

A Prima Donna's Jealousy

A Detective's Experience

"I shall never forget," said Mr. F——, "a circumstance that occurred here in the winter of 185-. It was illustrative, in an almost immeasurable degree, of that peculiar element in a woman's character—jealousy.

One night, Mr. I—— and myself were seated in the office, solacing ourselves after a hard day's work with cigars and an occasional sip of brandy, when the porter entered and announced a lady wishing to see us. She followed immediately behind him, and the announcement was hardly made when she stood before us.

A lady, evidently. There was no mistaking the haughty carriage, the dignified yet imposing manners. A heavy dark veil obscured her features, but I knew intuitively that the woman was beautiful. There was that indescribable manner about her which every woman, conscious of beauty, invariably possesses. I say I knew this, even before her voice told me who she was. I had heard that too often to mistake its accents now.

"You are Madam H——!" I said, offering her a seat.

"You know me then!" She started visibly as she spoke, and I detected a tremor in her voice.

"That is not surprising, madam, since I have so often heard your voice."

"Ah! yes, that has betrayed me, but I need your services, and should have been compelled to disclose my name any way. Your excellent memory, sir, has saved me the necessity."

I bowed in acquiescence, and she then proceeded to tell me that she had that afternoon received intelligence which she deemed reliable, that a plot had been formed by a rival actress to injure her personally, perhaps to take her life.

They were both prima donnas in the opera. Our visitor, a lady of remarkable beauty, and whose voice, the sweetest, most musical, I had ever heard, possessed a compass and tone that had made her the acknowledged favorite of our people. This had excited the animosity of Miss B——, who before the coming of Madam H—— had enjoyed the distinction of a favorite, now being rapidly withdrawn by her rival. She was a daring, vindictive woman, who for this indulged an animosity which could only be appeased in the destruction of the woman who had deprived her of the ambition in which she exulted. Almost as beautiful as Madam H——, she imagined that but for the graces of her person her triumphs would not be so assured. To strike this petted rival down and at the same time gratify the hate that burned in her heart, now engaged every sleeping and waking thought. To accomplish this Madam H—— had been informed a conspiracy had been planned, and to discover which our services were required. She revealed to us other facts not necessary now to detail, but which convinced us of the truth of the information the lady had received. Having done this she retired, and left Mr. I—— and myself to consult.

It is needless to say that the next night found us both at the opera. The beauty and fashion of the city had assembled to hear Bellini's Grand Opera of Norma, in which M'me H—— appeared as Norma, and Miss B—— represented the young priestess Adalgisa. Never, perhaps, was the passionate sorrows of these Druid priestesses so feelingly portrayed. There was a wild terror in Norma's eye, not lent by genius—a fierce despair in the mien of Adalgisa, not born of the wreck of her girlhood's hopes; their very communings had an antagonism in them, which appeared to the audience as if Norma had mingled with her soothing a jealousy of the young priestess who had robbed her of her lover's fidelity.

I saw it all and knew what it meant. This impression was more deeply confirmed when Adalgisa rose from her knees with a cry—meant as a wail of despair, but which breathed an exultant tone and fled from the presence of her consoler. Her personation was the repressed jealousy of a heart burning for revenge, not the analysis of an enthusiast's despair. My heart felt a chill of fear as I noted that wild look of the jealous woman, and marked the thrill of the passionate voice. Intuitively I felt that the hour in which she would seek to accomplish her revenge, was drawing near.

When the curtain fell, in the last scene, Mr. I. and myself were at the door from which the two prima donnas would leave.

In the carriage which Miss B—— occupied, I noticed a strange looking man, evidently disguised; but as the light of the lamp flashed on him, I saw a deep red scar on the back of his left hand. I knew him then as the keeper of a fashionable restaurant, to which the artists at the opera usually retired for a night supper. I saw the whole arrangement. It flashed on me like a gleam of lightning, and I determined not to lose sight of the prima donna that evening, come what might. That they were going to the restaurant, I knew full well. Madame H—— would be there, too. It was an invariable custom from which their habits never varied. Driving rapidly to the place, therefore, we were comfortably seated in the lady's ordinary when the prima donnas came in. I saw at once in Miss B——'s eye a restless, scared look, an uncertain painful attempt to appear at ease, which denoted mischief. But to Madame H—— she was unusually polite. I saw the start of unfeigned surprise of that lady, when her rival almost overwhelmed her with the unexpected compliments on her success. Ingenious and unsuspecting, she accepted them as in earnest and when invited to take a glass of wine, acceded at once.

Miss B—— rung the bell, and the proprietor entered himself with the wine. At this moment, the suppressed excitement of Miss B—— was intense. Her hand trembled as she toyed with her glass, and the pupils of her great black eyes contracted and enlarged with the rapidity of thought. The wine was poured into the glass, and as Madame H—— was raising it to her lips, I stepped behind her chair and took it from her hand. The lady looked surprised, the prima donna, with a scream of terror, fell fainting to the floor, while the proprietor, with a bound like a wounded panther, sprung forward to dash the glass from my hand. But he never reached me. The stern command of Mr. I—— stopped him, and his presented pistol reduced the refractory Frenchman to obedience.

The wine was poisoned.

The generosity of Madame H—— prevented an exposure of the sinning but repentant woman, and you are the only person to whom has ever been revealed the story of the PRIMA DONNA'S JEALOUSY.

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