

## A Detective's Experience

### *The Coral Necklace*

“One night,” said Mr. F., “the beauty and grace of the city filled almost to suffocation the St. Charles Theatre. It was the occasion of a benefit—the recipient an actress of bewildering beauty and acknowledged talent. For weeks she had filled the vast theatre with an enthusiastic populace, who seemed eager to make her *fete* an ovation. Again and again did the curtain rise to their plaudits, and the weird gas-light of the proscenium flash on costly jewels and a form radiant with beauty. She had appeared that night as ‘Bianca’ and the Italian bride of Fazio had received from her an interpretation grand in its thrilling power, splendid in delineation. Passion—jealousy—tenderness—had in turn swayed and moved an audience who accepted from the artist a portraiture of emotions, vivid and life-like as reality. Catching the inspiration which moved her, their feelings were her feelings, and when the curtain descended upon the tragic mimic death scene, a shout of horror—cries of distress—showed how perfectly death was counterfeited in the convulsive struggle, the paling cheek, the glazing eye, the breaking heart.

“But was it a mimic scene?”

Even as the words of her dying speech were fading on her lips she half raised up again, looked eagerly into the audience, while her face grew ghastly, and a cruel tremor shook her frame. Then the white arms glistened for a single moment above her head. The last words, “My heart has broken” died on her lips, and the senses fled as the lifeless form sunk back on the floor.

Was it real!

There was a rush from the audience—a cry of despair from the stage, and the curtain rose rapidly. Before them, white and ghastly, lay the woman who an hour before, instinct with life and beauty, had reigned regally over all their hearts.

It was long before the breath came back to the body, warmth to the palid cheeks, and light to the eyes; then with a cry she sprang to her feet.

“Save her, save her, I entreat!”

“Save whom?”

“The child yonder; she with the coral necklace!”

Even as she spoke, a man leading a child passed rapidly into the street.

In a few moments Mr. I—— and myself were sent for to visit the actress at the hotel.

It would be impossible to describe the interview. The lady was mad with terror and distress. She walked the room like some wild animal bereft of her young, and her broken utterance—her sorrow and tears—made up a scene rarely witnessed in a lifetime. But we learned that the child,

whose presence in the theatre had so nearly proven fatal to her life, was her daughter, stolen from her years before. She told us, too, that her husband was an English nobleman, who, in dying, had bequeathed to his child vast estates. In case of her decease, (the child's,) they would pass to a distant relative. He had been scarcely dead a week, when the child disappeared. She had searched the continent for her, and discovered no trace. Exhausted in means, she had resumed the profession which her husband had taken her from when he married her. Coming to this country, she had never lost sight of the one object to which she had dedicated her life.

In the closing scene of "Bianca" her eye had caught the glitter of a curiously wrought, a delicately fashioned coral necklace on a child seated in the audience. Such a one her child had worn. Time and distance had no power to drive it from her memory. Even in the crowded theatre she knew it. There might have been others like it, worn too, by children, not her own; but still she knew, with an intuition that could not deceive, that the wearer was her child.

It was all the clue we had; but to men accustomed to work out results from threads more slender, it was enough.

It is useless to relate the means we employed; but before the day dawned the child has been restored to its mother. It had been stolen away in the interest of the relative, and but for the accidental meeting in the theatre would never have been seen again.

It was the last night of the lady's professional career. Her child recovered, and with indisputable proofs of its identity, she hastened back to regain its inheritance.

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