

A Detective's Experience

A Touch of Romance

“It was just before the war,” said the detective, “that a queer trick was played me by a young fellow accused of forgery.”

“How was it? Let me hear the story.”

“Well, I have no objection, but don't interrupt me with questions.”

The reporter promised silence, and the detective elevated his feet to the table and thus proceeded.

“The Chief called me into his office one morning, and told me that a check for \$4,000 had been drawn by the confidential clerk of a well known commercial house, and had been cashed at the bank where their funds were deposited. It was a forgery, and the clerk had left as soon as the money was obtained. His name was Henry Harding; his parents lived in one of the interior parishes, and it was supposed he had gone there before setting out elsewhere. I could only learn that he was young and of rather effeminate appearance. This was all the description I could ascertain. The affair had not been blown abroad, and the Chief directed me ‘to work up the case.’ You know that S—— and I always work together. I called him and we had a consultation. He prosecuted researches here, while I went to the country. Thus arranged I was soon on my way. I had found out where the family of young Harding lived, and I had hoped to reach the house before night, but in this I was disappointed. Long before dusk, dark clouds began to form along the verge of the horizon and climb rapidly to the zenith. The thunder and lightning came at intervals, and I was soon assured that one of those semi-tropic storms, which are so frequent in the summer, would ere long burst upon me in its fury. I hastened forward, therefore, looking eagerly around for some place of shelter. I had proceeded but a little distance when I saw just before me a woodman's hut. I got into this as soon as possible. I hardly got comfortably sheltered before a gentleman and a lady dashed up to the door and dismounted. Like myself they were seeking shelter from the storm. The man was middle-aged, and exhibited in his person the strong athletic frame, the open brow, and genial, pleasant face of the Southern planter; but there was in his countenance now a touch of sadness, a seemingly exquisite sense of sorrow, strangely out of keeping with what the man should have been. His companion was a young girl of exquisite beauty, with dark, soulful eyes, and hair black as night. She looked, indeed, a daughter of the tropics, and the tall, splendid form was regal in its majesty. She was such a woman as a man could wish to live for, and, if need be, die for. They were both in traveling costume, and, from their conversation, I judged they were father and daughter, just setting out on a journey, and endeavoring to reach the river in time for an up-going steamer. Shortly after their arrival a negro boy drove up in a cart containing trunks. On one of these was the name of “Mrs. Harding, La.” You may readily conceive that my eyes were wide open, now, and my ears too. Here was something that I must needs observe. I walked out of the hut and went around to where the negro was standing. “Boy, where's your young master?” I asked the question abruptly, looking the negro in the eye.

“Golly, massa, dis chile dunno; hain’t seen him for mos’ a year.’ My resolution was taken on the instant. I would follow these people. I was satisfied they were in search of Henry. He could not come to them, and they were going to him. The whole matter was as clear as day. I did follow them to the river, where the daughter embarked on an upward-bound boat, and the father returned home. I took passage on the same steamer. I would not lose sight of the girl. I was satisfied she was going to her brother. I insinuated myself into her presence, and at last got into conversation. I was one half in love with her already; before we reached St. Louis I was wholly so. I learned that she was going to New York for some object she would not reveal. I thought I knew what the object was: but it had become of secondary importance now, for I was deeply, unmistakably in love. At last we reached New York. I could contain myself no longer. I sought an opportunity and told her of my love—told my name, occupation, and present object; I revealed everything; I only asked to share her affections. She seemed greatly agitated, and asked that I would leave her until next day. This was the forenoon of Monday—Tuesday afternoon I called for my answer. The servant who answered my summons informed me that the lady had left the evening previous on a steamer for the West Indies; but she had left a note. I tore open the letter eagerly. It contained these words:

“Sir,—For your preference I am much obliged; but the laws forbid gentlemen marrying each other. By the time this reaches you I will be on board the West Indies steamer.

“Very Respectfully,
“HENRY HARDING.’

“It took no more to show that a trick had been played me. You may believe I have seldom told that love story.”

The Daily Picayune [New Orleans LA], August 9, 1868

The [Richmond, VA] *Daily Dispatch*, August 20, 1868

Perrysburg [OH] *Journal*, September 18, 1868

The Corrector [Sag Harbor, NY] October 3, 1868

The Wyandot Pioneer [Upper Sandusky, OH], October 15, 1868

The Hancock Jeffersonian [Findlay, OH], October 23, 1868

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