

The Intriguante

A Detective's Experience

In a low, weather beaten brick mansion far down on Music street resides an old woman whose strange history is interwoven with the details of fearful crime. It is not many years since she was famous in the locality where she resides as an intriguante. No one rightly knew her origin. Ever since I have known her—and it has been many years now—she has been old and savage in look and action. Her long unkempt hair hangs around a face haggard and wrinkled with age. Crime has put its seal upon the strange weird face, and the fierce, black eyes have an intense glow which evinces habitual ill will.

“She was concerned,” said Mr. F., “a number of years ago in the abduction of a beautiful country girl who came to this city with her parents. Mr. I. and myself were employed to ferret the matter out, and bring, if possible, the guilty parties to punishment.

An account of the transaction was published in the Picayune of that day, and there are persons in the city who will yet remember the circumstance. The victim was a beautiful young girl, scarcely twenty, and for the short period she moved in society, reigned a belle. By some means she became acquainted with a young man, whose addresses were repulsed, and who contrived against her a fatal revenge. What motive aside from the fact of his rejection actuated him I never rightly understood. Be that as it may, one night when her parents were at the theatre a carriage drove hastily up to the St. Charles Hotel, and a card was sent in to her, stating that her mother had been taken suddenly ill, and that her presence was required at once. Without a moment's reflection she sprung into the carriage and was driven away. It was the last seen of her alive. Two days passed and no tidings of the missing daughter was received by the nearly distracted parents.

It was then that Mr. I. and myself were called in. It would be impossible to describe to you the search we had before a trace was found. There were weary hours of waiting, many a day of fruitless search. At one moment we would think a clue was discovered, and the next instant it would fade away. It would not do to make inquires, for this would put the parties on their guard. There was nothing left for it but weary waiting—incessant watching. This we did; habit and the experience of years had fitted us for it. But success crowned our efforts at last. There was that about the abduction which made me suspect the instrumentality of the *Cybele* whose acts I had had occasion before to unravel.

One night I saw her in conversation near Jackson Square with the rejected suitor. Unobserved, Mr. I. and myself watched the interview. When it was over, the young man quitted her with a face pale as death. Mr. I. followed him, and I the old woman. She walked as if she feared some one pursued her, but I kept in the back ground, and my eyes never strayed from the apparently decrepit wretch tottering ahead of me. Every now and then she would stop and look cautiously around, and then proceed warily. On her way she stopped at an undertaker's and ordered a plain coffin, and then went on. She did not recognize the disguised figure that brushed by her as she stood and chattered for the death casket. But my blood chilled as I heard her. Was I then too late? In a moment more she hobbled past me, and I again crept stealthily behind. I dared not alarm her. A more cunning creature never lived. Had she suspected me, I would never have

found her abode. Besides, she was now in the part of the city where she lived, and there was many a scowling outlaw, whose blade would have instantly sacrificed any life at her behest.

Her home was reached at last, and as she disappeared within, I hastened to the rendezvous with Mr. I——. On my way I stopped at the undertaker's, and told him to delay his proceedings until I rejoined him.

By the time, however, that he was ready Mr. I—— and myself had returned. It took but a moment to explain to the man who we were, and that we would relieve him of the necessity of attending to the funeral. As the undertaker's employees we started for the intriguante's residence. Reaching the place we removed the coffin from the vehicle and took it into the house.

It was as I feared—we were too late!

Before us on a low couch lay the dead body of the young girl—dead by her own hand. Rather than to submit to dishonor she had sacrificed her life. Kept here in confinement she had been daily subjected to the importunities of the wretch at whose instance her abduction had been accomplished. Despairing of succor and worn out with incessant strife, she had died a suicide.

We took the old woman into custody, but the evidence against either party was so defective, and their scheme had been managed so cunningly, that it was impossible to procure their conviction. But the man perished at the hands of the father, and a jury said he did right to kill him. God alone can judge the old creature, whose life is waning fast. Her ways have been evil, and many a young life has perished miserably because of her. Many a curse clings to her name—no prayer ever rose for her happiness.

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