the sullen answer, “as she deserved to be.”

He deserved to be hung, but he was not. He sickened with some kind of fever in the prison, and died there, without ever having shown much signs of repentance. Such natures as his are incapable of true repentance, I believe.

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