

DEATH ENDS A MARRIAGE OF A WEEK

Police Investigating the Strange Demise of Mrs. Vidal Cervantes.

Remarkable Conduct of Her Husband and a Woman Said to Be His Former Wife.

Out in Laurel Hill Cemetery is a newly made grave. To-day the fresh sod will be torn up and the casket removed, by direction of the police, for they are working on a mystery as deep and dark as was ever brought to their notice.

The silent occupant of the grave was known in life as Vidal Messa, or Cervantes, and the breaking into her last home is done in order to clear away, if possible, the mystery of her death.

Murder is the theory the officers are working on and should this theory be correct the case will prove one of the most sensational in the criminal records of the city.

The scene of the tragedy—if such it was—was laid in the heart of the Latin quarter, a locality that has yielded all too many such mysteries, the central figures being people of the lowest type.

Vidal Messa had been a familiar figure to the denizens of Hinckley and Pinckney alleys, both in the shadow of the gloomy old County Jail on Broadway, Fat, no longer fair and on the seamy side of the half-century mark, the woman made her home at 18 Pinckney street, together with Hans Nelson, her companion and confidential agent. He it was who nursed her through many hours of suffering when she lay gasping for breath from frequent attacks of asthma, while each day he made the rounds of the dens of vice that belonged to her and levied on the occupants the tortionate tribute demanded by his mistress, but one degree removed from the shame into which they had sunk.

Faithfully Nelson performed his duties, and steadily the woman's possessions increased. Property in other parts of the town in less despicable locations passed into her name and unceasingly grew the store of gold credited to her in bank. The little tag that invariably hung at her belt always contained several hundred dollars, while costly jewels sparkled on her puffy hands and at her deep-lined throat.

She had a passion for costly attire, and the closets of her Pinckney street home contained no less than forty-six dresses, including heaviest satins and brocades, and at least a dozen triumphs of the milliner's art.

While she suffered greatly at times from her malady, Vidal Messa never believed herself to be in danger, and the simple remedies used by his faithful friend, Nelson, invariably relieved her in a short time.

For nearly four years Nelson had served Vidal as friend and protector, when to his astonishment one day last month she disappeared. It was on the 21st, two weeks ago, and she did not return that night. The following day, however, Vidal walked into the Pinckney-street house and announced to Nelson that she was married—had married one Florentino Cervantes.

Mrs. Cervantes did not appear to be as happy as a bride is expected to be, and later when an acquaintance called upon her she burst into tears, and said she did not know she had been married, that she had no recollection of the ceremony having been performed, but that Cervantes and some of his friends had induced her to drink heavily and it was while she was in that condition that the ceremony must have taken place.

She told Nelson that they had passed that night at 636 Vallejo street, between Montgomery avenue and Stock-

ADVERTISEMENTS.



Cupid breaks his bow at the sight of a face full of pimples and blotches. Hollow cheeks, sunken eyes, and a sallow complexion will defy his best intentions. Beauty is more than skin deep. The skin is merely the surface on which is written in plain characters the condition of the body. The skin is not a thing by itself, and skin diseases are frequently not skin diseases at all. All the lotions and bleaches and creams and powders in the world won't make a good complexion if the digestion is wrong. If the stomach is sour, and the liver torpid, and the bowels constipated, the skin will show it. No use trying to treat the skin for such a condition. The only way to relieve it is to cleanse the system and purify the blood. As long as the heart is pumping impurities to every part of the body, just so long these impurities will show through the skin.

Dr. Pierce's Golden Medical Discovery is good for the complexion because it makes the whole body healthy, because it cleans and purifies the blood, makes the digestion strong and clears out impurities of all kinds. By increasing the ability to assimilate nutritious food, and by the infusion of its own ingredients, it enriches the blood and so makes solid, healthy flesh. It fills out the hollows, rubs out wrinkles and substitutes for sallowness a rosy, healthy glow. There is no mystery about it. It isn't a miracle. It is merely the result of a combination of rational, natural common sense with expert medical knowledge. It cures diseases of the lungs, liver, stomach, bowels, skin and scalp, simply because all these diseases spring from the same cause—a disordered digestion and consequent impure blood. Don't let prejudice and scepticism cheat you out of your health. Dr. Pierce's Golden Medical Discovery will positively cure you, if suffering from diseases named above.

If you want to know hundreds of great medical truths, send at once-cent stamps to cover cost of mailing only, and we will send you FREE a copy of Dr. Pierce's 1008 page book, "Common Sense Medical Advice." Address, WORLD'S DISPENSARY MEDICAL ASSOCIATION, Buffalo, N. Y.

ton street, Cervantes' friends, including a mysterious woman, remaining there too. The house belonged to Vidal and was partly furnished.

Mrs. Cervantes did not remain at the Pinckney-street house long, but after instructing Nelson to continue to watch over her interests returned to the Vallejo-street house. The strange wedding took place on Tuesday, and, according to the statements Nelson has made to The Call and Detective Anthony, who is conducting the investigation, Vidal made several visits to the Pinckney-street place during the week, at which times Nelson turned over to her the money he had collected from her tenants.

Saturday, March 26, she made her last visit to him. She complained of feeling very ill, and for the first time expressed a fear that her time on earth was short. She spoke of the woman Cervantes kept at the house constantly, and said she had given her an overdose of medicine the night before that had almost killed her.

Mrs. Cervantes did not mention this woman's name and Nelson could not tell who she was more than that she was a Hungarian by birth and that during the past week it had been rumored among those who knew all the parties concerned that she had lived with Cervantes and was supposed at one time to be his wife.

Nelson endeavored to cheer up the woman by telling her that she had often been as sick as she was then and that he would go up to the Vallejo-street house that night and give her a treatment such as he had in the past, which would relieve her of her suffering. He kept his promise and noticed that while he was in the house the mysterious female friend of Cervantes watched every movement he made and acted in a most peculiar manner.

Nelson asked her what medicine she had given to Mrs. Cervantes the night before, and she showed him a rather large bottle about half full of a dark colored liquid. The directions on the label gave twenty to forty drops as a dose for an adult, and five to ten drops for a child. Nelson asked if she had administered more than one dose, and she replied that she had not, but that the druggist had not filled the bottle up.

Nelson remarked that it was not the practice of druggists to put a small quantity of medicine in a large bottle, but that they used bottles of various sizes, according to the quantity of medicine, and he questioned the woman further. Finally she admitted that she



FLORENTINO CERVANTES.

had given Vidal about 200 drops by mistake, but supposed as it was a medicine that children could take, it would not harm her. The following day, Sunday, Nelson visited Vidal again and found her somewhat better. That was the last time he saw her alive.

Nelson states that Mrs. Cervantes did not remove her effects from the Pinckney-street house, all her dresses and other wearing apparel as well as the furniture being left undisturbed. Early on the morning of Tuesday, March 29, Cervantes and the mysterious woman appeared at 18 Pinckney street and informed Nelson that Vidal had died suddenly at 15 minutes after midnight. They brought an express wagon with them and proceeded to ransack the house, taking all the dead woman's clothes, jewelry, some furniture and \$20 that Nelson had collected the day before. Since then they have told other friends of Vidal that they only removed a portion of the fur-

niture, but Nelson is positive that they practically stripped the house.

After their departure Nelson hurried to the Vallejo-street house and found preparations for the funeral already well under way. Valenti, Marent & Co., undertakers, whose parlors are on Stockton street, between Green and Union, had been called in, and arranged the body for burial. As Mrs. Cervantes was a very large woman, they informed the husband that it would be difficult to secure a casket large enough that day, and it would be better to postpone the funeral until the following day. At this, both Cervantes and the mysterious female became greatly excited, and insisted that the funeral must be held that day. The undertaker said it would cost \$35 or \$40 more to carry out their wishes, but they replied that a matter of a few dollars made no difference.

Nelson describes the action of both the man and woman all the time he was there as most remarkable. Both were deeply agitated, and the woman kept rushing from one room to another, calling to Cervantes, holding whispered conversations with him and otherwise manifesting extreme nervousness. Once, when some friends of the dead woman called, they were shown into the room where the body lay, but had scarcely approached it when the woman burst out:

"Don't you like the way it looks? If you are not satisfied you had better leave the house!"

Nelson notified some friends of Vidal of her demise, among them the family of Isaac Silva, 171-g at 737 1/2 Green street, who had known her intimately

for many years. They had barely time to reach the house before the funeral took place, for Cervantes and the woman had their way and the cortege started for the cemetery at 1 o'clock, barely twelve hours after Vidal had ceased to breathe.

Then the actions of the strange pair

Nelson says the woman had five very valuable diamond rings and other jewelry, which she usually carried on her person. Where these are now nobody seems to know.

Cervantes' claim to the estate will be bitterly contested by the relatives of the dead woman, and Carmen D. Meza, a sister-in-law of Vidal, arrived from San Jose yesterday for that purpose. Besides Mr. Silva has had a power of attorney prepared and will forward it to Vidal's sister, who is living in Mexico, for her signature, and he will then be in a position to protect her rights.

Detective Anthony was most reluctant to discuss the case when seen by a representative of The Call last night, and expressed his regret that the matter had leaked out. He admitted, however, that he had been working on the case for several days and that the result of his investigation had convinced him that the woman had been murdered. He would make no charge as to who the guilty party, or parties, were, and said that no arrests had been or would be made until the body had been exhumed.

On the result of an analysis of the stomach, Anthony said, depended the whole case. He believed that traces of poison would be found, which would confirm his belief that the woman had been foully dealt with, but he could make no move toward apprehending the guilty party until that analysis was made.

He could not understand why Coroner Hawkins had failed to exhume the body before this, as he had been requested to do, but he believed the Coroner would take that step to-day. When the stomach was examined, if poison was found, the detective said he would be in a position to act promptly.

Yesterday Isaac Silva, the friend of the dead woman, said:

"I have been a friend of the dead woman for many years and used to transact her business for her. She did not tell me she had married, but tried to conceal the fact from everybody. I was told about it some time later, and on last Thursday I told Attorney Archie Campbell that I was going to bring him a divorce suit and he said: 'Is that so; why?' 'Well,' I said, 'Vidal won't stay with that fellow; he has been in State Prison.' Campbell replied: 'You are too late. I am going to bury the woman at 2 o'clock.'

"I was surprised and said I would go immediately to her house and see her. He said: 'You have plenty of time.' I went there at 11 o'clock. I saw a woman and some fellow who I afterward learned was her husband. She was running around from one room to another calling this man, Cervantes. She kept asking for the hearse and asking why they did not take her away. I didn't say anything, but within five minutes the hearse came and they were ready.

"Two days later they appeared before Judge Coffey, applying for letters of administration. While they were in the courtroom, I had a man who was once a guard in San Quentin to look at the man and he told me he was once in San Quentin and that he thought his brother was there now. When they came out of the courtroom she said: 'What business have those men there?' meaning the bondsmen. She was trembling and extremely nervous. Campbell told her who they were and what they

hearing the story, immediately summoned Detective Anthony and detailed him on the case. Since then the officer has been working unceasingly with the result that the police are convinced that the woman died under circumstances that warrant the remains being exhumed and the stomach analyzed. Coroner Hawkins has been requested to perform this duty and has promised to exhume the body to-day. A careful analysis of the stomach will be made and as no embalming fluids were used it is thought it will be an easy matter to detect the presence of poison, if any had been administered.

Cervantes lost but little time in taking the necessary legal steps to secure possession of his wife's property, for a few days after her death he appeared for letters of administration. He appeared in Judge Coffey's court last Saturday, accompanied by the mysterious woman. Several friends of the dead woman were present and they noted that this woman was decked out in some of Vidal's finery. She ostentatiously displayed a gold watch and chain, for which Nelson says Vidal paid \$180, while encircling her wrist was a bracelet that had cost \$190.

One point that Nelson calls particular attention to is that when Vidal made his last visit to the Pinckney-street house she had in her bag between \$300 and \$400 in gold. This money was also seen by a storekeeper, for the woman called at his place to pay a bill she owed and when she opened her bag he noticed the gold. She searched for some silver, but could find none, and finally gave him a gold piece to change.

"I know she was madly in love with Cervantes," she remarked, "and was not surprised at their being married. A few weeks before their marriage he bought the house in which she died. After she was taken ill he had her removed to his home. A short time before her death a dark woman, whose name I do not know, visited her room and gave her some gruel. After partaking of the nourishment she seemed to grow worse and in a few hours she breathed her last."

"Whether or not the gruel was poisoned I am at a loss to state. Since her death I have heard mutterings that Mrs. Messa was the victim of foul play. I know she madly loved Cervantes, and frequently expressed her intention of marrying him. If she was murdered I do not believe he was a party to the crime."

"I saw her a few months before she passed away, and it seems to me that if she had been poisoned, knowing she was about to die, she would have told me."

Mrs. Erdly admitted that the unfortunate woman possessed considerable jewelry, but what had become of it she could not state.

J. E. Artigues, the physician who signed the certificate of death, was seen last evening, and said:

"I was called in to attend the woman two days before she died. I found her suffering from asthma and in a bad condition. Her heart seemed very weak, due to her being so fleshy. She told me she had not slept for five nights, and to the best of my recollection I prescribed a sixth of a grain of morphine powders and also my regular prescription for asthma—a mixture of lobelia, iodine, potassium and belladonna, composed of about two drachms each, then left, and about thirty-six hours later the undertaker called and asked me to sign a death certificate."

"I refused his request, as I had only once attended the patient. Some hours later he returned and told me I had to sign it, as he could not find any other doctor who had administered to her. I then signed the paper, giving the cause of her death as due to asthma, and stating that I had only visited her once. I understand the undertaker took the certificate to the Morgue."

"The next I heard of the case was when an officer called at my office looking for information, and told me that I was sitting in my drugstore when a man rushed in and begged me to come with him, as a woman was very low. I went with him and prescribed. He told me not to say anything about the matter to any one, and I should not have told you, but you seem to be familiar with the facts."

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A member of the firm of Valente, Marini & Co., the undertakers who buried Mrs. Cervantes, said:

"Mrs. Cervantes was taken from 636 Vallejo street. She was about 41 years old, and died on March 30. She died at midnight, and being a fleshy woman, weighing in the neighborhood of 200 pounds, her husband was advised to bury her immediately. We took her to our home and kept her in our parlors all the next day, and on the 1st of April she was interred."

"There was nothing the matter with her. I heard there was a fuss being made by the relatives and other persons because she had some money. She married this fellow Cervantes about three weeks before she died. He, in my opinion, was a sucker. He was earning \$25 a week and was younger than this woman. I understand he comes from Los Angeles."

"Cervantes did not order us to bury her immediately. A woman by the name of Tomasso, whom I would not care to mention, started this trouble. Everything was done according to the strict letter of the law and this fuss amounts to nothing."

The undertakers deny that they received money from Cervantes to place the body in its grave.

Mrs. F. Habdad, an old friend of the dead woman and at whose house the sister-in-law is staying, when asked what Mrs. Cervantes was worth, said:

"She had about \$500 in bank, which she intended buying a house, also a lot of jewelry." She gave the following list of jewelry as possessed by the dead woman:

"A bracelet with eleven diamonds, valued at \$380; diamond earrings, \$150; a breast pin, set in diamonds, valued at \$180, and another at \$120; a \$200 diamond ring, another valued at \$40; another ring set in little diamonds, valued at \$50; a gold pin with three diamonds, pieces and two five-dollar pieces; a set of earrings made from five-dollar pieces; diamond scarf pin, valued at \$30; three men's gold watches, one valued at \$70; three ladies' gold watches. One worn by her was worth \$150 and the chain \$30. Three silver rings, one set with a diamond, and a half-dozen carved Mexican earrings and three gold encircling bracelets. I also a quartz chain, which she paid \$40 for."

Continuing, she said that Mrs. Cervantes' son died in Mexico, and that the only relatives in this State were her sister-in-law and three children. He was in deep mourning and wore a sorrowful expression on his countenance. When not being interpreted by his friend, he would break forth in broken English and tell what he knew about the death of his wife.

When asked to show the medicine that was administered to her in her last illness he acted nervously, and said that he could not remember what would produce the bottles to-morrow. During the interview he showed how the medicine was given Mrs. Cervantes by illustrating with two glasses, one filled one half full of water and the other a small medicine glass he pouring

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"I am sure there is something wrong about this, as they told the court on Saturday that the estate was valued at \$1000. Before she took the lease of the lower place on Pinckney place she went to see Mr. Burke of Madison & Burke, and offered him \$3500 for it. I advised her that the property was not worth it and she did not buy. That is why she still has that money. That woman must have \$6000 in gold coin besides her jewelry."

Mrs. Erdly conducted the house in which the unfortunate woman died. When seen last night she related the circumstances of Mrs. Cervantes' death, but refused to express an opinion whether or not the woman had been murdered.

"I know she was madly in love with Cervantes," she remarked, "and was not surprised at their being married. A few weeks before their marriage he bought the house in which she died. After she was taken ill he had her removed to his home. A short time before her death a dark woman, whose name I do not know, visited her room and gave her some gruel. After partaking of the nourishment she seemed to grow worse and in a few hours she breathed her last."

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ed out a tablespoonful and thrusting it in the light said that "as the amount of cherry pectoral he gave. He said he first swallowed it and asked him to get some other medicine. He said that he then went to the drug store for some other medicine, and the clerk gave him some that was to be taken three times a day. He said that, to his satisfaction, and was taking it up to the time of her death."

He then went on in his own way and gave a detailed account of what was done the night his wife died. He said: "At 8 o'clock on the night she died she said she felt hungry. 'What do you like?' I asked her, and she replied, 'Hot cakes.' 'Shall I make them?' I asked, and she said, 'No, tell the lady.' While they were being made I took her to the kitchen. The lady made three or four, and she gave me one first, to see if it was good to eat. I put butter and sugar on it and put it on a plate, and then cut it up in small pieces. I gave her half an apple and she said, 'I don't eat this.' She said she would like one more, and I fixed another one. I cut it up in pieces, and ate half again. Once in a while she would give me a piece of hers. Pretty soon she stood up, and I helped her to her room, and she sat down in a chair. She said, 'I feel better, and will be well in two days.' She also said, 'When I am not sick I will make up a paper and give up my business to you.' I said, 'I have mine.' She sat in her chair some time, and then she said, 'I would walk her up and down' the kitchen to her room to relieve her asthma."

"About 11:30 o'clock she told me, 'You lie down, as I can't sleep. During the last three weeks I can't sleep. I like to walk.' I lay down and sleep for a little while."

"Pretty soon, about 12 o'clock, I see my wife at the foot of my bed, and she told me, 'I feel better, but she has asthma again.' She coughed two or three times. I got up and took my wife to her room and she sat down in her chair. Pretty soon she told me, 'I feel cold, in my hands, in my feet, and other things.' 'Make a hot cloth on the lamp and put it around here.' After I do it, she tells me she wanted to breathe but could not. She told me she felt a big ball in her stomach, which came up to her throat and that was the only thing troubling her. I put clothes on her feet and rubbed her hands. Thinking she was bad, I tell her I will call the people in my time, and other things. 'No, I don't want to give them any trouble. I call for help by knocking on the door and they come in.'

"Mr. Adrian he went to get a doctor but the first time he could not find one. He tell me he ask the sergeant of police and the officer directed him to Dr. Leland in the Commercial Hotel, but when he return with the doctor my wife is dead."

"While he was away I told him to help quick. She began to breathe heavily and then she tell me to put hot clothes on her, as she was very cold. She has no feeling in her hand and I rub some more. Five minutes after she sat down. Pretty soon she tell me 'I like to lie down.' She stand up and I tell her I will help her and she says 'No. She lay down on her side with her arm holding her head and then gave a long sigh and die.'

Hans Nelson, who for the past three years acted as agent for the dead woman, was seen in 18 Pinckney place last evening. He hinted at what he could tell, but was loth to talk on the

subject, fearing that he would be shot by Cervantes, whom he thought a dangerous man.

"I was employed by Mrs. Cervantes to look after the house, attend to repairs in the houses she rented and do her collecting. Although I heard of her marrying again, I did not see her husband until the day of her death. I had gone up the street to buy some groceries, and when I returned I was surprised to see an express wagon in front of the door. I tried to enter the house, but found that the bolt had been drawn on the other side. After hammering on the panel the door was opened by some woman whom I had never seen before, and she says to me, 'This is Vidal's husband and Vidal's dead.'

"I was surprised at hearing the news, but was more surprised to see what they were doing. During my short absence they had taken every dress belonging to Mrs. Cervantes and had them tied up in a bundle. Everything of any value was bundled up and they loaded the things on the express wagon. They then removed every bit of furniture in the house and left it in a deserted state. With the keys that he must have found on Mrs. Cervantes he opened a closet and took from it about \$20 in gold, that I was saving for Mrs. Cervantes, to be given to her on her next visit."

"Mrs. Cervantes was worth a good deal of money because I used to collect from \$3 to \$10 a night for rental of her houses. To-night I took \$50 to Mr. Cervantes, which amount I have either brought to his house or given to him here since his wife's death."

"I learned later that Mrs. Cervantes died at 12:15 o'clock, and they came to the house eight hours after to remove her belongings."

"I don't want to say anything else about the matter, because I am not in a position to do so."

ed out a tablespoonful and thrusting it in the light said that "as the amount of cherry pectoral he gave. He said he first swallowed it and asked him to get some other medicine. He said that he then went to the drug store for some other medicine, and the clerk gave him some that was to be taken three times a day. He said that, to his satisfaction, and was taking it up to the time of her death."

He then went on in his own way and gave a detailed account of what was done the night his wife died. He said: "At 8 o'clock on the night she died she said she felt hungry. 'What do you like?' I asked her, and she replied, 'Hot cakes.' 'Shall I make them?' I asked, and she said, 'No, tell the lady.' While they were being made I took her to the kitchen. The lady made three or four, and she gave me one first, to see if it was good to eat. I put butter and sugar on it and put it on a plate, and then cut it up in small pieces. I gave her half an apple and she said, 'I don't eat this.' She said she would like one more, and I fixed another one. I cut it up in pieces, and ate half again. Once in a while she would give me a piece of hers. Pretty soon she stood up, and I helped her to her room, and she sat down in a chair. She said, 'I feel better, and will be well in two days.' She also said, 'When I am not sick I will make up a paper and give up my business to you.' I said, 'I have mine.' She sat in her chair some time, and then she said, 'I would walk her up and down' the kitchen to her room to relieve her asthma."

"About 11:30 o'clock she told me, 'You lie down, as I can't sleep. During the last three weeks I can't sleep. I like to walk.' I lay down and sleep for a little while."

"Pretty soon, about 12 o'clock, I see my wife at the foot of my bed, and she told me, 'I feel better, but she has asthma again.' She coughed two or three times. I got up and took my wife to her room and she sat down in her chair. Pretty soon she told me, 'I feel cold, in my hands, in my feet, and other things.' 'Make a hot cloth on the lamp and put it around here.' After I do it, she tells me she wanted to breathe but could not. She told me she felt a big ball in her stomach, which came up to her throat and that was the only thing troubling her. I put clothes on her feet and rubbed her hands. Thinking she was bad, I tell her I will call the people in my time, and other things. 'No, I don't want to give them any trouble. I call for help by knocking on the door and they come in.'

"Mr. Adrian he went to get a doctor but the first time he could not find one. He tell me he ask the sergeant of police and the officer directed him to Dr. Leland in the Commercial Hotel, but when he return with the doctor my wife is dead."

"While he was away I told him to help quick. She began to breathe heavily and then she tell me to put hot clothes on her, as she was very cold. She has no feeling in her hand and I rub some more. Five minutes after she sat down. Pretty soon she tell me 'I like to lie down.' She stand up and I tell her I will help her and she says 'No. She lay down on her side with her arm holding her head and then gave a long sigh and die.'

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