

For the Companion  
*The Detective's Story*

Queer, homey little romances come sometimes under the eye of the detective.

“One day I was called to a house in Russel Square to carry off a girl who had stolen a small diamond ring and a few other things.

“I shall never forget the bewildered look of the pretty little thing,—for she had a face as innocent as a babe’s. It made my heart ache, when I thought of my own daughter, about the age of this one.

“‘O, sir,’ she cried, in terror, ‘they say I have stolen these things, when I never saw them in my life. What does it mean, sir? O, what are they going to do to me?’

“Now, in my time, I have seen the pretence of innocence in every form that hypocrisy can shape, and for a time I was not disposed to credit the girl’s distress. But there was another servant there, a sleek-faced, smooth-haired creature, whose caliber I took in at a glance.

“‘That girl is as full of cunning,’ I said, mentally, ‘as a nut is full of meat.’

“Suddenly, Mary, that was the name of the girl accused of the theft, turned round to Dora, as the other servant was called. I was looking at Dora that moment, and saw the flush fly from her cheeks, and a flash of unspeakable hatred blaze in her eyes. Nobody noticed it, I think, besides myself.

“‘O, Dora! Dora!’ cried the weeping Mary, ‘clear me; *you* can clear me, me, you *must* clear me. Tell them I could not have taken it; that you would have seen or suspected me. You have lived with them so many years they will believe you. Tell them, Dora, tell them I am innocent.’

“In her agony Mary had caught the girl’s hand, which the latter struggled to free from her clasp. A quick gleam of terror in Dora’s face started my suspicions, but instantly she was calm again, as she said,—

“‘I can’t, I can’t; for I believe you are a thief.’

“I shall not soon forget the look that came into poor Mary’s face as she staggered back, now swaying this way, now that; then lifting her clasped hands, her eyes full of a wild light, she cried,—

“‘O mother! mother! What shall I do? What shall I do? I never in my life stole even a pin. O mother! mother!’

“She fell back, half senseless, and if the woman’s heart had not been adamant, she would have sent me away, and believed the poor child. But no. Mary must go to the jail, and await her trial, and if condemned, submit to the penalty of broken law.

“I took her with me, half inclined to carry her to my own home instead, but I knew my duty too well for that. The trial came off, the heart-broken girl pleaded innocence, but the evidence was against her, and she was sentenced to a year’s imprisonment.

“It’s no use telling what I suffered on this child’s account; she was only fifteen. My wife and daughter were both anxious about the result, and Milly, my youngest, cried herself to sleep the night that poor Mary was consigned to jail.

“Several days passed, when one morning a pale, decently dressed woman inquired for me at the quarters. I was in at the time, and when I met her, was startled by her resemblance to Mary. It was poor Mary’s widowed mother.

“‘My neighbors contributed the means for me to come,’ she said, in a low, broken voice, ‘for we are very poor. O, sir, I think it has given me my death-blow, this dreadful thing. Mary was so honest, my little Mary. Everybody will tell you, where I live, what she is. None of them believe it, sir, not one. Mary has only been here four months. Does it stand to reason, sir, that she who was always gentle, and pure, and honest, should change in that short time? Why, sir, I never knew my Mary to tell a lie, and surely, surely, she’d never steal. O the disgrace and the wickedness has broke my heart. I come from an honest family. I wouldn’t have parted with my child to go to service, but we was—we was *so* poor!’ and here she broke down.

“I had had my suspicions all along, but of course I could prove nothing. But when I had taken the poor mother home, and wife and daughter had said and done all they could to comfort her, a plan came into my head which I immediately communicated to the widow. It was this: That she should apply, with a strong recommendation from me, for Mary’s vacant place. Mrs. Black, the woman who had lost the ring, had begged me to find a woman honest and capable, and I was quite sure of Mary’s mother.

“‘O John, that will be splendid!’ cried my wife, smiling through her tears. ‘He has such a head of his own, my good husband. I was sure he would find some way for you.’

“‘I have thought ever since the arrest that Dora was the guilty party; that she stole those articles, and through some fiendish malice laid the crime on Mary.’ I said; ‘particularly since I have heard that Mary innocently betrayed the fact of Dora’s being away one whole night from the house. She is a cunning, wicked girl, and must be taken by craft.’

“Not over two days elapsed before Mrs. Morris, Mary’s mother, was domiciled in her new home. Mrs. Black met me, a week after, and expressed herself delighted with the new servant. Meanwhile, wife and daughter saw poor downcast Mary often, and every time they came from the jail, they protested, with tears, against the unmerited punishment of so sweet a girl.

“Mrs. Morris had received her instructions. She was to watch Dora—was told not to notice any of her faults—and if possible to get her confidence. I knew the girl was a bad girl, and felt assured that if she had another servant with her of whom she was not afraid, she would perhaps reveal her true character; and little by little she did reveal herself.

“It so happened that at the very time she was maturing a plan to rob Mrs. Black, the woman she lived with. There was money in the house, kept always in a small, strong box, and Dora had heard Mrs. Black say that she never allowed herself to be without a hundred or two dollars on hand. One Carney, a bluff, Irish fellow, none too good, wanted to marry Dora. Finally she promised Mrs. Morris, who acted as chamber girl, fifty dollars if she would help her to the key of the box.

“Dora wished to go back to Ireland with Carney. She had saved some little money, and so he declared that he had a handsome sum in the bank, but he was a liar and a drunkard, and had put the girl up to this trick of robbery.

“Now was my time. The plot was almost ripe.

“In the first place, I called upon Mrs. Black and informed her that she had been waited upon for the past month by poor little Mary’s mother. Confound the woman—excuse me sir, but I couldn’t help it—she was as mad as a March hare with me, and it took an hour to bring her to reason. I never saw a woman whose prejudices were so deeply rooted.

“However she consented to serve on my committee, and the whole thing was mapped out. I was to be near, but in hiding, and Mrs. Black was also to see the matter through with her own eyes.

“The night came, a bright moonlight one, and all preparations were made.

“Mrs. Black did not believe, but was willing, like the magnanimous creature she was, to be convinced. We had watched three hours, from ten to one, when, in the silence, we heard the opening of doors and the stealthy movement of gliding feet. Another moment the girl Dora stood on the threshold, holding the key up to her eyes, as if to be certain that it was the identical thing she needed.

“Presently she found the place, went inside the closet, brought the box out, sat down on the floor, opened it, turned the contents into a handkerchief, and then a dark lantern was flashed full in her face, and there stood before her Mrs. Black and myself.

“The girl was paralyzed, but curiously enough the first words she said, when I helped her to her feet, were,—

“‘Well, now it’s out, ye’ll think I did the whole, won’t ye?’

“‘I *know* you did,’ said I.

“‘Wicked, wicked, wicked woman!’ cried Mrs. Black. ‘How could you try to ruin that poor, innocent girl?’

“‘O don’t bother me,’ was the heartless reply. ‘Ivery one for himself, but if I knew who’d telled on me, I’d twist her throat, if they hung me for murder.’

“Well, Mary was triumphant at last, and a splendid purse was made up for her and her mother, so they went back together, thoroughly sick of their city experience. Now, there’s a little romance for you, isn’t there, sir?”

*The Youth’s Companion*, February 16, 1871