

with her, and the door was locked on the inner side.

Sophie unlocked the door. Outside, a slender woman dressed in black and with a rather childlike, appealing face, shaded by a large drooping hat, was feebly endeavoring to fit a key into the keyhole. She gave a smothered exclamation as the door opened and put her hand over her heart.

"You gave me such a start! I thought this was my room!"

"What is it?" Sophie said, eyeing the figure with suspicion.

"I think I am a little faint and dizzy. That must be why I came to the wrong door." The strength in her tone suddenly died out and she swayed to one side. "A chair," she gasped; "some water."

Sophie threw the door open and caught the swaying form, which staggered toward a lounge and lay there, pale and motionless. As the maid hurried to the electric bell a feeble voice remonstrated:

"No, no, I shall be better soon—then I can reach my room all right. I will rest here a moment with your permission."

"I have no right to give permission," Sophie again approached the bell.

"Wait," the newcomer said, sitting up with an effort, "I am almost myself again. These slight attacks pass off as suddenly as they come over me." She rose to her feet, steadied herself, and moved slowly toward the door. As she did so she glanced at the long mirror above the dressing-table.

"I do look pale," she murmured. The she uttered a slight exclamation. "How curious!" she said. "That is a picture of a friend of mine." She pointed to a little silver frame which Mrs. Cordover always carried with her. "Royal Cordover; I did not dream that he was staying at this hotel."

"He is not here," Sophie replied, reassured. "Mrs. Cordover is alone. She's at a ball tonight. She came on purpose for it."

"Indeed! I'm so delighted to know that she is here. I shall look for her to-morrow. It will be like old times to have a talk with her." The stranger's glance swept the dressing-table, where stood the open leather bag displaying empty jewel cases.

Sophie eyed her distrustfully. "Mrs. Cordover leaves early. Shall I give her your name in case you miss her?"

"I shan't do that," the other answered, lightly. "Tell her I've a surprise in store for her. When does she leave?"

"We take the ten o'clock express in the morning."

Sophie stared after her retreating figure. "I don't like her," she meditated. "She don't seem a real lady, but still she knows the family." Knowing the family, was with Sophie sufficient to offset many deficiencies in manners, if not in morals.

The maid dozed for a second time and when she awoke again, her mistress stood outside the door. She stepped in hurriedly. "I'm perfectly exhausted. It was a great big tiresome affair and I'm so nervous, Sophie!" She sank into a chair.

"Wait until I bring you some hot bouillon." While she was sipping the maid described the visit of the lady.

"I can't think who it can be," Mrs. Cordover mused. "I shall know when I see her. Sophie, it may be just imagination," she went on, after a few moments, "but I had an impression that two unpleasant-looking men followed me through the hotel corridor when I was starting for the ball, and when I came away I seemed to recognize their faces again as I waited a moment for my carriage. If I had been alone I should have been alarmed, but my friends only laughed at me and said my sapphire chain had made me nervous; perhaps it was merely imagination."

"If you feel nervous I'll take the jewelry down to the office," Sophie suggested.

"No, it is not worth while, we leave so early in the morning. I'm not worried about the jewelry, but annoyed at

the idea of being followed in this big city where I am a stranger."

At three minutes before the hour the following morning, Mrs. Cordover, accompanied by Sophie, passed through the gate and hastened down the platform to board the ten o'clock express; they had been several times delayed on their way to the station.

"I'm glad our section is engaged, this train seems crowded now," Mrs. Cordover said as they paused to inquire of an obliging colored porter which was their car.

As they started to step aboard some one touched Sophie's arm. "Just a word with your mistress," a voice cried, breathlessly. "It is the lady!" Sophie said, quickly, and Mrs. Cordover paused on the step.

"I must have just a word," the newcomer went on with cordial emphasis, her hand extended.

The other responded mechanically, eyeing her blankly. "Who is it?" she asked herself. "I certainly do not recall her."

"It is so nice to see you again after so many years," the stranger went on volubly. "Don't you remember me?"

"I cannot say I do," Mrs. Cordover made a motion to step aboard. "Perhaps you're coming too," she said.

"No, I am seeing off my sister. She's in the car behind. You will remember her; you really must step in and speak to her!"

Mrs. Cordover hesitated. She felt helpless before the other's decisiveness. "Sophie," she said, "take the things to our seats and I will join you in a moment."

"If the train starts you can walk through, as it is just the car behind your own," said the stranger as she led the way.

In the confusion which ensued Mrs. Cordover found herself well in the centre of the car. Then, as she paused the other said: "Wait just an instant till I find my sister," and disappeared.

Sophie in charge of the bags, shawls and umbrellas, was quietly awaiting her mistress, when the strange lady addressed her.

"Quick, quick!" the speaker gasped. "Your mistress, Mrs. Cordover has fainted in the next car. Hurry! Where is your flask? I'll take charge of your things!" Sophie still held the Russia-leather bag. "Stupid! what are you waiting for? She may be dying for all I know!"

At such a terrible suggestion Sophie forgot all else. She dropped the hand-bag, flew to a travelling case from which she pulled a flask, and rushed in the direction of the car behind.

The train had been a moment late in starting. Now the bell struck, and as the cars moved slowly through the station a slim woman in black holding a Russia-leather bag alighted on the platform. She was not, however, the last to leave the moving train—two men, who had been seated in the section adjoining Mrs. Cordover's, swung themselves off behind her.

And Sophie, vigilant guardian of the possessions of the mistress—what was her feeling when, having reached the door of the car behind, she saw no other than Mrs. Cordover herself approaching, in full possession of health and faculties? She turned and dashed back to the seats she had deserted to find that the lady in black had disappeared, and with her the bag of jewels. One thought alone inspired Sophie, to catch the woman and get back the bag. She rushed back through the car, pushed by her startled mistress, whom she met at the door, jumped off the train, now moving rapidly, and, true to her feminine inheritance, alighted backward and was thrown violently upon the platform. A moment later, instead of following the stolen bag, she was supported, stunned and dazed, into the waiting-room. Here, after a few moments, she regained her consciousness, and, hastening to the telegraph operator, wired the news to Mr. Cordover.

Not many minutes later a westward-bound express was speeding on its way. Among its passengers was a trim little woman dressed in black. Her

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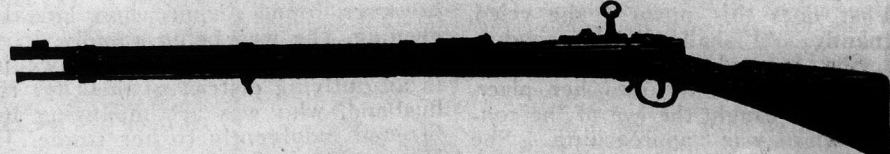


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