

## *A Sister's Vengeance*

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It was between the lights on a gloomy December afternoon. I was the sole occupant of the smoking-room of a "Literary and Artistic Club" which faces the Thames. I flung fresh coal on the gloomy embers, and stirred them till they sent up a blaze of light that drove the ghosts out of the shadowy corners, and then picked up a paper haphazard from the table, to dawdle over it till the waiter lighted the gas or some human being wandered in to keep me company. It was an American paper. Some visitor to the club had left it behind him, accidentally. I turned the pages listlessly, until suddenly my attention was arrested by a paragraph headed "Extraordinary Crime." It was the story of the robbery of a body of a lady from its grave. The whole affair was shrouded in mystery. On the 14th of the month there died in an American city the beautiful wife of an Englishman traveling for pleasure. In the same paper which contained this paragraph I found under the heading of "Cradle, Altar, Tomb," the following: "On the 14th inst, in this city, Drusilla, the beloved wife of Blissett Emerton, of London, England, aged twenty-four." In due course the poor lady was buried, and during the night the churchyard was entered and the coffin carried away. No motive is suggested in this American paper for the crime. The husband is interviewed at his hotel. He is inconsolable for the loss of his beautiful young wife—mad with mingled rage and horror at the desecration of her remains. He tells his story to the reporter. He had only been married a few months. They were traveling for pleasure in America. His poor wife caught a cold a fortnight since returning from the theater. He had medical advice, but the cold increased and inflammation of the lungs set in, and soon all was over. He buries his head in his hands and weeps, and the reporter leaves him alone with his sacred sorrow. The account in the paper I was reading by the fire-light concludes thus: "Up to the present no clue to this mysterious affair has been obtained." I glanced at the date of the paper, and flung it down in disgust. It was two years old. I had grown interested in the affair, and here it was two years old already, and probably forgotten. Where should I find out how it ended? The shadows had grown darker and darker; the fitful flare of the fire had died down into a dull red glow, and the riverside lamps were being lit. I flung myself back into the easy-chair, thrust my hands in my pockets, and half closed my eyes. Suddenly I was aware that I was not alone in the room. From the darkest corner there rose a long black figure. It glided slowly towards me. I had placed the paper where I had found it, on the table, by my side. The figure seemed to be looking for something. It passed its hands over the tables and peered down among the papers. Presently it came to the table at my elbow. In the gloom, as I sat in the deep armchair, I believe I was almost invisible. The figure came right up to me, and, reaching out its hand, passed it over my table. Presently it seized something, and glided away with it to the window, on which the lamps without flung a flicker of light. Then I saw that it was a man; and that in his hand he held the American paper in which I had just read the account of a mysterious crime. He glanced at it, and muttered something that sounded like, "How careless of me!" then folded the paper, thrust it into his breast pocket, and walked out of the room. Hardly had the door closed behind him when the attendant came in with lights. "Who is that gentleman who has just gone out?" I said.

"Don't know his name, sir. Ain't seen him here often."

I remembered that at this club every member had to sign his name in a daily book kept in the hall for that purpose. I ran downstairs and looked at the open leaf to see if that would afford me any

clue. The first name that caught my eye was that of Blissett Emerton.

No wonder the figure I had seen in the darkness had been so anxious to find that paper. I saw at once what had happened. He had been in the room reading, fancying himself alone. He had laid the paper down thoughtlessly and dropped off to sleep. I had not noticed him in the gloom, and he was quite unaware of my presence.

One thing more I did before I left.

I turned over the members' address book, and looked under the E's. There I found the name of "Blissett Emerton," and against it "No. 7 Blank Court, Temple."

Soon afterwards I found time to dine at the club, and there I met an old friend of mine, a barrister, whom I had not seen for a year, who after dinner invited me to come to his chambers for an hour.

"Still in your old diggings then," I said.

"Oh no," he answered. "I've moved since I saw you last into another set. I've got capital chambers at No. 7 Blank Court." I asked him at once if he knew Mr. Emerton.

"Only by sight," he answered. "He has chambers on the same floor, and we pass on the landing. We never speak."

I stayed longer than I meant to, and it was striking ten as we came out on the landing. The outer door of Mr. Emerton's chamber was ajar. As we passed the inner door opened, and a man rushed out with a scared white face. It was Blissett Emerton!

"Help!" he cried, tearing at his collar as though it choked him. "Help! help!" Then there was a strange gurgling noise in his throat, and he fell forward in a fit. I dragged him into his chambers, which were in total darkness, and laid him on the floor, bidding my friend run for a doctor at once. The man babbled in his frenzy: "The face," he cried, "the face—it was her face—there in the court below! Look between the trees!" I looked out into the court.

The moon was up, and among the trees near the fountain I could see the figure of a woman. She was in deep black, and as presently she stood where the trunk of the tree threw her white face into relief, I could see that she was looking toward the window. Probably she mistook my figure blotted against the window for that of Emerton's, for as I looked she raised her arms with a strange menacing gesture and pointed at me. Then she glided in among the trees and was lost to sight. The doctor came, examined Emerton, and prescribed for him. "He's had a violent fright," he said, "but he'll be all right by and by. It's more hysterical than anything else. Where are his friends?"

If I wanted to learn something of this man's strange story, what could I wish for better than a night alone with him. The doctor gave me certain directions and left.

We had carried Emerton to his bedroom and put him on the bed. Seeing he was still, I went into the front room, piled up the fire, put on the kettle, found some whisky, lit my pipe, and prepared for the night. I had just turned the burner down when I became aware of a soft grating sound at the outer door. Someone was softly opening the outer door with a key. The gas was low down. Hurriedly I picked up my overcoat and other traces of my presence and flung them under the large couch at the end of the room. It was an old-fashioned sofa with a hanging valance which reached to the ground. I then crept underneath and waited for the curtain to rise on the drama. I had hardly got into a safe position when the outer door yielded, and I heard a step in the passage that intervened. Then the outer door was gently closed. I expected to see the inner door open in its turn and someone enter. The minutes went by, and no one came. Whoever it might be was in the passage. I could hear a slight movement every now and then, and the rustle of a woman's dress. It must have been quite ten minutes since I heard the outer door opened when I noticed that the inner one was swinging noiselessly back on its hinges and *something* was gliding into the room. Slowly it moved across the floor till it stood right in the dim light of the turned-down gas.

I shall never forget the terrible sight that met my eyes. I would have screamed, but my tongue remained glued to my mouth. I was looking at a dead woman risen from the grave. Her face had been beautiful in life; now it was ashen gray. The eyes were sunken in their sockets, and her lips were pale and colorless. The figure was draped in a long white shroud, and I fancied that the room was heavy with the awful odor of an open grave. Slowly the phantom moved toward the next room and glided in. For a moment all was still. Then came a faint cry. The man was awake and alone with the apparition. "Drusilla!" he shrieked. "Mercy! Mercy! Have mercy!"

I heard a hollow voice answer him, "Rise and follow me."

"What would you have with me?"

"Confess."

"What shall I confess?" answered the wretched man, his voice trembling in an agony of fear.

"Confess the foul wrong you did me. Confess where my poor body lies, that it may be buried in holy ground."

Again the man's trembling voice wailed out, "I will confess all."

"Follow me!"

The apparition glided from the inner room, and the man followed her.

The dead woman pointed to the table where the pen and ink were, and the man obeyed her gesture mechanically.

"Write all!"

I could see from a rent in the valance the whole scene. The man, white with terror, the beads of cold perspiration on his brow, sat and wrote.

The apparition glided behind him and looked over his shoulder.

Once he paused in his task.

“Write *all*,” said the white figure.

And again the man wrote.

The figure then grasped the paper with its waxen fingers. “Go!” it said, pointing to the inner room.

With his eyes fixed upon its livid face, the man backed slowly for some paces. With a violent effort and a little scream, he seized the door, swung it to, and bolted it on the inside.

Then, for the first time, the dead woman trembled.

She seemed strangely nervous and agitated now. She clasped the paper closely, then put it in her bosom, and glided from the room.

I had got over the sudden terror inspired by such a strange sight, and had made up my mind that I had detected some terrible imposture. There was a slight pause in the lobby, and the noise of a garment being drawn off; then the outer door opened and the visitant passed out on to the staircase.

I followed as quietly as I could. The staircase was lighted with gas. As I trod on the second landing the ghost heard the noise and looked up. She was dressed in an ordinary black costume now, and her face was a natural color. To my intense surprise she neither screamed nor attempted to run away. She stood still, and beckoned me to her side.

“What are you going to do?” she said.

“To give you into custody.”

“Are you a friend of *his*?”

I answered “Yes,” mechanically.

“Then let me go free if you value his life.”

“If I let you go I am your accomplice,” I murmured; “your accomplice in some vile imposture.”

“No. If you are my accomplice tonight, you are an accomplice in the holiest deed a woman ever

wrought. Pass me through the gates if you doubt me; watch me; follow me home; give me into custody if you like; I don't care, I've got what I wanted."

I took her arm as though I had been a policeman, and said: "Pass through the gate, then, and if you attempt to get away from me I shall call for help."

She nodded to the proposition. The man at the gate was half asleep. I roused him, and from his box he pulled the cord and let us pass through the wicket door into the Strand.

I then listened to the strangest story that ever mortal lips had uttered, and there was no doubt that every word of it was true.

The confession which the trembling wretch had written at her dictation—as he believed at the dictation of his dead wife—I had read. It was a plain statement of how he had poisoned the poor girl whom he had wedded in a fit of mad jealousy, and how he had concealed his crime; how at the last moment he had overheard a whisper that someone suspected foul play; and how, fearing the body might be exhumed, he had, with the assistance of an accomplice, since dead, stolen the body that night and re-buried it in the garden of a house in a lonely part of the American town where this accomplice lived.

This woman was his wife's sister, and she had suspected foul play from the first. She was an actress, and was away on a provincial tour when Blissett Emerton wooed and won Drusilla and took her abroad with him. Emerton had never seen this sister. The marriage had been secret and hurried, and he had seemed strangely anxious to leave the country. They were to be back in five months.

Drusilla—poor trusting fool!—idolized the man and obeyed him. To her he was a knight without reproach.

But soon his conduct to her altered strangely, and she began to suspect that all was not right. He grew cold and cruel, and she was miserable and unhappy.

She wrote secretly to her sister, told her troubles and how quickly her husband's conduct had altered. The sister urged her to leave him and come home. She was expecting her to do so when there came the news of her illness and death, and then of the mysterious disappearance of the body. From that moment Drusilla Emerton's sister made up her mind to fathom the mystery and bring the guilt home to the murderer. She refused to accept the explanation of her sister's death. She believed Blissett Emerton to be quite capable of carrying out a carefully-matured plot to get rid of her. The disappearance of the body strengthened her suspicions. She concluded at once that he feared the corpse might afterward be exhumed, and as it turned out her suspicions were correct. When some time afterward he arrived in England, she commenced to put her plans into execution. She would terrify his secret from him. I have said she was an actress by profession. She was also an exact counterpart in height and feature of her dead sister.

When Emerton went to live in chambers she managed by a clever artifice to get a duplicate set of keys. The place is open night and day, and as there are only one or two men in residence it is

easy to choose a time to step up the stairs unnoticed. By getting into the enclosure before twelve one would not even be seen by the gate-porter.

The plan which occurred to the murdered woman's sister had been put in execution for the first time that night. Early in the evening she had let him see her face among the trees. I had been an unsuspected witness of the success of her appearance as one from the dead.

All this was told at the trial in America. He was extradited and I went over as a witness. But not even on the scaffold would he tell where reposed the remains of his victim. The avenging sister is now a member of Mr.—'s Dramatic Company, and the story, although well known in the States, is now perhaps told for the first time in England.—*London Referee*.

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