

The Diamond Bracelets

A Story Told by a French Detective

It was during the palmiest days of the Empire. Never was Paris so gay; in fact, it was the *fete* day of the Emperor, the last flickering blaze of his greatness ere his glory departed forever. All Paris knew that he would grace the opera that night, and add to its usual luster the glittering pomp and circumstance of power. Accordingly, all that portion of Paris who had the necessary number of francs went to the opera, and, in honor of so great an occasion Mons. Blauvais, the director, was to produce "La Prophete."

The overture was over; the emperor, accompanied by the empress, radiant in her beauty and glittering with jewels, had just entered the royal box; his suit, uniformed in every color of the rainbow, stood grouped in the background. In another moment the bell would tinkle and the opera commence. But in an instant of time, while every sound was heard, the second box to the right of the emperor was opened, the curtains were drawn aside, and revealed the lovely wife of the Russian ambassador, Duke Metzkervitch. No wonder that the bell tinkled unheard, and the curtain went up unnoticed; no wonder that every eye was fixed with a fascinated gaze upon the woman who had just taken her seat, and was calmly and with well-bred nonchalance glancing about the house; for upon her arms, blazing like beacons, sparkled the diamond bracelets of which Paris had heard so much, and which royalty had sought in vain to purchase. A hum of admiration, like the murmur of the sea, ran through the house, and then, for the first, the entrancing strains of the chorus were listened to.

When the curtain fell upon the first act, and Milord This was ogling Milady That, a servant, wearing the imperial livery, presented himself at the Russian ambassador's box, rapped only as an imperial flunky could rap, and then entered the box.

"Her Majesty has noticed the bracelets, and was dumb with admiration; would milady be so gracious as to allow the empress to make a personal examination of one of the bracelets?"

In an instant the fair arm was shorn of its gems, and, with a smothered ejaculation of delight, the man wearing the imperial livery bowed himself out of the box, bearing the bracelet that a million of francs could not purchase.

The curtain fell upon the third act; ascended again on the fourth; the notes of the finale rolled through the house, the curtain fell for the last time, and still, with well-bred politeness, the wife of the Russian ambassador waited for the return of her priceless jewels. The imperial party rose and departed, and yet the bracelet was not returned. Then the duke, with a terrible frown of impatience, rose and drove rapidly to the Tuileries, and demanded the return of the diamonds. Explanations followed, and the duke was at last convinced that the empress had never sent for the bracelet, and that the man wearing the imperial livery was one of the daring thieves who infested the capital. He bade his coachman drive to the office of the Prefect of Police, and ere daylight a hundred of the shrewdest officers were scouring Paris for the stolen gem. The duke, filled with anxiety, remained at the office for tidings, while the duchess restlessly awaited the recovery of her bracelet at home.

The great clock had just told the hour of six when the bell of the duke's hotel was rung violently, and an officer of the police was ushered into the presence of the duchess.

"Was the bracelet recovered?" and "would they imprison the scoundrel for the rest of his days?" eagerly demanded the duchess.

With a grave bow the officer stated that the thief was taken, and upon his person was found the bracelet. But the fellow stoutly insisted that he was not a thief, and that the bracelet in his possession had been in his family for many years. Would madame entrust to him the mate to the missing bracelet that the identification might be complete?

Madame the duchess without a word unlocked her casket, and placed in the hands of the trusty officer the second bracelet. The officer, with a profound bow, left the apartment, and madame retired once more—this time to sleep and to dream of her precious diamonds. When the bell tolled the hour of nine the Russian ambassador, haggard and disordered, entered his wife's apartment, and threw himself in despair into a chair. Madame opened her eyes, and with a smile of delight asked for the bracelets.

"Satan!" exclaimed the duke, "we can learn nothing of them."

"What!" shrieked the madame, "have you not recovered it? The officer who came for the other bracelet said that the thief had been taken and the bracelet found."

The duke, with an exclamation of amazement, sprang to his feet, and in a husky voice besought his wife to explain. In a few words she told him. And then, with a groan, the duke dropped into a seat.

"I see it all," said he. "The rascals have robbed you of the second bracelet. There was no messenger sent for the bracelet. The man to whom you gave it was no officer, but a bolder thief than he who robbed you of the first."

And so it proved. The bracelets were never returned, and the Russian ambassador recalls the last fete day of the fallen emperor with a sigh, for it made him a poorer man by many millions of francs than he was when he handed his charming wife into his carriage and bade his coachman drive to the opera.

Southern Watchman [Athens, GA], November 19, 1873