

A Detective's Experience

The Refugee

It is more than twenty years ago that fashionable society here was excited by the advent of a young Cuban beauty who, under the protection of the family of a distinguished merchant, came among them winning hearts as if at will. She was a tall, stately creature, grand in her faultless development and possessing a charm of manner, a fascination, indeed, indescribable, but none the less effective and controlling. Few of the youth of that day escaped the magnetism of the great black eyes—the spell of her wondrous beauty. The air of mystery about her enhanced rather than diminished her influence. But when it was known that she was an orphan—the heiress of wealth—the sole representative of vast estates, it is not surprising that she speedily exerted the power of a belle.

Her position, however, was unquestioned. As the *protege* of Mr. M——, she was courted by every one; and at a ball given in her honor by the family with whom she resided, seeing her for the first time I was not surprised at the reputation her beauty had acquired. The night in question Mr. I—— and myself had been sent for by Mr. M——, who, without explaining his motive, asked us to mingle with his guests, and wait for further intelligence.

Near the centre of the room a number of gentlemen were gathered around a lady whom I had no difficulty in recognizing as Miss de C——. I had never before seen a being so radiant. The flash of the costly jewels on brow and neck were not brighter than the dark Spanish eyes. The face was shaded by a wealth of rich braided hair, but the fierce blood of the tropics fevered on cheek and lip. Rounded and full the queenly figure would have been noted and admired in any assemblage. It was said by those who knew her best, that now and then the eyes grew sad, and the face was pallid with secret fear. But it was not so now. The triumph of her glorious beauty lit up eye and face; and the sheen of the burning lamps fell upon none who seemed more free from care. Even as I looked I saw a dark foreign looking man approaching her from behind. There was a stealthiness in his movements that arrested my attention. Supposing him a guest or friend of the family my eyes again turned to look upon the belle.

On the opposite wall a large mirror was placed; and this reflected every object in the room. As I looked again, the lady caught sight of the reflected figure approaching her so silently. On the instant she grew rigid as death—the smile died on her lips—the blood fled from her face. Even as I sprung forward to assist her, the man reached her side. There was a quick convulsive movement, and the lady sunk to the floor. I supposed she had fainted; but as I raised her in my arms a stream of blood spurted out on the sanded floor. There was no deception in that crimson stain. The dagger of an assassin had reached her heart. The shriek and tumult that ensued, aided the escape of the murderer. The search [instituted] at once proved futile. He was no where to be found. But his face was indelibly printed on my mind. Should we meet again I would know him.

It is useless to relate the scene that ensued. The lady was dead—a victim, as I afterwards ascertained of a brother's avarice. She had come here to escape his enmity; and had Mr. M—— confided to Mr. I—— and myself the reason he had sent for us, we might have preserved her life. For he had seen the name of her brother published in the *Picayune*, of that day, among the

list of arrivals by the Cuban steamer. Apprehensive that he would seek an interview we were sent for, to take him into custody, if the occasion required it. He delayed telling us until it proved too late. The life of the fair young creature fell a sacrifice to that moment's delay.

"Was Mr. M—— a relative?" the reporter asked of Mr. F——.

"No; a friend of her father—her guardian by his will."

"And you never saw the man again?"

"Oh, yes? I arrested him six weeks later in Havana."

"And what became of him?"

"He escaped from his prison here and went to Europe."

"But you followed him?"

"Yes; but never saw him again. He evaded me utterly. My heart was deeply interested in the pursuit, for it was a cruel deed; but he escaped me. I often recur to the sad fate of the beautiful refugee, and there are many yet living in New Orleans who will remember it. I can almost see her now—the beautiful creature—as she lay dead before me that sad night.["]

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