

An Adventuress

A Detective's Experience

It is said that evil invariably works out its reward. But it is not always so, as one will readily perceive in tracking the adventures of one of the most remarkable women I have ever met.

She grew from childhood in an inland town of Virginia under the shadow of the great Blue Ridge. There are persons in the city who remember her then as a beautiful child, wild and wayward as the wind, a laughing, black eyed creature, whom everybody loved. There was music in her voice—a charm none could resist in the spoilt, impulsive beauty, that seemed to carry perpetual sunshine with her. But the darkness of a great sorrow came upon her. She was then just seventeen. Her very virtues had become her enemies, and deserted by those who should have been her protectors, she left her home, and before a year was passed, her memory was scarcely recalled by those to whom she had been a creature of love and beauty.

“A friend of mine,” said Mr. F., “had often seen her there—indeed, had known her well—and as we talked of many things, so we talked of her. One day Mr. I. and myself were sent for by a merchant of this city to investigate a case involving a heavy forgery. It seemed that a check of his had been presented and cashed at one of our banks for a large sum. To us he confided the fact that the criminal was a woman. He said she had asked him for a small amount, and not having it, he had signed the check, and told her to fill it up for whatever sum she required.

She had drawn it for many thousands of dollars—for all, indeed, he had on deposit—and immediately fled the country. He gave us a picture of the criminal, but was careful to inform us that he only wished to recover his property, not to punish the offender.

It was a singular face the artist had painted; a strange, weird face; heavy masses of bronze hair shaded a broad, white forehead, that seemed to shadow dark, fathomless eyes, instinct with fire and intelligence. Even the picture grew strangely attractive as you looked upon it. The beautiful mouth was sunny with the smile that nestled on the lips; while the flush that seemed to fever on the cheek had the tint of the rose. It was such a face as man would want to love and cherish, or die that it might know no sorrow.

I could not believe that this strangely beautiful woman had committed such a crime; and, as I sat in my office, I spent hours in looking upon it. Indeed, I had begun to think of but little else, and one night my friend came in while I was yet looking at it.

I handed it to him with the remark—

“Is she not beautiful?”

“My God! it is Laura Ellison!”

“Who?”

“The young lady of whom you have often heard me speak.”

“Not she who so suddenly disappeared?”

“Yes; but when did you get this?”

And I told him all I knew of the case.

“You will never get her,” he said, as the picture was handed back to me.

“Why?”

“She is far too smart.”

“Why she looks as innocent as an angel.”

“You will find her subtle enough.”

And so the conversation ended. I adopted every possible means to find her in vain. From the moment she disappeared from the city all trace of her was lost.

After months of useless search, we surrendered the case and took no more interest in it.

It was several years afterward that I met my friend, on his return from Washington. There was a strange, humorous smile on his face as he asked me if I had ever heard of my fair friend, whose picture I had once taken such an interest in.

“Not a word.”

“Will you use any information I may give you about her?”

“No, the case is now out of my hands.”

“And you will receive in confidence what I now tell you?”

“Yes.”

“Well, then I have just left her in New York, and had the pleasure a week since of attending her wedding.”

“Her wedding!”

“Yes.”

“With whom?”

“One of the most distinguished persons in the country.”

“Impossible!”

“True! She went from here to her home, and by her family was sent to some relatives in Maryland. Here she formed the acquaintance of her present husband, and being introduced into fashionable society, has reigned the acknowledged belle in the gayest city in the Union.

“I met her in the street and was recognized by her. She communicated to me freely all her past history, and asked if I had heard of her career in New Orleans. I replied in the affirmative, and told her all I knew, and especially of the interest you took in her picture.

She said that picture had come near working her ruin, for it was sent to Washington, and would have procured her arrest, but that she was able to buy off the detective. I congratulated her on her success, and expressed the hope that her adventures were done.

“Yes,” she said, “I will make a good wife if I can.”

She has kept her promise, and none now who sees the elegant lady of one of the first gentlemen in the land, would ever imagine it possible for her to have been an adventuress. Loving and beloved, the atmosphere of her home is bright with the sunshine of love—children have grown up around her, and the promise of her girlhood is realized in age. The roses of her life received a blight in their young spring time, but the withered petals yet retain the odor of their bloom.

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