

A Detective Story

At their best the private detective agencies of New York are not admirable institutions. They take on cases of criminal investigation that the municipal force can not touch, and, as a rule, their methods of securing proof against an individual's character are of a very mean nature. Most of their work is done in the interest of jealous wives or husbands, who are endeavoring to get evidence for divorce suits. The proprietor of one of these agencies was giving some information concerning his business. He was sublimely unconscious of how his words made him out as an unadmirable and dishonorable citizen, being evidently convinced that his pursuit was most legitimate and one that any gentleman might take genuine pride in.

“The moment I have a case against a woman,” said he, “I get another woman to work up the points. I don't have a regular staff of female detectives. That would be of little use. My plan is to get hold of a woman who is right in the same social set with the suspect. Now you might think it hard to manage this. Well, it is, very often, but I never had a case yet where I failed to get hold of the woman I wanted. A gentleman who is a member of the great Four Hundred came to me some time ago and asked me to watch his wife. I knew well enough there was no use of putting a man after her, as he would never see her except as she went about the streets in a carriage, and a woman of her sort wasn't going to be careless in public [sections]. It took me two months to get anywhere on this case. All that time I was searching for the right woman to set on the wife's track. I found her at last. She was one of the same set, and I knew it was going to be a very delicate piece of work to approach her and buy her aid. I only knew she had a price. I saw the husband and proved to his satisfaction that I could get all the possible evidence against his wife, but I must have a large sum of money to do it with. I should have to employ a special agent at an expense of \$1000. He gave his consent for me to go ahead, and within forty-eight hours I had the lady I wanted to employ sitting in my private office. When she left, two hours afterward, she had agreed to do my work. In another month I held a letter that thoroughly incriminated the wife, and the husband had an easy case. The woman that aided me was thoroughly protected, as everything was planned so that the evidence appeared to come from another source. I paid her the \$1000, and she said she would be glad to go on another case of the same sort at a similar figure of remuneration.”

The listeners to the confidential anecdote were disgusted at the contemptible human character divulged, but the occasion did not warrant a rebuke, and so the self-satisfied detective agent went his way more pleased than before at having described an instance of his exceptional shrewdness. [Clara Hall]

Galveston [TX] Daily News, May 30, 1891