

Who Was Marie Dupont?

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SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS

GUY AMARINTH, very much in love with a young girl of his acquaintance, Marie Dupont, one night persuades her to run away from a ball and marry him. They have hardly concluded this impulsive act when Amarinth discovers to his dismay that his young wife has a very ambiguous past.

From her guardian, Hugh Senior, he learns that Marie's real identity is unknown. Seven years before Senior was motoring early one morning in Paris when he accidentally ran down a girl in the street. He carried her to his aunt's home, and in a day or two she recovered; but she had lost all memory of her life up to the time of the accident. No inquiries could unearth her identity. She was dressed at the time as a Paris working girl; but round her neck was a curious necklace, apparently of paste. Senior and his aunt, feeling responsible for the girl's situation, adopted her and called her Marie Dupont.

Young Amarinth is disagreeably affected by this revelation. Mysterious hints have already come to him that Marie resembles a professional dancer of not too flawless reputation who used to dance in Paris cafés. When Senior shows him the necklace that was found on Marie's neck, Amarinth declares that the stones are genuine.

To decide the question, he takes the necklace to a famous jeweler to be examined. He is startled a little later to receive a telephone message from the jeweler, saying that the firm took the liberty of displaying the necklace in their window, and that it has been claimed by a Rumanian, who swears that it was stolen seven years before in Paris.

In the meantime Gavock, an older friend of Amarinth's, who is convinced that he has seen Marie dancing in Paris under the name of Alix Floria, comes into possession of the pendant belonging to the necklace.

CHAPTER XI (Continued)

AT the office Gavock was told that it would be necessary to get additional cash to cover his check, but that he would have to wait only a few minutes, as the bank was very near. Mail? Yes, there was a letter.

Then he read:

May I see you for a few minutes? I have a picture I want to show you.

JOHN ANDRUS.

There was no address. Gavock beckoned the clerk. "When did this come?"

The letter had been left an hour before, he thought, and the man had said he would wait.

"Wait where?"

Inquiries ensued; but no one appeared to recall anything more definite.

Gavock frowned impatiently. "Have him paged—Mr. Andrus," he directed. "I'll wait here." He dropped into a deep leather chair commanding a view of the desk.

John Andrus of all people! An amazing thing to have him pop up like that. Why, it had been years since he had heard of him—since any of his former acquaintances had, indeed! The man had suddenly and unaccountably dropped out of sight. And it had been hinted too that he had been somehow involved in that mysterious murder—

Gavock's jaw fell in sudden stupefaction. Back to the surface of his memory impressions long submerged darted up and linked themselves with fresher images, and the union stunned and bewildered him. It was Andrus—yes, certainly it was he—who painted that portrait of Alix Floria which caused such a scandal that it was removed from the Salon on the second day of the exhibition. And it was just afterward that she was killed and Andrus disappeared. Where had he been all these years?

ABOY in livery announced that the messenger had returned from the bank. As Gavock stood at the desk a moment later slipping the bills into an envelop he chanced to glance round, and to his surprise found that he was being watched by the alert black eyes of Miss Lowther's friend with the Vandyke beard. Though the stranger turned away instantly, Gavock thought it likely that he had seen the receiving and counting of the money, and that he might connect it with the girl who was waiting in the lounge. There was nothing to do therefore but to wait until the man had taken himself off; which indeed he appeared to be in the act of doing, for he moved away with a light, swinging stride toward the street entrance.

"Have you located Mr. Andrus, whom

you were paging?" Gavock inquired of the hotel clerk. "No? He left word that he would wait. Please find out who received his message."

This appeared to be a baffling mystery until someone thought he recollected that the note had been sent in from the delivery entrance—the bearer had had a package.

Andrus had not come himself, but sent the picture, Gavock reflected, and no doubt his messenger would have some further word from him: Directing that the man should be taken to his rooms, where he would presently join him, he crossed the lobby toward the lounge and made his way to the recess behind the palms where Miss Lowther had told him she would be.

The corner was empty.

As he wheeled about he found himself face to face with Miss Lowther's black-bearded acquaintance. Not having heard anyone approach, the encounter disconcerted him, and he stepped back involuntarily.

A barely perceptible sneer curled the lip of the stranger, then he swerved aside and walked off.

CHAPTER XII

I WAS detained downstairs," Gavock said courteously to the shabby figure he found beside his door. "Sorry. Come in."

Andrus entered and waited silently.

"You've brought a picture from Mr. Andrus, I believe?" said Gavock, turning back from closing the door and looking at his visitor.

Andrus returned the look in silence, then he said huskily, "Don't you know me, Mr. Gavock?"

Gavock gave him a sharp stare. "Andrus!" he cried in shocked amazement. "I didn't know you—for the moment. I—I wasn't expecting to see you—I thought you'd sent someone." He thrust out his hand impulsively.

Andrus looked down at it a moment, then raised his right arm and held it out, showing the empty cuff.

"My God!" Gavock gasped. "Your right hand! Man, how did that happen?"

"An accident—seven years ago."

"Seven years! Why—then that was why you disappeared?"

John Andrus nodded. "What was left for me—a painter who could not paint?" he said dully.

"Good God!" Gavock muttered. "And no one knew? I never heard a word. An accident, you said? What? How?"

"I—I would rather not talk about it," Andrus answered, shuddering.

"Sit down—you look ill."

He drew out a chair, and his visitor sank into it heavily.



"The resemblance that had haunted him had been real and not fancied. Between Marie Dupont and Alix Floria was a connection, direct, close."

"I'm in for typhoid, I'm afraid. There's an epidemic of it where I live. That's why I'm here. I've been doing ads and such things with the left hand, just enough to live, the rest of the time trying to teach it what the other knew—" He broke off with a hopeless shrug. "I've no money put by for an illness; but I've got a picture—the last one I did over there. I want to sell it. He looked up with piteous questioning in his fevered eyes.

"Of course, of course," Gavock assured him instantly.

"Saw a doctor this morning—told me what I was in for. I'm all right—going to the hospital as soon as I arrange about things. But look at the picture."

GAVOCK unwrapped the parcel, and as the covering slipped off and revealed the canvas he exclaimed in surprise.

"Alix Floria! Not the portrait, though?"

"Yes; I never did but the one." After a moment he added in a lower tone, "I painted it out."

Gavock shot him a look of interrogation.

"The necklace, I mean."

"Ah, yes; I remember. I didn't see the picture then. It was shown only for a short time, I believe."

"One day. I withdrew it."

"You?"

"Did you think they'd ordered it out? You don't know them. They'd have been only too glad of the scandal to draw a crowd. I took it away myself."

He gave a harsh laugh. "I thought the damned thing was paste."

Gavock looked at him. A dozen ques-

tions crowded to his lips; but the haggard fitterness of Andrus' face checked them. He turned back to the picture, instinctively seeking enlightenment there. Something he got instantly,—the extraordinary likeness of the painted face to Miss Dupont's. The resemblance that had haunted him had been real and not fancied.

Twice he had seen Alix Floria dance; then he had gone no more to the Purple Pigeon. The second experience had sickened him,—that titled barbarian from the Caucasus gloating drunkenly from his box above the stage—

As memory suddenly evoked the offensive scene something in it caught Gavock's attention and caused him to bend a startled gaze on the canvas. The girl's dress! It was the one she had worn that second time he had seen her—and was it not very like the dress Miss Dupont had worn? His eyes groped vaguely among the intricacies of the painted costume. Assuredly in color, line, and complete effect this was the gown he had seen in Paris and again last night. Was that a chance resemblance too? No; nor was the other chance. Between Marie Dupont and Alix Floria there was certainly a connection, direct, close.

He jerked his head around to Andrus, determined now to question him; but again the artist's face halted the words. The man looked wretchedly ill, and should have medical care at once; but he made it plain that he wished no interference with the plans he had himself formed for such care, and the very magnitude of his misfortune somehow made it impossible to intrude either help or sympathy. The most