

A Bit of Detective-Office Romance
by Allan Pinkerton

OF the tens of thousands of strange and interesting incidents connected with prolonged and far-reaching detective service, undoubtedly that portion containing the richest veins of romance, the brightest humor, and the deepest pathos, is comprised in the demands made on the detective agency for numberless kinds of assistance by men and women who are unfortunate enough to become complicated in family troubles involving the supposed unfaithfulness of the husband or the wife.

I wish to say, at the beginning of this bit of romance, that I am bitterly and irrevocably opposed to touching that kind of work. No honest and honorable detective will soil his hands with it. For thirty years, and through hundreds of thousands of applications for the services of myself and my men, I have shunned and avoided it for the unclean, poisonous thing that it is. In all modesty, and for the purity and honor of the detective service of America, as one who has spent the best half of his life in its elevation and bettering, I wish to, here and at all times, urge upon those younger and less experienced than myself, who may be at the threshold of their life-work, the absolute necessity of turning a deaf ear to applications for this class of assistance.

There may be, there often are, exceptions in this regard, where men and women, from the highest and most honorable of motives, desire and have a right to certain information, which may more thoroughly establish a wife, a husband, or a near friend in their regard and esteem, or permit a decision which, though hard and heart-breaking to make, is the only dignified and honorable thing to be done, when the one under suspicion proves himself or herself utterly unworthy of confidence or respect; but these are unusual exceptions, and nearly every instance where women apply to the detective to watch the husband, or the husband the wife, the mistress the man, or her "friend" the mistress, there will be found something disreputable and degrading behind it.

To put detectives on such low errands of espionage is to demoralize them and utterly unfit them for higher work. The detective must have a clean mind and clean hands, or he sinks to the level of the criminal, and is no better than he; and there is no way in which he can become so completely corrupt and unbalanced as to place him where he becomes the spy and the football between animal passion and revenge.

The instance I am about to relate, where I took a case of this kind, is only an exception proving the general rule which I have laid down, and was one so pitiable, and yet so ridiculous, that I cannot restrain a hearty laugh whenever I recall it. It occurred but a few years since, and is still as fresh in my mind as though it happened but yesterday.

One summer afternoon, about three o'clock, a pretty coupé halted in front of my present offices on Fifth Avenue, Chicago. The sweet face of a young woman appeared at the window and looked up at the large building with evident trepidation and fear. Even the negro footman, that quickly descended to serve the lady, seemed possessed of a certain solemnity and awe, which indicated at least some well-defined unpleasantness in the household where he was employed, and momentous importance attaching to this visit. Alighting upon the sidewalk, the little lady

looked nervously about her, peered into the open door of the fine station on the first floor, where my large night watch, the preventative police, are quartered, where she saw a few officers and patrolmen quietly sitting about on day duty; and then, seemingly quickly satisfying herself that this was not the detective department, hastened rapidly up the broad stairs.

She had determination in her manner; but in every feature of her fine face there was a quiver and tremor that told of acute suffering. It was not common that so remarkably fine-looking a lady, so distinguished in appearance, sought the mysteries of detective service; and, as she swept into the main office, casting a flushed and startled look about her, the groups of sub-officers and bebies of clerks, by long custom grown quick and keen in judgment of such things, knew, without being told, something of what the case *might* be, and in their minds unanimously pronounced it: “Particularly pitiable.”

My office—boy also taking in the situation at a glance, and seeming to understand that the lady was much confused by the, to her, unaccustomed surroundings—at once conducted her into my superintendent’s consulting-room, and proffered her a seat opposite Mr. Warner himself.

Superintendent Warner, who has been in my employ for nearly twenty years, is a very staid, sober gentleman, one who has a reputation, among my other officers and men, of never looking at a woman save sidewise, and then only for the tenth part of a second—(a man who is so proverbially modest in this particular that it is even reported of him that he passes words, when reading, unless certain that they are of the masculine gender); but the very woe that spoke from his visitor’s face affected him so strongly that he looked up over his gold-rimmed quizzers from his papers and dispatches, and regarded her curiously with his cold gray eyes for fully three seconds.

Then the handsome, elegantly-dressed, beautiful lady began sobbing and talking.

Superintendent Warner, looking straight out of the window, adjusted his quizzers, and began listening.

The lady—whom I will call Mrs. Saunders—after several sobs, which she finally mastered with a great effort, said in a voice of repressed emotion:

“Mr. Warner, I am in great trouble—great trouble.”

He could see it; and he hinted as much, resuming his attitude of attention.

“Is it necessary to tell my name?”

“Most certainly.”

“And tell you where I live?”

“Yes.”

“Oh, this is awful!” she said, more as if speaking to herself than the superintendent. “Well, I live at No. — Indiana Avenue” (a very aristocratic thoroughfare). “My husband is the senior member of the firm of Saunders, Rice & Co., on State Street.”

Yes, Mr. Warner knew them very well.

“And you know about our trouble?” she asked, in a way showing that the poor woman felt certain, as people always do, that *her* grief was certain to occupy the attention of all the world.

“Well, I think it would be better for you to give me *your* version of it,” he replied quietly, but already nervous at the probable prospect before him.

“Oh, dear!—well—” she began, with a flushing and paling face. “My husband is rich. We have a beautiful home; it seemed as though the world was very bright before *this!*”(Sobs.) “He always came home to dinner, and never, never passed the evening away save with me!”

“How long have you been married, madam?” respectfully asked the superintendent.

“Only eighteen short months,” she replied, crying bitterly.

“Have you a child?”

“One darling babe.” Another sob.

“Well?”

The superintendent was getting anxious for particulars, and troubled for the result.

“Well, sir, about two weeks ago we had a slight misunderstanding.”

Mr. Warner nodded his head, as though he knew what *that* meant.

“But it wasn’t much, sir; truly it was hardly a quarrel. But we began taking our meals separately, each too proud to make any concession, each full of spirit, and thinking the other was in the wrong, but both gradually growing away from each other until finally—”

Here the good little lady paused and blushed deeply. It hurt her to say what was on her tongue, but it had to come.

“Well?” queried Mr. Warner, wiping his quizzers and blushing to the very top of his bald head.

“Until we finally occupied sleeping apartments in quite opposite parts of the house!”

Mr. Warner saw it was the old story, one that had floated ten thousand times into the office, ever since he had been in it, and he began to fidget about in his chair as the lady resumed her weeping.

“Well, sir, he acts *so* strangely. He slams the doors, and won’t even look at the baby I hold up in my arms for him to see; and, about a week ago, I noticed that he did not get into the house until two or three o’clock in the morning. I couldn’t get but a glimpse of his face, but he looked *guilty!* I hate to tell you this, sir, but I am *sure* some bold, bad woman is at the bottom of it all. He has been away from home for three whole nights, sir—for three long, dreary nights. I *know* he is with this woman. Oh, sir! I don’t know what to do! I don’t know what to do! But if you can only some way get my husband to realize what a terrible thing he is doing, and then capture this bad woman, and do something awful—just *awful!* with her, you shall have any—yes, any sum you have a mind to name!”

Here the poor lady, seeing that there was but little hope for her in my superintendent’s face, pleaded piteously, between really heart-rending sobs, that her “dear hubby” might be brought back, and this horrible woman completely annihilated, and explained how, for several days, *she* had been dodging about the city herself, to ascertain where the supposed cause of her husband’s misdoing lived, and how she might wreak a deserted wife’s vengeance upon her, and, finding that she could accomplish nothing, discouraged and disheartened, she had come to my office hoping for help.

Superintendent Warner really pitied his fair visitor, and hardly knew what to do. He glanced for courage along the wall, where one of the framed mottoes from my “General Principles” for detective work hung in its frame. The motto read:

“These Agencies will, under no circumstances, operate in cases arising from marital difficulties!”

He tried to get courage and bravery enough from this but the misery of the little woman got the better of him; and, trying to look very sympathetic and at the same time severe, he stammered out, as he rose to indicate the termination of the interview:

“Sorry; d—very sorry, madam! But much as I deplore your trouble—pardon me for saying this—is—well—ha, hum!—well, one of that *kind* of cases, you see, where I will have to confer with Mr. Pinkerton before giving you any answer of a definite character. I can hold out no hope for you whatever today. Mr. Pinkerton will be in shortly. I will lay the matter before him. You may call at the same hour tomorrow. I can give you a decision then.”

The little woman dried her eyes, thanked the superintendent as best she could, and was shown out the private door of the outer consulting-room, Mr. Warner murmuring sympathetically:

“Good-day, madam; good-day. Sorry; d—*very* sorry!”

It is a custom of mine, which has been observed without exception for several years, to ride in my carriage, rain or shine, snow or sleet, for from two to four hours of every afternoon. I find not only genuine pleasure in it, but health and vigor, and, above all, a relief from a crush of business, which, with me, seems never to be done, and to increase beyond measure as I advance in life.

These rides are taken in every direction from my office; sometimes through and through the heart of the city; sometimes to some outlying suburb; and often ten, twenty, and frequently thirty miles straight out into the country. I have thus formed a regular acquaintance with little roadside inns, where I always find my bevy of beggars and vagabonds ready to hold or water my horses, for the change they as invariably expect; and I have thus come to know every sign in the city, every alley or by-way, every nook and corner; and, in numberless instances, the almost perfect information so secured of every peculiarity of Chicago and its surroundings has proven of invaluable service in facilitating whatever work of a local nature I might have in hand.

On the day in question I had been out over the roads adjacent to Chicago's beautiful North Shore, and had determined to return through Lincoln Park along the wide, smooth boulevard which borders the white beach where the waves come tumbling in. It was one of those rough, raw days when the clouds go scurrying across the sky, and the water upon the broad expanse of Lake Michigan had a steely-blue color intervening between the scudding white-caps. The park was deserted, and not a carriage save my own was to be seen down the miles of drive, level as a floor. Turning from the highway into the drive, I saw, a mile beyond, like a dark *silhouette* against the water, the form of a solitary man, pacing rapidly back and forth upon the sands. Swiftly he sped up and down the shore, like one with no purpose, but impelled by some strong and overwhelming excitement.

As I neared him, he took no notice of either myself or carriage, and I saw that his face was pale, and that all of his actions betokened great mental trouble. My detective instincts, or curiosity, or whatever it may be called, were at once aroused, and I directed my driver to pass the man slowly. Arriving opposite him, as we were now going in opposite directions, I noticed at once that he was a young business man of my acquaintance.

"Hallo, Saunders!" said I.

"Well, what do you want?" he returned, in a hard, hurt kind of a way.

"I want you to get right in here with me," I replied sternly, knowing that the man required a superior will to manage him.

He got in the carriage and sat down beside me without a word.

"What is the matter, Saunders?" I abruptly asked.

"I'm all gone to pieces," he answered, with a moan.

"In a business way?" I asked.

"No, at home," he replied bitterly.

"Now, tell me the truth—nothing else!" said I, severely.

“Well, friend Pinkerton,” he answered slowly, and as though his whole life and heart were in the reply, “my wife is going wrong!”

“I don’t believe it!” I replied, warmly.

“Yes,” he said, after a pause; “yes, it’s true. A few weeks ago we had one of those family quarrels that curse married people. It was a little thing at first—a little thing—just one of those family misunderstandings that bring hell between a couple. I wouldn’t give up nor would she. At first we were very proud, and would not recognize each other. Soon we took separate meals. Then my wife got high-toned, and took a bed in another part of the house. I followed suit, and took *my* bed as far away from her as I could get it in the house. For nearly a week past she has been spending the days and nights out. I have been trying to get at the secret of her estrangement. For the last three days and nights I have been out constantly. I have had several of our most trustworthy employees watching the house and following her, but I am entirely at a loss; some human devil is taking advantage of our family trouble to ruin her. Pinkerton, I made up my mind to come to you. But I recollected that you never touch these matters, and I had about determined to do something desperate!”

My heart opened at once for the man, and I concluded to break over my rule at any cost, get at the bottom of the trouble, which, I could see, he had only made worse by his attempting to play the detective, and then, if it were possible, show the wife the wretchedness and misery she was causing, and in some way, not then quite clear to me, but which I felt assured would in good time transpire, bring about a reconciliation and peace to the family of my young friend.

I told him this; and it made a new man of him at once.

We were soon at the agency, and we proceeded together at once to my own private office. I immediately summoned Mr. Warner, and began explaining matters with a view of having him get a thorough understanding of it with me, and then make a detail of men when necessary for thorough investigation.

This had hardly been entered into when I observed that my superintendent was conducting himself very strangely. He “hummed” and “hawed,” cleared his throat a half-dozen times as if to speak, but each time seemed to change his mind and repress himself by the greatest effort. On several occasions I came near asking him the reason for his singular action, but refrained on account of the presence of my friend.

No sooner had he departed, with the understanding that I should pick him up at a designated spot on the next afternoon, and before he had hardly reached the street, than Mr. Warner burst into such an irrepressible fit of laughter that I could not resist joining him, although I confess the whole proceeding was quite beyond my power of comprehension; but when he had sufficiently recovered to explain himself and relate the interview with the beautiful lady an hour previous, the ludicrousness and complete absurdity of the entire situation came over me with such force that I am afraid I was quite as badly affected as my superintendent, and certainly myself indulged in a roar of laughter which must have been heard to the remotest part of the great building, and possibly, as I have capital lungs, beyond into the street.

But my readers may be very sure that the cases were taken.

The next afternoon the lady called, was informed that Mr. Pinkerton had deviated from his fixed rule in her behalf, and such necessary information was secured as would give color to the evident planning of a thorough investigation. Superintendent Warner also gave her such hope and courage as he could; and the little woman went away with the understanding that she should call at the same hour on the next day, and looking much brighter and happier for the hope that had risen within her. He also elicited the fact that her husband had returned to his home early on the previous night, had retired early, and had certainly remained in the house during the whole night.

On the same afternoon I had my young friend in my carriage for an hour, gave him some hint that the object of our search would be captured, possibly by the next day, and in all probability everything would terminate much better than I had at first feared—in fact, wholly as it should. I was also able to learn that his wife had certainly passed the preceding night at home. He was sure of it, but did not seem to wish to tell me how. Altogether, he had become sunnier and more hopeful.

On the third afternoon the little woman came as true as time to the minute of her appointment with my superintendent.

“Well, we have the truth of the matter at last. I hope it won’t prove too bad!” he continued, reassuringly, as the little lady, womanlike, now that the suspense of it all was nearly over, burst into tears.

“Tell me, tell me all about it! Do tell me! If it kills me, I must know it all!” she sobbed violently.

“My dear madam!” replied Mr. Warner in a soothing tone, “you *must* compose yourself. I am not at liberty to give you the particulars. I can only say this much: We shall in a few minutes have this party who has caused the trouble in our office. You are to take a seat in one of the parlors. We will then have the party introduced to you, and you can then, having everything in your power, secure a confession as we have done, and extort a lasting pledge!”

With this the lady was conducted to one of the several small parlors, or reception-rooms, near my own private office, frequently found necessary in my business. The room was conveniently somewhat darkened, and, on leaving the superintendent at the door, she said, with some trepidity and evident fear:

“Oh, what shall I do alone with this fiend?”

“Just use your very best judgment, madam,” Mr. Warner replied; “nothing shall harm you.”

With this the door closed, and the little woman was alone. What were her feelings and thoughts I cannot attempt to picture. One thing, however, was certain. As she paced the floor with a quick stride for the few minutes which should intervene, her fingers worked nervously, as though her

spirit and indignation could not be restrained, and that she must wreak vengeance upon the fiend who had come between her and all that she loved.

Half an hour before I had left my young friend at his store. I had informed him that I had “run into[”] the party he “most wanted to see;” that the person was then in my office; that I had extorted a full confession, the details of which, however, I declined to give, as I had determined he should be given an opportunity to confront the person himself and see with his own eyes and hear with his own ears the object of *his* fruitless detective service and the whole story. He was greatly moved, and said he feared he would do the d—d villain bodily harm. I told him that if he did he would forever forfeit my friendship; and he pledged himself solemnly to confine his indignation and punishment to his unexpected presence and words alone.

The last words of mine to him, as he alighted from my carriage at his store, were:

“Now, Saunders, if you bring a revolver or anything of that sort, or in any way break faith with me, I will make you suffer for it. *I won't have any scenes in my office!*”

I had arranged that he should take a certain course to get to the agency. This brought him to the second floor and near my room by a private entrance, so that there might be no danger of any of his friends seeing him.

I shortly heard his footsteps upon the stairs. He halted occasionally, as if to gain strength for his terrible meeting. At last he entered my room, and said:

“Pinkerton! My God! this is too much! Where—where is he?”

“There!” I replied, pointing to a sliding-door, through which a parlor was reached.

He stepped to the door, put his hand upon the knob, paused a moment nervously, then, drawing himself to his fullest height—and looking so much the man, every inch of him, that I was proud of the fellow—strode into the room.

There was silence for a moment—I confess that to me it was an awful silence. It was a thrilling moment, and had a thousand times more in it than I ever hoped.

Then there was a little shriek, a strong voice tremulously choked and stifled, a rush of a true husband and a devoted wife across what had seemed an impassable gulf, safe and sure into each other's arms.

I did not disturb them. For an hour they were there together. What love had been renewed, quickened, doubt dispelled, hopes brightened, everything that is tender and true in life resurrected and bettered, I cannot tell, but I *do* know that two more grateful people never existed on the face of this green earth.

And I also know that they both went home in the little *coupé* “separate apartments” since.

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