

A Detective's Experience *The Decoy's Victim*

“I can tell you an event which, although it did not come within the sphere of my own business relations, yet was within my personal observation, and for the correctness of which I can vouch,” said Mr. F——, as the reporter seated himself to hear some incident connected with his experience as a detective.

“A young Kentuckian had come to the city in the winter of 185—, as many do, purely for pleasure. Of great wealth, and by no means careful of his personal associates, he soon plunged into a career of dissipation which rapidly fitted him to become the victim of one of the most remarkable women of her age. This person was the wife of a noted gambler. She had apartments at the most fashionable hotel, and acted as a decoy to her profligate and unscrupulous consort. She was a Spanish Creole, and possessed every fascinating trait which have so distinguished the women of her race. But added to the exquisite beauty of her person, she possessed an educated mind, and was in reality fitted to [xxx] any sphere in society. Always dressed in robes that ever enhanced her rich tropical beauty—easy of access, and to the uninitiated and susceptible youth upon whom she lavished every bewildering charm of manner and address, it is not surprising she soon became a creature at whose shrine both heart and sense were gladly surrendered. He accompanied her to theatres, balls and parties, and as the influence of her artfully woven meshes became each day stronger, and he less capable of resisting them, she gradually drew him within the pale of her husband's evil designs. Her elegantly appointed parlor became the theatre of little card parties, at which costly wines and the blandishments of female beauty [formed] a combination of attractions which his blinded perceptions could not resist. Step by step he was led along the road to ruin.

He never saw his peril, or if he did, it was [xxx] only to be forgotten in the smile of his dark eyed enchantress. Vast sums had now swollen from the pittances hazarded at [first]. His own means had been exhausted; his friends had been appealed to, until they would loan no longer, still unmindful of his perilous career, a criminal step was taken, and a forged draft supplied him with the means he could not otherwise procure. Another and another followed, until the vast sums he squandered had absorbed every dollar of his inheritance. And now he awoke from his dream of passion, to realize the utter hopelessness of his condition. Bankrupt and criminal, a single hope still lingered around the memory of his wrecked life and fortune—one ray only of possible happiness was left him as he brooded on his sin, and that, the love of the beautiful woman who had ruined him. To him she had become as an Elvira to Lamartine, the Heloise of Abelard, and now in the cleft of his torn heart he cherished her as a beautiful flower in sweet memorial of a happier time. He knew she had ruined him; he knew that the beautiful [xxx] shined no jewel of purity; but he knew that he loved her, despite her crimes and his own. Flight was still left him; the magnanimity of his friends and creditors had left him this. From the consequences of his crimes and the scorn of his friends he perceived the necessity of this last alternative of the criminal and wretched outcast of society. But before he went he solicited and obtained an interview with the woman he had looked upon as an angel and worshipped her as such. What passed at that interview was never known or ever will be. He had been in her presence perhaps an hour, when the scream of a woman in deadly fright echoed through the house, followed by the report of a pistol. The startled servants rushed to the apartment, but recoiled in horror. In the

centre of the room, a bullet through the brain, lay the dead body of the young Kentuckian—a suicide, beside him, rigid and pale as death, stood the woman but the light of reason had [fled] from her eyes; a just retribution had [paralyzed] her mind. The spell of her dark enchantments were loosened, and none afterward travel their ruin to the gambler's maniac wife.

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