

## A Detective's Experience

### *A Prison Scene*

The long shadows that follow the sun's decline were nestling on the grass and playing among the rose bushes of a pleasant lawn on Prytania street, from which an English cottage rose like a bower of beauty. The white marble walls gleamed through verdant leaves like ivory, and the song of birds made the air vocal with melody. Within the bower reigned a quiet oppression in its silence. The wide windows admitted the evening breeze, which rustled the papers on the table and lifted the stray, thin locks of an old man asleep on the lounge. A sob would sometimes shake his bosom, and his lips muttered as if in prayer—and anon a spasm of pain would cross his face, as a sense of his sorrow weighed on his mind. "I stood in the door," said Mr. F——, "watching that troubled sleep, reluctant to break it, for I had that to tell which must augment his grief."

There is, however, a [subtle] sense, which tells of a stranger's presence even in sleep. Under this influence the old man woke. He was prepared for my coming and asked me eagerly:

"Have you any trace, sir—have you any trace?"

"I have found your son, Mr. H.; but I am still the bearer of bad tidings."

"Not dead—do not tell me he is dead!" and a mortal fear whitened the old man's face, and his words fell brokenly.

"No sir, not dead."

"Oh, there can be nothing bad then. He lives, and I am happy."

"Mr. H.," I replied, "I have that to tell you which I fear will break your heart. Yet it is my duty to disclose it."

"From the first, I know why your son had left you; but so long as he was not arrested, it was unnecessary to grieve you by a recital of his crime. If he had made good his escape, I would have kept from you that which now I must reveal."

"The night your son disappeared, a young girl named Minnie Davis was murdered. You heard of it, of course, but few suspected the man who did the deed, and justice imposed upon those few silence. You will remember that her room was found locked in the morning, and no clue was apparently discovered to her assassin. As usual, she had retired at night; the family heard no noise and suspected no danger, yet, when the door of her room was forced, she was found dead on her bed, stabbed to the heart. From this door you can see the window through which the murderer escaped. To hide his guilt he sacrificed a life he had rendered a disgrace. Mr. H., that murderer was your son!

"When you sent for me the next day to tell me of his mysterious absence, and your fears that he had come to harm, Mr. I—, was already in pursuit of him. From here to Havana—from thence to

New York he was traced, and but a few days since captured in that city—this evening he arrived here, and now you know all.”

I shall never forget the horror of the old man’s face as I told him the story. It seemed turned into marble, so rigid and pale had it become.

“My son a murderer!” he said at last, more to himself than me.

“He is, indeed!” I replied.

“Will you let me see him once. I have not long to live, and I would like to look upon his face before I die.”

There was an earnestness in the simple request I could not refuse, if I would. Yet I feared for the interview. The old man was frail, and suffering and fear had almost snapped the thread of his life. Still, it was better, perhaps, that his wish should be granted. “Come with me.”

Arrived at the jail I led him tottering to the cell where his son lay shackled. The yearning love of that old man surpassed even a mother’s affection. Strong men inured to prison scenes wept when they saw his agony. He spoke no word, but the sobs came thick and fast as his trembling hand rested on the bowed head of the convict man. He made an effort as if to invoke a blessing—a prayer trembled on his lips, then the body reeled—the senses fled, the old man fell down dead.

It was no more than I expected, but the stony face wore the saddest look I have ever seen in death. We took him away and buried him, where a few months later the body of his son was laid—the closing act of a sorrowful prison scene.

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