

A DETECTIVE'S LOVE STORY.

From New York Weekly.

Well, as I opened the door very quickly, I nearly knocked over Mrs. Fanfarelle.

I stared at her in perfect fright, she was so pale, and she had the same bunch of roses in her hand, and she was shaking fearfully.

She put her other hand up before her eyes, almost as if she was afraid that I would see them.

"I was coming," she said, "to apologize to you for my unwarrantable dislike and objection to your cousin. Pray do not send her away on my account. I am so full of whims, and I have been so indulged by both my husbands, that I think other people must humor my fancies the same. I beg of you not to send away your beautiful cousin on my account.

"I had no idea of doing so," I answered her, quickly. It angered me that she should think I would do such a thing.

"She didn't think it," Rose said, when I went back to her. "Didn't she see how white she was? And she gave me such a look behind her hand as she turned away! That was not what she came for. She was listening at the door, and she heard me say I would run away with Mrs. Fanfarelle if you urged me to marry her.

"I was only joking, of course. I hate her husband almost more than I do the other. But that was what made her so white, and she'd murder me if she could. Poor creature!" Rose added, softly. "I pity her to be so in love with such a mushroom as her husband as to be jealous of a poor girl like me."

That very evening, while her husband was away, Mrs. Fanfarelle sent for Rose, and was very kind to her, and she gave her the most elegant pair of bracelets—blue enamel, with small gold coins strung thickly along the edge. They were lovely. I had seen Mrs. Fanfarelle wearing them often, and I took it as taken that she really wanted to be kind to Rose, her giving her such a costly present. But Rose looked troubled.

"She don't like me, Maria. She tried to be sweet, and she laughed a great deal, and treated me as if I were an equal; but she hates me all the same. I caught her watching me sideways more than once, not with a kindly look either. I tell you, Maria, she don't like me, and fifty pairs of bracelets would not make me think differently. I won't have her bracelets," and she threw them on the bed. "I just brought them away with me to save any words. I thought I might be mistaken, and I knew you wanted every thing pleasant, so I took them and thanked her. But I'll never wear them. Do not you like with them, but don't you ask me to wear them. Pretty as they are, I would sooner have snakes on my arms, and I don't want to go near that woman again."

Well, I soothed her all I could, and coaxed her to promise me she would go if Mrs. Fanfarelle sent for her, as she did several times in the course of the following week. I thought Mrs. Fanfarelle was very kind, but Rose never went near her willingly.

Well, about a week after Mrs. Fanfarelle gave my cousin the bracelets, she sent for me. She was smiling and pleasant as usual, but a little pale I fancied, in spite of her roses, and she did not look at me, but at a bunch of roses she was pulling to pieces in her lap.

"Mrs. Panset," she said, "you have got some one in your house who is dishonest. I don't want to make any trouble; you and I will look for the thief and you will discharge him, and there will be an end. I don't want to disgrace you and your beautiful house by calling in an officer."

"A thief in my house?" I gave my word, sir, I thought I should go through the floor. You see I knew every one of my servants. Part of them had been with my father in his rich days, and I knew them so well. My cook had been my nurse when I was a baby, and took to cooking to please me and be where I was.

As for the rest, I could have vouched for every one, I thought. "What have you lost, Mrs. Fanfarelle?" I asked, as gently as I could, but I felt like a whirlwind.

"Oh, only trifles," she said, laughing lightly, "some rings that I did not care much for, some money, and

so on; you know I am very careless, Mrs. Panset. It is only that I think you ought to know there is a thief in the house, not because of the value of what is gone.

"Mrs. Fanfarelle," I said, "I will endeavor to discover the thief if there is one in my house, and I shall not hesitate to send for an officer."

"My good Mrs. Panset," she said, flinging the rest of her roses on the fire, "I beg of you not to be hasty. I may be mistaken. I may have only mislaid these things."

"Madam," I answered, "I beg your pardon, but you could have had no doubt on that point when you sent for me."

She glanced up at me quickly, then down again at the remains of a rose she was crushing and rolling between her slim, white hands, as if it had been a living thing. She seemed to reflect a moment, then, suddenly rising to her feet, looked at me with blazing eyes.

"I believe you are a respectable woman," she said, her voice rising every moment, till it was almost a scream, "but some one in your house is a thief. I have been robbed in your house, Mrs. Panset, and I will not submit to it. I tell you I will not submit to it."

She was in a perfect frenzy of rage, and, oddly enough, her very excitement calmed me.

"Madam," I said, thankful at that moment that I had been reared as a lady, "madam," I said, "if you have been robbed in my house, you shall not suffer for it. The thief shall be found, and shall disgorge his gains, or else I will myself pay for what ever you have lost."

She threw herself into her chair again with a burst of hysterical laughter.

"My good woman," said she, "do you for an instant imagine it is the value of things I care for? Oh, no. It is the idea of having some one about me whom I cannot trust. It would kill me to think I had any one near me who would steal from me, or lie to me, or cheat me in any way. It is a terrible thing to be deceived by those you love, Mrs. Panset."

And then from laughing she went to crying. Violent hysterics I called it.

I was quite sorry for her by this time. I have a soft heart, sir, and when she began to cry, I gave in. I saw there was more in it than I had at first imagined.

"Mrs. Fanfarelle," I said, "have you lost something you particularly cared for because it was a present from some one else—from some one you loved?"

"Yes," she answered, "I have. I hate to be deceived, Mrs. Panset. I have lost something money could not buy."

Well, I thought she meant that whatever was gone, was so valuable to her because of the giver—her husband, probably—that money would not replace it.

I went close to her then, and patted the slim, soft, white hand that hung, glittering with diamonds, over the arm of her chair, the other held a lace handkerchief to her eyes, that never cost less than twenty guineas, and it was drenched, positively drenched, sir, with her tears. So I know she was crying.

"Mrs. Fanfarelle," I said, don't cry, don't take on so. I am sure we shall find it. What is it you have lost, and when did you miss it first? If any one in my house has got it you shall have it back again."

She let her lace handkerchief down from her eyes just far enough to say:— "I've been missing things for some time, Mrs. Panset, more within the past week, but I said nothing till this last, crucifix of all. I won't tell you what it is, you dear, good woman. Yes, I will, too. It is my husband's picture, a lovely miniature in a frame set thick with rubies. The rubies were that the thief wanted, of course. The thief is welcome to them, provided the picture is brought back."

I stared at her again. A picture like that, set in rubies? Why, it must be worth thousands of dollars! Who could have taken it? "Do you imagine it could have been any of the other lodgers," I asked, faintly. "I had but two others, Mr. Blackheath and an old lady—a sweet old thing, with soft white curls around her face, and the loveliest expression. Mr. Blackheath was beyond suspicion, of course, and so was my sweet old lady. But so was every body in the house, for that matter. How can I tell?" Mrs. Fanfarelle sobbed, with her handkerchief to her eyes. "You know I am careless, Mrs. Panset. I like to be where I can be careless. I don't suspect any one, upon my word. If I did, I'd have more reason to suspect my own maid than any one else. Of course it is some one who has access to my rooms. But then, every one has, for that matter. I never lock them, I leave everything to Corinne."

Corinne was her maid. "Have you perfect confidence in Corinne?" I asked. "Oh, implicit," she answered eagerly. "But then I have confidence in every one. That is my nature. Corinne has been with me a long time. I don't think it could be Corinne."

"My servants have been with me a long time, too," I said. "I have implicit confidence in them. I would as soon doubt myself. But what is that? There is a thief in the house, madam. I don't know who to suspect, neither do you. Clearly there is nothing for it but to send for a police officer to examine into things."

"Very well," she said angrily, "send for a police officer if you like. But be good enough to remember I never suggested it."

"I will remember, madam," I said calmly. "I could not see why she should be angry; but, as I say, it is my nature to grow cool as soon as other people begin to grow warm. I went straight from Mrs. Fanfarelle to the kitchen. The servants were having supper there, and I sent one of them instantly to the police-station near. To my surprise, the Inspector came himself, and Mr. Blackheath with him; though, as it chanced, it was mere accident, their coming into the door together."

"There is a mystery about this business," I heard the Inspector say to Mr. Blackheath. "This isn't the first time we have heard that trouble was brewing in this house."

Well, I braced myself, and met the Inspector coolly. "He didn't question me much. He asked for Mrs. Fanfarelle, and I took him to her."

She was in deepest tears. "I never sent for you," she said; "I only told Mrs. Panset that I had missed things. I thought she would find out who had them; but, instead of that, she sent for you. I don't want to hurt any one in this house."

"I do," said I. "If there is a thief in my house, man or woman, I want to root him or her out—and I will!"

"I think I had better question the lady alone," Mrs. Panset, said the Inspector to me. "And don't tell any of the servants what is going on."

"They must suspect something," I said, as I went out of the room.

Mr. Blackheath was in my room, talking with Rose. "I don't believe she has lost anything," Rose was saying, in her disdainful way. "If she has, it is that silly-faced maid who has taken it. I saw her coming out of my room the other day, and she pretended she had made a mistake. But of course she hadn't. She was just spying around to see what she could find."

"What do you think about it?" I asked Mr. Blackheath. "I think as Miss Massy does," he answered. "I am a pretty good reader of character, and I don't know any one in the house outside Mrs. Fanfarelle's rooms that I should suspect, if, indeed, anything is really gone. She has made you some presents lately, has she not, Miss Massy?"

Rose curled her lips. "She gave me a pair of bracelets, Maria has them."

"Nothing else?" Mr. Blackheath asked—"no rings, no pins, no ornament for your hair?"

"Nothing," Rose said, with a glance at me. "She offered them to me, but I would not have them. Why should I take presents from her? Why should she offer them? I hate her."

"And she hates you," said Mr. Blackheath, impressively. "Don't I know that?" Rose said. "All her offers of presents could not deceive me. I never took one but the bracelets, and I only took them to please my cousin. I would wear snakes on my arms sooner than Mrs. Fanfarelle's bracelets."

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