

The FILIGREE BALL

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CHAPTER I.

FOR a detective whose talents had not been recognized at headquarters I possessed an ambition which, fortunately for my standing with the lieutenant of the precinct, had not yet been expressed in words. Though I had small reason for expecting great things of myself, I had always cherished the hope that if a big case came my way I should be found able to do something with it—something more, that is, than I had accomplished by the police of the District of Columbia since I had had the honor of being one of their number. Therefore, when I found myself plunged, almost without my own volition, into the Jeffrey-Moore affair, I believed that the opportunity had come whereby I might distinguish myself.

It had complications, this Jeffrey-Moore affair; greater ones than the public ever knew, keen as the interest in it ran both in and out of Washington.

This is why I propose to tell the story of this great tragedy from my own standpoint, even if in so doing I risk the charge of attempting to exploit my own connection with this celebrated case. In its course I encountered as many disappointments as triumphs and brought out of the affair a heart as sore as it was satisfied, for I am a lover of women and—

But I am keeping you from the story itself.

I was at the station house the night Uncle David came in. He was always

The detective



called Uncle David, even by theurchins who followed him in the street, so I am showing him no disrespect, gentleman though he is, by giving him a title which as completely characterized him in those days as did his moody ways, his quaint attire and the persistence with which he kept at his side his great mastiff Rudge.

I had long since heard of the old gentleman as one of the most interesting residents of the precinct. I had even seen him more than once on the avenue, but I had never before been brought face to face with him, and consequently had much too superficial a knowledge of his countenance to determine offhand whether the uneasy light in his small gray eyes was natural to them or simply the result of present excitement. But when he began to talk I detected an unmistakable tremor in his tones and decided that he was in a state of suppressed agitation, though he appeared to have nothing more alarming to impart than the fact that he had seen a light burning in some house presumably empty.

It was all so trivial that I gave him but scant attention till he let a name fall which caused me to prick up my ears and even to put in a word. "The Moore house," he had said.

"The Moore house?" I repeated in amazement. "Are you speaking of the Moore house?"

A thousand recollections came with the name.

"What other?" he grumbled, directing toward me a look as keen as it was impatient. "Do you think that I would bother myself long about a house I had no interest in, or drag Rudge from his warm rug to save some ungrateful neighbor from a possible burglary? No, it is my house which some rogue has chosen to enter. That is," he suavely corrected, as he saw surprise in every eye, "the house which the law will give me, if anything ever happens to that chit of a girl whom my brother left behind him."

Growling some words at the dog, who showed a decided inclination to lie down where he was, the old man made for the door and in another moment would have been in the street, if I had not stepped after him.

"You are a Moore and live in or near that old house?" I asked.

The surprise with which he met this question daunted me a little.

"How long have you been in Washington, I should like to ask?" was his acid retort.

"Oh, some five months."

His good nature, or what passed for such in this irascible old man, returned in an instant, and he curbed but not unkindly remarked:

"You haven't learned much in that time." Then, with a nod more ceremonious than many another man's bow, he added, with sudden dignity: "I am of the elder branch and live in the cottage fronting the old place. I am the only resident on the block. When you have lived here longer you

will know why that especial neighborhood is not a favorite one with those who cannot boast of the Moore blood. For the present, let us attribute the bad name that it holds to malaria. And with a significant hitch of his lean shoulders, which set in undulating motion every fold of the old fashioned cloak he wore, he started again for the door.

But my curiosity was by this time roused to fever heat. I knew more about this house than he gave me credit for. No one who had read the papers of late, much less a man connected with the police, could help being well informed in all the details of its remarkable history. What I had failed to know was his close relationship to the family whose name for the last two weeks had been in every mouth.

"Wait!" I called out. "You say that you live opposite the Moore house. You can then tell me—"

But he had no mind to stop for any gossip.

"It was all in the papers," he called back. "Read them. But first be sure to find out who has struck a light in the house that we all know has not even a caretaker in it."

It was good advice. My duty and my curiosity both led me to follow it. Perhaps you have heard of the distinguishing feature of this house. If so, you do not need my explanations. But if, for any reason, you are ignorant of the facts which within a very short time have set a final seal of horror upon this old historic dwelling, then you will be glad to read what has made and will continue to make the Moore house in Washington one to be pointed at in daylight and shunned after dark, not only by superstitious colored folk, but by all who are susceptible to the most ordinary emotions of fear and dread.

It was standing when Washington was a village. It antedates the capitol and the White House. Built by a man of wealth, it bears to this day the impress of the large ideas and quiet elegance of colonial times; but the shadow which speedily fell across it made it a marked place even in those early days. While it has always escaped the hackneyed epithet of "haunted," families that have moved in have as quickly moved out, giving as their excuse that no happiness was to be found there and that sleep was impossible under its roof. That there was some reason for this lack of rest within walls which were not without their tragic reminiscences all must acknowledge. Death had often occurred there, and while this fact can be stated in regard to most old houses, it is not often that one can say, as in this case, that it was invariably sudden and invariably of one character.

A lifeless man, lying outstretched on a certain hearthstone, might be found once in a house and awaken no special comment, but when this same discovery has been made twice, if not thrice, during the history of a single dwelling, one might surely be pardoned a distrust of its seemingly homelike appointments and discern in its slowly darkening walls the presence of an evil which if left to itself might perish in the natural decay of the place, but which, if met and challenged, might strike again and make another blot on its three crimsoned hearthstone.

But these are old fables which I should hardly presume to mention had it not been for the recent occurrence which has recalled them to all men's minds and given to this long empty and slowly crumbling building an importance which has spread its fame from one end of the country to the other. I refer to the tragedy attending the wedding lately celebrated there.

Veronica Moore, rich, pretty and willful, had long cherished a strange liking for this frowning old home of her ancestors and, at the most critical time in her life, conceived the idea of proving to herself and to society at large that no real ban lay upon it save in the imagination of the superstitious. So, being about to marry the choice of her young heart, she caused this house to be opened for the wedding ceremony.

Uncle David



mony—with what result you know. Though the occasion was a joyous one and accompanied by all that could give cheer to such a function, it had not escaped the old time shadow. One of the guests straying into the room of ancient and unhallowed memory, the one room which had not been thrown open to the crowd, had been found within five minutes of the ceremony lying on its dolorous hearthstone dead, and, though the bride was spared a knowledge of the dreadful fact till the holy words were said, a panic had seized the guests and emptied the house as suddenly and completely as though the plague had been discovered there.

This is why I hastened to follow Uncle David when he told me that all was not right in this house of tragic memories.

CHAPTER II.

THOUGH past seventy, Uncle David was a brisk walker, and on this night in particular he sped along so fast that he was half way down H street by the time I had turned the corner of New Hampshire avenue.

His gaunt but not ungraceful figure, merged in that of the dog trotting closely at his heels, was the only moving object in the dreary vista of this most desolate block in Washington. As I neared the building I was so impressed by the surrounding stillness that I was ready to vow that the shadows were denser here than elsewhere and that the few gas lamps which flickered at intervals down the street shone with a more feeble ray than in any other equal length of street in Washington.

Meanwhile the shadow of Uncle David had vanished from the pavement. He had paused beside a fence which, hung with vines, surrounded and nearly hid from sight the little cottage he had mentioned as the only house on the block with the exception of the great Moore place; in other words, his own home.

As I came abreast of him I heard him muttering, not to his dog, as was his custom, but to himself. In fact, the dog was not to be seen, and this desertion on the part of his constant companion seemed to add to his disturbance and affect him beyond all reason. I could distinguish these words among the many he directed toward the unseen animal:

"You're a knowing one—too knowing! You see that loosened shutter over the way as plainly as I do; but you're a coward to slink away from it. I don't. I face the thing, and, what's more, I'll show you yet what I think of a dog that can't stand his ground and help his old master out with some show of courage. Creeps, does it? Well, let it creep. I don't mind its creeping, glad as I should be to know whose hand—Hello! You've come, have you?" This to me. I had just stepped up to him.

"Yes, I've come. Now, what is the matter with the Moore house?"

He must have expected the question, yet his answer was a long time coming. His voice, too, sounded strained, and was pitched quite too high to be natural. But he evidently did not expect me to show surprise at his manner.

"Look at that window over there!" he cried at last. "That one with the slightly open shutter! Watch and you will see that shutter move. There, it creaked! Didn't you hear it?"

A growl—it was more like a moan—came from the porch behind us. In

Rudge



stantly the old gentleman turned and, with a gesture as fierce as it was instinctive, shouted out:

"Be still there! If you haven't the courage to face a blowing shutter, keep your jaws shut and don't let every fellow who happens along know what a fool you are. I declare," he muttered on, half to himself and half to me, "that dog is getting old. He can't be trusted any more. He forsakes his master just when"—The rest was lost in his throat, which rattled with something more than impatient anger.

Meanwhile I had been attentively scrutinizing the house thus pointedly brought to my notice. I had seen it many times before, but, as it happened, had never stopped to look at it when the huge trees surrounding it were shrouded in darkness. The black hollow of its disused portal looked out from shadows which acquired some of their somberness from the tragic memories connected with its empty void.

Its aspect was scarcely reassuring. Not that superstition lent its terrors to the lonely scene, but that through the blank panes of window, alternately appearing and disappearing from view as the shutter pointed out by Uncle David blew to and fro in the wind, I saw or was persuaded that I saw a beam of light which argued an unknown presence within walls which had so lately been declared unfit for any man's habitation.

"You are right," I now remarked to the uneasy figure at my side. "Some one is prowling through the house yonder. Can it possibly be Mrs. Jeffrey or her husband?"

"At night and with no gas in the house? Hardly."

The words were natural, but the voice was not. Neither was his manner quite suited to the occasion. Giving him another sly glance and marking how uneasily he edged away from me in the darkness, I cried out more cheerfully than he possibly expected:

"I will summon another officer, and we three will just slip across and investigate."

"Not I!" was his violent rejoinder as he swung open a gate concealed in the vines behind him. "The Jeffreys would resent my intrusion if they ever happened to hear of it."

"Indeed!" I laughed, sounding my whistle. Then, soberly enough, for I was more than a little struck by the oddity of his behavior and thought him as well worth investigation as the house in which he showed such an interest: "You shouldn't let that count. Come and see what's up in the house you are so ready to call yours."

But he only drew farther into the shade.

the doorway of a burglar—perhaps you don't know that there are rare treasures on the bookshelves of the great library—or whether it is the fantastic illumination which frightens fool folks and some fool dogs, I'm done with it and done with you, too, for tonight."

As he said this he mounted to his door and disappeared under the vines, hanging like a shroud over the front

The Moore house



of the house. In another moment the rich peal of an organ sounded from within, followed by the prolonged howling of Rudge, who, either from a too great appreciation of his master's music or in utter disapproval of it—no one, I believe, has ever been able to make out which—was accustomed to add this undesirable accompaniment to every strain from the old man's hand. The playing did not cease because of these outrageous discords. On the contrary, it increased in force and volume, causing Rudge's expression of pain or pleasure to increase also. The result can be imagined. As I listened to the intolerable howls of the dog cutting clean through the exquisite harmonies of his master I wondered if the shadows cast by the frowning structure of the great Moore house were alone to blame for Uncle David's lack of neighbors.

Meantime Hibbard, who was the first to hear my signal, came running down the block. As he joined me the light, or what we chose to call a light, appeared in the window toward which my attention had been directed.

"Some one's in the Moore house!" I declared, in as matter of fact tones as I could command.

Hibbard is a big fellow, the biggest fellow on the force, and so far as my own experience with him had gone, as stolid and imperturbable as the best of us. But after a quick glance at the towering walls of the lonely building he showed decided embarrassment and seemed in no haste to cross the street.

With difficulty I concealed my disgust.

"Come," I cried, stepping down from the curb, "let's go over and investigate. The property is valuable, the furnishings are handsome, and there is no end of costly books on the library shelves. You have matches and a revolver?"

He nodded, quietly showing me first the one, then the other; then, with a sheepish air which he endeavored to carry off with a laugh, he cried:

"Have you use for 'em? If so, I'm quite willing to part with 'em for a half hour."

I was more than amazed at this evidence of weakness in one I had always considered as tough and impenetrable as flint rock. Thrusting back the hand with which he had half drawn into view the weapon I had mentioned, I put on my sternest air and led the way across the street. As I did so, I tossed back the words:

"We may come upon a gang. You do not wish me to face some half dozen men alone?"

"You won't find any half dozen men there," was his muttered reply. Nevertheless he followed me, though with less spirit than I liked, considering that my own manner was in a measure assumed and that I was not without sympathy—well, let me say, for a dog who preferred howling a dismal accompaniment to his master's music to keeping open watch over a neighborhood dominated by the unhalloved structure I now proposed to enter.

At the first touch the door yielded. It was not even latched.

"So! so!" thought I. "This is no fool's job; some one is in the house."

I had provided myself with an ordinary pocket lantern, and, when I had convinced Hibbard that I fully meant to enter the house and discover for myself who had taken advantage of the popular prejudice against it to make a secret refuge or rendezvous of its decayed old rooms, I took out this lantern and held it in readiness.

"We may strike a hornet's nest," I explained to Hibbard, whose feet seemed very heavy even for a man of his size. "But I'm going in and so are you. Only, let me suggest first that we take off our shoes. We can hide them in these bushes."

"I always catch cold when I walk barefooted," mumbled my brave companion; but receiving no reply, he drew off his shoes and dropped them beside mine in the cluster of stark bushes which figure so prominently in the newspaper illustrations that have lately appeared. Then he took out his revolver, and, cocking it, stood waiting, while I gave a cautious push to the door.

Darkness! Silence!

Rather had I confronted a light and heard some noise, even if it had been the ominous click to which we are so well accustomed. Hibbard seemed to share my feelings, though from an entirely different cause.

My patience could stand no more. With a shake I rid myself of his clutch, muttering:

"There, go! You're too much of a fool for me. I'm in for it alone." And in proof of my determination I turned the slide of the lantern and flashed the light through the house.

The effect was ghastly; but while the fellow at my side breathed hard, he did not take advantage of my words to make his escape, as I half expected him to. The truth is, I was startled myself, but I was able to hide the fact and to whisper back to him fiercely:

"Hush!"

I had just heard something. For a moment we stood breathless, but as the sound was not repeated I concluded that it was the creaking of that faraway shutter. Certainly there was nothing moving near us.

"Shall we go upstairs?" whispered Hibbard.

"Not till we have made sure that all is right down here."

A door stood slightly ajar on our left.

Pushing it open, we looked in. A well furnished parlor was before us.

"Here's where the wedding took place," remarked Hibbard, straining his head over my shoulder.

There were signs of this wedding on every side. Walls and ceilings had been hung with garlands, and these still clung to the mantelpiece and over and around the various doorways. The clock occupying the center of the mantelpiece alone gave evidence of life. It had been wound for the wedding and had not yet run down. Its tick-tick came faint enough, however, through the darkness, as if it, too, had lost heart and would soon lapse into the deadly quiet of its ghostly surroundings.

"It's—it's funeral-like," chattered Hibbard.

He was right; I felt as if I were shutting the lid of a coffin when I finally closed the door.

Our next steps took us into the rear, where we found little to detain us, and then, with a certain dread fully justified by the event, we made for the door defined by the two Corinthian columns.

It was ajar like the rest, and, call me coward or call me fool—I have called Hibbard both, you will remember—I found that it cost me an effort to lay my hand on its mahogany panels. Danger, if danger there was, lurked here, and while I had never known myself to quail before any ordinary antagonist, I, like others of my kind, have no especial fondness for unseen and mysterious perils.

Hibbard, who up to this point had followed me almost too closely, now acceded me all the room that was necessary. It was with a sense of entering alone upon the scene that I finally thrust wide the door and crossed the threshold of this redoubtable room where, but two short weeks before, a fresh victim had been added to the list of those who had by some unheard of, unpalpable means found their death within its recesses.

My first glance showed me little save the ponderous outlines of an old settle, which jutted from the corner of the fireplace half way out into the room. As it was seemingly from this seat that the men, who at various times had been found lying here, had fallen to their doom, a thrill passed over me as I noted its unwieldy bulk and the deep shadow it threw on the ancient and dishonored hearthstone.

To escape the ghastly memories it evoked and also to satisfy myself that the room was really as empty as it seemed, I took another step forward. This caused the light from the lantern I carried to spread beyond the point on which it had hitherto been so effectively concentrated, but the result

The dead bride



was to emphasize rather than detract from the extreme desolation of the great room. The settle was a fixture, as I afterward found, and was almost the only article of furniture to be seen on the wide expanse of uncarpeted floor. There was a table or two in hiding somewhere amid the shadows at the other end from where I stood, and possibly some kind of stool or settee, but the general impression made upon me was that of a completely dismantled place given over to moth and rust.

The elegance of the heavily stuccoed ceiling, admitted to be one of the finest specimens of its kind in Washington, as well as the richness of the carvings ornamenting the mantel of Italian marble rising above the accursed hearthstone, only served to make more evident the extreme neglect into which the rest of the room had sunk. Being anything but anxious to subject myself further to its unhappy influence and quite convinced that the place was indeed as empty as it looked, I turned to leave when my eye fell upon something so unexpected and so extraordinary, seen as it was under the influence of the old tragedies with which my mind was necessarily full, that I paused, balked in my advance and well nigh uncertain whether I looked upon a real thing or on some strange and terrible fantasy of my aroused imagination.

A form lay before me, outstretched on that portion of the floor which had hitherto been hidden from me by the half open door—a woman's form, which even in that first casual look impressed itself upon me as one of aerial delicacy and extreme refinement; and this form lay as only the dead lie; the dead! And I had been

looking at the deathstone for just such a picture! No, not just such a picture, for this woman lay face uppermost, and, on the floor beside her was blood—

A hand had plucked my sleeve. It was Hibbard's. Startled by my immobility and silence, he had stepped in with quaking members, expecting he hardly knew what. But no sooner did his eyes fall on the prostrate form which held me spellbound than an unforeseen change took place in him. What had unnerved me, restored him to full self possession. Death in this shape was familiar to him. He had no fear of blood. He did not show surprise at encountering it, but only at the effect it appeared to produce on me.

"Shot!" was his laconic comment as he bent over the prostrate body. "Shot through the heart! She must have died before she fell."

Shot!

That was a new experience for this room. No wound had ever before disfigured those who had fallen here, nor had any of the previous victims been found lying on any other spot than the one over which that huge settle kept guard. As these thoughts crossed my mind I instinctively glanced again toward the fireplace for what I almost refused to believe lay outstretched at my feet. When nothing more appeared there than that old seat of sinister memory, I experienced a thrill which poorly prepared me for the cry which I now heard raised by Hibbard.

"Look here! What do you make of this?"

He was pointing to what, upon closer inspection, proved to be a strip of white satin ribbon running from one of the delicate wrists of the girl before us to the handle of a pistol which had fallen not far away from her side. "It looks as if the pistol was attached to her. That is something new in my experience. What do you think it means?"

Alas, there was but one thing it could mean. The shot to which she had succumbed had been delivered by herself. This fair and delicate creature was a suicide.

But suicide in this place! How could we account for that? Had the story of this room's ill acquired fame acted hypnotically on her, or had she stumbled upon the open door in front and been glad of any refuge where her misery might find a solitary termination? Closely scanning her upturned face, I sought an answer to this question, and while thus seeking received a fresh shock which I did not hesitate to communicate to my now none too sensitive companion.

"Look at these features," I cried. "Do you seem to know them. Do you?"

He growled out a dissent, but stooped at my bidding and gave the pitiful young face a prolonged stare. When he looked up again it was with a puzzled contraction of his eyebrows.

"I've certainly seen it somewhere," he hesitatingly admitted, edging slowly away toward the door. "Perhaps in the papers. Isn't she like?"

"Like?" I interrupted. "It is Veronica Moore herself, the owner of this house and she who was married here two weeks since to Mr. Jeffrey. Evidently her reason was unseated by the tragedy which threw so deep a gloom over her wedding."

CHAPTER III.

NOT for an instant did I doubt the correctness of this identification. All the pictures I had seen of this well known society belle had been marked by an individuality of expression which fixed her face in the memory and which I now saw repeated in the lifeless features before me.

Having sent the too willing Hibbard to notify headquarters, I was on the point of making a memorandum of such details as seemed important, when my lantern suddenly went out, leaving me in total darkness.

This was far from pleasant, but the effect it produced upon my mind was not without its result; for no sooner did I find myself alone and in the unrelieved darkness of this gravelike room than I became convinced that no woman, however frenzied, would make her plunge into an unknown existence from the midst of a darkness only too suggestive of the tomb to which she was hastening. It was not in nature, not in woman's nature, at all events, before she had committed the final act that she should disappear—a hypothesis instantly destroyed by the warmth which still lingered in certain portions of her body—or else the light which had been burning when she pulled the fatal trigger had since been carried elsewhere or extinguished.

Recalling the uncertain gleams which he had seen flashing from one of the upper windows, I was inclined to give some credence to the former theory, but was disposed to be fair to both. So after relighting my lamp I turned on one of the gas cocks of the massive chandelier over my head and applied a match. The result was just what I anticipated; no gas in the pipes. A meter had not been put in for the wedding. This the papers had repeatedly stated in dwelling upon the garish effect of the daylight on the elaborate costumes worn by the ladies. Candles

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

How to Clean Combs.

If it can be avoided, never wash combs, as the water often makes the teeth split and renders the tortoise shell or horn of which they are made rough. Small brushes manufactured purposely for cleaning combs may be purchased at a trifling cost. With one of these the combs should be well brushed and afterward wiped with a towel or cloth.