

A Detective's Experience

Medusa

“What a creature!”

The words sprung involuntarily to the lips of the observer as an old woman hobbled past. Age had rendered decrepid her frame, and wrinkled her face, but there was a look out of the hollow eyes that made one shudder.

“Yes, a strange woman, and with a history, too,” said Mr. F.

“You know her, then.”

“Yes.”

“Who is she?”

“A murderess.”

“Perhaps I should not say as much, but I will tell you her history. It has not been many years ago since she lived with her husband, honored and respected by everyone. They had no children of their own, but had adopted a child from the orphan asylum. It was a winsome creature, with laughing blue eyes and a merry smile that won insensibly on your heart. Years passed away, and the orphan girl grew into a beautiful woman. Everyone loved her, and society lavished on her caresses which only its belles receive. But the graces of her mind were not exceeded by her personal beauty. Brilliant and fascinating, there was ever about her that charm which wins on the heart while it pleases the senses. It is not surprising that her protector loved her as if she had been his child; but it was the love of a father only. But somehow his wife grew jealous of the child she had reared, and this sentiment once excited can never be appeased. She may not have been a bad woman, yet that passion made her insensible to every just and charitable emotion. Unsuspecting and loving as one so circumstanced would be, the girl lavished upon both the affection her real parents would have obtained. But it had no power to disarm the fatal cruelty of a heart maddened by suspicion. Her caresses were torture, and sight of her at last became insupportable. Strange to say the object of this hostility never dreamed of its existence. And as “trifles light as air are to the jealous minded confirmations strong as proofs from holy writ,” so the natural affection and innocent love of this young girl were made the means of confirming suspicions that at last destroyed her life.

You have often seen the home where they lived. It is a small two-story dwelling on the corner of Love and—streets. The chamber of Louise adjoined that of Mr. T—— and his wife, but the door to it opened from the hall-way which ran alongside of both of them. The only other means of access to the room was from a window which looked out into the courtyard. This could only be reached by means of a ladder.

One morning the whole community were startled by the announcement that Louise Rayner had been murdered. Mr. I. and myself were among the first who entered the house. The door had been broken open, but everything remained as before. The young creature, scarcely twenty, lay upon the bed as if in sleep. The golden hair lay like floss on the pillow; the face was chill and white, but never more beautiful. The long lashes rested lovingly on the cheek, and the blue-veined lids, so palely tinted now, looked as if they were ready to life from the sunny eyes. No sculptor ever chiseled a form so fair. The drapery that hid her form could not conceal its delicate outline, nor the contour of the rounded limbs. A gash in the bosom and a crimson stain disclosed where the treacherous blow had been dealt. It had found her heart—that sharp, avenging steel—even as she slept. The young life had passed almost without a struggle, and the scream that the lips had opened to utter was lost in a smile.

The door of her room had been locked, and no answer being returned when she was called in the morning, the door had been forced open. The key was on the inside. The window, however, was open. The murderer must have gained access through it, many thought. My conclusions led to a different theory.

I soon became satisfied from all I could learn from the servants and the confused statements of Mrs. T that she had committed the deed. Still there was no proof of it, and I was equally satisfied there would be none. She had been far too cunning to leave a trace behind. She had no doubt concealed herself in the room, and after Louise had retired accomplished her purpose, and then, to avoid detection, had swung herself from the open window to the brick court beneath. No impression of her feet on the ground—no bit of torn apparel—nothing was left to give a clue. People wondered; the mystery became an item for the papers, and after awhile faded out of the public thought.

But although she escaped man's justice, retribution found her out. Her husband died, and the property he bequeathed her took wings and fled. Her face, once fair, had become haggard, and, Medusa-like, was evil in its sorrow. Her sex avoided her, for strange suspicions had crept into people's minds. The face was hardened now, and the evil expression played upon it as you have often seen shadows play upon the wall. Year by year her wretchedness increased, and scorn and opprobrium followed in her path. She returned it all with malice. She loves no one; lives with no one; but it is said that strange cries issue from her doors at night, and it may be that the brain of the old woman is crazed at last; and the phantom of the fair young girl, whose life she took, comes to disturb her repose. But it has no power to soften the evil face and hide the cruel gleam of the cold, gray eyes.

“And that is her history?”

“Yes.”

“It is a strange one, indeed!”

“It is a true one.”

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