

The Detective's Story

by Geo. Melnotte Grummond

One dark and stormy night in November, 1874, when the rain was beating a dismal tattoo on the window pane, and the wind was howling and shrieking around the gables of the neighboring houses in a lonesome accompaniment to the splashing of the water in the gutters, swelled by the fast-falling rain, I sat in my cozy little office, where the ruddy fire-light cast a comfortable contrast to the darkness without, where the mellow light from a student's lamp barely lit up the space outside the shadow of the shade upon it, and utterly failed to dispel the darkness and ghostly sombreness that clung to the piles of old books, manuscripts, old papers, ancient pictures, and innumerable other "old things" with histories and tales attached to them; making their dim, dull outlines take upon themselves the light and glory of romance.

On the opposite side of my desk sat a life-long friend, Tom O'Hara. We had been schoolboys together, mates at college; and the firmest of friends in after years. Tom was a detective in the City of New York and one of the shrewdest men on the force, and having run down to Riverside on private business, had spent his leisure time with me. And on this evening, just mentioned, we were talking over the old scenes which had taken place long ago in our schooldays, and many were the laughs our pranks in younger days brought up. So vivid was memory that I almost felt myself again grasping the ball-bat or skimming over the glassy ice as we had often done; then there were the gay scenes attending us at college, the triumphs, the defeats, and the last victory at graduation day. There is something tender and touching in thoughts of long ago, thoughts of things we will never do again, thoughts of faces and voices long vanished from our sight, which, perhaps, we will never again behold. And we were both enjoying these thoughts as only school-fellows can, and Tom's deep bass voice vibrated through the rooms like a bell, broken now and then by his hearty laugh.

I could not see his face for a perpetual cloud of cigar smoke enveloped it, but between the laughs, sounding so merry, were frequent sighs. It may seem strange that a whole-hearted fellow of Tom O'Hara's calibre should sigh, but yet it was so, and I don't believe there is any man living who has a heart to feel for him, who could resist sighing for "the days gone by."

Finally I said: "Tom, you never gave me a story from your own experience as an officer. Come, now, let's have a good one to drive away the "blues."

"Well, old boy," he said, "I don't mind if I do tell you of a little adventure I had in Detroit about four years ago, and you, being in the legal profession will readily appreciate it."

"All right, fire away," I said.

Tom gave two or three vigorous pulls at his cigar, puffing up little circlets of smoke that clustered around his head like blue halos, and then began:

“You see, George, it was in the fall of ’69 and old John Mather of Buffalo died; you remember John, don’t you?”

I nodded, and he went on.

[“]Well, after his death, as you remember, no will could be found. The old man was supposed to have made one, but it could never be brought to light[.] And so the whole estate was divided[,] equally between his nephew and niece, the only living relatives. About that time a casket of diamonds was missed from the house, and the nephew sent for me and placed the case in my hands, saying:

[“]Now, Mr. O’Hara, I leave the whole to your ability, and expect you to get back the casket again, any assistance which [you] may need, I will furnish cordially.[’]

[“]Well, I began my investigations by examining the safe where old Mather kept his valuables, and I found that it was perfectly sound, so I knew that the casket had been taken out by the safe’s being opened in the regular way.

[“]I next questioned all the servants closely, and found that they had all been excluded from Mather’s room with the exception of the nurse; this latter person was John’s niece, who, as I said before, obtained one half of the estate. On her I fixed my suspicions, partly from the evidence on hand, and partly because I knew her character was not of the best.

[“]I had an interview with young Mather again, and told him I suspected his cousin of taking the diamonds, and asked him if I should follow and arrest her.

[“]He told me to bring her back to the house but that he did not want her arrested, and only wanted the family diamonds back again. He also said he did not know where she was at present, but thought she had gone to New York.

[“]I obtained a photograph of the girl, and learned from the ticket agent at the depot, that a woman answering her description had bought a ticket to Detroit, Michigan, three days before. The conductor of the express confirmed the agent’s opinion, and I immediately took the next train for the [‘]City of the Straits.[’]

[“]Arriving at Detroit, I put up at the Michigan Exchange on Jefferson Ave. under an assumed name, and immediately commenced to hunt up the girl.

[“]By careful inquiries, concealing my vocation the while, I learned sufficient to convince me that she was in the city, but her name was not on any of the hotel registers. After considerable trouble, I tracked her to the Russel House, one of the best hotels in town at that time, but for a long time, I was unable to see her, or to be assured that it was really she, as she took her meals in

her room and seldom went out.

[“]One evening, I stood on the steps of the hotel hoping that she might be obliged to go out for something, and then I could arrest her in a quiet way. About eight o’clock, she came out and entered a carriage that was waiting, and, under the gaslight I saw the diamonds, which I was [looking] for, flash and sparkle at her throat and in her ears.

[“]The carriage drove to the Opera House, hardly a square distant, and she alighted and entered. I followed, keeping in the crowd and avoiding all actions that would lead her to suspect that she was watched.

[“]She passed around the circle and entered a private-box, and the door closed between her and me. I saw that she was magnificently dressed and was evidently getting rid of her inheritance as fast as possible. Knowing that I could not enter the box before the curtain rose without attracting general attention, I waited.

[“]When the audience became absorbed in what was going on before them on the stage, I walked around and entered the box, closing the door after me.

[“]She started and turned around, hesitated and then demanded the cause of my intrusion. To which I replied that I was an officer, at the same time displaying the star on my breast, and that I wanted her for robbery, also that if she did not come quietly I should have to handcuff her. I knew it would be impossible for me to arrest her in the theatre, but I wanted to frighten her into coming out.

[“]Without any more ado, she arose and followed me, and I was careful to keep a sharp eye on her. I allowed her to go back to the hotel and settle her bill, and order her trunks to be sent to Buffalo by express. I then took her to the depot just in time for the 10.30 train eastward.

[“]During the night, she sat by my side without even uttering a word, but occasionally she glanced across the aisle at a dark, handsome looking man, who, when these glances met his eye, slightly lifted his brows, and went on staring out of the window. In fact he overdid himself, and was too cautious, consequently I knew he was acquainted with my companion.

[“]Presently he turned and threw his hand over the back of the seat, and out of my half-closed eyes I watched him sharply. In a moment I understood what he was doing. He was talking in signs to my charming prisoner. And without much of an effort, I read plainly:

[““]I will drug him, and you must get away. We will go to Europe. Have you got the will safe? and have you sent your trunks to Montreal? Is he a regular detective? Is he asleep now.[’]

[“]To which she answered in the affirmative to all of the questions.

[“]I was wide awake now, you may be sure, but I did not open my eyes. The passengers were all sleeping or dozing around me, and no one was looking toward us. Quietly I took out my handcuffs and held them under my coat-skirt. The fellow crossed the aisle and took the seat behind me; presently both of his hands came over my shoulders, one holding a sponge, from the peculiar odor of which, I concluded it to be chloroform. When the hands were far enough over, I quickly snapped a bracelet on one and grasped the other firmly, and before he could recover from his surprise, I had the other on and he was caught.

[“]He swore and raved like a madman, and threatened me with dire vengeance, called upon the girl to shoot me, which only caused me to slip a pair of irons on her own delicate wrists. I then took the fellow by the coat collar, and jerked him into the seat with the girl, and sat down opposite, with my eyes watching every movement.

[“]In this way we rode to Buffalo, and I soon had them before John Mather’s nephew. I related the conversation about the will which I had witnessed in the car; and telegraphed to Detroit for the girl’s trunks. When they came, we found the casket with all the missing diamonds safely hidden in a secret compartment, and, in the casket, was a piece of parchment. This was the last will and testament of John Mather, deceased, leaving everything to his nephew.

[“]They recovered all that was possible from the girl, but she had fixed things with her husband, the chap who tried to drug me, in such a manner that after all, she carried away something like seventy thousand dollars.

[“]I wanted to have the man sent up, but young Mather let them both go, and I have never heard anything of them since, except that her husband, whose name was Leone Howard, was shot at a Baden Baden gambling house. Young Mather still lives in the old house yet, and, I think, has quite a family.

[“]I received \$5,000 for that bit of work, besides this,” showing me a magnificent cluster diamond ring, which adorned the little finger of his left hand, “and I think I should like a few more like it, for you know I’m only human, my boy, and so earthly things possess for me a wonderful charm.”

“I have had many adventures in my day,” was answered to my question, “but I have told you this because you are familiar with the parties occurring in it.”

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