

WHAT WAS THE SENSE?

A Story for the Psychiatrists.

The lady in the party told this story, avouching that she meant every word of it to be taken with the utmost seriousness. It was at a private dinner party in St. Louis last Saturday evening.

"It was in, about, the year of 1881 that I, with my parents, was on a visit to New York City, my father having business there. We went to reside, before going on to the Maine coast resorts, for the season, at a boarding house in, I think it was, West Seventeenth street. It was a very exclusive sort of place. The keeper of the house would admit no one who did not come highly recommended by the very best people, and those people, too, had to be known personally to the keeper of the house. I was a young woman then—you see it's twenty years ago—and I thought the place was too exclusive, so exclusive that fun was out of the question.

"Well, we had been at the place two or three days when, one morning, at breakfast, there came into the dining room a young man of somewhat dapper appearance,—indeed he was dressed in the height of the then prevailing masculine fashion. He was, I should say, good looking, though it seemed to me, a little dissipated looking. I looked at him with an interest that was a little strange to myself, and he caught my eye, and then, a sudden chill striking me, I called the waiter and had him put down the window that was raised behind me

"There were four tables in the room. All were filled except ours. The young man had evidently only come to the house the night before, or, possibly, that very morning. He looked around the place queerly, as I thought, and then the waiter beckoned him to come and sit at our table. He did so with a great deal of manner, as I thought, and he sat down opposite me.

"I shall never be able to describe the feeling that came over me. It was worse than the chill that, they say, signalizes the walking of some one on your grave-to-be. It was a terrible, rather a horrible, sinking dread that suddenly turned to sickness, sickness all over, sickness that seemed to centre in the very soul of my being. I was helped from the table, and immediately I was out of the room I was relieved. At dinner that evening I was thoroughly recovered, and went to the table. We got through the meal all right, and were leaving the dining room when we met the young man coming in the direction of the dining room. He passed close to me, and I collapsed right on the floor, as if some sort of shock had knocked me down, and then came the awful sickness. My father carried me to my room. When I was pulled together again both father and mother questioned me. They were frightened a good deal and, I think, more than half angry at me. I had never had such spells before. They thought, perhaps, I had over-exerted myself in gadding about the city.

"What's the matter Mary?" mother asked me.

"I don't know. I can't tell—only something—that young—' and I faltered

"That young what?" my father asked

"That young man that came to our table; the same young man I met in the hall"

"Father and mother looked at one another, oh, so queerly. I can't imagine what they thought—at least I couldn't at that time, but they thought all sorts of dreadful things.

"Do you know him?" thundered papa.

"No."

"Then what—' Papa didn't finish his sentence, but he picked up his hat

and left the room while my mother questioned me. I could only say that the young man strangely affected me. The repulsion I felt was something like—well, it was like what I've felt when I've seen one of my brothers kill a snake in the woods—only worse. Mamma was sure my nerves had been worn out. She said I was only a victim of my moods. She tried to get me to admit that it was all imagination, but I couldn't. I said that if that man were to touch me I felt sure I should die of loathing of the touch, of a loathing hatred that moved my whole soul.

"Papa came back with the doctor from the nearest hotel. The doctor quizzed me. I answered, as best I could, as to all the details concerning the young man and as to all the other details into which, as you may imagine, a medical man's inquiries might go.

"Nerves," he said, as he sat down and wrote out a prescription. I didn't need the prescription, I was sure, but I took the dose. At breakfast the next morning I was thoroughly well. At dinner that evening I was all right, and so at the meals on the next succeeding day, but on the third evening the young man came in again and I experienced the same feeling coming upon me as he advanced toward our table, and I arose and left the room none too soon, I assure you, to hide another attack of my illness in my room.

"My parents joined me later. They said I was an idiot. They thought, at least, that I was going crazy. Father talked to the young man, later, in a casual way, and told me that he appeared to be a nice enough young fellow.

"There's something about him—' I went on to say, and then my mother turned the subject by remarking jokingly that, if this delusion kept up, she'd have to send for a young man back here in St. Louis, who had been attentive to me, and whom I liked, to stir me out of my doleful dumps.

"Anyhow, I couldn't abide that strange young man. I could not explain the mortal antipathy I felt for him. We had to leave the boarding house and we went to the Astor House. I never felt the attack upon me again, during my stay in New York; not once, though I met many young men, not so different, from general indications, from my special detestation in the West Seventeenth street boarding house.

"I forgot all about the matter until later and then it all came back to me most curiously. We were at a New England resort and I was having a fine time. I remember that there came to our cottage any number of young fellows. One in particular I liked fairly well, and one day I met him on the street of the village and he accompanied me home. He had a bundle of papers under his arm and I asked him what he had, and I started to open the bundle and he said I must not.

"Why not," I inquired. We were walking to the cottage veranda, where we both sat in rockers, and he was trying to convince me that he had something perfectly dreadful in the package of literature. When we got to the cottage veranda and sat down, I rolled off the rubber band and opened the roll of literature. He made a grab for the package, but I held it away and there was before me one of those police papers printed on pinkish paper, you know.

"I whisked it open and then—all of a sudden—like a tremendous shock came upon me the sickness that I had experienced as I have told you.

"The young man summoned my mother. She came. I was borne into the house. The young man, desperately mystified, left. Papa came back from Boston that evening. He interviewed me. What was the matter?

"That man," was all I could reply,

'that man in New York.'

"But the man is in New York,' he said. 'He couldn't affect you at this distance'

"No," I said. 'His picture is in the paper, in the paper, in the pinkish paper that Mr. — had and that I opened to tease him.'

"Papa called on Mr. —, the young man who had the paper, and asked to see it. The young man produced it from among his effects and gave it to papa. Then papa came back to the house and had a long talk with mother, and after they had done talking they looked at me awesomely and strangely, until I was afraid that they had suddenly become afraid of me. Then—"

The lady paused in her story. Her husband took it up.

"The paper was the Police Gazette. The picture was the picture of one of the Malley brothers, who had been arrested, a few days before the issuance of the paper, for the murder of a beautiful young working woman he had betrayed, whose body was found in the river, near Boston. The picture was the picture of the young man who so affected Mary—my wife—at the boarding house in New York. At the time that my wife was in the boarding house and the young man was also stopping there, the murder had not been discovered—at least the girl's body had not been discovered, though she had disappeared."

"Which of the Malley boys was it?" I inquired, for I remembered well the great sensation the trial had created all over the country, the Malley boys being sons of a wealthy factor, in society in a way, and the whole case bearing in general a great similarity to the Boscheiter case, now in the public mind, in New Jersey.

"I shall not say," was the somewhat startling reply of the lady.

"Why?" I asked.

"Well," said the lady's husband, again taking up her story. "both the Malley boys were tried for the murder, but neither was convicted. My wife feels sure that the one who excited her antipathy was surely guilty, but she will not say which it was, in view of the fact of their acquittal."

"One might tell by hunting up the files of the Police Gazette and looking at the picture; it bore his name," I suggested.

"Hardly, my boy. The pictures of both the Malley boys were in the paper at the same time."

"And now how do you explain it?" I asked.

"Explain it? Well, there's nothing particular to explain, that I can see," said the lady's husband, "and Mrs. — will not explain further."

Any reader of the Mirror is at liberty to look up the Malley case, in the newspaper dispatches from Boston about the time indicated at the beginning of the recital that lent a peculiar charm to my last Saturday evening's dinner.

W. M. R., in The Mirror.

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