

The Death Life

I hardly knew what to do, now that the father of the deceased claimed leniency for the criminal. It was true that the law would hold her guiltless of wrong; but should I accept it as evident, and let the accused go free? I sympathized in the feelings that urged her to the deed of blood. I knew her wrongs were many and her provocation just—but what then?

I repeated all that Mr. Locey had told me to Mr. I——, and asked his advice.

“What shall we do?”

“Let her go! I cannot but admire the heroism of the friendless girl, who in this way avenges the wrong none but herself may redress.”

“So do I; but can we, now that we know where she is, permit her to depart in peace?”

“Yes!”

“So be it, then; I submit,” and so the crime and the criminal faded out of men’s minds. It as a nine days’ wonder, and then ceased to appall. The days fled by as rapidly as before—new excitements sprung up and then disappeared. The world wagged on, and none were worse or better that a life had been quenched and the murderess escaped unscathed. But there is

A Providence that shapes our ends,
Rough how them as we will.

I had myself almost forgotten the circumstances just recounted, when, two years later, business called me to Havana. Standing in the rotunda of the *Hotel D’Isabelle*, one night, a young quadron boy approached me and slipped a note in my hand. The address bore my name, and the inscription was in a lady’s handwriting.

“What did it mean?” I knew no one there—had not even an acquaintance in the city. I hesitated a moment before opening the note. In my confusion I had permitted the boy to escape unquestioned. There was only a line; it said, “Mr. F—— will oblige an old acquaintance by calling at the *Hotel D’Escalon*, Room No. 8.” “What friend had I there?” It was a puzzle to me, and the more I reflected, the more confused I became. But I determined, nevertheless, to keep the appointment, and the next day I accordingly repaired to the hotel in question. I knew not who to inquire for, but trusted to luck. I would make some inquiries, I thought, and perhaps I might gain some intelligence to guide me. But I had barely reached the long flight of marble steps that led to the saloon, than the same messenger who had given me the note met me. “The señor will step this way?” I followed him through a long hall, and up a flight of stairs into a private room. It was a large apartment, elegantly furnished, and displaying in its arrangement and surroundings the unmistakable indications of being occupied by a lady. It needed not the tall figure, draped in black, that rose, as I entered, to teach me this. But had these objects been a hundred fold more attractice, they would have ceased to interest in the presence of the lady. Serge-like garments enveloped her person, and a black veil rested upon the thick masses of hair that adorned her

head. Tall and queenly, the form was symmetrical and faultless. Standing, as she did, in her long sweeping robe it would have taxed the imagination but little to have thought that the *venus de medicis* wore such shape. The fierce blood of the tropics flowed in the olive cheek and flashed in the great [black] eyes, while its sunshine seemed to linger in the smile that played on her lips.

I have seen many beautiful women, have admired the belles in almost every land, but I have never looked upon one who could at all compare with the woman who I then supposed I had met for the first time in my life.

“You do not recognize me,” she said, extending her right hand, and seemingly enjoying my bewildered looks.

“Really, I do not,” I said, frankly; and yet across my mind there flashed the impression that I had seen the face before. Its delicate outline—the wild beauty that seemed all aglow with feeling and emotion, had in it a touch of remembrance, as evanescent as the lightning, but as strong as its impressions.

Where had I seen it? Not among the beauties of my own land. I had seen many fair faces there, but none like this. The faculty that had never failed me before I distrusted now. My memory was at fault.

“And yet you have cause to remember me!”

Again the image of a memory almost dead flashed out, and the identity of the stranger was almost within my grasp. But I shook my head; it was beyond my reach.

“Do you not remember the young Cuban who killed young Locey?”

Quick at the words the tide of time swept back, and rushing memories thronged thick and fast. I knew her now—knew the tall form, the faultless person, and that quickly searching eye, that seemed with intuitive faculty to read the mind as if by instinct.

“Sit you down and listen to me!”

The tone was abrupt, but the face retained its sweetness, and a nameless fascination lingered in the light of the wondrous eyes.

“I wish to talk of New Orleans: it was his home—he died there.”

The voice was changed now, and the mournful utterance fell distinct and soft as one might tell of a cherished friend’s decease. She told me of their meeting, years before, she a winsome girl and he a fugitive in a strange land. How she hid him in the fastnesses of the wild woods, and watched in cunning his pursuers. How her girlish heart opened to his tale of love and would not have bartered heaven for the paradise he made her.

“He was a hunted fugitive—[I] a trusting woman who could wait. The war ceased. Lopez’s band defeated and dispersed, the most of them sacrificed, offered no cause to withhold an amnesty. It was proclaimed at last. Yet he came not. The weeks became months, and these, too, fled in the waste of years. The truth was long in coming, but it came at last; *I was deserted*. Then my love turned to hate. My honor cried for vengeance. It was appeased in blood. You know the story now: did I right?” Her utterance grew rapid as she proceeded until the last, when she stood before me, her face flaming as did *Hecate’s a Nemesis* of woe. Her eyes fairly glowed with fire, and the passionate sense of wrong burnt upon her face like a flame.

I knew now the *woman was insane*. The night that bloody deed was done her reason fled. This I learned afterwards. We were interrupted shortly and I took my leave. I never saw her again. She died no doubt the victim of a broken heart.

The Daily Picayune [New Orleans, LA], October 3, 1869

This story was part of a series titled “A Detective’s Experience” and featuring detectives Mr. F— and Mr. I— that was published in the Sunday *Daily Picayune* from August 1868 to November 1869.