

A Detective's Experience

A Life of Crime

One of the most remarkable cases that ever came within my experience was that of Lucille Dutton. She was, in every respect, a woman of the world. Fascinating, brilliant, dashing, possessing an exquisite grace of manner and rare conversational powers, that charmed every one who came within the sphere of her influence. Until her crimes were known and her arrest attempted, she reigned here an acknowledged belle. Even the most jealously envious of her own sex admitted the wondrous spell exercised by her singular and surpassing beauty.

An actress, a vocalist, it would have been no extravagant eulogy to have called her a prima donna. Tall beyond the average of women, her slender, graceful form was modeled into an exquisite symmetry that would have been a sculptor's ideal. Curling, silky tresses of nut brown hair, shaded a face fair and delicate as a child. Great luminous black eyes flashed from beneath the beautiful lashes with a strange mesmeric power, that few indeed had the power to resist. This expression, combined with her rare intellectual gifts, made her regnant over many a heart that had never before felt the spelt of woman's charms.

She had come to New Orleans as a vocalist. Her engagement was attended with a success never before equaled by the most accomplished professional. Night after night the theatre was crowded with her admirers. Her appearance was ever the signal of an enthusiasm all but wild. As the weird light of the proscenium flashed on to the jewel and gem, and the queenly form, radiant in beauty, stood before the multitude, who swayed in the magic charm and impulse of tone and voice, I have often fancied her beauty supernatural. Youth and age alike felt its influence.

There was a thrill in the low utterance, that trembled on the air like the soft vibration of a harp whose strings the wind had struck, and rising in fullness and strength of tone until a rich, delicious harmony filled the vast building with a magical cadence, which no ear attuned to music could resist. Her name was on every lip—her picture adorned every window along the fashionable thoroughfare. Before the charm of that strange, wondrous beauty, fashion forgot exclusiveness, society opened its doors. Petted and caressed in every circle, admired and loved, her heart remained insensible to so much flattery, and homage of men and women was received as if it were her due.

It was at a time when her fame was greatest, and her success in fashionable life most assured, that an event occurred which changed it all and precipitated a catastrophe which I cannot even now reflect upon without a sense of pain. A few months before her advent here, a series of the most startling tragedies had occurred in Montreal. An entire family had been poisoned by a governess. The papers were never weary of the episode of horrors the recital furnished. The instrument of this wickedness had fled, and with such consummate skill had her flight been contrived, that not even a trace of her was left. It appeared that her beauty and accomplishments had won the affections of a youth, whose marriage with her his parents opposed. Driven to desperation, Harlow Vincent had, in a moment of frenzy, perished by his own hand. Over the corpse of her lover the governess had sworn a dire revenge. How faithfully she adhered to her guilty oath, the rapid decease of his relatives full well attested.

The story of the Canadian homicides had long since reached us, but had left but little impression, as a matter with which we had nothing to do.

One night a gentleman returning from the theatre, entered our office. His look was disturbed, and his face wore an expression of profound agitation

Mr. I—— handed him a chair, and after a moment's hesitation, he inquired if I had heard of the tragedies at Montreal.

I replied that I had.

“Have you no suspicion of the actor in that fearful drama?”

“The governess, of course.

“Yes; but have you no suspicion of who that governess is?”

“Certainly not.”

“Would you like me to point her out to you?”

“Most certainly I would.”

“And you would arrest her if I did?”

“Certainly.”

“Then, sir, your task is easy; the woman who is setting your city wild at present, the fascinating Lucille Dutton is the person.”

“What?” I exclaimed, “you are mad!”

“Not I; I speak advisedly—I know the woman; am a resident of Montreal, and have known her for years.”

The telegraph was at once put in requisition, and in less than an hour all the information sought for was obtained. There was no longer a doubt; the enchantress of the theatre was the murderess of Montreal.

We were warranted in taking her in custody at once; but, as there was no probability of escape, we delayed until morning. I confess I felt a strange reluctance in executing the duty I had to perform. I admired the beautiful creature, despite her crimes. I thought I could understand how these could have been committed without her being wholly bad. Maddened by the death of one she loved; hating with bitter animosity those who were, in a measure, responsible for it, and incited to the deed by the fierce, revengeful nature of her race, it seemed to me more the crime of others than her own. Still I would do my duty.

Early the ensuing morning Mr. I. and myself visited her apartments at a fashionable boarding-house on Camp street. Although the hour was early, she was up, and to the servants inquiring if two gentlemen could be admitted to see her, returned an affirmative answer. The bright golden sunshine of the early spring morning gleamed in at the open window, filling the room with light. It shone on the beautiful woman like a crown—red with crime, she might have been—but the nut-brown hair, in the sheen of those golden rays, seemed glory crowned. Robed in white, a single jewel flashed from the belt that encircled her waist—a bud of the early spring roses peeped from her hair. How beautiful she looked—how innocent. My tongue faltered—my utterance indistinct as I told my errand.

“And you believe me guilty?”

“By no means, my lady; I but execute my duty!”

“You do right!” Her voice was low and so exquisitely sorrowful that tears came into my eyes. A single hectic flush fevered on the smooth round cheek, as she rose and walked across the room to an escritoire that stood in the corner. The great luminous eyes were sheathed snow, and the long dark lashes drooped over them. She sat down at the desk and leaned her head on her hand for a moment; then searched for a paper or parcel in a nook in the desk. I did not observe her closely until she turned around facing me.

“I am guilty,” she said—the same low tone of sorrow—“yes, guilty in the eyes of the world, but not in the sight of heaven. I was insane when I did the deed. Insanity has its cunning—delirium its passionate sense of revenge. They broke my heart, destroyed in their bloom all the flowers of my life. I am a maniac even now, for I feel no terror in my crime. I have long looked for this hour. I am ready for it. My dead body the law may have; but with it, no sense of shame.”

As she spoke she swallowed a dull, grayish looking powder, threw up her arms, and fell back in her seat—dead!

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