

Pearson was not angry, for he understood the circumstances. He knew how Sercombe loved Nellie Weldon. But he resolved to look into the mystery with eyes not clouded by love; in fact, he would go to Madison that very night, for whatever he did must be done quickly.

He carefully avoided Sercombe on the train, and when he reached Madison he went to look up one of his acquaintances. His friend had never heard of Nellie Weldon, but was little acquainted on Asbury avenue, so Pearson hunted for the name in a directory. Failing to find it, he asked the drug clerk if he had ever heard of her.

"No," replied the fellow. "What does she look like?"

Pearson gave the best description of her he could from what Sercombe had told him.

"Why, that must be Jack Cummins's wife. She's the prettiest woman in these parts. Jack thinks his eyes of her," he went on glibly, "but she likes fun now and then, I guess, and he's as jealous as the Old Nick of her. He swears he'll shoot the first man he finds gettin' too gay. Jack is a fine fellow. He was in here for a cigar not ten minutes ago. The house called him in unexpectedly. He's got a good job; he gets— but his listener was gone.

Pearson understood the whole matter at once. He tore down the street in the direction of Asbury avenue and Seventh street at his best gait. If he could only get there ahead of Cummins. He was soon there, but he could not tell in the darkness which house was numbered 712. As he was about to ring a bell a man walked past him, went up the next steps and opened the door. Tom followed him quickly, and was just about to press the button when he heard a scream.

"Robbers!" shrieked a woman's voice.

Pearson sprang in and through the hall door just in time to save his friend's life. On the opposite side of the parlor he saw Sercombe grasping the wrist of a badly frightened, but beautiful woman. Before him, with a chair uplifted, just in the act of bringing it down on Sercombe's head, was a strong man.

In that instant the whole mystery cleared itself. Sercombe's angel was a married woman. She flirted while her husband was off on the road, and had been caught by his unexpected return to-night. Sercombe, with innocent indignation, grasped the screaming girl's wrist, while Cummins was about to deal out to him a robber's deserts.