

The Detective's Story

In one of our Western cities a forgery to a large amount had been effected, and the perpetrator had escaped with the spoils. The place of his concealment was not entirely known, but he was supposed to be secreted in New York City. In the city where the crime had been committed, I held a situation as lieutenant of police, and in obedience to orders I proceeded to New York in search of the forger. It was my first evening in town, and as I was sitting within the friendly walls of the St. Nicholas, wrapped in a cloud of tobacco smoke and a fine specimen of the latest style of false whiskers and moustache, I saw enter a very dear friend, from whom, two years before, I had parted in California. As he passed, he glanced at me, but did not recognize me. I was glad of it, for it assured me that my false whiskers would be a valuable aid to me as a disguise in the search which on the next day I intended to commence. My friend lighted a cigar, and seated himself some distance from me. As I couldn't allow the opportunity of speaking to him to pass by, I went toward him and said:

"Good evening, Mr. Markham."

"Good evening, sir," he replied, at the same time looking at me as if endeavoring to recall my countenance.

"When did you return from El Dorado?" I asked of him.

"A week ago, but really you have the advantage over me; inasmuch as you are acquainted with my name, while I don't recognize you."

"Is that the case?"

"It is, sir."

"Don't you remember me?"

"No sir, I do not," he replied.

"Can I speak with you one moment in private?" I asked.

"Certainly," was the answer, and arising, he accompanied me to my room. When the door was closed, I said:

"Do you not recollect me?"

"I cannot," was the reply.

Taking off my whiskers and moustache, and speaking in a natural tone, for I before used a disguised voice, I said:

“Does that refresh your memory?”

“Harry Evans, by all that’s powerful!” he exclaimed as he grasped my hand and shook it, until I feared that when he should release it my fingers would drop off.

“But what is the meaning of all of this; where did you come from, and what are you up to, that you must disguise yourself so that your friends don’t know you?”

On promise of secrecy, and in a few words, I told him what business I had before me. When I ended, he cried out:

“By Jove, Harry, of all the men in the city, you are the one I am most delighted to see; for there is a little matter, which is precisely in line, that I want attended to.”

I assured him that nothing would afford me more pleasure than to serve him in any way which might be in my power. Having ordered some champagne and fresh cigars, he told me of the work which he had for me to do and I will repeat the story as nearly as possible in his own words:

“It was just a week since I arrived here, with good health and plenty of money—a combination of circumstances which I consider particularly fortunate—and last night the trouble happened which I want you to see right. During the evening, having nothing better to do, I strolled into Burton’s to witness him in one of his inimitable performances. Next to me was seated a lady, who was neatly but rather showily dressed, and who appeared to be unaccompanied by anyone. Moreover, she was exceedingly handsome, and having by some chance entered into conversation with her, I found her also very interesting. What started our acquaintance I cannot remember, although I think it arose from some remark which she made to me—but, at any rate she was quite agreeable. When the performance was about half through she suddenly complained of feeling faint, and asked me if I would accompany her where she could get some fresh air. I did so, and it appeared to revive her, but after a few minutes she appeared to grow worse, and speaking to a small boy who was standing near, she asked him to call a carriage. Up to the present time I had felt a slight suspicion that all was not perhaps as it should be. It had been but the shadow of an idea, which her last request dissipated, and therefore I assisted her into the carriage. But no sooner was she in than she fell almost upon the floor. Of course, I jumped in to hold her upon her seat. Hardly was I in before the door was closed, the driver sprung to his box and off we went. I was about ordering him to stop, as I had no intention of riding with him, when the lady, who appeared to divine my thoughts, grasped me by the arm, and exclaimed: ‘My dear sir, do not leave me, I beg of you; I am very unwell, and if you will but ride with me home, you will oblige me very much; it is not far, and you can instantly return to the theatre.’—What could I do? I was in for it, and determined to take it quietly—besides, thought I, it may turn out to be a romantic adventure; and you will soon see that it did, and that the romance rather exceeded the pleasantness of the thing. So I remained seated by her side, supporting her, as she slowly revived. Although she had said that the distance was but short, and notwithstanding I was rather enjoying myself, yet it seemed to me that we were never to stop, although the horses had been going for a long time at the top of their speed. In fact, I had several times thought that they must be running away with us. But, at last, after riding almost half an hour, at a break-neck pace, we halted. By this time, she was again so unwell that I was absolutely obliged to lift her out of the carriage, and

carry her up the steps. Here she besought me to come in, that she might thank me for my kindness, assuring me that she should never forget it. Accordingly, I ordered the driver to wait, and in I went. We passed through a hall in which the gas burned dimly, and into a parlor likewise but little lighted, but as well as I could see, quite nicely furnished. The moment we entered the room, she appeared to revive, and closing the door, and taking off her bonnet and cloak, she requested me to be seated; I did so upon a lounge near at hand, and presently she came and seated herself at my side. She thanked me over and over again, and requested my card, which I gave her. She appeared completely recovered from her late illness, which she said she was quite subject to, and I have since come very much to the same conclusion. She had expected to meet her husband at the theatre, and did not know why he had not been there. He was a lawyer, and perhaps his business had detained him. Thus passed a quarter of an hour. At the end of that time, I heard steps coming along the hall; they stopped at the parlor door, and the knob was turned, but the door would not yield. Then a heavy voice exclaimed, 'Open this door!' This was followed by a strong kick. At the same time the lady cried out, 'My God, it is my husband—the door is locked; he is terribly jealous—he will kill you;' and fell fainting into my arms. What a position for a modest man! Before I could think twice, open burst the door, with a tremendous crash, and a man frantic with rage rushed into the room. For a moment he looked at us without speaking, and with a loud oath sprung to the table, opened a drawer, and seizing a pair of pistols pointed them at my head, crying out as he did so, 'Villain, I have found you; you shall die!' The wife sprung from my arms, and seized the barrel of a pistol with each hand. 'Would you commit murder? He is innocent!' she cried out, but he swore with an awful oath that if I moved he would kill me. Had I only had my revolver with me—and I generally carry it—he would perhaps have come off second best; but I had that day sent it to be repaired, and therefore, luckily for him I was unarmed. At length his ferocity melted beneath the tears and protestations of his wife, and the matter was finally adjusted by my leaving my watch and all my money—which was about three hundred dollars—as a pledge that I would call the next day and settle the affair, he at the same time giving me his note for the amount, and threatening to blow my brains out if I retired without so doing. After it was done, he walked down to the carriage with me, for it was still waiting, and got in after me, still keeping his pistols in his hands. When we had ridden some ten minutes, the carriage stopped, and I was ordered to get out. I did so, as he possessed a most potent 'persuader,' and the hack drove off and left me in an unknown part of the city. Of course, I have been unable to find the house, and so my money is lost, without you can help me find it; but I will give them the credit of having played the game excellently."

When my friend had finished, I burst into a loud laugh. I could not help it, the whole affair was so rich and amusing, but I promised to assist him as far as I was able.

"Have you mentioned the affair to anyone else?" I asked him.

"No, you are the first. I thought that it would be useless, as I had no satisfactory proof of the transaction, for of course the note is worthless, even if I could find the house, which is perfectly impossible, as I have not the faintest idea of its locality."

"Should you know the woman if you should see her again?"

"Yes, among a thousand."

“And the man, could you recognize him?”

“I think I could.”

I asked him to give a description of him, and he did so. I could have hugged him in my joy, for here was the very man whom I was in search of, and I could, by finding him, kill two birds with one stone, and instead of being to my friend a losing business, it would pay well, as a reward of one thousand dollars had been offered me by the persons whose names he had forged, if I should arrest the criminal, and I promised Markham one half of it in case I was successful, for having put me upon the right track.

The next day I commenced, but for two days nothing of consequence was done. On the second evening, however, the prospect brightened. Markham and myself were leisurely promenading Broadway, and talking of nothing particular, when grasping me by the arm, he suddenly exclaimed:

“Do you see it?”

“Yes,” said I mechanically, but without having the faintest idea of what he meant.

“That’s the one, he continued, I could tell it anywhere.”

“What is the one?” I asked.

“That pink bonnet ahead,” he replied, “and ‘tis the same cloak, too.”

In truth, about twenty feet before us was a lady wearing a pink bonnet, and walking unaccompanied by a gentleman. I instantly knew to what he referred, and my pleasure was as great as his.

“But you are perfectly certain it is the one?”

“That I am; but see she has stopped at the window and we shall have a look at her face; yes, I knew I was right,” he continued as the lady in question looking in at a store window gave us a good view of her countenance.

I instantly requested Markham to leave me lest she should chance to see him, and recognize him, which would completely spoil the plan of operation, the principal points of which I had already marked out for myself. I promised that if he should do so I would run the game to cover, and he should be in at the death. Accordingly he turned upon his steps and in a few minutes was out of sight. As soon as he was gone I walked forward briskly till I reached the pink bonnet. I continued behind her long enough to impress myself with the appearance of her attire, and then passing her, I walked swiftly on until I was about three or four rods ahead of her, when I stopped at the doorway of a store, and appeared to be intently examining the articles through the window. As she came towards me I obtained a fair view of her face, which was very handsome, and when she

passed, I dropped behind her at a reasonable distance, until she stopped at a confectioner's. Observing, opposite, an apothecary's, a sudden thought came to me, following which I hurried over and purchased a bottle of strong spirits of ammonia, resolving that if while in my presence, she should meet with a fainting turn, she should meet with a most powerful, and perhaps not very agreeable revival. After leaving the confectioner's she kept on until she reached Ordway's which she entered, I following. Just within the outer door I designedly placed my foot upon the skirt of her dress. Rip went the stitches and my first stroke was struck. I apologized tremendously, and assisted her in its restoration. When it was done she inquired if I would do her a little favor.

"A thousand if you wish me," I answered.

"Would you be so very kind as to purchase for me my ticket?" at the same time putting her hand in her pocket. Suddenly however, she withdrew it with the exclamation, "Heavens! I have lost my port-monnaie, what shall I do?" "I am truly sorry for your loss" said I, "but it shall not prevent you from attending the performance," and hastening to the office I purchased two tickets, and returning to her placed one in her hand. She was very sorry to put me to so much trouble—was a thousand times obliged, and hoped I would not consider it unlady-like in her to receive a ticket from a stranger; but she had so set her mind upon the performance that really she could not stay away. All these thanks and protestations ended in my accompanying her into the hall and seating myself at her side. She was so pretty, so fascinating, and played her part so well that I did not wonder that Markham had been taken in, and I verily believe that had I not been forewarned I should have shared the same fate. As it was, however, I was prepared for whatever might turn up, and appeared as unsuspecting as possible. All went off according to my expectation. The ill turn and carriage were strictly *en regle*. When I had placed her in it, I begged her to excuse me a moment while I returned for my gloves which I pretended to have dropped. Beckoning to me a boy of a dozen years, who looked as if he might be trusted, I asked him: "Would you like to earn five dollars?"

"Certainly," was the reply.

I said to him: "At the door is a hack which I shall get into. As soon as I do so, jump on behind and ride till I get out. Notice the number of the house I shall enter, and then run for a couple of policemen; tell them in fifteen minutes to enter it, pass through the hall into the second door on upon the right hand side. Don't let the driver know you are on. Call tomorrow at ten, at the St. Nicholas, and I will pay you. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir."

"Repeat what I have told you."

He did it correctly. I entered the carriage and went through precisely the same course that Markham had done. All in good time came the knock at the door, and my lady tried to faint, but did not succeed, for laying her back upon the sofa, I poured about half a spoonful of the ammonia into her nose. I knew that it was rather cruel, but I could not resist the temptation to pay her off a little. Quick as lightening she sprang to her feet, gasping and strangling, while at the same instant open flew the door, and the enraged husband entered. The pistols were duly

drawn forth and pointed at me, while the wife, instead of imploring my life, was busily engaged in endeavoring to get breath, for the ammonia nearly killed her. I saw that my game was safe, that the forger stood before me, and when his first burst of well counterfeited passion was at its height, pulling off my whiskers and drawing out my revolver, I coolly informed him that he was my prisoner. The moment he recognized me, "a change came over the spirit of his dreams." He dropped his pistols and sank speechless into a chair. In a few minutes the policemen entered, and I explained the case. The prisoners were taken care of, and afterwards paid the penalty of their crimes. Markham recovered his watch and a portion of his money, but would not accept the five hundred dollars which I had promised him, and we have often since then, congratulated each other that there was so favorable a termination to our "shaking."

Raftmans's Journal [Clearfield, PA], March 13, 1861

Reprinted as

"How I Wasn't Taken Down" in
[Montpelier] *Vermont Watchman and State Journal*, March 29, 1861

"Shaken Down. A Detective's Story" in
Nebraska Advertiser, April 9, 1874