

A Detective's Experience

A Betrayed

“One evening, Mr. J—— and myself,” said Mr. F——, “were sent for to see a lady at one of the principal hotels. The message disclosed no name or any clue to her purpose in sending for us. But the words evinced hurry and some little excitement. We went at once. Shown to the apartment of the lady, we were met by a young creature, scarcely twenty, but disclosing in her hard, sternly set features an experience which few of her age and sex ever encountered. The face itself was dark and gipsy-like, with large black eyes and regular features, which, when animated by pleasure or flushed by the fever of excitement, must have been surprisingly beautiful. Now they were marble-like. No trace of emotion played upon them; no smile hovered on the lips. Only the eyes gleamed with a strange, wild fire, and the muscles of the face sometimes twitched nervously. Her form was tall and graceful, and lithe as a willow; and when she spoke to us, with the graceful courtesy of one long accustomed to the refinements of life, her accents were musical, and the charm of her manner won upon the heart.

“I have sent for you gentlemen,” she said, “to see if you can discover the whereabouts of the criminal of that picture,” handing me the portrait of a young man it struck me I had seen before.

“What is the name of this person?” I inquired.

“His real name is Thomas Reed; but it is possible that he may have assumed a different appellation,” she replied.

“Has he any particular reason for doing so?” I asked.

“I do not know that he has; but, still, he may have done so.”

“You think he is in the city?”

“I think it possible, and I have sent for you to ascertain the fact.”

“Has he any profession, and what business would he be likely to follow?”

“He has been bred a physician.”

“What is your object in finding him?” I ventured to ask.

“That I decline telling you. I wish to know where he is, where he eats and where he sleeps, what is he doing, and, indeed, everything about him. This information I wish secured with the utmost secrecy and within a week. I wish no intimation given him of my presence here, and to avoid any accidental meeting, I shall remain in my room. This money,” and she extended to me a roll of bills, “will defray your immediate expenses. In the meantime, if you should need more, call on me,” and by her manner, rather than her words, she intimated that the interview was over.

What did all this mean? There was a mystery of some sort about it; but what mystery? The question puzzled me. The lady seemed utterly unattended and alone. Her manner disclosed a lady of education and refinement. Was this mythical personage, of whom she was in search, husband or lover; and what did she want with him when found. On all these subjects I was left in the dark.

I consoled myself, however, with the reflection that if we found the man all this would be made known to us, and if it was not, why it was no business of ours.

Detectives, you know, are proverbially curious. Their profession makes them so; and of whatever nationality they may be they have all a trick of the Yankee in them. I confess the mysterious lady puzzled me greatly. Even while at work on her case I often found myself wondering what was at the bottom of the strange search.

I attended the Medical School, visited in turn every doctor's office in the city, attended the theatres, haunted the concert halls, and, indeed, went everywhere it was likely a young man would go. At last, one day, near the close of the week, I met up with him at the office of a well known physician and without discovering any especial interest in my inquiries, managed to learn his present residence and pursuits. He had not been in the city a great while, and was evidently but little acquainted here. Yet he was a gentleman of finished manners and fascinating address—handsome, too, and certainly a man of the world. I concluded at once he was no brother of my client, whatever else he might be. It took me but a short time after this to acquire the additional intelligence the lady wished to know.

I visited her, therefore, immediately, and stated what I had learned.

The information seemed to excite her greatly, but it was like the flash of electricity, as transient and evanescent.

“I must know all this,” she said, “from my own observation. Come here at 12 o'clock tonight, precisely. I will be dressed as a boy—the garb is familiar to me—and will accompany you to his boarding house. When there I want you to point out to me his room—so perfectly that there will be no mistake—and the most perfect and easy mode of access to it, by one who seeks to visit it without the knowledge of its inmate.”

“But, madam, this is very strange!” I ventured to suggest.

“It may be so, sir, but I am neither a housebreaker nor a robber; and besides, it were useless to attempt to baulk me in my further proceedings.”

This seemed true enough, but notwithstanding I had many misgivings about the matter. Still, the lady looked honest, and a frail weak thing like her I thought could do the man no harm.

True to the appointed time I called for her and together we sought the house. No architect ever scanned a building more closely than she did this. It seemed to me she counted every brick in it. By virtue of my authority as an officer we went in and visited the different rooms—all but his—ostensibly in search of a criminal. Even the locks of the doors did not escape her minute

observation. At last she announced herself satisfied and we regained the street. As her feet touched the pavement, a low, bitter laugh issued from her lips and her right arm was flung up with an air of triumph, as she said, between her clenched teeth—

“I have him! I have him!”

What did it mean?

Silently we walked back to the hotel. No effort of mine could draw her into conversation. Some powerful emotion influenced her mind and held her speechless. Whatever the mystery of these two people, it had some hidden and terrible meaning. It flushed the lady’s cheeks, and her eyes gleamed with a strange, wild fire. I was almost afraid of her myself.

When we reached the hotel she put a large roll of bills in my hand and said:

“I will see you two days hence; until then, leave me alone.”

The next morning the city was wild with a strange rumor; a stranger in a boarding-house up town had been stabbed to the heart while asleep. A slip of paper pinned to his breast bore in the neat and elegant hand-writing of a female the simple words. “He betrayed and I avenged!”

It was all the explanation that could be given. You can yet read an account of the tragedy in the *Picayune* of that day. I hurried to the hotel; the lady was gone; then to the scene of the tragedy. It was the stranger who had been killed. This is all we ever knew. No trace of the fugitive was ever found.

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