

Our Murderer;
Or
The Sea Gives Up Its Dead
by Barbara Thorne

It is often asserted by the opponents of spiritualism that the occult science has never been of any practical use in the detection of crime. One case that came under my own observation, however, controverts this statement. I have a morbid habit of imagining the crimes that certain persons of my acquaintance might commit, if given the temptation and opportunity. No doubt this mental peculiarity of mind is due to my occupation, that of a detective.

I had been sent to Paris upon business connected with a bank robbery, and having no charge upon my return voyage was at liberty to employ my leisure time in studying my fellow-passengers.

I was especially fascinated by a young husband and wife, of whom I could not learn much except that they were New-Yorkers and bore the name of Tracy.

Though I never exchanged a dozen words with the lady, yet she won my deepest sympathy, from a certain wistful expression of her beautiful eyes—a look which I imagine often characterizes a neglected wife.

The gentleman was always affable, and a general favorite; still, I could not rid myself of the conviction that he would help his gentle, delicate wife out of the world if he had any powerful incentive to the crime.

European voyages were rather longer in those days than they are now. Ours was at first a prosperous one. The good ship sped on, through bright days and starry nights, until we were nearing New York; then a fierce storm drove us out of our course, and for a week most of our passengers were too sick to care whether we ever reached our destination or not. Then the gale abated, and we resumed our occupations.

Mr. and Mrs. Tracy did not appear, however, and I was shocked and startled to learn that the lady had died during the storm, supposedly from heart disease, aggravated by sea sickness, and her body had been consigned to the watery deep. The funeral had been hurried, in compliance with the demands of superstitious sailors, who in some way learned of Mrs. Tracy's death, and insisted that a corpse on board would sink the ship.

Of course the explanation of the lady's sudden death seemed reasonable enough to everybody except myself. Grave suspicions haunted me that the poor, sad-faced little wife had been foully murdered, without a hand having been raised either to help or avenge her.

But I kept my own counsel, for if a crime had been committed all evidences of it had been swallowed up by the sea, and bringing the guilt home would be a hopeless undertaking. So I tried to dismiss the affair from my mind: but at night, in my state room, a pair of soft, dark eyes

seemed to haunt me, pleading for help. I had no opportunity to see the widower, for he remained constantly alone in his state-room, evidently in too deep affliction to come among us.

“We arrived in New York two weeks behind time, and I found a great deal of business waiting for me at the Bureau. My attention was occupied by a hundred new cases, still I was often haunted by Mrs. Tracy’s sad eyes, and the old suspicions would arise as to the causes that led to her mysterious death at sea.

This was a case in which I had mentally volunteered my services, yet so far could see “no thoroughfare” to the end desired. And now, strangely enough, I frequently encountered Mr. Tracy, the widower, in my wanderings, and I occasionally devoted some of my leisure time to shadowing him, so that I became pretty well acquainted with his mode of life, which was not at all that of a sorrow-stricken man; it was, in fact, a decidedly gay career in which he was indulging.

Time rolled on, until it was nearly a year since my return from Europe, and with all my experience not a ghost of a plan for bringing the gay widower to justice had one presented itself to my mind. In this emergency I one evening confided the story to my sister Rose, whose quick intuition had often thrown light upon some obscure point in cases I was studying.

She was interested at once, and after a little reflection said:

“If you will contrive some way to bring that man here a few times in a social way, I think I will find out some plan to force a full confession from him.”

I smiled a little doubtfully at this, as I answered: “I hope you will, sister mine, yet remember, we have not a particle of evidence against him. Even the ship’s surgeon was ill at the time of Mrs. Tracy’s death and unable to attend her.”

“Yes, I know all that,” answered Rose, “but you bring him here and I think we will force a full confession from him before many weeks roll by.”

The result of this conversation was that Mr. Tracy soon became quite a frequent guest at our little home, yet nothing of any interest occurred. He was genial, polite, and apparently very frank, without a care upon his mind.

I confess that I almost grew to like the man, and began to be ashamed of my suspicions. I remarked something like this to my sister one day, and then begged her to tell me what was her plan to extort a confession. She only shook her pretty head to all my pleadings, but refused to join me in my new feelings of regard for Mr. Tracy.

A few weeks later I was deputed to invite “Our Murderer,” as Rose and I called him, to an evening entertainment at our house. There was to be music and tableaux. My part of the performance, Rose said, was merely to sit next to Mr. Tracy in the audience and prevent him from leaving the house in any event, for, as Rose significantly observed, “Something might happen that would frighten him.”

Upon the evening of the entertainment the company assembled at about 9 o'clock, Mr. Tracy and myself being assigned seats in the rear of the others. The tableaux, interspersed with music, went on successfully for an hour, then the programme changed and the stage manager made this announcement:

“Ladies and gentlemen, we are favored to-night by having in our midst the great materializing medium, Dr. Slayton, recently from London, where he suffered considerable persecution for the sake of his supernatural powers. He has kindly consented to give us a slight exhibition of his remarkable ability to communicate with the unseen world. He promises, however, not to frighten anybody who has not a guilty conscience.”

This speech was greeted with laughter and applause, and the introduction of Dr. Slayton was generally believed to be a capital joke, part of the amusement of the evening. But the veritable Doctor soon appeared upon the stage, to the surprise of my companion and myself, who were familiar with his appearance, he having been one of our fellow-voyagers upon the fateful journey from Europe.

Nothing very terrifying occurred. Some familiar airs were played by unseen agencies, and bouquets of natural flowers were bestowed upon some of the ladies—flowers that came from nowhere, apparently.

Presently Mr. Tracy and myself were requested by a messenger to repair to the library. We crossed the hall and entered the room, which was illuminated by the silvery light of the full moon that shone through the long windows.

We were not alone. The phantom like figure of a woman stood by a window, apparently gazing out into the radiant night. She slowly turned at our approach, and we stood face to face with the ghost of the murdered wife. For a time I could never tell how long dead silence reigned. Then these words were pronounced in a chilling tone that seemed like an echo from the tomb:

“The sea gives up its dead!”

My companion sank upon his knees in pitiful, abject terror. “Oh, Genevieve, forgive, forgive me!” he cried. “My God, I have suffered—how I have suffered! Pity and forgive me!”

The attitude and the cry of unmistakable anguish were, to my mind, sufficient evidence of Tracy's guilt.

While we were both completely dazed, the apparition vanished. When the villain had somewhat recovered, and become aware of all that he had betrayed, he tried in a confused way to account for his exclamation, but I was not disposed to lose the advantage so gained, and so affected to possess absolute proof of his crime.

Finding denial useless, he confessed all and pleaded eloquently for his life. His evident remorse affected me. I called in Rose, and the result of our consultation was that we agreed to keep to

ourselves all knowledge of Tracy's crime, upon these conditions: The criminal was to devote \$18,000—out of his annual income of \$20,000—to the sick and destitute of the poverty-stricken portions of New York, and he was to live an upright, regular life.

He was to personally superintend, each year, the distribution of this money, and at the least deviation from the terms of these conditions we were at liberty to denounce him to the authorities. To make everything secure, we had exacted a written confession from him, to be used as evidence in case he violated the terms of our contract.

When we were alone together again I tried to induce Rose to explain the mystery of the ghost, but she would give me no satisfactory reply. If she knew it she was resolved to keep her own secret, and in thinking the matter over I am forced to the conclusion that the famous doctor evolved the manifestation out of "thin air."

Whatever it may have been, the apparition was precisely the shadowy counterpart of the murdered wife, even to the expression of the wistful, beautiful eyes.

Truly "there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamed of in our philosophy."

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