

A Detective's Experience

A Death Struggle

The wide river that sweeps around our city so grandly has been made the receptacle of many a deed of crime, has hid beneath its silent waters many a horror. "Many years ago it was the scene of a tragedy, the saddest I ever witnessed," said Mr. F——; "and despite the long years that have flown, it still rises as vividly before me as if it occurred but yesterday. Mr. I—— and myself had been watching a man for weeks, suspected of a heavy robbery in the East. We had no proof, and were waiting day by day for details that should satisfy the law. You may have read an account of it in the Picayune. It was published far and near, this homicide on the river.

The man gave his name as Torpin, a tall, finely proportioned man, and with a face bearing no traces of crime. His wife was one of the most beautiful women I ever met. They had been here for weeks, with no apparent occupation or design. They visited all places of amusement, rode out daily, and never seemed happy unless mingling with the crowd. There was a restlessness about them which no effort could wholly repress, and which first excited our suspicious. There was another fact connected with them which attracted attention and occasioned remark.

The man was afraid of his wife.

One could see it in the restless, uncertain glance of his eye; in the paling cheek and trembling lip when she taunted him, as she sometimes did in a low tone. When her eyes were off of him, he repaid the taunts with a look of hatred, that fevered in his eye, wrathful and malignant as death. I shuddered, and a cold chill went through my frame, when one day I detected that burning glare, which for a single moment rested on the fair young girl with the beautiful but Hecate-like face.

Often at night they strayed arm in arm along the avenues, or walked upon the Levee; and one evening I saw him persuading her to take a ride upon the river. She refused for a long time, but finally he overcame her scruples, and the miniature boat glided away from the dock, bearing the two out upon the flood. I could never tell you why, but a feeling that something was wrong came over me. I felt that the man meant evil. Hastily getting into a skiff, we followed them. The night settled dense and cloudy, and a low, restless wind, moaned along the waters. The moon was hid behind masses of clouds; and the uncertain light from the lamps on the bank did not relieve the darkened atmosphere.

The boat glided silently, and we followed almost breathlessly in its wake—only the creaking of the oars was heard, and the regular splash of the paddles in the water. Presently these ceased, and we knew the boat was at rest. Approaching as silently as we might, soon a low conversation struck upon our ears.

"You intend to betray me?" we heard the man say.

The woman laughed—a strange, mocking laugh. "You are insane!" she said at last.

"I am not!"

“Am not I as deeply implicated as yourself?” the woman asked.

“Yes—but you do not feel the degradation as I do—you hate me!”

“No, I have only more courage!”

“You taunt and despise me!”

“No, I’m foolish enough to love you!”

“You have a strange way of evincing affection!”

“Have I, indeed!” And even in the distance I could note the scornful intonation with which each word was breathed “have I, indeed? I have loved you, and you betrayed me. I have clung to you in disgrace, and you hate me! I managed your escape, eluded your enemies, defeated their schemes and preserved your plunder. You reward my devotion with suspicion. I have taunted your cowardice—I despise the selfishness of your nature—yet I love you.”

At first scornful, the voice grew gentle as her utterance ended, and a sob, almost a moan, stifled her words.

“I do not believe you!”

“I dare say you do not.”

“I mean to kill you!”

“What?”

Out upon the moonless air came a shriek, piercing and fearful, and then a splash of a body falling heavily through the water.

One sweep of the oars and we were side by side.

It was too late. The woman had already perished. Before we had time to lay hold of the criminal he leaped into the river and sunk from sight. Whether or not he ever escaped I never knew. I never saw him again.

The next day the body of the young girl was found and buried. Her history no one could ascertain—a beautiful, nameless wanderer, dead with the roses of life at their bloom—dead before the evil spirit of an erring life had made her beauty fade.

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