

The Lost Jewel

A Detective's Experience

I have never seen so perfect a specimen of feminine beauty as that of Delia Howard. She was just on the verge of her young womanhood when I knew her first. Petite in form, yet with a physical development so singularly lovely that even in a fashionable theatre, crowded with the beauty and refinement of a city, she would have been singled out as an object of peculiar admiration. Her blonde features and golden hair were made brilliant and noticeable by the large black eyes that were fathomless in their intense light. Large and lustrous they were indeed, full of beauty that fascinated while it maddened you. She was an orphan niece of Mr. Howard, whom he had reared as his child. "Until recently," said Mr. F—— "she had repaid his kindness with affection, and even up to the event which owed none of its favor and sincerity to pretension."

His own daughter was a different style of beauty, and with a haughty and imperious manner which repelled friendship and esteem. But she hid under all that calm pride a heart quick to feel and passionate to resent real or supposed injury, her jealousy of her cousin disclosed. The admiration which the orphan everywhere excited maddened her, and I do not doubt that she had sworn in her fierce and bitter wrath to crush and kill her.

You must not understand that I knew this until long afterward. When Mr. L—— and myself were called on to investigate the robbery which involved the loss of a valuable diamond by a guest in the house, none suspected its existence. But when, after a patient research and a thorough examination of the premises, we became satisfied that the robbery had been committed by [someone] in the house, and so stated to Mr. Howard, I noticed just for one moment a wild light, a cruel gleam of intelligence burn in the eye of his daughter. What it meant then I did not know, but I was then sure it had an evil significance.

"You do not mean to tell me that one of my own family has done this deed?" sternly demanded Mr. Howard.

"That can't be ascertained, sir, but that [someone] in the house did it is evident," I rejoined.

Of course he demanded the strictest investigation, and while the search was being prosecuted, his daughter exhibited violent excitement. But the missing jewel was found at last in the work-box of Delia Howard. I knew the expression of guilt too well to confound it with the look of an affected surprise, which changed to amazement, when her cousin said[:]

"I saw her put it there!"

Astonished, which for a moment held soul and sense spell-bound, passed away in a moment. The indignant blood flushed face and brow, and the great black eyes flashed out a fierce, bitter scorn.

"I am innocent!"

The young head was thrown back, the form drawn up with a dignity almost regal as she looked upon her cousin.

“How dare you asperse me so.”

“It is true!”

“It is not. Oh! Uncle, believe me, I am innocent. I could not stain my soul with such treachery. I could not do such a deed.” And she knelt at the feet of the stern old man, who only felt the disgrace.

I could have sworn to her innocence as she knelt there in her passionate grief. Mr. Howard was the only one who doubted it. He motioned us to leave the room, and we did. What passed between the niece and her uncle I do not know, but she quitted the house that day. Refusing all offers of assistance, she went out alone. She was heard of in the city no more.

Two years afterward I was in New York. The city was wild over a new actress that had just appeared. I went, as [everyone] else did to see her. The play was “Fazio.” The vast audience was spell-bound from the rise to the fall of the curtain. I had never seen such acting before—I never expect to again.

From the first the face of the artist haunted me. I had surely seen it before, it lingered in my memory like a regret. As the curtain was descending on the third act, she raised her eyes to my box, and I saw her turn pale and shudder. In a moment a messenger entered and handed me a card. It bore the address of the young tragedienne, and appointed an interview. It is needless to say I kept the appointment. She met me calmly, and seemed to wait for a recognition. I could not tell where I had seen her. She went to an escritoire and took out a copy of the *Picayune*—read that; and she pointed to a paragraph detailing the circumstances of the missing diamond, but asserting a belief in her innocence.

I knew her then for the young girl whose unhappy fate had been a regret to me.

“That paragraph,” she said, “has been my only consolation in all my trouble. It seemed to say that there was yet a memory somewhere that linked my name with virtue; the consciousness of that has dwelt in my heart like a sweet memorial of a time when a single thought lingered like a ray of light in the darkness of my life. I saw you to-night, and the old scene of horror rose before me dizzily. I could not refrain from sending you that card. I wanted to hear from my old home and know if my innocence was confessed.”

“You have not heard from New Orleans then since [you] left?” I asked.

“No.”

“And know you nothing of what has occurred?”

“Not a syllable!”

“Your cousin is dead, but not even in death did she confess the great injury she had done you.”

“Poor girl!”

“Don’t you know it was she who did it?”

“Yes!”

“And you do not hate her memory?”

“No, she needs the love of her enemy. Unconsciously I stood in her way, and her fierce resentment could not forgive me. It is bitter to think of it, for the wrong was so cruel, but I do not hate her. I am alone in the world, divorced from kind friends—wedded to my art. You alone knew me for who I am, I shall try to forget that I was ever other than I now appear.”

And so I left her. Many a time I have heard of her since—the world has grown familiar with her name, but there are few who imagine that the famous queen of the drama was once a belle in New Orleans. Yet it is so and living she may read these few lines.

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