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A MILLION A MINUTE

A ROMANCE OF MODERN NEW YORK AND PARIS
BY HUDSON DOUGLAS.

(Continued.)

"Now stay where you are. You may drop your hands, but the first of you who makes the slightest movement otherwise will make no more. Understand?"

Seager nodded. He was breathing stertorously, through set teeth, eyes dilated, unable to comprehend what had happened. Arendsen nodded also, against his will, in answer to a significant crooking of his questioner's trigger-finger. And, "Oui, oui, Monsieur!" wailed Maitre Georges, no less bewildered but very anxious to save his own skin.

"Keep an eye on them for a moment, O'Ferral, and you too, J. J.," said the same speaker, and turned to where the Duchesse and Fanchette were still standing in almost equal amazement.

"Your pardon," he said, bowing courteously, and both recognized him at the same instant. He was the same man whom the Duchesse had met first at Martin's, then on the eashore at Stormport, and lastly at the Elysee, the same man to whom Fanchette had sold her mistress's roundabout, whose car she had commandeered. "Your pardon," said he, bowing courteously, "but we've overheard all that's passed. We were waiting outside—at your service. Won't you, please, sit down. You have nothing more to fear from these fellows, and—"

He sprang forward, caught at the Duchesse or she would have fallen. Her overtaxed strength had failed her, and she lay helpless in his arms for a blissful moment ere he carried her to the sofa and set her down tenderly there.

Fanchette, scarcely less overcome, flew to her, and for a brief space they mingled their tears, sobbing without restraint since the most hurtful strain of the terror they had undergone was thus lately relieved. And the chief of their rescuers stood staring wickedly at their aggressors until the sobs ceased, the Duchesse looked up woefully, and met his eyes again. So that their anger died and there was only left in them a look of longing, at which she flushed, so faintly that he did not notice it.

"Tell me what has happened, please Mr. Newman," she begged piteously, ignoring all else in her stress of mind. "I have been held prisoner here for twenty-four hours, and—I do not understand."

"I must tell you, to start with," said Quintance quickly, "and I must ask you to believe all I say without question meanwhile, that my name is not Newman. I'm Stephen Quintance, Miles Quintance's nephew."

"You're a damned liar," cried Seager from the background, furiously, on the impulse of the moment. "I'm Stephen Quintance, not you. And I can prove what I say. Don't believe him Dagmar. He must be mad!"

Quintance wheeled toward him with look which boded him ill.

"You ring off," he ordered imperatively. "Break his head with the butt of your gun, O'Ferral, if he opens his mouth again till he's told to."

O'Ferral made as if to obey him, and Seager subsided, glaring, with twitching lips, his mind in a ferment.

"I changed my name because of my

uncle's will, and so that you should not have to marry me. You are Dagmar Lorraine, aren't you?"

She nodded.

"And Duchesse des Reves," she said drearily, oppressed anew by the knowledge that neither man or woman may safely interfere with the dictates of fate. "I married the Duc des Reves as soon as I heard of Mr. Quintance's death, to escape—"

"To escape me," Quintance supplemented, as she paused, at a loss to explain herself without hurting his feelings. He lowered his voice.

"I made the mistake of my life when I discarded my own identity, Dagmar. But I did it for your sake, that you might have my uncle's money and your own freedom."

Her eyes fell again before his and the story they told her. Her face was suffused now. But she would be honest with him at all costs.

"I, too, made a great mistake," she said, very gravely, in a low whisper, and Fanchette, an arm round her, fondled her trembling hand.

"We have both paid very dearly for our independence," commented Quintance in a grievous voice, "but—you are safe now at any rate."

"They tell me my husband is dead," she said, starting up, suddenly recalled to the actualities of her position. "They say he's dead—here, downstairs."

Seager had overheard her. He had been watching them with ferocious intensity, knew all that he needed to know for the present. His drawn face shaped itself to a grin, cruel, mocking, malevolent. It might be too late now to win the hazard himself, but—he could still spoil their chances of happiness.

"The Duc is not dead," he cried cross, braving O'Ferral's uplifted pistol. "We only drugged him. He is not dead."

He licked his lips at sight of the shadow that came down on Quintance's face. So much at least, of the score between them, he had paid off. For, the Duc living, and since he himself must perforce give up all hope of winning Miles Quintance's millions, the man whose birthright he would have usurped, was no better off. And neither could gain the girl.

But his heart failed him utterly as O'Ferral spoke, with a quiet certainty which appalled him. And Arendsen also cowed and shuddered under the portent of these curt words.

"The Duc des Reves is dead," said the correspondent. "I went down to see himself myself. You must have drugged him too deeply. He's been dead for a good half-hour."

They looked at the clock. It wanted but twenty minutes to midnight. And no more was said for a space, so harshly had the horror of it all gripped their minds.

"I had nothing to do with it," Arendsen urged, his strangled words breaking the tense silence, Seager stood huddled, shrinking, against the wall, Cornoyer, revolver in hand, confronting him watchfully. The man's lips were blue, his face the color of chalk. His fingers were twitching impotently.

"I had nothing to do with it. It was Seager who—"

(To Be Continued.)

Items of Interest to Ladies

We pass along the rosy way every now and then and just for a change our steps are directed through a blue or a green season. There are styles in colors just as decidedly as in lines or lengths. But one color combination holds its own through the turning of the color wheel—the friendly black and white in checks, stripes or of different materials. When successfully handled black and white is generally becoming and always good looking.

From Paris the edict has gone forth that black and white is the idea that is most favored for street wear or for more formal occasions in the evening.

The checked suitings lend themselves to various ideas. A walking suit of shepherd's plaid is now either the perennially good looking strictly tailored suit or it is more ornamental displaying trimming of braid, buttons, satin

revers or collar, and giving excellent opportunity for displaying a brilliant colored vest.

Checked materials are of a safe size to be becoming to large and small women and the cut of the material does not in any way alter a good effect although in the hands of an adept the lines of a figure can be considerably changed.

Serge suits of cream with stripes are another field in which most wearers can revel. The hairline is safe for all, adding to apparent height and giving a background for black trimming that does not produce a contrast too startling.

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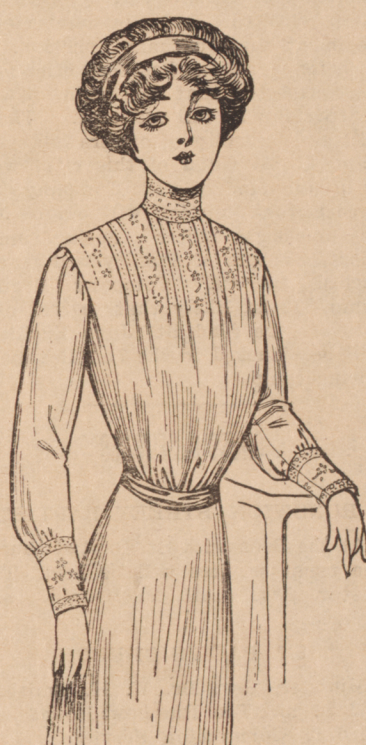
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