

A Detective's Experience

A Tragedy

There is a low ruined cottage on St. Anthony street, where the moss grows over the roofing and the rickety doors hang by broken hinges. Dust and age have hid the floor from sight, and the decaying walls are damp and mouldy. Only one room is habitable, and that shelters an old woman, gray and decrepid. Sitting on a low stool she mutters a lullaby—an old time song. Age had deprived her of reason, but the sorrow a tragedy wrought is yet fresh at her heart.

Twenty years ago she was beautiful. The olive cheeks were radiant, and the glorious eyes flashed the triumph of a belle. Tall and slender, exquisitely formed, with rich andalusian type of beauty, it is no wonder that she reigned regally over many hearts. At that time no society in the world was more brilliant than ours. Wealth and hospitality went hand in hand, and the most refined and elegant in the land did homage to the beauty of New Orleans. To be star regnant of such society involved more than physical loveliness, and Blanco Castello had all the graces that intellect bestows.

None knew then she was married. A young clerk of the father's had gained her heart and hand. In this cottage her infant was born—here, when she stole away from the bewilderments of fashion, she enjoyed the society of the man whose love she had ventured so much to win. Wedding him in secret, she had contrived to deceive her parents and friends.

There were few things the father would not have pardoned in his child—but not this? He was want to boast that kingly blood was in his veins; that his ancestry had fought under the standard of Arregon. How could he accept a plebian son-in-law. Months went by and the mask was persevered in. But a jealous rival discovered the deception at last. And one night the young husband fell dead from a shot fired by a concealed assassin. The bullet that pierced his heart destroyed the life of the child he held in his arms.

Who did it?

Mr. I. and myself had the working up of the case. The city was wild over the tragedy—an account of it will be found in the Picayune of that day. The unhappy wife, wild with grief, had not hesitated to avow her marriage. It produced an excitement in fashionable society rarely, if ever seen before.

But who was the murderer?

This was the question upon every tongue. It was for us to discover. Month went by in incessant search. Here and there a link in the chain of evidence was picked up until at last we were able to lay our hands upon the man. But, if the deed in itself was horrifying, the culprit, when known, occasioned a thrill of indignant sympathy for the unfortunate wife felt by all. Before arresting him, however, we deemed it advisable to consult the lady. For this purpose, Mr. I—— and myself visited her. She was still at the cottage, never having left it since the night of the murder. When shown into the room my heart turned sick as I contemplated the ravages a few short

months had made. The form was bowed and bent—the beauty which had been the toast of brilliant society—had fled. Before us stood a lady whom grief had all but wrecked.

“Madam, we have come to consult you in reference to the murderer of your husband.”

“You have found him, then?” she eagerly inquired.

“Yes.”

“And he is—?”

I could not help the sad look that came into my face. How could I inflict on a heart so worn and weary additional sorrow.

“You do not tell me,” she said, with an intonation of voice so exquisitely sad that it went to my heart.

“I must tell you, madam, deeply as I grieve to do so; but you must prepare yourself for a great shock,” I rejoined.

“What other calamity can befall me?”

“Perhaps a greater one than you have yet encountered. I fear you will esteem it such.”

“Speak, who is it?”

“Your father.”

“My father?—oh, no, not him; say it was not him,” and her arms stretched out to me so appealingly; the white lips and anguished eyes were so beseeching that I felt I would rather die than face such an ordeal again.

“My father?”

“Yes, madam, the chain of circumstantial evidence leave no room for doubt. He did the deed.” It seemed as if this last sorrow had broken her heart. She stood up before me; every trace of color fled from her face, with unutterable anguish in look and gesture.

“Leave him alone with God,!” and fell fainting to the floor.

From that hour to this I have never seen her. She holds no intercourse with any one. All else save a faithful servant is banished from the house. From her I learn what I repeat to you. Her reason has no doubt fled; and she sits by the fireless hearth nursing her sorrow alone with her sorrowful memories.

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Omaha [NE] *Daily Bee*, February 1, 1882
Wilcox News and Pacificator [Camden, AL], February 10, 1882
The Republican Citizen [Atwood, KS], February 24, 1882
The Spirit of Democracy [Woodsfield, OH], April 18, 1882
Daily Republican [Wilmington, DE], May 04, 1882
The Sentinel [Carlisle, PA], May 23, 1882

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