

A Strange Murder

A DETECTIVE'S STORY

MISS CLARA HAMILTON, the daughter of a wealthy merchant, retired from business, and living in a pretty little villa in the suburbs of the city, did not appear at breakfast as usual one morning, and, on entering her bed-chamber, it was found that her bed had not been occupied the previous night.

Search was made, and at last, in a sort of natural arbor, made by the group of lilac bushes, with the clusters of white and purple blossoms bending down, as though to hide the pitiful sight from our avenging Heaven, they found her lying stabbed through the heart, and, as if that were not horror enough, two fearful gashes crossing each other on her face, and making it almost unrecognizable.

The evidence went to show that the murdered girl had retired to her room about 8 o'clock on the previous evening, pleading a headache. Mr. Hamilton, who was a widower, supposed that she had retired to rest; but, on the testimony of one of the servants, it appeared that she was afterward seen in the garden in company with a young man, a newspaper reporter named Geo. Gangoil, for whom she cherished an attachment, but contrary to her father's wish. About ten o'clock the servant saw this young man leave the garden by the water gate, and jumping into a boat that lay moored there, row rapidly away. Then the witness expecting Miss Hamilton to re-enter the house, had gone to bed.

Gangoil's landlady testified that he returned home about eleven o'clock, evidently disturbed in mind about something, and hastily packing a few articles in a valise, had paid his bill, and told her he would probably not return for a week or two. Then he had taken a cab and driving to Clearing Cross station, left by the one o'clock express for Denver.

On this evidence the inspector of police telegraphed to the authorities and had him arrested as he was stepping on the boat to cross the channel. So far everything was correct; the police had fulfilled their duty in arresting him, and it was now ours, we of the detective force, to find out whether he was wrongly accused, and if so, who was the perpetrator of the crime.

The first moment I looked at Gangoil I felt convinced that he was innocent, but though I could not get him to answer any questions, I felt certain that it was not the sullen obstinacy of guilt, fearful of criminating itself, but the apathetic despair of an overwhelming misery.

"You have the power, if not the right to insult me," he said, his eyes flashing up fiercely for a moment. "I loved her and we bid each other a sad farewell because of her father's wishes, and now you dare to accuse me of her death—my murdered darling!"

Every word he spoke, his face burning with honest indignation, convinced me the more of his innocence, but as I could get no more information from him, I proceeded once more to the scene of the tragedy.

I felt perplexed. I had not the slightest clue to work upon, and as I stood there I could only make vague conjectures, wondering what the tale would be. Could those scented blossoms that all night long hung over that dead mutilated face but speak.

It might seem foolish, but, after all, that was the only way to pierce the mystery—to build up a theory, and then proceed to prove it either true or false. The more I thought of the possibilities of it having been Gangoil who did the deed, the fewer they seemed.

Supposing that a sudden fit of passion or jealousy had moved him to kill her, he never would have made those fearful gashes upon her face. From the estimate I formed of the man he could not do it. But then on the other hand, the murderer must have been prompted by either revenge or jealousy, for the rings upon her fingers and the chain around her neck were untouched; and turning these thoughts over and over in my mind, I at last once became satisfied the criminal was a woman.

My conjectures went no farther than that, and I once more made a thorough search through the garden, but I had done this so carefully twice before that it seemed almost useless. However, I prosecuted my search and at last found in the hedge between the garden and the next, a fragment of the dress. This was something, at all events, and showed two things—that my guess as to its being a woman was correct, and also the means by which she entered and left the garden.

I was on a track now—a slight, one to be sure, but still it was a beginning, and I immediately made inquiries as to the occupants of the next house. I learned it was occupied by an old lady and her niece, who were reported to be very rich. They were of the Jewish persuasion, and their names was Rosenbaum. I also learned that the niece was of a passionate temper and led the household a hard life.

Having learned this much, I went to the house where Gangoil had lodged, and once more went carefully over his papers and letters, in the hope of finding something that might assist me. There was nothing of the sort among the papers, however, but in a cigar case lying on the mantel-shelf, I found a woman's card with the name of Mary Rosenbaum.

I began to have my case pretty well in hand now. Dressing myself as a peddler, I went to the house, and exhibited my wares in the servants' hall and spreading out my stock of silks and ribbons, offered them for about half their value, saying I would take cast-off dresses in exchange.

“Now, my dears,” I said, “your mistress must have very many that she will not wear again.”

“Lawks! yes.” Replied one of the girls. “Why, Molly, where is that old gray merino that Miss

Mary told you to give to the regiment.”

The dress was brought and my satisfaction was intense when I saw it was of the identical shade of the piece I had found in the hedge. Purchasing it at a figure that made their eyes open, I went on my way, and examining it, found the spot from which the fragment had been torn.

My case now stood as follows: It was a woman who had done the murder; a woman wearing a dark dress, had climbed over the hedge into the garden on the night of the murder; this woman was Mary Rosenbaum, who was acquainted with George Gangoil, and was of a passionate temper. The question now was what did she go into the garden for at all, and why take that method of doing so?

Under the peculiar circumstances, I thought myself justified in communicating these facts to the superintendent, and asking for a warrant to apprehend Mary Rosenbaum. It was granted me, and I and another officer took a coach and proceeded to the house.

Leaving my companion outside, I sent my name as the bearer of a message from Gangoil, and I was at once ushered up stairs into the drawing-room.

“I am Miss Rosenbaum,” she said: “what have you to say to me?”

She was a woman of about thirty, slightly corpulent, with the common, heavy cast of countenance, and an ill-tempered look in her coal black eyes.

[“I am an officer of the detective police,[”] I said, “and I arrest you for the murder of Clara Hamilton.”

A ghastly pallor overspread her face, and she seized the back of a chair for support.

“I have been waiting for you,” she said, at length. “I do not deny anything. I loved him madly, and I might have won him if it had not been for that doll-faced girl, with her large, sheep’s eyes. I only went to listen, but when I saw him press her to his bosom, and lavish the caresses upon her, I could not help it, and as soon as he was out of sight, I crept upon her and stabbed her through the heart, and even robbed the worms of the triumph of spoiling her wax-doll beauty.

A baleful green light shone in her eyes, while the tone of vindictive triumph in which she spoke made me shudder.

“I will go with you at once,” she said, “but let me first go to my dressing room for a moment.”

“No,” I said; “you can ring for anything you want. Dressing-cases may hold other drugs than toilet-powders.”

“You think I would poison myself?” she said, with a hallow laugh. “Well, you are right; for I never will go into court nor ascend the gallows. See!”

Even while she spoke, before I could stir or stop her, she had sprung from where she stood and dashed herself through the French window to the street below.

I ran down stairs as quickly as I could, but my companion met me in the doorway.

“Call for assistance to carry the body into the house,” he said; “there is no more use for us here, for she will never speak again.”

The New Bloomfield [PA] Times, October 29, 1878