

All in the Family

A DETECTIVE'S STORY

One of the hardest things in detective life is for the officer to be obliged to report on family matters. No matter how long he has been in the business, or how fireproof he has become, the detective who can make a report which he knows will break up a family and bring wretchedness to half a dozen persons, is a scarce article. That is, he will report to his chief verbally or by letter, and thus let the information get to those who hunger for it and yet dread to hear the truth.

A fair share of the detective business of every city in the land hinges upon family matters, and the work done seldom appears in print, or if the newspaper reporters get hold of the circumstance, the particulars are kept away from them. For a long term of years my assignments as a detective connected with the force in one of our large cities, were entirely of this character, and some of the incidents can be related without injury to anyone's feelings. I did not associate with the criminal detectives at all, and the majority of them did not know me by name.

One morning I was sent for by the Chief to take up a new case, and when I entered his office I found a lady present. She was a woman not over 25 years of age, handsome, educated, and a society ornament. She was the second wife of a rich old wholesale merchant whom I will call Williams. They had been married about a year and a half, and it was said that it was a love match. She had come to headquarters in her own carriage in broad daylight to tell her story to the Chief and seek the services of a detective. I may tell you that I was prejudiced in her favor from the very first glance. She was one of those women whose every word is of interest, and whose every gesture has a touch of artlessness in it. And she could shed big tears, and catch little sobs, and put such a look into her brown eyes as would make even an old detective almost want to die for her. When her story had been simmered down it amounted to this: For some time past she had been missing jewelry and sums of money. A private detective had been employed, but had met with no success in discovering the thief. One robbery included a valuable diamond ring; another a pair of earrings; a third the sum of \$400 in gold; a fourth the sum of \$300 in greenbacks. About ten days previous to her visit a package of \$12,000 had been taken from her husband's secretary, and at the same time she had missed a diamond brooch from her dressing case. One of the regular detectives had been working on this last steal for over a week, and was still at it, although he had thus far been unable to secure a clue.

It was not only natural that Mrs. Williams should be interested in the recovery of the property, but that her great interest should lead her to call at headquarters to consult with the chief. In fact, her husband was confined to his room by an attack of gout, and, for all we knew to the contrary, it was by his advice that she came. It would appear sharper in me to say that I suspected something wrong from the very start, but honesty compels me to say that I didn't. When she had departed the chief said to me:

“This looks like a very simple case, and I can't see why Taylor has not picked up some clue. The robberies have been perpetrated by some of the servants, and I'll give you a fortnight to trap the guilty party.”

I was at liberty to consult Taylor. The only servants who had access to the bedroom were the chambermaid and the butler. This last personage had no right there, of course, but having the run of the house he could slip into the room. Taylor had suspected him, rather than the chambermaid, and had devoted his whole time to watching the man. Nothing but disappointments had turned up. The butler had the best of recommendations, was without vices of any sort, and a search of his effects had brought nothing to light which would implicate him. It was agreed that I should look out for the chambermaid, and I put in a week on the case to find out that she also had the best of recommendations, and that the probabilities were all in her favor. If it was true that either of the servants had committed the robberies, it was likewise true that they had covered their tracks so well that we had no hopes of making an arrest. I worked on the case three weeks, and then abandoned it. Mrs. Williams seemed much more disappointed than her husband over my failure, and she shed tears of vexation when informed that I was to drop this case, or at least cease active work. I meant to keep the butler and the chambermaid under surveillance for a time longer, but I could not promise that anything would come of it.

The third day after this, Fate played me a curious trick. I had dropped into a family restaurant for a plate of oysters, and not caring to have comers and goers study my face, I went up stairs to be served in one of the little rooms or stalls. I had devoured my oysters and drunk my coffee when a lady and gentleman entered the next stall on the right, and it wasn't ten seconds before I recognized Mrs. Williams' voice. The man's identity I also soon established by his tones. He was a handsome, dissipated chap named Raynor, known in all the clubs as a great spendthrift, and reported to the police as a reckless gambler. The pair were scarcely seated in the stall when the lady said:

"Will, I can do no more for you. I have robbed myself, stolen from my husband, and perjured myself to the officers to help you out of your troubles. You are no sooner out of one trouble than you bring another upon yourself."

"Softly, sister Nell, softly!" chided the man. "I have always been kind to you. I have always been the best brother in the world. Give me a chance. I was horribly in debt. You have come to my aid in a grand way, and God will bless you for it."

"Hush, Will! God cannot bless me for stealing from my husband to pay your gambling debts. Do you know the value of the package I gave you the night you came and threatened to commit suicide?"

"About \$12,000, I believe, and it helped me out of three or four bad scrapes."

"And I thought it was only \$200! Oh, brother, I am afraid you are down to ruin."

"Pooh! Pooh! Nell, I am no worse than hundreds of others who are sowing their wild oats. Make a raise of a couple of thousand for me this week, and I'll go to Europe, and remain away until I can steady down."

"I cannot do it. I can't even raise \$50."

“But you must. It’s either Europe for me or a bullet through my head.”

With that I walked in on the pair. A few words had made the case as plain as day. While it was “all in the family,” as the saying is, and while there was no probability that the dissolute brother would be punished, I did not rest until he had been taken into Williams’s presence and made to confess all. The victim had no desire to resort to the courts, but he was a man of considerable temper, and his remarks were anything but complimentary. I left the house in company with the brother, and as we gained the walk he asked:

“Do you think the old man would shell out a couple of thousand for me?”

“You must be crazy,” I replied.

“Then the game is up, and here’s good-bye to you!” he exclaimed, and before I could lift a hand he had pulled a pistol and sent a bullet into his head. — [New York Sun.

The Barnstable [MA] Patriot, August 2, 1887

The Opelousas [LA] Courier, August 13, 1887