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# Things Are Not Always What They Seem.

### A DECEPTION.

(Continued.) His expression intimated his ignorance, and Blanche Norley saw it. "Of course you didn't! Yet it's a fact!" she declared. "And what is still more startling, no doubt, she's been in this very town the whole of the time—lying low, of course, but ma foi, working like a Trojan. Making love, to be precise. And nigh a month ago she was married to one of the wealthiest men on the 'Change. You didn't know that, eh?"

"No," Wilfred answered, surprised. "But what—"

"Don't ask questions!" she snapped in, cutting him short. "That is my business—yours is to answer. Now, then," she went on, "what would you say if you discovered she, this great Nora Brunhildt, was living under this very roof, at this very moment, eh?"

Wilfred Norley could stand it no longer. He must have his say. "Blanche, Blanche! are you mad?" he asked, believing himself that his wife had certainly lost her reason, and now was raving mad. "What are—"

He got no further with his question. "Bah! Don't ask questions!" she thundered, in a terrible voice that demanded obedience. Then she went on with the old thread.

"Furthermore, what would you do if you learned you, yourself, had taken her as wife, eh?"

Beads of perspiration stood out on Wilfred's brow. He was absolutely helpless. He couldn't decide what to do. There, that dangerous revolver was unerringly aimed at his forehead, and if he moved he was sure it would go off. Yes, he was sure of that. There was such a look in his wife's eyes that said so. He dare not move. He dare not even call for help. A mad person is a strange being to deal with, and he was sure his wife was mad. But he found his voice.

"O Blanche, don't torture me," he pleaded. "I know you hold the upper hand; but if you intend to kill me kill me at once, and have done with it. Don't play with me like this."

His wife only smiled. Again it was that same evil smile.

"Ha! it's my nature," she told him

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cooly—"my nature, ever akin to a cat's, and it pleases me to play with my victims before I polish them off."

She laughed aloud at her words, "Ha, ha, ha!"

"Don't look so miserable man—cheer up a bit!" She so bade her unhappy husband. "Raise a ghost of a smile and I'll proceed."

But the smile was not forthcoming.

"Well, well, you are 'brave!' she mockingly added. Then she went on, seriously: "Now, Wilfred Norley, without any joke at all, I tell you that under the assumed name of Blanche Lovejoy, you, in truth, married Nora Brunhildt."

Wilfred turned white! Should he believe her? Mad people say strange things. But if she really was Nora Brunhildt, these actions would be natural, he concluded, and not the outcome of madness at all! What should he do? Should he, or should he not, believe her? Was she, or was she not, mad? Oh, this was torture indeed! But Blanche Norley decided, for a time, at least.

"Nora Brunhildt—that's who I am!" she declared, with evident pride. "If you want to know more about me, ask a policeman."

She laughed at the joke. "Ha, ha, ha!"

Wilfred was still in a condition of uncertainty, and Blanche Norley, alias Nora Brunhildt—and his wife for certain—spoke to him, the while assuming that nerve-shattering smile of hers.

"What's the matter, man?" she asked. "You look staggered. Surely you're not ashamed of marrying the most notorious Nora Brunhildt—and his wife for certain—spoke to him, the while assuming that nerve-shattering smile of hers.

"What's the matter, man?" she asked. "You look staggered. Surely you're not ashamed of marrying the most notorious Nora Brunhildt—and his wife for certain—spoke to him, the while assuming that nerve-shattering smile of hers.

"What did she mean?"—An honour that few enjoy!" Wilfred wondered and was thinking; but Nora Brunhildt was a wise bird, and very wisely scattered all chance of reasoning.

"Come, puff yourself up with pride!" she urged him. "If there was any misfortune at all it was mine—not yours. Why, do you know," she continued—"do you know that Loch stein, the greatest detective in Fredricktown, and, perhaps, the greatest in the world, made love to me the very day after I had robbed old Gut-terein, the timber king, of £10,000 and killed his son and a couple of servants to facilitate my task?"

That was a joke! She laughed at it.

"Ha, ha, ha! And the best of it was, she went on, "that all the time he was billing and cooing, and going daft on me, he was hunting high and low for me. Ha, ha, ha! What fool-men are!"

Wilfred Norley did not smile at the story. Perhaps he had not heard it. He was awfully confused, that was evident; but the expression on his face altered a little. His wife noticed it, and spoke.

"Ah, I see you have recovered a little," she said. "That is well! I can proceed. Now, with regard to your case, Wilfred Norley, you are no wheeler and cooing and loving, and, of course, I captured you. It was part of the plans we drew up to rob you, you understand, eh? I was to marry you in the first place; get rid of you somehow or other, without rousing suspicion about myself, in the second place; and, in the third place, get hold of your money and family jewels—get them safe and sound in my hands, without trusting to wills, or that sort of thing. You see the steps, eh?"

Without allowing him even time to answer, she continued.

"Well, I have everything ready—the poison came from headquarters this morning! You see, Wilfred Norley, despite what the papers say, I really have a heart, and in a minute way it appreciates kind souls. Now, you yourself is not a bad sort, so I resolved to refrain from violence to kill you, and intended to let you end your days peacefully by the aid of a dose of pleasant-to-take poison; you understand? Well, this should have happened to-morrow, the 19th, but my carelessness in allowing that ad-



visory letter to headquarters to fall into your hands has smashed the whole plot. Why, what's the matter, man? You're shaking like a jelly. Oh, I'm not going to poison you now, don't fear. No, no."

Blanche Norley left her sentence unfinished, for to her surprise Wilfred rose boldly, his face aglow.

"Blanche, Nora Brunhildt, or whatever else your name may be, I refuse to stand any more of this," he told her, and, to all appearance, meant it, too.

"Sit down!" she commanded. "I'll blow—"

"I won't! I refuse!" broke in Wilfred, without heed.

"Sit down, I tell you! Sit—"

Wilfred rushed at her; but simultaneously with his action a shot rang out, and he dropped with a heavy thud to the floor. But a third person had entered. It was one of the servants, and in his hand, pointed at her what appeared to be a revolver.

"Hands up!" he commanded, rather meekly. "Hands up, or—or I'll fire! I saw you shoot him."

Mrs. Norley responded only with a mocking smile.

"Bah, you fool! Drop it!" she said, calmly. "You don't fool me with a pipe-case! Ha, ha!"

The servant, looking very foolish, lowered his hand.

"Drop it!" Mrs. Norley repeated, covering the servant with her revolver. And the pipelace fell to the floor.

The poor servant was terrified almost to death in his new role. His teeth chattered, his knees knocked, his face portrayed absolute despair.

"Hands up!" commanded his victor, and immediately his hands shot up.

"So you saw me shoot him, did you? Well, take that for your inquisitiveness!" she said as the revolver cracked again, and the poor servant, with a deep groan, fell forward on his face.

Then she gazed on her evil work, and with a smile, remarked:

"Dead men tell no tales."

Did she forget that there are other means besides the human lips that convey tales and promotes suggestions? Even corpses may tell a tale. However, her work was by no means finished. Going over to the inanimate form of her husband, she felt in pocket after pocket, until at last she triumphantly withdrew a bunch of keys.

"It made things much easier by marrying him," she observed, "certainly. 'Ah, I knew it would. That act was a master stroke.' And she was apparently proud of it.

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Keys in hand, she made her course towards the safe.

"Now for the money! Now for the jewels!"

She was eager to put her hands on them. Her expression and her tone proved that.

With a slight click the safe-door flew open, and her anxious eyes gazed with mighty hunger upon the contents.

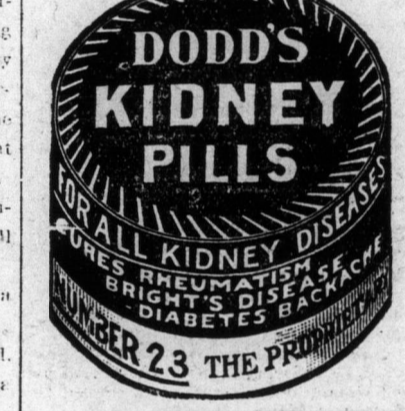
Hastily, bag after bag she extracted and placed on the table. Next followed jewelry cases, which she affectionately handled, delight in her eyes.

Having extracted all—a valuable haul!—she rose, and opening now a bag, now a case, she passed comments upon the contents.

She was highly pleased with her booty, there was no doubt about it. Here were the "Norley diamonds," famous throughout the world; there the "Eye of Gooan," the loveliest pearl ever possessed by man, and originally stolen from some Oriental despot. Oh, what a haul! What a record!

"My word, Wilfred was a fool to keep all these gems in a private box, now a case, she passed comments upon the contents.

"And now for the completion of my task," she said, gazing around on the state of affairs.



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