Mystery Stories: "The Cab of the Sleeping Horse," "The House of Fear," "The Curious Case of Marie Dupont," "The Kingdom of the Blind"

The Cab of the Sleeping Horse is the absurd title of a story that fits the title. An American diplomatist, or alleged diplomatist, named Harleston, is walking back one night to his palatial apartment in one of Washington's finest apartment houses when he comes across a cab-horse asleep, tied to an empty cab. Curiosity impels him to look inside. He is rewarded with a lace handkerchief, some roses and a letter, all of which he carries off to the aforesaid palatial apartment. The paper, which he examines when safe indoors, contains an apparently meaningless string of capital letters—evidently a code message. The diplomatist is a clever man, so he takes his finds to a friend in the next apartment and goes to bed. An hour later several gentlemen of fierce aspect break in upon him to demand the letter he found in the cab. The veriest tyro at detective stories can see from here that this code message is of vast international importance and that the reader is to assist in a helter-skelter race for it that will last till the end of the book. De-

tectives, male and female, spies, statesmen, even our Secretary of State, thieves, burglars and lady-like swindlers are mixed up in the race. A certain Mrs. Spencer, once the morganatic wife of the Duke of Lotzen, later the mistress of several other distinguished persons, and, when the story begins, a secret agent of Germany, described as the most fascinating and accomplished woman of two continents is the keenest of the hounds on the scent. This is the way the author makes her talk: "Why didn't she beat it there direct from the train I can't imagine. It riles me, however, that the affair was so atrociously bungled by Crenshaw and the others." This sounds like telephone-girl talk, but it is from the ex-Duchess; and the real angel of the book, Mrs. Clephane, is not much better. Here is her summary of life: "A man may be cynical and get away with it; a woman only injures her complexion and makes trouble for herself. Me for the happy spirit and side-stepping the bumps."

Those of us who have been inside great theatres when the lights are out, the seats covered with cloths and the place everything that a theatre should not be will acknowledge the inspiration that led Wadsworth Camp to place his latest mystery in an abandoned playhouse. *The House of Fear* is the name given to an old theatre unoccupied for years and now taken by a bold manager named McHugh who proposes nothing less than a revival of the very play in which a great actor died forty years before on the stage as he uttered a famous line of imprecation. People shake their heads and predict that nothing but misfortune can come of such temerity and so it proves. Fear grips every member of the cast, from the first rehearsal. It is only the grim determination of the manager that compels them to go on. At the dress rehearsal the leading man falls dead just as his predecessor had done, and at the same line. That might have daunted most managers, who as a matter of fact are rather superstitious men. But not so in this case. McHugh vows that he will put the play on if every ghost of the old company gathers on the stage and every seat in the audience has a skeleton in it. He finds another leading man daring enough to attempt the part. The night of the dress rehearsal comes around again and with tense nerves all concerned watch for the fatal line. There have been warnings without number that something terrible would happen. Ghostly telephone calls have come from the air; the curtain rose without human help; electric lights went out and on again without rhyme or reason; the orchestra's music was bewitched. And, sure enough, the leading man almost loses his life. But there proves to be a solid foundation for the diabolical doings in the old playhouse. McHugh solves the mystery. The sense of abject fear produced by an unseen foe is well portrayed and for those who like to read with cold shivers running down their backs *The House of Fear* is just the book.

The Curious Case of Marie Dupont is said to be the first book of Miss Adele Luehrmann. If it were the lady's tenth, it would still be a credit to her, for as mystery stories go this has all the attributes of a good one—sustained interest, movement, and the sort of ingenuity that keeps the reader guessing and guessing wrong all the time. An elderly man, Roger Gavock, who has lived most of his life in Paris, comes back to New York and goes one rainy night to dine with the son of an old friend. On his way through the storm he stumbles against a young and pretty woman. With the habit of years he blurts out: *"Pardonnez-moi, Madame,"* to which she responds: *"Ça ne fait rien, Monsieur,"* which is just what two people in collision on a rainy night might say to another in the Rue de la Paix. The curious feature of this collsion is that upon trying to continue the conversation in French, the girl professes to know no French. So after excuses in English he passes on to tell the story to his young friend. The young man also had a story to tell. He was engaged to the loveliest

girl in the world and the best dancer of their set, Marie Dupont. He would take his father's friend to see her dance at a charity entertainment that night, and in the meantime there was her photograph on the desk. Gavock took it up and it was the picture of the girl he had met in the street. Moreover it was a face that he had seen somewhere under strange circumstances. He could not remember where; but he was certain that the face was familiar and that the girl had played some extraordinary part. Then he goes to the dance and with all the rest of the guests marvels at the beauty and grace of this Marie Dupont. When she ends her performance with a strange Russian dance, far too well done and too daring to meet with the approval of the society women present, a light breaks upon him. He had seen the girl years before. He had seen her in that Russian dance in a vile Montmartre all-night café where she was known as the mistress of a notorious Rumanian prince and a leader of the *demi-monde*. There is the mystery presented by the author, who unravels it cleverly, at times in too melodramatic a fashion, but always with sufficient skill to hold the reader's interest.

Mr. Oppenheim's latest romance, *The Kingdom of the Blind*, deals with war matters. Most of his personages are in uniform, but they are just as mysterious, just as puzzling as ever. The villain is an English officer, of course with a tinge of German blood in him, who goes about the best society in London picking up information that may be of value to his beloved Kaiser. It is stretching our credulity a trifle to tell us that this dashing Captain Granet carries about with him an autograph letter from the Kaiser offering England peace and all she wants if he, the Kaiser, is allowed to crush France, but that is Mr. Oppenheim's idea of high diplomacy. Of course there is a love story—several of them in fact—and *cherchez les femmes* would not be an inappropriate title, for the women concerned are a singularly foolish lot. No man in his senses would think of trusting one of them with anything worth keeping. Some of the war pictures have lots of dramatic movement and the Zeppelin raid in which the villain meets his end is quite an exciting affair. The book teems with detectives, secret intelligence officers, envoys in every possible guise, and of course the most harmless man in the world turns out to be the most dangerous. There are surprises without end and excitement on every page—for, of course, Mr. Oppenheim may be trusted for that.