

# A SKIRMISH WITH THE OCCULT

ADVENTURES OF CLARE KENDALL  
WOMAN DETECTIVE

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**W**OMAN'S INTUITION may not be good evidence in a court of law, Mrs. Hammersley; but it is one of the best means to get good evidence that will convince a court of law."

Clare Kendall rested her chin on her interlocked fingers and her elbows on the little side extension of her desk. It was one of her favorite attitudes in quizzing a client or involving a criminal in the meshes of his own web. It seemed to bring her so close to the person seated in the deep leather arm chair beside her desk that she could almost read the very thoughts that were passing in the other's mind.

"To think that I must come to a stranger, a total stranger, for help against my own husband," sobbed the woman in the chair, adding bitterly, "and — and another woman."

"There, there, my dear Mrs. Hammersley!" reaching out and gently touching the gloved hand. "There, there! You're not the first woman who has appealed to me for help, though I must say your case is unusual."

"I — I can't say I hate him — yet," hesitated Mrs. Hammersley. "But all my love is gone. At first I fought against the feeling, whatever it is, but it was of no use. If he had wanted to bring it about, he could not have made me feel more — more strange. Every day it seems to me that my power to love anybody is being killed, as if by an unseen hand. Oh, Miss Kendall, it is awful, awful to feel this way, to feel that love is dead!"

They were as different as two women well could be. Detective Kendall was a tall, striking, self-reliant, dark-haired, clear, gray-eyed girl who had fought her way unaided to a position of keen rivalry with the best men in the profession. The woman in the chair was a transparent-complexioned, blue-eyed, fair-haired little lady. She had been nervously pouring forth her story, as she could never have done to any man, much less to the ordinary detective.

"You see," continued Miss Kendall, more to gain the confidence of her client than for the mere sake of talking about her own work, "more valuable than anything else in a case like this, Mrs. Hammersley, is the faculty of intuition, the ability to feel or sense things for which at first you have no actual proof. I think that is the reason why I succeed often where a man would fail. It is because I am more strongly endowed with intuition. But I also have a man's mind in this respect — I do not stop with intuition; I carry it to certainty. It is all very well to rely on a feeling the certainty of which you have no proof. I don't think any good detective ever lacks that sort of instinct. But it is n't enough. To catch criminals, you need facts, facts, facts."

**T**HE speaker looked anything but a twentieth-century woman Gradgrind. She emphasized her remark by a look that left no doubt in the mind of Miriam Hammersley that in retaining Clare Kendall in the marital tangle in which she found herself she had also gained a sympathetic friend.

"Yes," Mrs. Hammersley admitted hastily, with a final dab of the moist lace handkerchief, "after all, I suppose, I have nothing but suspicion, an intuition, as you call it. Only, I am so afraid, afraid — she was quite pale and actually trembling now — "afraid for my very life. Where will it all end?" She looked an appeal at Clare, more eloquent than words.

"I must find a way to meet that woman, Veda Fenton, socially," mused the other, half to herself. "It is very strange, as you say, that her husband, Stuart, should die so conveniently and that at the same time you should feel so ill and nervous."

"Until Veda became infatuated with Howard, I felt so well, too — hardly had a sick day in my life. My doctor says it's just nervousness and has given me some tablets, but they don't seem to do any good."

Miss Kendall shot a quick glance at her client. "You have no reason to suspect the doctor?" she asked.

"Oh, none in the world! In fact, I have n't even told any one else I have been to see a doctor, though I suppose they have seen me taking the medicine."

It was clear that, like many another woman, this one felt first of all that her husband had been more sinned against than sinning. It was Veda who had stolen him; not he who had sought Veda.

"Of what did Stuart Fenton die?" asked Clare.

"They said it was pneumonia, and perhaps it was. But he had n't been well for some time and I can't get over the feeling that, somehow or other, there was something more to it than they said. Oh, I don't know, Miss Kendall, but perhaps I'm very foolish! It all seems so strange and unaccountable and — I feel so badly myself."

Her fingers twitched nervously and there was a peculiar drop of her wrist over which she seemed to have uncertain control.

"It is n't that I fear Howard — er — Mr. Hammersley," she added, "but that other woman — I hate her, I am afraid of her. And since I have found out that she is a student of Madame Raport at that Temple of the Occult, as they call it, it sends a shiver over me whenever I think of Veda Fenton. . . . She may be thinking of me now. Do you believe that you can affect persons for good or evil merely by thinking about them?"

**T**HE woman's fears were so real and the physical evidences of her nervousness so apparent, that Clare hastened again to reassure her. "No, indeed, Mrs. Hammersley, not unless you yourself play into their hands. Leave Veda Fenton to me. I can take advantage of some little weakness in these fakers and their dupes. I can play on it, and none of them will ever dream that I am a detective. These society mystics will never suspect if I attend some of their meetings. Yes, that is what I will do. I will go to this Temple of the Occult, as they call it, in the Devon Arms. Let me see, the Devon Arms is just off Longacre Square, quite naturally, the home of the fakers. How did Mr. Hammersley become interested in the occult?"

"Until a few months ago we were quite friendly with the Fentons, although I thought I saw a growing coldness between them. My husband rather sided with Veda in the trouble that was brewing. I know that once she told him she had consulted Madame Raport. Of course, I know what Howard would have said

if I had gone to a fortune-teller. But it's different with some one else, I suppose. Anyhow, I learned later that, whether it was from curiosity or because he was infatuated with Veda, he began to join the group that frequents the Temple of the Occult. He and Veda Fenton have been together there a great deal. People have told me about it. Every one seems to know more about my husband than I do."

Her plaintive tone showed that she was approaching dangerously near tears again. "Where was Stuart Fenton buried?" asked Clare, quickly changing the subject.

"Up at their country place at Riverwood-on-the-Hudson."

Clare had been watching Mrs. Hammersley without seeming to do so. "I think you have given me quite enough

to work on for the present," she said at length. "As soon as anything new develops I shall let you know. Meanwhile, don't worry, but keep your eyes open and keep in touch with me."

Mrs. Hammersley had risen and began to arrange her hair which had become loosened in her excitement. "Have you a looking glass?" she asked.

Clare indicated a screen in a corner of her little office, studying her new client curiously. It was quite evident that her very white complexion was natural, though remarkable. The rich masses of golden yellow hair arranged, the little woman withdrew, looking rather than speaking her gratitude.

"I never saw any one more nervous," thought Clare. "Why, she almost loses control of her fingers."



"In a sense we are all Devil worshippers in modern society"

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