

BERENICE ST. CYR.

A Story of Love, Intrigue, and Crime.

BY DWIGHT BALDWIN.



CHAPTER XIV.

A PROFESSIONAL INTERVIEW.

T was with a feeling of weariness that our hero sank to a seat. It had been an eventful night to him. Adventures, complications, escapes, had followed each other with all the rapidity with which scenes were shifted on the stage of the theater.

Cole Winters had not tasted food for four and twenty hours, and began to feel quite keenly the pangs of hunger. The effects of the drug that had been administered to him the preceding night, and the chloroform he had more recently inhaled, had disappeared now, leaving his brain clear and active.

Our hero believed that by shadowing Sears he would learn the present whereabouts of the young lady whose safety now interested him far more than his own.

After a time he began to regret that he had not taken a seat near his enemy. In that way he could better test the value of his disguise, for if he passed the scrutiny of Sears he would consider himself tolerably secure.

At first he thought that the other might recognize the clothes and false mustaches as his own, but upon reflection he decided that this was unlikely, since there was nothing peculiar in either to distinguish them from thousands of others.

Besides, he had provided himself with a number of disguises, and was not likely to be very familiar with the appearance of any of them.

"I'll risk it," decided Cole. "If my identity can be detected, I'd better know it now, when I can have an opportunity to escape."

Whereupon he rose, walked through the car, and passed through the open portion where smoking was permitted.

With an air of weariness he threw himself into a seat opposite the man he had resolved to shadow. As he did so he threw open his coat, so as to display the star which proclaimed him a reporter.

Cole knew, of course, that Almon Sears was exceedingly anxious and worried, and hoped on those accounts to engage him in conversation. In a moment he learned that his judgment had been well taken.

"Anything new to-night?" asked Sears. "I see that you are one of the licensed newsgatherers." He pointed to the badge and smiled.

"Oh!" ejaculated Cole, hastily buttoning up his coat. "The murder is the great topic to-night."

"What murder?" "That of Mr. St. Cyr, last night."

"Oh, of course! Any new developments?"

The daughter of the murdered man was decoyed from her home to-night, and her whereabouts are unknown. The police are looking for her. It is feared that she has shared the fate of her father!"

"Horrible!" said the other, with a look calculated to harmonize with the word. "Any arrests made?"

"I understand that Winters was captured to-night."

Cole disliked to make statements not strictly in unison with truth. However, not only his own life and liberty but that of Berenice was at stake, and he felt that the end justified the means."

"Is he the guilty party?"

"The police think so."

"He hasn't made a confession?"

"On the contrary, he maintains that he is innocent."

"How does he account for the evidence accomplished against him yesterday?"

"I claim to be the victim of a plot. Say that the ringleader is a young man befriended by Mr. St. Cyr. His name is Sears."

"Is his story believed?"

"No; but it will be investigated."

"You reporters are always anxious for what you call it where one of you gets ahead of the others on a piece of news?"

"A scoop?"

"Exactly. You like to get the exclusive handling of a choice bit of sensational news, I suppose?"

"I should say so."

Cole started with well-assumed eagerness, and drew from his pocket a notebook which the editor had given him.

"No; not here. It's too long a story and besides I'm near my destination, the house of a friend, where I propose to pass what remains of the night."

"But where—"

"You can accompany me if you like. Hal! Here we are."

The speaker signaled the grip-man, who at once severed the connection between the car and the moving cable beneath, thus bringing the former to a stop.

Following the example of Sears, Cole Winters sprang to the ground.

"This way," directed Sears, and walked briskly down a cross street in the direction of the lake.

Although he was setting out on a desperate mission with his life in his hand, the heart of our intrepid young hero fairly bounded within him as he followed the guidance of his most bitter enemy.

After traversing several blocks, Sears halted before an isolated brick house near the famous shore drive-way, which was Lake Michigan.

"Wait a second," said he, and darted up the steps.

A pull at the bell had barely been given when the door was thrown open by a man.

By the light of a gas-lamp which stood near by Cole noted that his face was for bidding, almost villainous-looking.

"Is your master in, Luke?"

The question was asked in a low tone, but our hero had very particular reasons for not missing a word of any conversation that might ensue, so he strained as far as possible his sense of hearing, and hearkened intently.

"No," returned the servant.

"And Harper?"

"He came."

"Leave anything for us?"

"Yes. That's all right."

Cole's heart gave a sudden thump as he heard these words. He remembered that the coachman employed by Bloom had

been spoken of by that name, and concluded that here was where he had brought Berenice.

"I'm going to stay here to-night, Luke, at least until your master comes. He'll be along soon, I think."

"All right, sir."

Thus invited, our hero hurried up the stone steps and followed his guide into a broad hall.

Then the servant showed them into a small room, half parlor, half library, where he lighted the gas, having first closed the blinds tightly and drawn down the curtains.

"Now for business," cried Sears, as he waved the reporter to a seat beside the table and proceeded to light a fresh cigar.

"I'm ready," replied Cole, as he made ready to note down what the other might say.

"In the first place, my name is Almon Sears."

"What?" cried the reporter, dropping his pencil and half rising to his feet.

Although not in the least surprised, he saw that evidences of it could be expected.

"That's what," returned the hardened villain, in a flippant tone, and then blew a number of smoke rings into the air.

"My name is Sears," he resumed, a moment later, after the rings had dissolved in the air. "An hour ago I called to see the chief of police, to give some additional information as to this Winters. He wasn't in, and so I left and came here. Now that he has mixed me up with it to the extent of charging me with murder, I might as well give the whole matter to the public, and I'm very glad I happened to meet you."

"So am I," returned Cole, as he picked up his pencil and resumed his seat.

"In the first place, a man in the desperate situation that this Winters finds himself will do anything to save his life. The evidence against him is most conclusive, and he can only hope to save himself by showing that a job was put up on him."

"I see," assented Cole, pausing in his writing.

"In the second place he has a grudge against me, and his former employer, Mr. Max Morris, who more than likely he will try to involve with me."

"How did that happen?"

"I detected him in the act of robbing the cash drawer and told Max. As a result, he was at once discharged, and only escaped prosecution by concealing himself."

"It's a good point—"

"But the weightiest matter remains. You see—"

A sharp rap at the door interrupted the speaker.

"Come in!" he cried.

"It's me!" said Luke, thrusting his head into the room.

"What's the matter?" Has he come?"

"No. I want to speak with you, though."

"I'll be back soon," said Sears, and stepped into the hall, closing the door after him.

In an instant, Cole had his ear opposite the keyhole.

He caught but a few words in the voice of the servant, but they sent a thrill to his heart:

"You'll have to come, sir! She's makin' an outcry, an' I'm afraid as she'll be heard!"

CHAPTER XV.

BADLY DECEIVED.

For an instant our hero stood with bated breath. Then, as he heard the sound of footsteps ascending the stairs, he opened the door and glided out into the hall.

Another moment and he had reached the head of the stairs and saw Sears in the act of unlocking a door, not fifteen feet away.

As for Luke, he was not in sight, and Cole concluded that he had remained in the lower part of the house.

He applied his ear to the door, but a muffled mass of confused sounds alone rewarded his vigilance.

He had had little doubt as to who was held a prisoner there, but he resolved to know beyond all peradventure.

Not only were his chances of learning anything small where he then was, but he ran the risk of being detected in the act of listening should Sears leave the room without giving him any kind of warning.

Accordingly he passed on to the adjoining apartment, the door of which, to his great joy, he found to be unlocked.

Closing it after him, he advanced and entered a large closet on the side next the room which his enemy had just unlocked.

"Calm yourself, I tell you! Calm yourself!"

"Cole had barely entered the closet when he heard these words, pronounced in the voice of Almon Sears.

"Why have you torn me from my poor dead father?"

"Berenice!" murmured the listening lover, in intense excitement.

"Because I don't propose to be tricked out of my rightful inheritance," returned the new comer. "The bonds are gone, no one can tell where."

"Exactly. You like to get the exclusive handling of a choice bit of sensational news, I suppose?"

"I should say so."

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"No; not here. It's too long a story and besides I'm near my destination, the house of a friend, where I propose to pass what remains of the night."

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"I congratulate you on the night's work!" cried he.

Cole Winters was completely dumfounded.

"I don't—that is—" he stammered.

"You don't? The girl is secure, the detective dying, and the young fellow a fugitive from justice, who can only save his life by keeping himself to himself."

"But the bonds?" asked our hero, who felt that he must say something, though he could not imagine the cause of the banker's strange conduct.

"That's the very point."

"Have you found them?"

"No; but I have a theory. By the way, how came you to turn blonde to come here?"

Like a flash the secret of Morris' strange mistake dawned upon Cole Winters.

He had, no doubt, seen Almon Sears wearing the disguise he had appropriated, and had mistaken him for his partner in crime.

The knowledge almost deprived the young man of wits, and he narrowly escaped betraying himself.

He wondered now that Sears had not discovered his identity, but remembered that we are not so familiar with our own appearance as with that of others.

"I've been doing some work on my own account," said Cole, as he made ready to note down what the other might say.

"In the first place, my name is Almon Sears."

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"Did you see Bloom?"

"Did you see Bloom? What are you talking about? Didn't you send him around to tell me that you were coming to my house and for me to meet you here? What's wrong with you?"

"H