

after seeing Jaunuschock play Mr. Edwin Booth into the wings with her *Lady Macbeth*. I don't think Ristori's artificial handling of that role would amount to much. But that isn't what I was going to tell you."

"No, it isn't? It was something about a mahogany box."

"Yes. Well, when Mr. H. J. Sargent started in the Modjeska season he had a countess on his hands who, so far as the theatrical business was concerned, was destitute of diamonds."

"She had some very fine jewels, as became a Polish nobleman's wife, but she wasn't going to have them trotted out. This annoyed Sargent who knew perfectly well that in the Mississippi Valley there was an unassailable conviction that any foreign actress who had not received at least two diamond necklaces from the Emperor of Russia couldn't amount to much."

"One day when he had just got into—Buffalo, I think it was,—to play that night, he saw in a jeweler's window a very showy necklace of stage diamonds. He went in and found that it had been made for Mary Anderson to wear in *Pauline*, and she had refused to take it because her directions had not been followed with regard to the setting. 'How much do you want for it?' asked Sargent. 'Forty dollars,' said the jeweler. Give you thirty-five,' said Sargent. Then they compromised on thirty seven."

"Now, I want a box," says the manager, and after running all over the town he got hold of a second-hand mahogany casket bound in brass. 'How long will it take you to polish this up and put two heavy handles on it?' he asked of the jeweler."

"Have it done in an hour," was the assurance of the obliging merchant."

"In an hour Sargent was on his way to the theatre with the box under his arm. He noticed with pensive care that the town had not thrilled much as yet under the glowing announcement that the Countess Modjeska would appear that night. Trade flowed on in its unbroken currents. Life was unperturbed. The great prosaic interests of the world did not appear to care whether Modjeska or Johannes had arrived."

"Mr. Sargent strode into the office of the theatre. He was flushed and excited. 'Where's your safe?' he asked. They had not got any safe. He put the box down on the table and kept his hand on it. 'No safe!' he cried. What are you talking

about? Do you know what's in that box? It's got jewelry in it worth \$50,000. I'm not going to take the responsibility of the thing any longer. Here, send to the police station. I must have a couple of men to watch it while I go to the bank."

"Then he got two officers to stay there and not take their eyes off the mahogany box, while he went off to the hotel and opened a bottle of wine. As he had shouted a good deal there was quite a group collected round the office. And in less than half-an-hour the Modjeska current began to stir along the sluggish street. He let it work. When the two policemen were relieved the entire force knew of the Emperor of Russia's gift and before six o'clock they had quadrupled the rumor by means of wives and sisters and sweethearts. At eight o'clock there was only one person in that city who had not heard of the Emperor of Russia's gift."

"That person was the Countess Modjeska."

"The Mahogany box worked so well that Sargent began to look upon it as a sort of Aladdin's lamp, and he rubbed it up every day and got a new idea."

"The first inspiration was to have it stolen. Hitherto only the policemen had made obeisance to it. Now the telegraph and the night editors fell down. The wires flashed it through sixteen States. The Emperor's diamond necklace was gone. A heavy reward was offered. It must have cost Sargent something to hire detectives to work up the case. I believe the *Bellefountain Bugle* published the original despatch of condolence from the Emperor of Russia."

"When the sympathy for Modjeska had become national, and there was some likelihood of the emotional women of the country making up a fund to replace her diamonds, a rash reporter forced an entrance to her boudoir one day when Sargent's back was turned, and found that her distress at the unparalleled loss was altogether disproportionate to the circumstances."

"An infamous and suborned press then began to give way to ignoble doubts about the robbery, and the *Bellefountain Bugle* even printed an editorial throwing suspicion not only on the Emperor's gift, but upon the Emperor himself."

"Sargent was equal to the emergency. He took two of the most versatile and copious pressmen into his confidence. He pledged them to secrecy, that being the shortest cut to publicity. 'Now,' he said, 'I have a confession to make. I

was so afraid that the Countess's jewels would be stolen that I had an imitation set made just like them for show purposes, and it was the imitation set that was stolen. The real gems are here."

"With that he unlocked the safe and got out the mahogany box."

"Gentlemen," he observed, as he unlocked the box, 'you can examine those jewels. You can see for yourself whether they are of the first water. I'll send for an expert if you wish it.'

"The versatile and copious drew them selves up with dignity, 'As if,' they said, 'we are not experts enough to tell real gems like those from stage jewels!'

"This dodge worked very well for a few days. A new crop of stories broke out about the Emperor's necklace. But the original syndicate of night editors and local reporters who had sworn to the real robbery felt aggrieved. A committee waited on Mr. Sargent. 'See here,' said the spokesman, 'as we understand this thing, you agree to have the real necklace stolen, not an imitation one. It's an outrage on the public and the press. You're a fraud.'

"Go slow, my dear fellows," said Sargent. I don't think you've got the thing right. If you will not give me away, I'll tell you. The fact is, I set that story going about the bogus necklace having been stolen, in hopes that it would reach the thieves and make them send back the real one. Of course, you saw the real necklace two months ago, and would know it if you saw it again."

"The committee remarked that they should smile."

"Very well," said Sargent; 'here's the only necklace I've got now.'

"Then out came the mahogany box."

"If you think that that is the genuine article, all I've got to say is, you are not up in stage jewels. If you'd like one of those pieces of glass as a souvenir, just pull it off."

"The American press was pretty equally divided by this time on the question of the diamond necklace, and the American managers were getting to have a superstitious regard for Sargent and his box."

"But Sargent had got enough of it, and he sold out the scheme to some other manager."

"I think it was six or eight months afterwards that Minnie Palmer lost her diamonds, and, meeting John Rodgers one day, he began to tell me about it."