

A Detective's Experience

A Woman's Confession

“A few days ago,” said Mr. F——, “intelligence reached us that a Milan banker had absconded with an immense amount of money. It was believed he had fled to this country and taken refuge in New Orleans. A young Italian girl was the companion of his flight. Together with a description of the man was a miniature of this girl. She was very beautiful, and the inanimate ivory pictured a face so winsome in its youth and innocence, so trustful, so confiding, that my heart ached as I looked at it.

Months went by in the fruitless search for the criminal. If here, his precautions were well taken, and his concealment effectual.

One night report reached the station that the body of a drowned woman had been drawn from the river. She had been dead but a few hours, it was said, and was elegantly clad, was young and beautiful.

Why, I could not divine at the time, but I felt a strange desire to see this girl. I mentioned the fact to Mr. I——, and we walked together to the river. The body was laid out on the pier, and the lovely, upturned face was magnetic in its intense beauty. A wealth of black wet hair fell back from the broad, low forehead, exposing a face rounded and full in its fresh spring time beauty. The long lashes drooped darkly over the pale underlids, and the chiseled lips had not lost their delicate curve and crimson stain. The soft, milky skin showed beneath it the olive tint it had worn in life. The clinging dress but imperfectly concealed each rounded limb and the exquisite outline of body.

I felt a strange attraction in looking at this dead woman. She must have been unsurpassingly lovely when life was instinct in the frame now so chill. The warm sun of her native land could not have been more lustrous than her eyes were then. I felt that I had seen her before. The conviction grew upon me as my eyes became riveted on her features. The face haunted me. For an hour my memory was at fault, but it came at last. Like a flash, recollection returned.

She was the original of the picture.

Eagerly I bent forward and traced again and again each outline of face and figure. There could be no mistake—the liniaments were the same.

On examining the body it was discovered that she had been murdered. A deep penetrating wound in her side, made with a small Spanish dagger, which yet filled the cavity, disclosed the means of her death. This knife bore the initials E. F. They did not stand for her name nor that of her betrayer. It was a costly weapon, for in the handle was a brilliant of value. I took the knife to a jeweler, and asked him to examine it closely. The monogram arrested his attention at once. He took it and examined it closely. Then from his desk he brought a jewel set in gold, on which was a lettering precisely similar.

“Where did you get this?” I asked. “From a customer of mine; a lady.”

“Yes.”

“Where is she to be found?”

He showed me a direction. It was that of a lady of fashion, a Cuban, visiting in the city.

I went to her at once. On mentioning my name she showed evident signs of uneasiness, and motioning me to a private room, begged with white lips and a faltering utterance, the nature of my errand.

I detailed the circumstance briefly. I told her of the criminal, the flight and escape, of the dead body; I showed her the knife, and the ring I had obtained at the jeweler’s.

“Madame,” I concluded, “I must arrest you for murder!”

“Oh, no! no, no,” she exclaimed, “I will confess all; not mine the sin, not mine the deed!”

She then told me who the man was, where he lived, and the circumstances that occasioned the poor girl’s death.

It appeared from her statement that some weeks before, the banker had wearied of the young girl, and had abandoned her. He had then paid his court to her, and not knowing his antecedents, and judging of him by the station he held in society, had consented to marry him. That the evening previous, she had been walking with him on the pier. Standing there in the moonlight, they had been approached by a female clad as this one was. Upbraidings and angry reproaches followed, and the girl, in the madness and frenzy of her distress, threatened to reveal a secret. The words had scarcely left her lips when the man struck her with the dagger I held in my hand. She said he had taken it from her a few moments, and was toying with it when the woman came up.

“When the blow was struck,” she said, “the woman reeled and fell into the river. I saw her as she sunk beneath the water, and her white face upturned in agony yet haunts me with its horror. I screamed and fled. It was the most terrible sight I ever witnessed.”

The woman told her story truthfully I could not doubt. But, as I supposed, the man was gone. He was never heard of afterwards; and this little memory is all that is left of the wrecked and ruined woman who died beneath the flood.

The Daily Picayune [New Orleans, LA], November 1, 1868

The Courier-Journal [Louisville, KY], November 5, 1868—with the subtitle “A Leaf from a New Orleans Detective’s Experience”

Edgefield [SC] *Advertiser*, November 18, 1868

Fayetteville [TN] *Observer*, November 19, 1868—with the subtitle “A Leaf from a New Orleans Detective’s Experience”

The Spirit of Democracy [Woodsfield, OH], December 1, 1868—with the subtitle “A Leaf from a New Orleans Detective’s Experience”

This story was reprinted as

“A Detective’s Experience” in

Sacramento Daily Union, December 19, 1868—cites the *New Orleans Picayune*;

as “A Frightful Story” in

Reading [PA] *Times*, January 15, 1869;

This story was part of a series titled “A Detective’s Experience” and featuring detectives Mr. F—
— and Mr. I—— that was published in the Sunday *Daily Picayune* from August 1868 to
November 1869.