

A Detective's Experience

The Blue Domino

A low, vine-clad cottage, with green creepers shading the doorway. A young girl peered from the tangled foliage out into the darkness; the young face wore an anxious look, and the eyes were sad with sorrow. The bright golden curls were thrown back and a little white hand was lifted to the ear as if to catch the first echo of a footstep. The light from the room flashed over the sunny tresses that shone in the glare like a golden crown. Suddenly the report of a pistol rent the air, and a man staggered and fell at her feet.

The noise of the street had long died out. The busy city was sunk to rest; the wild fever that had burned along its arteries had ceased; in that secluded spot no sound was heard, save the pistol shot and the death rattle as the victim's pallid face was raised appealingly.

"These were the facts as they were related to Mr. I—— and myself," said Mr. F——, "an hour afterwards."

The head of the dead man was pillowed on his daughter's lap, and to the stiffened lips she pressed her own repeatedly. But friends interposed and the man was carried into the house.

"Have you an idea who did it?" I asked of the young lady.

She hesitated for a moment. Not even her overwhelming sorrow had power to suppress the blush that stained neck and face with a burning glow.

"I have none!" she said falteringly.

I did not believe her. Whoever the assassin was, she knew him. I was satisfied of this, although some reason, for which I could not then account, kept her silent. This was all the public learned from the daily papers. It was related in the "Picayune" as all, and for awhile it passed from men's thoughts. But you know what others forget we remember. The detective's work is never done. The clue lost must be regained. But in this instance the mystery seemed impenetrable. Still the belief that the girl knew by whom the fatal shot was fired, kept her constantly in my mind. I watched her incessantly. I searched out her history—learned of her loves—her courtship and all the secrets that young ladies guard so sacredly. I ascertained from them that she had been addressed by a young man of dissolute habits, and a wild wayward character. She was an heiress in her own right, but her fortune depended on her marrying with her father's consent. This could not be obtained. I now settled in my own mind who was the murderer. But I had no proof. Since the night of the tragedy he had not come near her. But something assured me that an interview would yet take place. To this end I waited patiently.

It was Mardi-Gras night—the night of the carnival. The brilliantly lighted city was wild with excitement. The population was *en mask*. The sound of music—the sound of echoing feet—reached the street from many a palatial home and public building—a night of revelry. I stood in the centre of a room thronged with dancers, my eyes never straying from a *blue domino*. I had

traced it here. I knew the lady who wore it; I had seen the milliner who fashioned it; I had seen it fitted to the beautiful face. I had not lost sight of her from early dawn. She was standing underneath the chandelier when a man approached her dressed as a harlequin. Instinct would have told me who he was, had I not recognized the sound of his voice—the simple word—

“Mary!”

The girl trembled violently, but I heard the reply—

“Murderer!”

“It was for love of you!”

“It was for love of my money—go! I have not and will not betray you. But I will never willingly look on your face again.”

“You will desert me then?”

“Would you have me marry the man who killed my parent?”

“Mary, what else could I do?”

I did not wait for the reply. I had proof enough now. I whispered in his ear, and he followed me from the room.

“You are my prisoner!”

“For what?” he inquired haughtily.

“For murder!” I replied, looking him steadily in the eye. He bore the look unflinchingly for a moment, and then broke down utterly.

“Mary has betrayed me!” He said.

“Not so! but I heard your conversation!”

“No matter, I will confess it!” And he did. It is useless to repeat the recital. It was such as a wild, impetuous nature inured to crime would be likely to make. A great effort was made by his friends to save him, but in vain. The crime he perpetrated was too cruel—the deed too heartless. He is in middle age, but his hair is white, and his face is wrinkled with care—an old man, whom remorse has cheated of youth. The girl yet lives in the city unmarried. She has a strange heart, and a mind warped by affection. She refused to testify even at the trial.

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