

A close-up photograph of a hand holding a pencil, drawing a fashion sketch on a piece of fabric with a grey and white geometric pattern. The hand is positioned on the left side of the frame, and the pencil is in contact with the fabric. In the background, several other pencils are visible, some standing upright and others lying on a white surface. The overall scene suggests a fashion design or sketching process.

Fashion and Lies

CHAPTER ONE

A Handsome Man and an Angry Woman

Monday 1st March

All women found Cristian La Roque incredibly handsome. He had beautiful dark hair and eyes as blue as the sea. He was tall, slim and always elegantly dressed. His mother had given him a passion for clothes and at sixteen, he decided to become a fashion designer. He was now twenty-nine and good at his job.

But he was ambitious and he wanted to be the best.

At 9.15 he walked into the offices of his latest employer, Folly Fashions.

Norma Folly was the owner of Folly Fashions, the fashion house she had set up thirty years ago.

She was fifty-two years old but looked younger. She had blonde hair, wore lots of make-up and liked to wear the latest fashions. Her dream was to have the most successful fashion house in Britain. She wanted everyone to know the name Folly Fashions.

Norma was not a happy woman. She was reading the front page of the newspaper Business World.

The more she read, the angrier she became.

She heard voices coming from reception.

She got up, opened the door and saw her new designer laughing and joking with the secretary.

"Good morning, Cristian. I see that, as usual, you are working hard. In my office - NOW!"

Cristian winked at the secretary, followed Norma into the office and sat down.

Norma stood behind her desk.

"I don't pay you to talk to women all day. While you're chatting, I'm worrying. I employed you to prepare our autumn-winter collection for the next fashion show but I'm beginning to regret it. The show is on 19th March so you've got less than three weeks to produce all the designs." She glared at Cristian and waited for an answer.

"Don't worry, Norma. Everything is under control.

I just need a few more dresses to finish the collection." He noticed the newspaper on her desk. "What are you reading, your horoscope?" he joked.

"Cristian, don't forget that I'm the boss. Now, what do you know about Laura Crane?" she asked.

"I hear she's quite successful," he replied.

"Certainly more successful than you. She works for her father at Crane Creations, our biggest rivals. In this week's issue of Business World there's an article about her. They call her 'the new face of fashion'. Listen to this..." Norma began to read from the article: 'Crane Creations has a new designer, the turnover is up by 35 percent and profits are increasing. They now receive orders from all over Europe, they make clothes for famous people, they are preparing their best autumn-winter collection...'

Cristian interrupted her to say: "OK, OK, I understand."

"No, you don't," shouted Norma. "At Folly Fashions the turnover is down, our profits are decreasing and we have had only three orders from our last catalogue. Every month I have to delay payments to suppliers and all I get from you are expense claims. I want to be bigger and better than Crane Creations. So, what are you going to do about it?"

Cristian smiled.

"Norma, soon I will make you the queen of fashion and destroy Crane Creations at the same time. I've got an idea..."

CHAPTER TWO

An Important Meeting

Monday 1st March

"The next point on the agenda is the present financial position of Crane Creations." Edward Crane couldn't resist a smile. He was dressed, as always, in an expensive suit, shirt and tie. His grey hair was cut short and he looked elegant and distinguished.

He was in a meeting with his daughter Laura, Manuel, their new designer, and Suzie Forest, the secretary.

"I'd like to take this opportunity to congratulate Laura on the success she has brought to Crane Creations.

I'm sure everyone has read the article in Business World this morning."

Laura smiled. Her long brown hair was tied at the back of her neck and she too was well-dressed.

She preferred to wear trouser suits and silk blouses.

She said: "This has been a great year for us. If you look at these graphs you will see that sales, turnover and profits have all increased sharply. This is due to the hard work and effort of all employees at Crane Creations. Things are going so well that we have decided to launch some of our designs on the American market. In April we are going to begin selling our most popular line of clothing in two retail outlets in New York."

Her father smiled again. "Manuel's first collection for us was a huge success. Manuel, are you going to tell us about the autumn-winter fashion show on March 27th?"

The small man with hair dyed blond and dressed in a purple shirt and designer jeans began to speak.

"I have so many ideas that I can't decide which ones to include in the collection. I think I'll make my final decision next week but I can tell you now, it's going to be a fantastic show."

"Excellent," replied Edward Crane. "Our company is getting stronger unlike our competitor Folly Fashions, although I've heard that Norma has a new designer."

"That company's a joke," sneered Manuel. Everyone in the room agreed.

Laura said: "My father and I are going to visit the trade fair 'Everything for Fashion' on Monday 8th March to try and make more contacts in our field. We always need new suppliers and buyers. Suzie, have you booked our train tickets?" She looked at the young woman who was busy taking the minutes of the meeting. Suzie had beautiful long red hair and green eyes. She shared a house with Laura and they were good friends.

"Not yet. I'll do it after the meeting."

At four o'clock the meeting had finished and Laura and Suzie were in their office. The phone rang and Suzie answered it.

"Good afternoon, Crane Creations. Can I help you?"

"Hello. My name is Simon Robbins. I work for the UK Post and I'd like to make an appointment to interview Laura Crane."

"Hold the line please, I'm putting you through," replied Suzie.

Laura picked up the phone and spoke to the reporter. "Mr Robbins, is Wednesday at 1.30 a convenient time for you?"

"That will be perfect. I look forward to meeting you. Goodbye."

When Laura looked up to ask Suzie to put it in her diary, she saw the best-looking postman in the world standing at the door. Those eyes were as blue as the sea...

CHAPTER THREE

A Tour of Crane Creations

Wednesday 3rd March

"Welcome to Crane Creations, Mr Robbins," said Laura as she greeted the journalist in reception. "Shall we begin with a tour of the offices?"

Simon Robbins liked Laura Crane. She seemed kind, helpful and very intelligent.

"Could you give me a summary of the company history?" he asked as they moved to the office area. "I've only recently started writing about fashion."

"Well, my father, Edward Crane, is the man who founded this fashion house in 1968. At that time he had just six employees, a small office and little money."

"When did you move to these wonderful premises?" enquired Simon.

"Ten years ago. We now have a total of fifty employees and our turnover has increased every year since 1980."

"And how long have you been a part of the family business?"

"When I left school I decided to do a degree in fashion and textiles. I graduated six years ago and worked in each department here to gain some experience. I've been sales manager for the past eighteen months."

"What is your commercial strategy to ensure success in the future?"

"Primarily to establish more contacts abroad. We believe that diversification is crucial so we aim to introduce more lines. Our target is to increase profits by 20 percent each year so we can reinvest some capital

into the business." They arrived at a large door. Laura stopped and said: "This is Manuel's workshop. He's the designer whose creations have brought us such success." She opened the door and shouted: "Manuel, I have a journalist, Simon Robbins, with me. Can we come in?"

Manuel appeared almost immediately wearing a yellow shirt and his usual jeans. "Hello, Laura," he said and then looked suspiciously at Simon.

"Mr... err... Manuel..." stuttered Simon. "I'm from the UK Post. Do you like working at Crane Creations?"

"I could work anywhere but for now I'm happy here."

"Could I see your workshop?" Simon asked tentatively. "No, I'm too busy. I must get back to work. Goodbye." Laura smiled and led Simon away.

"He isn't the friendliest person here," remarked the journalist.

"Don't worry," replied Laura. "Manuel is very protective of his work. He designed all the clothes you saw in our last catalogue."

They walked to her office and continued the interview before Simon went to talk to Edward Crane. He had just left when the postman arrived. Laura felt nervous as he gave the letters to Suzie and then came towards her. "Miss Crane... Laura, we didn't get a chance to talk last time. My name's George Blake and I'm your new postman." He leaned forward and took her hand.

Laura looked into his blue eyes.

"Suzie, take the letters which must be signed to my father, please," she said quickly as she began to blush... Simon Robbins now had all the information for the article he wanted to write. He walked along the corridor to Laura's office to say goodbye and thank her for the interview. When he reached the door he saw that she was talking to a man. The man was wearing a postman's uniform and was holding her hand.

He decided not to disturb them.

"Laura," said George hesitantly, "I'd like to ask you a question..."

CHAPTER FOUR

A Romantic Dinner Date

Wednesday 3rd March

"Would you like to come to dinner with me." repeated George. Laura came back to reality. She was dreaming of a romantic dinner date.

"Yes, of course I would," she replied as she looked once more into his eyes.

"Great," said George. "I'll pick you up at 8 o'clock on Friday night. I can't wait. See you soon," and he blew a kiss as he left the office. Suzie returned a few minutes later and Laura told her what had happened. "Laura, are you mad?" she cried. "You can't go out with him. You've only met him once."

But Laura was adamant. "I can go out with whoever I want. He's very good-looking, isn't he?"

"He is gorgeous," admitted Suzie.

Friday evening came quickly. George took Laura to an expensive restaurant and paid her lots of compliments. "Laura, I've been thinking of you since Monday. I've been waiting so long to meet a girl like you, pretty and intelligent."

Laura wasn't used to all this attention. "Tell me about yourself," she said. "I only know your name."

George grinned. "Well, I'm a postman but I go to night school. Pm studying to be a lawyer hut I've only been studying for six months."

"Really?" said Laura. "That's great."

George smiled again. "What about you? Tell me about your work. It must be so interesting. Is your father's fashion house very successful?"

"Well, yes, it is, actually. We all work very hard."

"And who's your main designer?" George enquired. "His name's Manuel and he's truly the best." Laura didn't notice the frown on George's face as he asked a third question. "When's the next fashion show?"

"It's at the end of the month. We've been preparing for it since Christmas. We..."

"And are all the dresses ready?" interrupted George.

He was anxious to find out as much as possible.

"Most of them," Laura told him.

"What are the plans for the future of Crane Creations?" Before Laura could answer, the waiter brought their - food. During the meal, George continued to ask more questions. At midnight, he took her home and they arranged to meet for lunch at the trade fair on Monday. Laura walked into the house she shared with Suzie. Suzie was waiting for her.

"Suzie, how long have you been sitting there?"

"You won't go out with him again, will you?" asked Suzie. "You don't know anything about him."

Laura sighed. "He's such a nice man, Suzie. He's really interested in me and my work and I like him. You're so beautiful, you have a different boyfriend every week but I haven't had a boyfriend for months. I'm right, aren't I?" Suzie looked at her, shook her head and said: "I'm going to bed."

Before George drove home, he phoned Norma. "Cristian, where have you been? I've been waiting for your call for hours. What happened?"

George told her that Laura had given him lots of information. "She thinks I like her," he laughed.

When Norma heard that the dresses for the autumn-winter collection were ready, she became even more worried. "I want those designs. You have to get into the office at night. Now, listen carefully..."

CHAPTER FIVE

Everything for Fashion

Monday 8th March

Edward and Laura Crane were at the entrance of the trade fair. The main organizer, John Maxwell, was there to greet the visitors.

"Edward! How marvellous to see you. How are you?" Edward shook his hand and replied: "I'm fine, thanks. What about you? Busy as always? This fair gets bigger every year."

John laughed. "You're absolutely right. This year we have over three hundred stands. Here's the brochure with the floor plan, the information about the exhibitors and opening times."

"Thanks. You know my daughter Laura, don't you?" asked Edward.

"Of course. What a pleasure to see you again, Laura.

I read the article about you in the UK Post last Friday. If you aren't careful, Edward, Laura will soon be more famous than you!"

They all laughed. "It's nice to see you again, Mr Maxwell," said Laura. "If you have time, will you join us for lunch later?"

"I'd love to. I'll see you at I o'clock in the restaurant." Laura and her father began to walk around the many stands. They spoke to suppliers, saw some of their clients and took the business cards of possible new contacts and potential buyers. Soon Laura had collected a pile of catalogues, samples and price lists for fabrics and fashion accessories.

"I'm so glad we came, Dad. There are some great new products here. I've seen a few fantastic accessories we could use with our new line."

Her father replied quickly: "Laura, if you order something from all those catalogues, we'll be bankrupt before the end of the year!"

Laura was about to answer when she heard a voice from behind.

"Well, how nice to meet 'the new face of fashion!'" She turned around to see a blonde woman in a fashionable red suit. Edward Crane intervened:

"Laura, this is Norma Folly. How's business, Norma? Not too good, I hear."

Norma smiled at him. "Things couldn't be better.

I have a new designer who is preparing our next fashion show. His creations will surprise you."

"Ah, yes," said Laura, "the mysterious new designer. Are you sure this person really exists?"

"Enjoy your success, Miss Crane," said Norma. "You never know when it might end." And then she turned and walked away.

"What did she mean?" Laura asked her father.

"Who knows! But don't worry, she's just envious!"

Look! There's Mark Hill. Let's see if he has any new fabrics."

They were with their supplier Mark for more than an hour. He wanted to get an order from them but Laura said: "I'll speak to Manuel first and as soon as we decide, I'll send you a fax with our order - as long as you give us the usual discount and can guarantee our delivery deadlines!"

Edward was hungry. "It's time for lunch. Let's go and meet John." As he said those words Laura remembered that she had arranged to meet George for lunch.

"Dad, I'm sorry," she apologized. "I'm meeting a friend. There he is now," and she pointed to George who was coming towards them.

"But, isn't he our new postman?" replied her father. "Yes," said Laura. She introduced them and then quickly escaped with George.

Mark Hill was concerned. "I've seen that man before.

I don't remember where but he's definitely not a postman."

CHAPTER SIX

George Gives Laura a Hand

Wednesday 10th March

"That was a stupid thing to do," yelled Norma. "And when are you going to get the office keys and the computer password? Time's running out!"

George knew it had been a silly idea to go to the trade fair - someone could have recognized him. He tried to calm Norma down.

"I'll get everything we need very soon," he reassured her.

Laura was talking about fabrics with Manuel.

"Manuel, please decide which fabrics you need.

We have to send the order this morning."

"What about the organza and the silk in these six colours?" he suggested. "I must have only the best quality for my creations."

"Great. I'll fill in the order form and send a fax right away."

She took a form from the file and wrote in all the relevant information for the purchase. She chose a banker's draft as form of payment and road freight as dispatch method. Then she looked up to see her father standing by the door.

"May I speak to you, Laura?" asked Edward.

Manuel decided it was time to leave.

"I'm going back to the workshop," he said and disappeared.

"Laura, I'm worried about your choice of boyfriend. Firstly, you hardly know him and, secondly, I don't trust him. Mark Hill says he isn't really a postman."

"Of course he is," replied Laura, "and he's a kind, honest man."

Edward raised his voice. "Laura, I don't want you to see him again. Do you understand?"

At that moment, George appeared at the door. "Hello, Mr Crane. Nice to see you again."

Laura's father glared at him and left the office without saying anything more. Laura sighed. "He should mind his own business. Why shouldn't I go out with you?" George noticed the order form on the desk. "He's worried about you," he said. "Look, it's 12.40. Why don't we go to lunch?"

"OK," she replied, "but I have to send this fax first and wait for Suzie but she'll be back by one o'clock..."

"Laura!" Manuel ran into the office. "Could you come to the workshop? I need your help. It's urgent."

Laura sighed again. "OK, don't panic. I'm coming."

She looked at George. "Can you wait here? I'll be back soon."

"No problem. I'll sit here and read this magazine."

As soon as Laura had left, George took another order form from the file and quickly filled it in for a completely different order - cheap nylon and acrylic fabrics. He had to change the product codes, the description, the quantity and the unit price.

Then he carefully faked Laura's signature and sent the order by fax. He put his order form and Laura's in his pocket.

Laura returned and he explained: "I've sent the fax for you. There was no-one here and I wanted to help. I've put the form in the file."

Laura smiled. "You're so thoughtful, George. I'm sorry but there's an emergency in the workshop so I can't have lunch with you."

"Well, how about spending the weekend together instead?" he said.

"I'd love to. We'll talk about it tonight."

As he was leaving the office, she asked: "Has that important letter arrived from the USA? It's for a big order."

"Not yet," replied George.

When he was outside the building, he took the letter from his bag and laughed.

CHAPTER SEVEN

A Wrong Order and a Set of Keys

Monday 15th March

Laura was telling Suzie about her weekend with George. "We stayed at the Hillcrest Hotel. It was so romantic."

"And expensive," added Suzie. "How can George afford to take you there?"

"You sound just like my father," replied Laura angrily. "Laura! Laura!" Manuel suddenly came into the office carrying a roll of cheap acrylic fabric. "I ordered silk and organza and look what that stupid supplier has sent!" he shouted as he threw it onto her desk.

"I'll ring and see how this has happened," said Laura quickly. She dialled the number.

"Hello. This is Laura Crane. I'm phoning to complain about our last consignment. Last week we placed an order with you for 500 metres of silk and organza but we have been sent the wrong fabrics. I think a mistake was made in the processing of the order."

The secretary's voice replied: "I have your fax here. It is a purchase order for our best acrylic and nylon fabrics." Laura was puzzled. She opened the order file but couldn't find the form. "I don't understand. Anyway, I'll send you another order now. Can you arrange for the immediate dispatch of the correct fabrics? Insurance and transport must be included, as usual.

And of course, we'll require a new invoice.

Thank you. Goodbye."

Manuel left muttering: "Acrylic! Nylon!"

Laura was still thinking about the original order form when George arrived. She smiled brightly as he handed the post to Suzie.

"George, thank you again for such a fabulous weekend. I really enjoyed it."

"So did I. We must go away again soon," said George. Suzie shook her head in disbelief and spoke to Laura. "There's a letter here from Hatfield's department store, requesting a copy of our new catalogue and price list."

"That's great," she replied. "It's a big store and would be a valuable new outlet for our ranges."

"I'll send them a copy of the catalogue, our most competitive prices, terms of payment and the address of our web site," said Suzie.

When Suzie went for lunch, George began to ask questions.

"How long has Crane Creations had a web site?"

"Not long," answered Laura happily. "It was designed for us by an expert just a few weeks ago. My father and I believe that Internet retailing, e-tailing, will be very popular with our customers in the future. Do you want to see the site?"

George stood behind her and watched carefully as she keyed in her password - EDLA. He saw the icon "New Collection" and asked to see it, but Laura said: "Sorry, it's not possible. The new dresses will be added when Manuel has finished the collection and can't be seen until after the fashion show." George was disappointed but at least he now knew the password.

"I have to go now, but I'll see you again very soon," he whispered in her ear. Laura was happy and so was George when he saw Laura's keys on her desk.

As she turned to get a file from a shelf, he quickly picked them up and put them in his pocket.

Norma Folly picked up the phone. It was Cristian.

At last, he had the password and the keys.

She smiled.

"Now there is just one more thing we need..."

CHAPTER EIGHT

A Break-in

Tuesday 16th March

George arrived at the door to Laura's office and stopped. The door was open and he could hear Manuel's voice. Laura and Manuel were talking about the forthcoming fashion show. George saw them from the crack in the door and heard their conversation. "Laura, this is the CD with the last three dresses for the autumn-winter collection. They are fantastic, as you'll see. Please put the CD in a safe place, as there is only one copy. Some people would do anything to see my creations," he sighed.

Laura giggled. "Manuel, are you trying to take over this company?"

"Of course not," he replied. "Remember, I turned down some excellent offers to come and work here."

"I know, and we're very grateful," answered Laura. "Now, I'll just copy the designs from the CD to my file to complete the collection and then I'll put the CD with the others. There won't be any problem finding it again as you're the only person here to use pink CDs and floppy disks. By the way, did I leave my keys in your workshop yesterday? I can't find them."

"Laura, you're turning into a very forgetful person. Maybe your mind is on other things," suggested

Manuel as he saw George come in.

Laura blushed. "I take after my mother. She's a romantic person too." Manuel groaned and left.

Suzie wasn't in the office so George gave some letters to Laura. "I've come to take you out to lunch. Let's go," he said.

While Laura was closing the window, George put her keys under her desk. Then, as she was walking to the door, he called to her. "Laura, are these your keys? You should be more careful. There are a lot of dishonest people around."

She turned to him. "There they are! Thanks, George. I've been looking everywhere for them."

After lunch, George took Laura back to the office and then sent a text message to Norma. It said: Tonight's the night!

Cristian opened the door to the premises of Crane Creations and waited for the alarm to ring. It didn't. "This is my lucky night," he thought as he walked quickly to Laura's office. He was wearing gloves and a black jacket and had a copy of all Laura's keys. He put another key into the lock, turned it and the door opened easily. He turned on the torch he had brought and looked around the room. It was warm so he took off his jacket.

Cristian went to Laura's desk, opened the top drawer and found the box of CDs. He took out the pink one. He locked the drawer, switched on Laura's computer and keyed in the password EDLA. He clicked on the file "autumn-winter" to open it. The most beautiful designs he had ever seen appeared on the screen.

He smiled. "Bye bye!" he said as he pressed the delete key. The designs now existed only on the CD he had taken from the drawer.

Cristian entered Laura's e-mail account and deleted the new messages that had arrived, including one from the American client who wanted to know why Laura hadn't replied to his letter.

Cristian switched off the computer and put on his jacket. He was walking towards the door when he heard a noise. Someone was coming!

CHAPTER NINE

Whose Dresses Are They?

Friday 19th March

Cristian was sitting in Norma Folly's office. He had to watch their fashion show on TV as he didn't want to be seen by anyone yet. He had been very lucky when he had broken into Laura's office. The security guard had not tried to enter the office and Cristian had escaped.

Edward Crane, Laura, Manuel and Suzie were also sitting in front of the TV in the conference room of Crane Creations waiting for the show to start. Nobody in the room was worried and they were all in a good mood. Edward spoke first. "We needn't worry. Norma's fashion shows are always entertaining but the designs are never exceptional."

"If we knew the identity of her mystery designer, we would have a better idea of what to expect," said Laura. "He only exists in Norma's head. He isn't real, but I am," said Manuel.

"Quiet!" said Edward. "It's starting." They looked at the TV screen. The long catwalk came into view and the curtains opened. Norma Folly was standing at the side, holding a microphone. In the audience she saw some of her regular clients, managing directors of big city stores, and buyers from both the home and overseas markets.

If all went well tonight, Norma expected to receive a lot of enquiries and orders for her new range. She welcomed everyone, the music started and the models began to walk down the catwalk in front of the audience.

The designs were better than usual but nothing fantastic. Then the final three models appeared together. One was wearing a fairytale wedding dress and the others were wearing the most beautiful evening gowns imaginable. The audience applauded loudly.

At Crane Creations Manuel shouted just as loudly: "They're my creations! They've been stolen!"

"Manuel, are you sure?" asked Edward hesitantly.

"Of course I'm sure," cried the desperate designer.

"Call the police. NOW!"

"First, I'm going to phone Norma," said Edward.

He dialled her number and waited.

"I don't know what you're talking about," Norma replied to Edward's accusation of theft. "My new designer has created all the dresses."

"So, where is he? I didn't see him at the show!" yelled Edward.

"Unfortunately he's in bed with flu," answered Norma just before she hung up.

Laura and Manuel ran to her office. Laura looked in her drawer. The pink CD had disappeared. She switched on the computer. The file had been deleted.

"Everything's gone," she whispered. "If I had the CD,

I could call the police. But now there's no proof." Manuel fainted.

Norma entered her office and hugged Cristian.

"We've done it," she laughed. "Everyone's talking about our new collection..." She was interrupted by the sound of the telephone. "Good evening, Mrs Folly. This is Simon Robbins from the UK Post. Congratulations on a wonderful show. Could I interview you later this evening? I'd like to write an article on Folly Fashions." Nonna tried to contain her delight. "If I had time, I would speak to you but I'm going to celebrate my success with my staff." She arranged to meet him on Monday at 11 a.m. She had just made the biggest mistake of her life...

CHAPTER TEN

An Identity Revealed

Monday 22nd March

Simon Robbins had never met Norma Folly.

The fashion show last Friday had aroused a lot of interest in her.

"How nice to see you, Mr Robbins. Welcome to Folly Fashions," said Norma. "I'm afraid I don't have much time as I'm having my hair done at 12.30."

"What a pleasure it is to meet you at last, Mrs Folly," answered Simon. "You're looking gorgeous today, as always."

Simon knew that the best way to get information from Norma was to flatter her. "What a great outfit! I'm not surprised you're in the fashion business," he said looking at the elegant dress Norma was wearing.

"It's lovely, isn't it? I had it made by one of my designers. So, what would you like to ask me?"

They had spoken for more than an hour when Simon asked: "Would it be possible to meet your new designer? I'd like to congratulate him on his success." Norma was so happy that she agreed instantly. She phoned Cristian and a few moments later, he came to her office. He shook Simon's hand and they talked for a while. Simon knew that he had seen Cristian before, but where? When Cristian refused to have his photo taken, Simon became suspicious.

As he got up to leave at the end of the interview, he saw some letters on Norma's desk and he remembered. Cristian had been at Crane Creations on the day Simon had interviewed Laura. But he had been dressed as a postman. What was going on?

Edward couldn't believe his ears when Simon told him about Cristian. "I knew it! I knew he was an impostor. Mark Hill was right," he cried. "This Cristian is Laura's new boyfriend, and now we know why."

He told Simon about the theft of the dresses. Simon asked cautiously: "Are you going to tell Laura?"

"Yes, WE are. But how?"

Both men were looking worried when Laura came into her father's office.

"What's up, Dad?"

Edward tried to explain George's deception to her. Naturally, Laura refused to believe him.

"Dad, I know you don't like him but what you're saying is ridiculous," she protested.

"I'm afraid it's true," apologized Simon. "His name is Cristian La Roque and he's the new designer at Folly Fashions. I've just met him there. If you don't believe us, why don't you phone him there?"

Laura picked up the phone, dialled the number and waited to be put through to Cristian La Roque. She felt sure it was all a mistake. Then she heard George's voice: "Cristian La Roque speaking..."

Laura put the phone down quickly. She was shaking. She heard her father's voice: "I'm so sorry, Laura." Everything became clear in Laura's mind. George had always asked her lots of questions about Crane Creations. Why had he wanted to know everything about their next fashion show? She was sure now that he had sent the fax for the order of nylon and acrylic. He had taken her keys and made a copy of them to get into her office. He had stolen Manuel's designs.

He had never been interested in her. He had used her. She said: "Cristian and Norma think they have been very clever. Well, I'm going to

make them pay for what they've done to us. I've got a plan..."

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Setting the Trap

Wednesday 24th March

Cristian had decided to play the part of George the postman for at least a few more weeks. He wanted to discover some more secrets from Laura and destroy Crane Creations forever.

Laura greeted George warmly when he came into her office. She was reading the latest copy of the UK Post. A photo of Norma Folly smiled up at her from the front page.

"Do you know anything about fashion, George?" Laura asked him innocently.

"Not really," replied George. "Why?"

"Well, I'm reading about one of our rivals in the fashion business, Folly Fashions. Their new collection has been a great success and they have a new designer hut nobody has ever seen him. There isn't even a photo in the paper. Don't you think that's strange?" said Laura. "I phoned Folly Fashions and asked if I could speak to the person who created the new designs..." Laura stopped to see the reaction on George's face but his expression didn't change,

"... but the secretary told me that he wasn't in the office."

Suzie, who was at her desk, giggled uncontrollably.

Laura quickly asked her to go and get a cup of tea.

She didn't want George to become suspicious.

"I'm sure that your fashion show this weekend will be an even greater success," lied George.

"There's no doubt about that," answered Laura. "Crane Creations will put on a show to remember. Manuel has worked day and night to produce some of the best designs anyone will ever see. He's created three new dresses for the end of the show. Would you like to see one of them?"

She led him to the corner of the office where there was a long line of clothes hanging on a rail.

They were covered in black plastic.

"These are all the dresses which will be part of the fashion show," said Laura.

She took the first dress in the row and uncovered it. She had to show George that she wasn't lying. The dress was magnificent - a cloud of pale blue and white organza with tiny buttons that looked like diamonds. "Isn't it beautiful?" she asked just as her father and Manuel came into the office. They both pretended to be annoyed with Laura.

"Laura, what are you doing? I told you not to show the dresses to anyone!" shouted Manuel.

"Yes, Laura. We must be vigilant at all times," insisted Edward Crane. "Now, our press release was issued last week so all potential buyers know when and where the show will take place. I spoke to the publicity officer an hour ago and he told me that a celebrity from the world of sport would be present on Saturday to open our show. He also said that some famous names of pop music had asked him for tickets to see the show."

"Yes, such big names are coming to see my show... sorry, OUR show. I can't wait."

"Ok, let's get back to work," said Edward. "This show will definitely be our best ever, won't it, Manuel?"

As they left the office, Laura heard Manuel reply:

"Our show, MY creations!"

Laura gazed into George's blue eyes. "See you tonight?" she asked.

George wasn't listening. He was trying to remember where he had put his gloves and torch...

CHAPTER TWELVE

To Catch a Thief

Thursday 25th March

Once again, George found it easy to enter the premises of Crane Creations. He was not a happy man. He said to himself: "If Manuel hadn't designed some more dresses, this wouldn't have been necessary."

He opened the door to Laura's office and quickly went in. He turned on the torch and went to the rail in the corner. Good! The dresses were still there. George smiled. He put the two enormous hags he had brought on the floor and began to fill them with the dresses. If Laura hadn't told him about them, the show would have been a great success. She was so trusting and naive.

He filled both bags, picked them up and began to walk to the door. At the very moment he turned off his torch, the whole room filled with light. He saw two policemen and behind them were Edward, Manuel, Suzie and, of course, Laura. For a moment no-one spoke.

Then a policeman said: "Don't move! Put the bags down NOW."

"Laura, I can explain. Please tell the police to go," cried George.

He moved towards her but again the policeman shouted: "Don't move!"

Laura came forward. "I thought you liked me, George.

If you had told me who you really were, I would have understood. I trusted you but you betrayed me. You're just a common thief."

"A common thief," repeated Manuel. "A thief who stole MY creations."

George sneered at the group. "Laura, I've never liked you. You're nothing special." He had to escape.

He dropped the bags, pushed Laura to the floor and ran to the door.

"Not so fast!" came a voice. Edward Crane put out his foot, George tripped and fell at the feet of the policemen who quickly handcuffed him.

"Surprise!" The voice of Simon Robbins was followed by the flash of his camera. This scene was a great photo for the front page of the UK Post.

Laura was crying. "I've been so stupid! Thanks,

Simon. If you hadn't seen George at Folly Fashions, he would have destroyed Crane Creations."

The police arrested Cristian and took him away.

On Friday evening, it seemed like the whole world was present at the fashion show for the new autumn-winter collection of Crane Creations. As expected, it was a great success. Manuel and Laura were the centre of attention, and Edward Crane was happy to see his daughter smile again. Simon Robbins was also there and the next day the leading articles in the UK Post were about fashion. On the front page, there was a photo and an account of the fashion show. At the bottom was an article describing the arrest of Cristian La Roque and Norma Folly. The photo Simon had taken in Laura's office was next to another one of Nonna being arrested at her home on Thursday night.

Laura was reading the paper at home.

"Suzie, I'm never going out with another man. I've decided that I'm going to concentrate on my work from now on."

Suzie laughed. "I don't believe you. Have you seen our new IT manager? He's so..." She was interrupted by the phone. Laura answered.

"Hi, Laura. It's Simon. Would you like to come to dinner with me tonight?"

- THE END -

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