

# Who Was Marie Dupont?

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## SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS

**GUY AMARINTH** persuades Marie Dupont, a young girl of his acquaintance, 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. The necklace is claimed by a Rumanian, Count Egon Szemere, who tells Amarinth and Hugh Senior that the necklace was the chief treasure of the Rumanian royal house; that it was sent to Paris, to be remodeled, in charge of himself and Prince Lascar; that in Paris the Prince became infatuated with a dancer, Alix Floria, and lent her the necklace to wear. A scandal occurred; the Prince was ordered back to Rumania. But the following day he was found stabbed in a ditch twenty miles from Paris, the woman supposed to be Alix Floria was found stabbed in her apartment, her face mutilated beyond recognition; and the necklace had disappeared. At the trial some doubt was cast on the identity of the murdered woman, as one of the witnesses testified that she had seen Floria the morning after the murder. As the Count finishes his story, Marie Dupont enters the room. She apparently fails to recognize the Count, but he is overcome by her resemblance to the supposedly murdered dancer.

Senior offers to return the necklace; but Szemere insists that there was a pendant cross attached to it, which was the most valuable part of it and which has disappeared. He wishes to cross-examine Marie on the subject. This Senior refuses. In the meantime, Gavock, an old friend of Amarinth's, has accidentally come into possession of a cross that he believes to be the missing pendant. He has seen Alix Floria, and knows that she was married to an artist named Andrus, who painted her wearing the royal necklace. He unearths the portrait in order to compare the two crosses, but finds that the necklace has been painted out.

**T**WO hours later the picture "restorer" had come and gone. He had found his task a difficult one, and had had to proceed with great caution; but his work had been successful, the necklace lay uncovered, and suspended from it was a cross.

Fortunately for Gavock's purpose this cross was painted with more minuteness of detail than was usual in the work of John Andrus, and it was just possible to make out from the tiny points of red and green the arrangement of the stones.

He took Miss Lowther's pendant from his pocket and held it against the pictured one. In size and shape they were identical. The design too, as nearly as he could determine, was the same—a large ruby in the center and diamonds and emeralds alternating to the four points. There was barely a chance, he knew, that the object in his hand was the ancient cross sought by the Rumanian government; but he felt less like a fool now at putting that chance to a test. At any rate he could not conscientiously return the ornament to Miss Lowther without doing so.

That decision reached, he telephoned Amarinth, found him at home, and announced his intention of calling upon him at once. As he hung up the receiver the bell shrilled through the room.

Miss Lowther was waiting below.

**G**AVOCK found her in the corner behind the palms where hours earlier they had agreed to meet. She rose at his approach and stood waiting. She wore a long cloth coat and a close-fitting hat from which a dark veil had been thrown back. A traveling bag was at her feet.

"I suppose you wondered what had become of me?" she said at once. "After you left me here I found that I had barely time to keep an appointment with a manager about a large engagement. I had no idea that it was so late. I hurried off, expecting to be back on; but I got the engagement and had to go to a rehearsal at once—I'm to replace some one who is ill. Since then I've been packing—I leave for Chicago to-night. However, as she has turned out, I don't need to borrow from you after all. I'll just come back to thank you and get my pendant." She held out her hand. "You have with you, haven't you?"

The request took Gavock surprise. It was the one item in affairs he had not counted on. But before he was conscious of having decided how to meet it he had committed himself. He did not have the cross with him, he said: it was in his safe deposit box.

"At the bank? Then I can't get it to-night?" she exclaimed. "I'm afraid not."

"But I must have it! I'm going away. Surely there's

some way of getting it!" she urged, alarm in her voice. "You're a rich man, you must have influence. Surely you could get at the people who control the place! It wouldn't take a minute to get it out—" "My dear young lady," Gavock interrupted, "the red tape involved in such an undertaking would be endless. Come, sit down and let's talk it over sensibly."

She obeyed him automatically, and he took a seat at her side. She bit her lips, and her eyes shifted in nervous thought. He watched her closely. This sudden anxiety to recover the pendant was as puzzling as her former desire to force it upon him.

"Now, it might be possible to get into the bank to-night," he said; "but one

dancing for them. They think they're like royalty, that you ought to be flattered to have them look at you! And the men—"

She paused, shuddering, and turned her eyes from his. All the exorcences of manner had fallen from her. For the first time she rang true. Tremulously she went on again, with bent head:

"Lately things have been going all wrong with me. I wasn't making anything out of the amateur dancing; so I decided to go on the stage. But I couldn't get anything to do. I had no money, I didn't know where to turn. Then I remembered the cross."

"Remembered it?" "Yes; I'd seen it once. He'd shown it to me, and I happened to see where he put it afterward. It was an odd place for such a thing. That was why I thought it was not valuable. Well, I went to his house when he was out and said I'd wait for him, and when the servant was gone I got the cross. I meant to pawn it for what I could get, thinking that would tide me over for a few weeks until I had a position; then I would redeem it and give it back to him. But after I got it I was frightened. I remembered hearing about pawnbrokers identifying people who had pawned stolen things. I carried it about all day, trembling. And that night I met you. I knew I could trust you, and that the cross would be safe with you. And it wasn't until you told me that I had any idea of its value. I swear that!"

"And he knows now that you took it?"

"Yes. He found it out late this afternoon. He accused me, and I admitted it. I said I could get it back to-night. He said it was enormously valuable, that to lose it would ruin him. He talked so wildly that I thought he had been drinking. Once he took down the telephone receiver to call the police to arrest me. He says he will have me arrested if I don't get it for him to-night." She threw out her hands imploringly. "What am I to do unless you get it for me? What can I do?"

Gavock was worried. Her



"I am so tired," she whispered. "I walked and walked—"