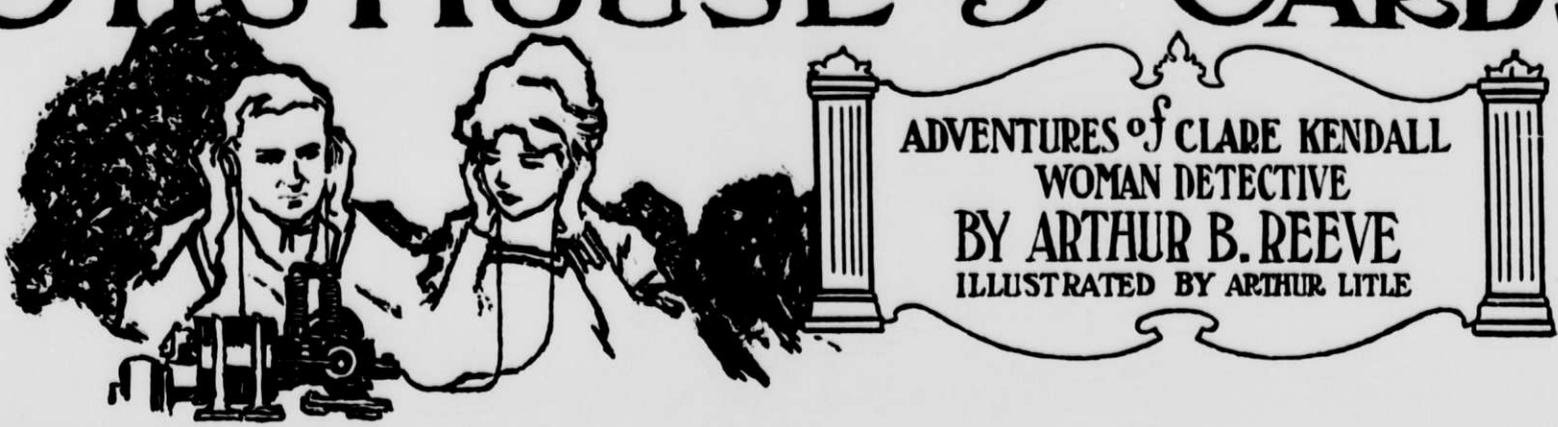


The House of Cards



ADVENTURES OF CLARE KENDALL
WOMAN DETECTIVE
BY ARTHUR B. REEVE
ILLUSTRATED BY ARTHUR LITTLE

WOULD'N'T YOU LIKE to get into a little game, dear?" purred the woman in the wicker settee by the side of Clare. The girl hesitated. It was exactly what she had dropped into the tea room of the Hotel Mochante to find, but it would never do to seem too eager about it.

"Perhaps you prefer to spin the wheel?" persisted the perfectly groomed woman at her elbow, toying with the Russian tea and muffins.

"No, I prefer poker, really, but —"

"But what?" urged the woman.

"I am afraid. My husband —"

"Oh," laughing, "most of our husbands have forbidden us to play! Come — you won't lose. Beginner's luck, you know. Besides, if you did lose, they'd trust you until you won enough to pay it back."

Clare hesitated as if still undecided. "I've heard of those gambling apartments," she temporized. "Are you sure this is perfectly safe?"

The woman laughed again and patted Clare's hand encouragingly as she saw her waver. "Surely," she replied, "as safe as if it were your own home safer," she added significantly.

"Well," succumbed Clare, reaching for her wraps. "I'll go, only I can't afford to lose very much today."

"That will be all right," encouraged the woman, paying the check. "Besides, you won't lose. The car is waiting outside."

As the two passed from the tea room through the lobby of the Mochante, a man rose from an easy chair by a pillar, smiled in well-feigned surprise and tipped his hat to Clare. It was Billy Lawson.

"Why — how — how do you do, Mr. Lawson," gasped Clare in simulated confusion.

"Very well, indeed, thank you, and — yourself?" he inquired, half turning as if expecting to be introduced to her companion.

Complying with the suggestion, "Mrs. Willis," Clare interjected, "let me introduce an old friend of mine, Mr. Lawson."

"It's a beautiful afternoon," pursued Lawson, adding suggestively, "for shopping. The world is on the Avenue."

"N — no, we are not shopping bound," hesitated Clare, not overdoing the part, but managing to let Mrs. Willis see that there was a special intimacy here.

"**P**ERHAPS Mr. Lawson will join us, Mrs. Kendall," whispered the other, making effective use of her dark eyes under their droopy lashes. It was not difficult for Lawson to seem to meet her half way. A hasty explanation followed.

"I'll do anything — once," laughed Billy.

A moment later they were chatting merrily in a richly upholstered limousine speeding luxuriously up to the Recherche Apartments on Central Park West.

A look between Clare and Billy told each that the "plant" was working beautifully.

It had come about in this way. Marvin Carlyle, the millionaire, had suddenly discovered a few days before, that his wife's jewels, some of them family heirlooms, were missing from the little safe in their Fifth Avenue home.

Mrs. Carlyle had worn them one night at the opera and instead of returning them to the safe had tucked them in a drawer of her dressing table until morning. In the morning they were gone — nearly fifty thousand dollars' worth of them, too.

There was not a mark of a housebreaker anywhere, not a clew or suspicion on which to work. With the

secretiveness natural to him, however, Carlyle had avoided the publicity of the regular police and had placed the case in Clare Kendall's hands.

She had looked over the ground and quickly decided that it was an "inside job." In trailing the various servants, before coming to the "open investigation" stage of the case, she had found that the chauffeur of the Carlyle town car, Jack Hennessy, was a rather sporty personage, apparently disposed to discreet joy-riding. Reports came to her that the car had been much seen in the white light district, not at the more questionable resorts, but at restaurants and hotels just a trifle risqué, where fashionable near-Bohemians foregathered.

Could it be, reasoned Clare at first, that some of the swift acquaintances of the handsome young chauffeur

Clare out of the car at the Recherche, after Mrs. Willis had led the way.

"S-sh!" cautioning. "Don't you see the monogram on the door? It's Mrs. Carlyle herself!"

Lawson covered his surprise by a hasty glance at the little red "M. C." on the shining black enamel of the car as he slammed the door shut, then followed Clare and Mrs. Carlyle.

As they entered the grilled plate glass door of the huge apartment house, Clare noted with a quick glance the small gilt sign, "Desirable apartments for rent."

They were whisked up from the marble and onyx hall in the bronze-doored lift to the tenth floor. Two hasty rings at the buzzer followed by a long one, and they were admitted to a sumptuous apartment.

A trim negro maid took Lawson's hat and coat, and Mrs. Carlyle herself conducted Clare to a boudoir in which was a bed covered with hats and wraps.

Only for a moment did the gracious "Mrs. Willis" leave Clare alone. But that moment was enough.

With a hasty glance about to make sure that no one was looking, she pulled out the bottom drawer of the dresser by the window. In an instant she had stuffed a black disc under the feminine finery. A wire, loosely attached by plugs to the disc so that there was play enough to allow the drawer to be opened or shut without exciting suspicion that anything was attached to it, passed out from the back. Deftly and quietly she replaced the drawer. There were footsteps in the hall. Pushing the drawer shut, she dropped the wire out of the window close to which the dresser stood. As the spool clattered on the concrete at the bottom of the court, she was standing before the mirror tucking in a stray wisp of hair.

"**I**'S all right, my dear," whispered "Mrs. Willis." "There's a little three-handed game going to start immediately. You and Mr. Lawson will be welcome. Come out and let me introduce you."

The hostess was smartly gowned in an afternoon frock of Nell rose. As Mrs. Carlyle whispered

the names of her companions, she let her hand linger confidently in Clare's.

"So glad to see you," murmured Mrs. Livingston engagingly. "Friends of Mrs. Willis are always welcome here."

It was just like a social call. Yet it was no social call.

"Mr. Harrington," remarked the hostess as a faultlessly dressed, heavy-set young man entered, "two friends of Mrs. Willis."

The rooms into which the host and hostess ushered them had an air of quiet and refinement. Electric bulbs glistened in silken shades. There were noise-



"You know how I have lost everything — everything," wailed Mrs. Carlyle

had enmeshed him and had either used him as a tool or corrupted him to steal the gems!

One report had it that not long ago Hennessy had driven several rather exhilarated ladies from the Mochante tea room to the Recherche. Clare had traced out the clew. A Mrs. Willis had been of the party. Clare had haunted the tea room, had cultivated the acquaintance of any who spoke to her, while Lawson had remained faithfully in the lobby.

At last she had seen Mrs. Willis. It was not long before the latter had nodded. Then she had stopped to speak. This was the result.

"Who is she?" whispered Lawson, as he helped