

ivory-handled revolver from her handbag, broke it, looked intently at the cartridges to see if they were all right, then snapped it shut and dropped it back into her handbag. "I shall be all right. Besides, I count on your being there. I shall go in. I want you to follow and wait in the hallway. You can do it; it is the public hall of an office building. The moment you hear anything unusual, I shall want you."

A second time Clare entered the Futurist Shop. There was the same atmosphere of perfumes and repose, but somehow she could feel the frigidity in the air as she asked the girl at the desk, "Is Mademoiselle Fleurette in?"

"Here is Mademoiselle Fleurette," returned a voice from the other side of the partition that cut off the outer office.

The beauty specialist herself emerged. Her face seemed a little flushed perhaps in spite of her artificial complexion. It was evident from the harshness of her tone that she did not enjoy the second visit.

"What—back again?" she rasped. "What can I do for you, now, Miss Kendall?"

"I am looking for news of the whereabouts of Miss Norma Moore," returned Clare quietly, meeting the defiance of Mademoiselle with a cold, searching glance.

"Miss Moore? Who is Miss Moore?" "I have every reason to know that some one here can answer the question," ignored Clare, then added, eyeing the beauty specialist steadily, "Mrs. Despard, for instance."

Fleurette then repeated, "I told you she had sailed for Europe."

"I saw her enter this building, not ten minutes ago," asserted Clare.

"Indeed." "And I have every reason to know that she and Mr. Lyons, who was with her at the Montmartre this afternoon, can answer my question. You can answer it." Clare was leaning forward emphasizing each word.

Fleurette laughed again harshly. "So—you think I know something of Norma Moore, do you? Little fool!"

"What has become of her? I shall not move from this place until you tell me the truth."

The woman laughed again. "How should I know? Perhaps she disappeared to escape a scandal. Perhaps there had been a clandestine correspondence—who knows? There are many 'perhap's'."

"I insist that Mrs. Despard herself," Clare laid emphasis on the word, "tell me where Norma Moore is."

Mademoiselle was struggling with suppressed fury. "This has gone too far," she cried, backing to a door that opened on the opposite side of the beauty shop from the entrance to the corridor to the little dressing rooms. "I shall call assistance."

Before she could open it, some one on the other side turned the knob. "What's the matter?" asked a man's voice.

"Here is that woman detective again," she hissed.

It was Jack Delroy, no longer clubman, but fiend, as he saw Clare blocking the progress of his amorous program.

"Sinclair will be back in a moment, now. Let me—"

There had been no chance to call Lawson. As Delroy rushed at her Clare whipped an automatic from her handbag and covered him. There was a loud explosion and a puff of stifling, choking smoke. Fleurette lay motionless on the floor and a few feet away sprawled Delroy.

AS Lawson rushed in, he stopped short, aghast. "You—you shot them—both?" he gasped.

"With a bulletless gun, a German invention adopted by our own Secret Service. It shoots stupefying gas of capsicum and lycopodium. Here—watch Delroy while I loosen her dress. She will be all right in a minute."

Clare was on her knees beside Fleurette. She had seized an inking pad from the office desk and was rolling the unresisting fingers of the woman on it and then on a sheet of paper.

"Thumb a whorl—index, a loop, central pocket—middle finger, no, I don't want that," she was saying to herself as she studied the ink smudges eagerly. "There—ring finger—a radial loop—no arches or composites."

"What do you mean?" inquired Lawson, bending over.

"I mean," explained Clare, looking up at him with cheeks flushed by the excitement of the moment, "that though she could change the face of Fleurette to Mrs. Despard or perhaps a dozen other disguises by her art, there was one thing she could not change and that was the fine lines on the inside of those long slender white fingers. The infallible finger print is proof against even the criminal art of the beauty doctor. It was Fleurette who wrote the note. Fleurette is Mrs. Despard herself!"

As the beauty specialist came blinking and choking from the effects of the fumes, she was murmuring, ramblingly. Clare bent over to catch what she was saying.

"Jack—get her away—quick—no money—any of us—without marriage."

"Bilfy," cried Clare, as the truth suddenly dawned on her, "she is here—in one of those little dressing rooms."

Crashing down one after another of the doors into the corridor which opened into the office on the opposite side from the room from which Delroy had entered, Lawson peered into the darkness of each.

There in the last one lay Norma Moore, fully dressed, but half dazed. As he leaned over, she mistook him in the darkness.

"Jack—is it all right—the license—what church? Help! help! Jack, there is a strange man in the room."

"There, there," interrupted Clare, gently motioning Lawson out into the corridor, "my poor dear—these are friends—don't scream—you have been the victim of a drug—the cigarettes, you know."

She had taken the now unresisting girl in her arms, and rapidly reviewed the story of how she had been led on by Delroy and his friends.

"And to think, I loved him!" sobbed the girl. "How I loved him and thought he loved me! I never let mother know—she did not like him. But we were to be married as soon as it could be arranged."

NORMA had clearly been fighting to the last the effects of the drug which Delroy had used to lead her on until he could take advantage of her infatuation.

"My God," she cried, rising and pressing her hands wildly to her throbbing temples, "it was not I whom he wanted—whom they wanted, after all—it was my money—my money—my money."

Clare, whom experience and observation had taught the close psychological connection between love and hate and how readily one may pass into the other, stroked her hand as she endeavored to quiet the bitterness of her denunciation of Delroy.

"My dear," she soothed, "you are with friends. All has come out right in the end. It is an awful shock, I know, but don't give way to it. Sit still a minute, here, then when you are recovered we shall go away."

Dr. Lawson meanwhile had hurried back to the main room. Already Delroy was stirring restlessly and muttering, "Quick, Fleurette, Sinclair—somebody—a cab—Little Church Around the Corner—all arranged—"

"It's too late, Delroy," exclaimed Miss Kendall, coming down the corridor looking for Lawson. "The conspiracy is discovered. Only the desire of the Moores to cover what might have been an open scandal will save you from jail. Billy, call Mrs. Moore. Tell her—for the present—it was as she suspected—a case of aphasia."

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