

A Detective Story

by Rebecca Forbes

I met with a strange, genial, talkative old gentleman one day, who told me a story which seems too good to be withheld from an appreciative public.

“That is a love sick couple over there,” he observed, indicating a pair of rustics that were just off on their bridal tour. “It reminds me of a certain experience in my life, which, until this moment, I have not alluded to for years.”

“What was it?” I asked. “Something rich I am sure, from your comical expression.”

“Yes, very rich. So rich, in fact, that I was completely sold for nothing. However, I will give it to you and let you judge.

“When I was a youngster of one-and-twenty I was crazy to become a detective. I had read a great many stories and novels where detectives figured conspicuously. I had caught boys stealing apples, negroes robbing hen roosts, and several other little affairs, which gave me the idea that I was especially designed for that calling. I spoke to my father about it, but he laughed at me. However that did not discourage me. I became acquainted with a detective, and, though he was not as sanguine of my success in the future, as I was, he offered to assist me. I became on friendly terms with him, and hope flourished finely for a while.

[“]Well, my boy,[’] he said to me one day, [‘]I think there is something which you may do, and if you accomplish it you will earn a five hundred dollar reward.[’]

[“]What is it?[’] I asked.

[“]A rich old merchant in W——— is being robbed continually and can make no discovery as to who is doing it. He came to us to-day and offered five hundred dollars if we would investigate the matter.[’]

[“]Well,[’] says I, impatiently, [‘]what do you propose for me to do?[’]

[“]Go down there disguised as a farm hand,—he has a farm,—and watch proceedings. There is but one person in the house, his daughter, or an adopted daughter, besides himself, and an old servant.[’]

[“]I went down. I carried a private letter of introduction, which I presented to the old gentleman. He looked over it, and then laid the whole case before me. He always brought the money from the store at night, and he always was robbed at night. How or by whom he had not the least idea. I was to watch and see if I could find any clue to the mystery.

[“]I was then introduced to his daughter, as he called her, a rather plain looking girl, of some nineteen years of age. Her father told her my business, and she treated me with a degree of

familiarity which she would not have extended to a mere farm hand.[']

[“]On the following day a dashing, handsome young lady came to visit Miss Kitty. She said she was a young lady she had met at boarding school, and thought very much of. She introduced me, and, at the very first sight, Miss George Summers’ bright eyes carried me captive.

[“]The old gentleman was annoyed at Kitty having company at that time, but did not like to make his annoyance known. [‘]However,[’] he said, [‘]it will not probably make much difference to the thief, whoever it is, so we will have to endure her.[’]

[“]I found enduring her very pleasant work. Kitty left us together a great portion of the time, and I was not slow in embracing the opportunity it presented. Georgie told me all her affairs. She was an orphan. Had a large property, held by her uncle, who was her guardian until she should become of age, unless she married before that time.

[““]It is wonderful you have not married before this,[’] I said, and she answered—[‘]I never found any one I liked, and I did not wish to buy my [freedom] too dearly.[’]

[“]That was a good opening for me. I told her how much I loved her, and proposed a hasty marriage. At first she demurred, and then assented. I was rapturous. I was in luck. Only two days more and I was to be the possessor of a handsome wife and a handsome fortune. I thanked the propitious stars that ruled over my destiny, and first gave me the wish to become a detective.

[“]Meanwhile, I had watched, and I saw enough to convince me that Miss Kitty was the thief that was robbing her father! What her motive could be I had not the most remote ideas, for she did not appear to spend or dispose of one cent. I found out the place where she kept it, and I determined to let my secret be known to the old man. I made Georgie my confidant. She wept; she took on dreadfully.

[““]It is so horrible, Harry![’] she said, [‘]and I have loved Kitty so! Promise me one thing?[’]

[““]What is it?[’]

[““]That you will not make the disclosure until after we are married to-morrow night. Then I can go away with you, and not witness her grief.[’]

[“]Of course I assented. What fellow in love with such a radiant creature could do otherwise? Kitty was to know nothing of our discovery. She was to go to the little brown church, a mile away with us, see us married, and then I should tell her father of my discovery, show him the proofs and then take the train for home. That was the happy plan we sketched out.

[“]The next morning the merchant told me that he had been robbed of more than usual.

[““]And I have found out the thief,[’] I said, [‘]though I cannot tell you who until to-night, when I will be able to show you the proof—that is, the money itself![’]

[“]He grasped me by the hand and thanked me, but I would give him no hint until the designated time.

[“]Evening came at last. We three went to the church. We found it dimly lighted. Georgie left me standing by the altar, while she went with Kitty into a little room at the side of the altar for a few moments.

[“]It seemed but a second before a young man stood before me with a pistol leveled at my head in his hand. I looked at him in amazement[.] It must be—and yet how could it be—my expected bride.

[““]Georgie![’] I exclaimed.

[““]George Conrad, at your service sir,[’] he returned in a sneering tone. [‘]Stand still while Kitty adjusts those handcuffs on your wrists,[’]—Kitty held them in her hand,—[‘]and ties you securely to the altar, or I shall be under the necessity of shooting you![’]

[“]I was at their mercy—the handcuffs gave an [ominous] click, the rope was adjusted around me and the altar—I was a prisoner!

[““]Now,[’] he continued, [‘]when you play detective again, I hope you will have the sense not to be bewitched so easily. I wanted Kitty, and she wanted me, and the old fellow objected. I was poor, Kitty could not go away with me. We contrived a plan to rob the old man and then elope. She robbed him successfully for a time, and everything was going well until you appeared. I saw at one glance that you was an over-grown, vain, spoony calf, and so I came to the house as a young lady on purpose for you to make love to. How do you like the looks of your bride?[/]’ and he laughed outright. [‘]Now,[’] he continued, [‘]we have made a big haul to-night, and we are off. You will stay here until some one accidentally finds and release you. Then it will be too late to pursue us. Good day, my darling Harry,[’] and throwing me a kiss, he took Miss Kitty’s [hand] and walked off.

[“]I felt mean; I was sold and I was helpless. Nobody came that night, nor during the first part of the next day, and I had the happy prospect of starvation staring me in the face if nobody should come until the next Sunday.

[“]Late in the afternoon I was released. I told my story to the man, and together we went into the little room. All the female apparel which had robed the form of George Conrad was still lying there. I took them, wrapped them up carefully, and went to the old merchant. He was much surprised at my appearance. Kitty and Georgie and I, all being missing, he had supposed that we were all murdered, and a search had been instituted. He listened to my story. He raved like a madman, and called me a fool for my pains.

[“]I went home without the promised reward, and I left the detective business in disgust. I turned my attention to something else, and, for a long time I was shy of any one dressed in lady’s clothes. However, I have married since then, but I have never been quite so spoony or hasty as I was when courting Miss Georgie.

["I leave you to judge for yourself if I was not, as I have told you before, sold, and unmercifully cheap at that!"

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