

A Young Nemesis

Detectives' stories are rarely devoid of interest, and when truthfulness is a prominent element of their matter, they acquire positive importance in the eyes of the general reader. The one told by an officer, in the New Orleans *Picayune*, and printed below, is no exception to the rule. As a record of facts, giving prominence to the keenness and courage of a woman, it will be found worthy of perusal:

In 1848, a circumstance occurred in New Orleans which, at the time, created an excitement which affected the entire population. An old merchant, highly connected, wealthy and of distinguished social position, one night mysteriously disappeared. His family were in infinite distress, and his business in consequent disorder. He left his store at a late hour, ostensibly to go home; but, before going, contrary to his usual practice, he put in his pocket a large sum of money. His way led along Peters street, on the bank of the river, far down in the Third District of the city. His life may have been sacrificed, and his body thrown into the flood that rolled at his feet. Police regulations at that time were bad, and crimes of this description were not unfrequently perpetrated. A little way back from the street was a ruinous building, half tumbling to decay, and inhabited by a number of people, men and women inured to vice, and living by robbery.

Among the notes Mr. Conlay was known to possess was one for \$500, with the word "Canal" written on the back. The rest were of various denominations and without peculiar identity.

Mr. I—— and myself visited the residence of the missing man, at the request of his wife, and by her we were charged with the duty of tracing out and bringing to justice his supposed murderers. She was a tall, elegant-looking lady, of commanding presence and great culture. The wealth of her beauty and fine mind were inherited by her daughter, a young girl scarcely twenty. The terrible bereavement had paralyzed the senses of the mother, but had aroused the energy and fire of the young girl's nature. More like a beautiful Nemesis than an ordinary woman she appeared to us. As we entered the room she was in the act of consoling her mother. The long black hair had escaped from its confinement and almost enveloped her person in its ebon tresses. The great, luminous eyes were tearful, but flashing and full of fire. The face was dark with the blood of her Spanish race, but the figure was queenly, slender and faultless as a model. The glorious beauty of this young girl fascinated while it bewildered you. Rare in its exquisite loveliness, the eye delighted to rest on the willowy outline and graceful symmetry. Starting up as we entered the room, she inquired hastily, almost fiercely, I thought.

"Are you the detectives?"

"We are," and I mentioned our names.

"I must speak to you in private," she said, and led the way to an adjoining apartment.

"What do you think of the matter?" she asked, when out of hearing of her mother.

"As yet, an opinion would be mere guesswork," I replied.

“Nevertheless, *I* have come to one. I have no doubt he has been murdered, and that the deed was committed somewhere near that old ruinous building by the river.”

“Some such idea has crossed my mind, but there is no trace as yet which can lead to proof of it.”

“We will find it, rest assured,” she said, “and to this end you must co-operate with me. And now listen to what I have to say: To-night, at 12 o’clock, precisely, do you two visit the old building. I will be there. Ask for the young woman who applied at night-fall to them for shelter. Let your object be, apparently, to arrest her.”

“But I do not understand!”

“But you will. I am going there at dusk, disguised as a beggar girl. By the time you come, my information will have been collected.” She rose to her feet as she spoke, and now indeed she wore the appearance of the Nemesis I had likened her to at first. Beautiful, but rigid as fate, looked that set determined face. The beautiful eyes had lost their softened lustre, and shone with a passionate light almost cruel. The lips were pale, but rigid as iron, and the beautiful nostril dilated with an expression of heart-consuming vengeance. “I will read the guilty secret,” she said, “if the criminal is there, however deep in his heart he may bury it.”

Strange as it may appear, I made no attempt to dissuade her from her purpose. I could not. I felt as if the beautiful creature exercised over me a magnetic control. And with this understanding, we took our leave, to prepare for the night visit to the old house and its dangerous inhabitants.

Those acquainted with the city at that period, can form some idea of the danger of the plot we had formed. To us it was a matter of daily occurrence. But for the young girl, inexperienced and tenderly nurtured, to thrust herself into the very house of the unscrupulous and desperate wretches who were suspected of this crime, was simply appalling. It would not do, however, to go to the place before the hour appointed for our coming, for that would defeat the object in view. It was, therefore, with many a misgiving, and an uneasiness but poorly concealed, we bided our time. But we determined to be there at the very moment, and the clock was on the stroke of mid-night, when we knocked at the door. The outside of the house gave no signs of life within. The shutters were securely fastened, and no ray of light penetrated the darkness; but the muffled sound of voices reached our ears, until our knock hushed them to a whisper. There was a momentary hesitation, as if of counseling together, and then the door was opened wide.

It was a long, low room, dusty and brown from age. About a dozen persons were seated around, but every eye was turned to the door. Two men had risen to their feet, and stood in an attitude, which might mean defense, before the fire-place; but the object that attracted our attention most was a young girl sitting in the center of the apartment. Her face was dark as a gypsy’s, and the long hair hung loose on her shoulders. Her dress was of poor material, ragged and unclean. Patches and rents had almost changed its hue and disguised its texture. She seemed too thinly clad for that cold night, and her slender frame shivered, as if from cold, as the chill air from the open door swept in.

“What do you want?” was the stern question addressed to us by one of the men at the fire.

Before I had time to reply, the girl sprang to her feet, and spoke instead: “Arrest these men!” Her voice was low, but the face, flashing in the light of the fire, was that of the Nemesis I had seen that day.

There was a short, fierce struggle, and the men were in our power. The girl then walked to a place in the floor, and, touching a concealed spring, raised a trap-door. She bade Mr. I. lift the box that lay in the hiding-place. The lid was wrenched off, and in it were the old merchant’s money, papers and pocket-book. With the money was found the bill, and the word “Canal” written across it.

It was not long before the men confessed their crime. The old man had been murdered and his body thrown in the river.

The daughter accomplished her mission. She had carried out her design, and traced to their hiding-place, the proofs of the murderer’s crime. It is useless to realize what followed. Long years have fled since then, and the young Nemesis is yet among the living. Beautiful still, there are many hearts to grow glad at her smile, and share with her the joys of the home she charms. But this strange incident in her life will never be effaced from her mind, or fade from the memory of those who saw her then.

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