

## *A Clew In A Dream*

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### A Detective Who Firmly Believes in the Truth of Visions

[From the Omaha Bee]

“This thing happened some ten years ago,” said the detective. “I was living in Alton, Ill., or rather was visiting there, resting up after a hard winter’s work. The month was May, and the weather was simply perfect. I spent most of my time out of doors, hunting, fishing, and having a good time generally. Yes, I was better looking then than I am now, and I used to be quite a favorite with the girls. Perhaps I am yet—I don’t know. But that’s neither here nor there. One of the young ladies with whom I became acquainted was a fair being whom I shall call Ida. Pretty? Yes. Take my word for it, a more charming creature never lived. She was beautiful in form, face, and, as I thought, in intellect and character. About her past history I never learned much, except that she was an orphan, had been born and raised in St. Louis, and was living with an aunt in Alton, an old, ugly, peevish vixen, who always reminded me of a horrible dragon.

“One morning in May, I shall never forget the date, the 15<sup>th</sup> of the month—the quiet little town was startled by the news that a terrible tragedy had been committed. Ida’s aunt had been found murdered in her bed that morning. My professional instincts were aroused at once, and I hurried to the house where the murdered woman lay. Ida admitted me. I expected to find her in spasms of agonies, or at least terribly wrought up over the awful occurrence which had bereft her of the only relative she had in the world. But no, she was strangely cold and calm, and even smiled as she gave assent to my request to be led to the room where the murdered aunt lay.

“‘You, too, are curious,’ she said. ‘Well, I’ll show you the way,’ and she tripped lightly through the hallway leading me up a pair of back stairs. I did not know what to make of the girl’s strange conduct. ‘Something wrong here,’ thought I to myself. ‘Wonder what it can be. Perhaps the poor girl’s grief is of that kind which is not characterized by tears and sobbing.’ Still the circumstance lingered in my mind, and I could not rid myself of it, try as I might.

“The old woman lay upon the snowy sheets, which were torn and scattered, showing that a terrible death struggle had taken place. Her throat was cut from ear to ear. I don’t need to dwell upon the horrible details of the affair. The Coroner came, held an inquest, and went away. Every witness who could possibly throw any light upon the mystery was examined. The city and county authorities took the matter up, and offered large rewards for the detection and arrest of the assassin. Detectives were engaged to work upon the case but were compelled to give it up after weeks and months of hard work. Every scent was a ‘blind’ one. Not even a motive for the act could be satisfactorily established. Certainly, though the old woman was rich, she could not have been killed for her money. She never kept any ready cash in the house, and all of her valuables were found undisturbed. Revenge, jealousy, or a sudden quarrel were motives entirely out of the range of fact or theory.

“I set to work upon the case, quietly and without being retained by any of the parties interested. I studied long and deeply upon every phase of the mysterious murder. I lay awake nights evolving new theories, and spent the days in trying to confirm or disprove them. But though my labors

were hard and conscientious, and were, I believe, shrewdly conducted, one month from the time of the murder was committed, I found myself no nearer a solution than I was when I began.

“One night, I think it was the 20<sup>th</sup> of June, I had a dream. I had retired to bed early, tired out with hard work. In my sleep I saw a vision—it must have been a dream, of course, though it was far more realistic. The door of my room opened and I saw a figure in white advancing to what seemed to me to be a bed in one corner of the room. Slowly the figure came on, and in one hand I could see a long, sharp knife. The moon had been behind a cloud, but just then it burst through and shed its bright light upon every object in the room. I looked again at the figure, and as she turned, her long locks a shimmer in the moonlight, I could see that it was Ida. Horrified, I watched her advance stealthy step by step towards the bed. With one bound she sprang upon her victim, and with a dexterous cross-thrust of her knife, cut the old woman’s throat from ear to ear. One convulsive shudder and the whole thing was over. Assured that her work had been thoroughly done, Ida turned away with that strange, odd smile which had so struck me the first day of the murder, and tiptoed out of the room. I awoke with a shudder, but my strange dream haunted me, and I slept no more that night.

“The vision rested uneasily on my mind the next day. Strange fancies took possession of me, which I vainly tried to shake off. The next night the vision was repeated with all its intense realism. Every night thereafter for a week I was visited by the same awful dream.

“I won’t give you all the details of the closing up of the case. To cut my story short, I managed to secure entrance unobserved into Ida’s room, examined every trunk, box, receptacle in the room, looking for I hardly knew what. My labor was after a time rewarded. In the bottom of a large box used for storing rubbish I found a long blood-stained knife and a nightgown, whose snowy folds were crimsoned here and there with blood. Then my suspicions were confirmed. I made up my mind to go to work upon the theory that Ida had murdered her aunt, having already secured a good ground-work of evidence. While I stood there, still gazing at the bloody knife and garment, the door opened behind me. I glanced over my shoulder. There stood Ida. The smile on her face was gone, but in her eyes there was a maniacal light. She sprang at me with a bound, and hissing into my ears, ‘You think you have me,’ tried to wrest the knife from me. She seemed possessed of a demon’s strength, and I can tell you that the struggle that ensued was a tough one. I believe that if assistance had not come just then she would have bested me. She was taken out of the room a raving maniac.

“The rest of the story is soon told. Ida in her ravings told the story of the crime in its every detail, and there was no longer any doubt in my mind, or that of any one else, but that she had murdered the old woman. Prosecution, of course, was out of the question. The girl was taken to the Jacksonville (Ill.) Insane Asylum. No, she is not alive now. She died after three or four years of confinement, never having recovered reason in the slightest degree. I made inquiries afterward, and found that on both her father and mother’s side the taint of insanity existed; that, furthermore, she herself had once been in an insane asylum, but had been discharged cured. And now you know why I have faith in my dreams.”

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