

A Detective's Experience

Secret Murder

"I once arrested a man," said Mr. F., "accused of killing his wife. Although convicted, I have always been doubtful if his sentence were just. He came here a stranger; silent and repellant in his manner, making no acquaintance and shunning society. He was a foreigner, too, speaking our language but imperfectly, and relying solely for sympathy and confidence on the beautiful woman whose warm, sunny loveliness seemed chilled by the cold, rigid manners of her husband. She was very young, too, and those who knew them best, from seeing them most, declared that her glad utterances were often frozen—her childish laughter stilled—by a gloomy look or stern command. He seemed a man at war with mirth, and brooked no joy in his alienated sympathies. She feared him, too; for those who saw how the young creature gladdened when the sunlight flung its beauty around her; when the flowers bloomed in her way, or nature answered back her smiles; saw, too, her furtive glances to see if he noted the transient joy she felt, and saw her sadden at the frown she met.

One night the people in the house at which they staid heard her scream in terror, but the man's gloomy nature had made them fear to enter his room, unless invited, and several minutes elapsed before they summoned courage to ascertain the cause of her alarm. When, at last, a servant opened the door, the young wife lay dead upon the floor, stabbed to the heart. *The man was gone.* Mr. I. and myself were sent for at once, and came immediately. The window fronting the street was open—a leap of nearly twenty feet to the banquette—but through this, it was certain, the man escaped. The knife that still pierced her heart was a Spanish dagger, and usually lay upon the mantle—its sheath was thrown upon the floor. It looked as if it had been snatched up in sudden passion to do a deed of blood.

It was late at night, and the woman had been aroused from sleep. Her long gown was stained red with blood, and clung to the beautiful frame like a winding sheet. But the face shown ashen in the gas light with fear. There was horror in the stony outlines, and the parted lips seemed open for a cry of despair. I shuddered as I looked at the spectacle. So young, so lovely, so full of witching graces, one could hardly think a being so beautiful could die. Only the day before I had seen her, with eyes flashing like the sunlight, a form of beauty, and laughter rippling like the song of waters on her lips, looked indeed "like a thing of beauty and a joy forever." And now she lay dead. I noted well each mark essential in the search I had to make, and then, sick at heart, turned from the place to look for her murderer.

At the threshold I met her husband. I laid my hand on his shoulder:

"You are my prisoner!"

"Sir!" he indignantly exclaimed, "how dare you?"

The tears were yet in my eyes; the horror of his deed still before my vision. I could scarcely retain my patience, but I did.

“I arrest you, sir, for the murder of your wife!”

His cry as like that of some wild animal, as he sprung by me up the stairs and disappeared in his room. The people stood grouped around the dead body, tender hands washing off the bloodstains. These he flung aside, and knelt, with a cry, at her side—a cry like that despair might wring from courage when hope had fled and life was at its ebb—a cry like that “of some strong swimmer in his agony,” or such as virtue gives when honor’s fled. Sobbing, crying, calling her name in accents piteous and tender, he at last sunk back, fainting, and we carried him away.

It seemed so certain that he killed her that none could believe him innocent, yet his manner showed no guilt. It may have been insanity, or another may have done the deed; but a jury said he did it. As the years go by, the mystery may be cleared; but my heart acquits him now of the lawless deed done years ago. It robbed him of the only sunlight his manhood knew—it took from his path the only flower that gave to him its incense and perfume. But he never denied it—only looked at you, when he was spoken to, in an aimless, wandering way, as if the shock that had deprived him of the only being that he loved had destroyed his reason.

Long years have passed since then, but the memory of that horror lingers in my mind, an episode so sad and wretched that I shudder at the thought of it.

The Daily Picayune [New Orleans, LA], June 6, 1869

The [Nashville] *Tennessean*, June 22, 1869

Richmond [VA] *Dispatch*, June 23, 1869

The Leavenworth [KS] *Times*, June 29, 1869

Buffalo Morning Express and Illustrated Buffalo Express, July 2, 1869

Mower County Transcript [Lansing, MN], July 15, 1869

Chippewa Union and Times[Chippewa Falls, WI], July 17, 1869

Hornellsville [NY] *Weekly Tribune*, July 22, 1869

The Daily Gazette[Wilmington, DE], November 28, 1881

Ellsworth [KS] *Reporter*, January 5, 1882

Gibson City [IL] *Courier*, June 2, 1882

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