

The Monomaniac

There is an old house on Spain street, worm-eaten and decayed, that has been the scene of a strange life's history. It was built in the old colonial days, and was the residence of a Spanish family of repute. It was a mansion then, and pleasure and luxury held a carnival within its doors. Wealth furnished the magnificently appointed rooms, and a rare taste was displayed in the elegant grounds and costly statues that adorned the lawn. A marble fountain rose in front of the wide gallery, and the flight of marble steps was guarded by a Sphynx wrought with exquisite skill. The wide hall swept back into corridors of rare mechanic art, and the mosaic work upon the walls and ceilings had tasked the elaborate genius of the Florentine and Venetian. In those grand old days many a courtly dame had dispensed the hospitalities of a Spanish noble beneath its roof; within its walls many a scheme was formed to beguile a fair domain from the grasp of France. Castilian grace and the beauty of Andalusia mingled here in youth and age. Then as now the fetters of many a love dream was flung around young hearts; and in all the wide province there were few so bright and beautiful, so lovely as the daughter of the Spanish conqueror. Against the wall of the old picture gallery yet hangs a portrait of the Spanish girl, with eyes like the gazelle, a smile like sunshine, and radiant as a dream.

Time wore on, and generations passed away. But from father to son the old mansion went down, as the eldest of the family successively died and passed away. A few years since, the sole representative of the old race inhabited the house with his family. The youngest of them was a beautiful girl of twenty. There was about her the witching grace, the sunny smiles, the glad beauty, that ever clings to the maidens of Castile. Yet in the great black eyes there sometimes crept a sorrow, beaming from a single moment mournful and sad, and then passing away. It was such a look as pity might wear in the presence of distress—such as the kind heart feels when saddened by a thought of wrong or a sight of woe.

There was about her, too, a look of the beautiful picture that hung on the wall. Sometimes she would go to it, the nurses said, and look upon the beautiful outlines of her ancestress, then shiver and turn pale; for the young girl whose miniature was painted there had died a maniac.

So time wore on until the revolution in Cuba. That ill-fated expedition had drawn to the isle some of the bravest and best of our people. Among them went a son of the proprietor of the old gray house, and he, too, lost his life. The sorrow that wrung so many hearts was felt there as well. On the young girl the anguish fell heaviest, and the sorrow more intense. For a time her intellect was maddened and her mind a chaos. She recovered at last; but her face always wore a frightened expression, and her eyes grew wild, and her lips turned white at a sight of blood.

There was six in the family then—three brothers, the parents and the subject of this sketch.

One night a strange tragedy occurred: the three brothers were found dead in bed, stabbed to the heart. The city was wild with excitement. The shocking details were told with white, scared face and a terror that would creep into every heart. The deed was a mystery; no one could tell who did it—no clue could be found upon which the detectives could work. The door of each room was locked—the windows shut; but there the victims lay, stabbed to the heart. Inquiry was set at

defiance, and, after months of labor, we gave the search up in despair. No eye, save the all-seeing One, had seen the strange murder done.

The mother soon died of a broken heart, and the daughter and the sire alone remained. But the horror was not yet complete—another victim was to be added to the rest; and one night, scarcely a year afterward, the father met the fate of his sons. The same mystery clung about his murder that shadowed the rest; the same dark, impenetrable horror overclouded all. What could it mean? This time, however, the doubt must be resolved and the mystery cleared. Nothing could be learned from the daughter; she was wild. I never saw such passionate grief—such an overpowering sense of woe. Before the awful horror her senses reeled, and the very fountains of her life were drying up. Her screams, the anguish of her moans linger in my memory yet. Sometimes she would stand silent for an hour, looking into vacancy. Her cheeks had grown pale, the splendid form attenuated and thin. Her eyes were an index to her heart-consuming sorrow—mournful and sad. The great, black pupils looked as if that sight of horror could never fade from their vision. Then she would grow restless and walk incessantly. Sometimes a wild, mournful song would struggle to her lips, and the heart grew sad and unrestful as the weird, unnatural cadence met the ear. Then, suddenly, her mood would change, and she would laugh and clatter like a child at play.

The girl was a maniac! No wonder! Before her terrible grief minds more strong would have fallen shattered and bruised.

But this was not all. It begun to be whispered around that she had been long insane; and perhaps at intervals, when her mind was black with its chaos of unreasoning impulses, and fearful imaginings, she may have done these horrible deeds! I shuddered when I heard it. God forbid that it should be so, but a strange horror crept through my veins as I heard it.

What if it should be true? I determined to watch her. This was easy, for the house was still under surveillance. I took up my residence there. Day and night I kept her in view. I saw the light and the shade; as her mind darkened or brightened I marked its travail, and saw its unrest and despair. The face had grown wan, the figure slender and fragile, and the beautiful eyes were luminous, but the light was wild, as if from insane fires. How I pitied her! She never raved now, and a sweet smile sometimes clung to her lips as sunshine kisses ice; a dreary, pitiful smile like a ray that sometimes dart from the sun when it struggles in clouds, but making the things that it touches beautiful.

One night I perceived her mood was changing, and I watched her attentively. A strange impulse seemed to be pushing her on to do some deed. She tried to resist it. I saw her struggles to keep down the thought. She would put it back as the weak and vacillating sinner would put back a thought of evil.

But at last she rose and left the room. She seemed to heed no one, care for no one. Step by step I followed her. At the rooms her brothers formerly occupied she stopped and listened, then opened the doors and went in. For a single moment she paused at the bed side, looking upon an imaginary sleeper, then quick as thought drew from the folds of her dress a knife, and struck home. Each in succession she visited, then came back silently to her room.

The mystery was cleared. The next day the knife was found hid in the folds of her dress.

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