

## *Brought to Justice*

---

by J.T. Hunter

---

“I *wish* you would not go, my daughter,” and my mother held my hands in a close grasp as the express thundered into the depot, and the hurry and bustle consequent thereon began.

“I must, for the last time, dear mother.”

I choked down a dreadful lump in my throat and hurried away, not daring to give a second look at the tear-brimmed eyes that I felt were following me.

The dear little mamma. She did not know how those two words “my daughter” nerved me. It was my father’s favorite expression and when he was murdered by the robber he had followed to his death his last words to me were, “You must fill my place and take care of the little mother, my daughter.”

People read carelessly, among the scores of daily murders, that Detective Erickson had been killed in an attempted arrest, and never gave the matter a second thought. But O the terrible tragedy it made in two women’s lives! He had been tracing the robber for weeks and in his zeal to recover the property of others had neglected to renew the insurance policy upon his life, and his wife and daughter were left almost penniless.

I had been my father’s confidant and companion and it had been our constant care to shield the frail little mother. But he was dead and I was left to bear the burden alone. I did not know which way to turn. I could not teach. I could not earn enough for our support by my needle. My one passion was for painting and I felt that with one more year’s practice and instruction I would be independent.

One day I was surprised by a message from the Chief. He had conferred many favors upon my mother and myself, for my father had been one of his most trusted men. He had a delicate secret service which he considered me fitted to perform and which he wished to intrust to me. My pride arose in revolt. I could not be a “female detective.” Such a dreadful name! But the compensation was liberal, and my father’s last words came to me. “You must fill my place.” Could I afford to throw away this chance for a mere whim? Before I left the office I had received my instructions and since then had overruled my mother’s objections and conquered my repugnance for the work, for the sake of the support it afforded us.

My present undertaking was of a secret nature. A large reward had been offered for the apprehension of a base woman who had plundered and murdered her benefactors, a kind old gentleman and lady who had befriended her. I had studied the case day and night and felt confident that I had a clue to her whereabouts. If I could secure the reward offered, the money would buy us a tiny home in the little village which had been my mother’s birthplace, and with a roof of our own over our heads, I would defy want or care. The bare room of the strange hotel

where they had carried him, and my father's dying face, came before me just as I had seen him on that last dreadful day, as I pushed through the crowd toward the waiting train, as if I might run away from my thoughts.

The conductor of the parlor coach "Atlantic" and a brakeman stood beside the track.

"Hello," cried the conductor, looking straight at me, "here comes my deaf and dumb girl again. She made a trip in my car down to Plattsville last month."

"Purty good figure of a woman," commented the brakeman, critically. "Wish she had half of my woman's tongue. She jaws enough for two."

The conductor had been making such exaggerated motions to me that it seemed as if he might do himself an injury, asking if I would go aboard. I stood irresolute, for I had intended to take an ordinary car.

"I'd like to know what she carries in that gripsack," said the conductor, intent upon my personal appearance. "She clung to it all the way down the other day like grim death. She talks on those little ivory tablets sticking out of her coat pocket."

His last words decided me, for on the little ivory tablets, which, like the girl he mistook me for, I carried, were written in cipher words that would amaze the loquacious man. I would take advantage of his mistake and secure a quiet afternoon, for in these days of commercial travelers, if one is moderately well-looking, there is no privacy in a public railway coach—and I don't suppose I really am a fright. To carry out the innocent deception I clung closely to my traveling bag, which contained two disguises, one of which had often metamorphosed me into a bent old woman, and the other which I prayed heaven I might never be obliged to don—a suit which would fit a boy of just my size.

The coach was empty as I took my seat, and no one entered until the train was about to move. Then I saw that I was to have two men only for my fellow-passengers, or rather one man and a boy. The elder was apparently a Frenchman with a very imperfect knowledge of English, for the younger, who attended to all the business, explained that his uncle could neither speak nor understand the language.

The train got under way, and we whirled past the little villages and through the broad pasture lands, that lay brown and dead under the gray sky. The conductor came in occasionally, when he could tear himself away from the fascinations of a story teller in the baggage car, who, as he informed my fellow voyager, had "fit Injuns;" only he supplied an adjective which he doubtless would have been omitted had he known that his lady passenger was gifted with the third sense.

On we flew, when suddenly I awoke from a deep reverie, with a premonition that the men behind were discussing me.

"She don't look dumb to me," said a voice which I believed belonged to the boy.

“I’ll soon find out if she is deaf,” said a deeper voice in the broadest English.

I heard a movement behind me and knew that I was to be subjected to some test. A dreadful *creepy* sensation came over me. I dared not turn my head, but sat with every nerve and muscle strained to bear the shock, whatever it might be. I heard him creeping nearer, nearer, and held my breath in a very agony of suspense. I heard his low breathing and then he suddenly gave a demoniacal yell which paralyzed me for a moment and left a ringing in my ears for days after.

“She never flinched a hair,” aid the younger voice, “she’s deafer than the dead if she did not hear that howl, for it would have raised the seven sleepers.”

I drew a long breath as a form passed my chair, and as he turned to come back I glanced carelessly up from the book I pretended to be reading, I saw a tall handsome man with broad shoulders and a waxed moustache. He lifted his hat and smiled slightly, revealing his large white teeth. As I gazed it came over me with sickening force that the man before me was Edgar Nolan, my father’s murderer.

“His strong cruel teeth, Christine, white like an animal’s. They were set like a vise when he drew his thin lips back and dealt me that fatal blow.” This my father had told me between his gasps of pain.

The next ten minutes proved that my instinct was a correct one. “She’s safe enough, and now I’ll tell you, Harry, how I worked that diamond racket,” said the counterfeit Frenchman, resuming his seat. “If you’re going to be one of us, it won’t hurt you to know how the job was done.”

Then followed a description of the robbery of the old diamond merchant, every particular of which was so familiar to me. I listened intently as he described the place where the booty lay hidden.

“I stabbed him with a knife like this when he wouldn’t give over yelling,” said the fiend, coolly, “and flung the knife down behind the plaster where there was a hole in the wall. I never use a shooter, they are too noisy. These fellows do their work and never speak.”

Then I lived over again the horror of my father’s death as he told the boy how he had been obliged to kill another man “in self-defense.”

“They doubled the price on my head after that, to make men more willing to hunt me down like a rat,” he added bitterly. Had he no conscience or sense of wrong doing?

“How dare you travel through the country like this, with such a big reward up?” asked the boy.

“I was a thin, pale Yankee then, with a smooth face and light hair,” answered the murderer. “Now, thanks to my wig and heavy beard and to the tailor’s art, I am a portly Frenchman. This confounded padding isn’t very comfortable in a warm room, though.” Their voices sank lower. My very life seemed centered in the sense of hearing. I changed my position as much as I dared and through the tumultuous throbbing of my heart heard their plans for a burglary they intended

to commit that night. An hour's ride farther on, the train would stop at L— Junction, a little town where the road branched to the south. Ten miles away to the north was the village of Clifton, two miles from the lake shore. It was only a cluster of houses, with a post office and a church and no railroad. A number of wealthy people owned summer residences there, but in winter it was generally almost deserted.

I gathered from their conversation that Mr. Gleason, a wealthy old gentleman who owned a handsome house in the village, with the memory of his early holidays green in his heart, had brought his family, children, and grandchildren, and a large circle of friends from the city, to spend an old-fashioned Christmas in the country.

“We'll have a good, dark night for our work,” said Nolan; “glad there isn't any snow. Sydney has kept me posted. He says old Gleason's tribe are all going over to Oakdale to a ball, where the silly women will caper in calico for charity's sake, and leave all their finery at home. We'll do a work of charity, too, in taking it away so they will not get vain. There don't many of the servants sleep in the house, so we can go through it easily. The primitive people don't think much of bolts and bars in that Arcadia, so there won't be much sawing. Sydney will be at the shore with his swift-sailing yacht. We won't stay to be saddened by the mourning for lost jewels and plate. Such scenes always sadden me so. We'll stop and get the other plunder that I buried, and then away where extradition papers are unknown.”

Merciful Heaven! How could I, a feeble woman, thwart this desperate villain, whose hands were already stained with the blood of two victims? I would run no risks and take no chances. A fierce exhilaration took possession of me. He should be captured at Gleason's. I would secure swifter horses at the Junction and drive across the country fast enough to reach Clifton first. I must not be seen leaving the train, for I had heard the conductor tell them my destination as well as my supposed infirmity. I knew what my fate would be should Nolan's suspicions be aroused.

As the early twilight fell, and we drew near the Junction, I entered a small stateroom, which held a sofa and a long mirror. When the train stopped and the other passengers left the coach, an (apparently) old lady, with snowy hair, spectacled, bent and leaning upon a cane descended upon the opposite side. The men did not enter the depot, and I hurriedly asked for the nearest livery stable of the first man I met, who seemed to be employed about the station.

“There ain't but one,” he answered. “Want a rig?”

I explained that I must go to Clifton at once, and as no one had come to meet me I wanted two horses and a carriage immediately.

“Folks sick?” he inquired with Yankee curiosity.

“Very dangerous,” I replied, briefly.

He volunteered to go and give my order, and I seated myself in the dimmest corner of the ill lighted waiting-room. He returned in a few minutes with the intelligence that the only “rig” in the stable had just been hired.

“A young feller is takin’ his sick father over to Clifton,” he said. “I tole ‘im how anxious you wuz to go, Granny, and after parlaying awhile with his pa, he said there wa’n’t nothin’ agin your ridin’ on the front seat with the driver, if you was so set on goin’.”

I knew instantly who the “sick father” was. I could not put myself in his power again, but the cool touch of the revolver hidden in “Granny’s” pocket reassured me. I knew I was a better marksman than the assassin who stabbed his victims to the heart.

We started at once. The ten miles could not have seemed longer had they been stretched into twenty. As I rode through the darkness I constantly imagined that my disguise had been penetrated by the muffled figure on the back seat, whose breath I could almost feel. I knew he would not hesitate to let out my heart’s blood could he know my errand, and his murderous knife seemed poised above my head.

I was very glad to be set down at the edge of the quiet little village, and made way with all haste to the post office, which the combined postmaster, grocer, and dry goods merchant about to close. He evidently thought me a lunatic, but pointed to one of a half dozen men seated around the store, when I demanded an officer.

I knew the robber’s plan was to go down to the shore and make sure that his pal was in waiting. The Gleason mansion stood half way between the shore and village. I told my story and after a sufficient interval the whole six stalwart men (who evidently had a wholesome appreciation of the burglar’s prowess) were on their way to the big house, accompanied by an old woman, who walked with as firm a stride as the strongest, for the thought that my father’s death would be avenged gave wings to my feet.

Great was the consternation of the two servants when we reached the house.

Two men were stationed outside, screened by the bushes, and the others concealed in the room where the safe stood which held the valuables. “Remember it is for murder you are to arrest him,” I cautioned the officer for the twentieth time. He should not escape with the lesser penalty for the burglary and wait until his crimes were half forgotten, but should answer for the murder now when the strong hand of the law which demands a “life for a life,” should be laid upon him.

I went upstairs to quiet the frightened cook, whose moans were finally stifled in the bed-clothes where she hid her head. I intended to stay, but a terrible fascination drew me below. I lighted my little dark lantern and, in spite of the remonstrances of the men against an old lady taking part in such an exciting scene, crouched behind a large sofa to await the expected arrival. The door was conveniently open, and he entered so cautiously that only the gleam of his lantern revealed his presence. Instantly my light flashed up and he saw four glittering revolvers leveled at his head. It had been done so quickly that he had no time to draw the ready knife before he was overpowered and closely bound. Many and deep were the curses he uttered when he saw me, and vain his conjectures as to how I had discovered his plans.

“I’m sure I did not tell the ugly beldam on my way here, and I’m equally sure I ever saw her before,” he muttered.

“But you shall see me again to your everlasting sorrow,” I could not help answering.

The boy was relieved from his bootless guard at the door by the outside captors. They were taken, closely guarded, up to the city that night. In the confusion “Sydney” was forgotten and no one ever knew into what waters his yacht carried him.

The appointed time for the trial came at last. “Christine Erickson” was called. As I put aside my veil in the witness box, the boy (who still clung to his wicked companion) involuntarily exclaimed, “By Jove, it’s the deaf and dumb girl.” A look of deadly hate from the prisoner rested upon me as I gave my evidence. The recovered knife and the gems were used with convicting effect. Although I knew that the doom that was dealt was richly deserved by the confessed murderer, I almost repented my part in the transaction, and could think of nothing for days but the terrible words of his sentence, “You shall be hanged by the neck until you are dead, and may God have mercy upon your soul.”

\* \* \* \* \*

Mother and I have lived in our little home for a year. All day I paint the flowers and birds and butterflies around us and find no difficulty in disposing of the studies to generous patrons. At evening I watch for the familiar form that never fails to come, and with a sigh for the past and a smile for the present, I shall listen to the loving voice whose music shall sound through all my future.

*Sterling [IL] Standard*, June 3, 1886