

The Woman In the Alcove

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Author of "The Millionaire Baby," "The Filigree Ball," "The House in the Mist," "The Amethyst Box," Etc.

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CONTINUED

England. I should like to say a word to you before you embark."

A change, quick as lightning and almost as dangerous, passed over the face Sweetwater was watching with such painful anxiety, but as the other added nothing to his words and seemed to be merely waiting, he shrugged his shoulders and muttered an order to his rovers to proceed.

In another moment the sterns of the two small craft swung together, but in such a way that, by dint of a little skillful manipulation on the part of Wellgood's men, the latter's back was toward the moon.

Mr. Grey leaned toward Wellgood, and his face fell into shadow also.

"Bah!" thought the detective, "I should have managed that myself. But if I cannot see I shall at least hear."

But he deceived himself in this. The two men spoke in such low whispers that only their lateness was manifest. Not a word came to Sweetwater's ears.

"Bah!" he thought again, "this is bad."

But he had to swallow his disappointment and more. For presently the two men, so different in culture, station and appearance, came, as it seemed, to an understanding, and Wellgood, taking his hand from his breast, fumbled in one of his pockets and drew out something which he handed to Mr. Grey.

This made Sweetwater start and peer with still greater anxiety at every movement, when to his surprise both bent forward, each over his own knee, doing something so mysterious he could get no clew to its nature till they again stretched forth their hands to each other, and he caught the gleam of paper and realized that they were exchanging memoranda or notes.

These must have been important, for each made an immediate endeavor to read his slip by turning it toward the moon's rays. That both were satisfied was shown by their after movements. Wellgood put his slip into his pocket and without further word to Mr. Grey motioned his men to row away. They did so with a will, leaving a line of silver in their wake. Mr. Grey, on the contrary, gave no orders. He still held his slip and seemed to be dreaming. But his eye was on the shore, and he did not even turn when sounds from the launch denoted that she was under way.

Sweetwater, looking at this morsel of paper with greedy eyes, dipped his oars and began pulling softly toward that portion of the beach where a small and twinkling light defined the boathouse. He hoped Mr. Grey would speak; hoped that in some way, by some means, he might obtain a clew to his patron's thoughts. But the English gentleman sat like an image and did not move till a slight but sudden breeze, blowing in-shore, seized the paper in his hand and carried it away, past Sweetwater, who vainly sought to catch it as it went fluttering by into the water ahead, where it shone for a moment, then softly disappeared.

Sweetwater uttered a cry; so did Mr. Grey.

"Is it anything you wanted?" called out the former, leaning over the bow of the boat and making a dive at the paper with his oar.

"Yes; but if it's gone, it's gone," returned the other with some feeling.

DOCTORS MISTAKES

Are said often to be buried six feet under ground. But many times women call on their family physicians, suffering, as they imagine, one from dyspepsia, another from heart disease, another from liver or kidney disease, another from nervous prostration, another with pain here and there, and in this way they present alike to themselves and their easy-going or over-busy doctor, separate diseases, for which he, assuming them to be such, prescribes his pills and potions. In reality, they are all only symptoms caused by some uterine disease. The physician, ignorant of the cause of suffering, keeps up his treatment until large bills are made. The suffering patient gets no better. The reason of the wrong treatment, but probably worse, is a proper medicine like Dr. Pierce's Favorite Prescription, which is the only medicine that has entirely removed the disease, thereby dispelling all those distressing symptoms, and instituting comfort instead of prolonged misery. It has been well said, that "a disease known is half cured."

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"Careless of me, very careless, but I was thinking of—"

He stopped. He was greatly agitated, but he did not encourage Sweetwater in any further attempts to recover the lost memorandum. Indeed, such an effort would have been fruitless. The paper was gone, and there was nothing left for them but to continue their way. As they did so it would have been hard to tell in which breast chagrin mounted higher. Sweetwater had lost a clew in a thousand, and Mr. Grey—well, no one knew what he had lost. He said nothing and plainly showed by his changed manner that he was in haste to land now and be done with this doubtful adventure.

When they reached the boathouse Mr. Grey left Sweetwater to pay for the boat and started at once for the hotel.

The man in charge had the bow of the boat in hand, preparatory to pulling it up.



He picked off a small piece of paper from the dripping keel.

ing it up on the boards. As Sweetwater turned toward him he caught sight of the side of the boat, shining brightly in the moonlight. He gave a start and, with a muttered ejaculation, darted forward and picked off a small piece of paper from the dripping keel. It separated in his hand and part of it escaped him, but the rest he managed to keep by secreting it in his palm, where it still clung, wet and possibly illegible, when he came upon Mr. Grey again in the hotel office.

"That's your pay," said that gentleman, giving him a bill. "I am very glad I met you. You have served me remarkably well."

There was an anxiety in his face and a hurry in his movements which struck Sweetwater.

"Does this mean that you are through with me?" asked Sweetwater. "That you have no further call for my services?"

"Quite so," said the gentleman. "I am going to take the train tonight. I find that I still have time."

Sweetwater began to look alive.

Uttering hasty thanks, he rushed away to his own room and, turning on the gas, peeled off the morsel of paper which had begun to dry on his hand. If it should prove to be the blank end! If the written part were the one which had floated off! Such disappointments had fallen to his lot! He was not unused to them.

But he was destined to better luck this time. The written end had indeed disappeared, but there was one word left, which he had no sooner read than he gave a low cry and prepared to leave for New York on the same train as Mr. Grey.

The word was—diamond.

CHAPTER XXI.

INDULGED in some very serious thoughts after Mr. Grey's departure. A fact was borne in upon me to which I had hitherto closed my prejudiced eyes, but which I could no longer ignore, whatever confusion it brought or however it caused me to change my mind on a subject which had formed one of the strongest bases to the argument by which I had sought to save Mr. Durand. Miss Grey cherished no such distrust of her father as I in my ignorance of their relations had imputed to her in the early hours of my ministrations. This you have already seen in my account of their parting. Whatever his dread, fear or remorse, there was no evidence that she felt toward him anything but love and confidence. But love and confidence from her to him were in direct contradiction to the doubts I had believed her to have expressed in the half written note handed to Mrs. Fairbrother in the alcove. Had I been wrong, then, in attributing this scrawl to her? It began to look so. Though forbidden to allow her to speak on the one tabooed subject, I had wit enough to know that nothing would keep her from it if the fate of Mrs. Fairbrother occupied any real place in her thoughts.

Yet when the opportunity was given me one morning of settling this fact beyond all doubt I own that my main feeling was one of dread. I feared to

see this article in my creed destroyed, lest I should lose confidence in the whole. Yet conscience bade me face the matter boldly, for had I not boasted to myself that my one desire was the truth?

I allude to the disposition which Miss Grey showed on the morning of the third day to do a little surreptitious writing. You remember that a specimen of her handwriting had been asked for by the inspector, and—once had been earnestly desired by myself. Now I seemed likely to have it, if I did not open my eyes too widely to the meaning of her seemingly chance requests. A little pencil dangled at the end of my watch chain. Would I let her see it, let her hold it in her hand for a minute? It was so like one she used to have. Of course I took it off, of course I let her retain it a little while in her hand. But the pencil was not enough. A few minutes later she asked for a book to look at—I sometimes let her look at pictures. But the book bothered her—she would look at it later; would I give her something to mark the place—that postal over there. I gave her the postal. She put it in the book and I, who understood her thoroughly, wondered what excuse she would now find for sending me into the other room. She found one very soon, and with a heavily beating heart I left her with that pencil and postal.

A soft laugh from her lips drew me back. She was holding up the postal. "See! I have written a line to him! Oh, you good, good nurse, to let me! You needn't look so alarmed. It hasn't hurt me one bit."

I knew that it had not; knew that such an exertion was likely to be more beneficial than hurtful to her, or I should have found some excuse for deterring her. I endeavored to make my face more natural. As she seemed to want me to take the postal in my hand I drew near and took it.

"The address looks very shaky," she laughed. "I think you will have to put it in an envelope."

I looked at it—I could not help it—her eye was on me, and I could not even prepare my mind for the shock of seeing it like or totally unlike the writing of the warning. It was totally unlike; so distinctly unlike that it was no longer possible to attribute those lines to her which, according to Mr. Durand's story, had caused Mrs. Fairbrother to take off her diamond.

"Why, why?" she cried. "You actually look pale. Are you afraid the doctor will scold us? It hasn't hurt me nearly so much as lying here and knowing what he would give for one word from me."

"You are right, and I am foolish," I answered with all the spirit left in me. "I should be glad—I am glad that you have written these words. I will copy the address on an envelope and send it out in the first mail."

"Thank you," she murmured, giving me back my pencil with a sly smile. "Now I can sleep. I must have roses in my cheeks when papa comes home."

And she bade fair to have ruddier roses than myself, for conscience was working havoc in my breast. The theory I had built up with such care, the theory I had persisted in urging upon the inspector in spite of his rebuke, was slowly crumbling to pieces in my mind with the falling of one of its main pillars. With the warning unaccounted for in the manner I have stated, there was a weakness in my argument which nothing could make good. How could I tell the inspector, if ever I should be so happy or so miserable as to meet his eye again, humiliated to the dust, I could see no worth now in any of the arguments I had advanced. I flew from one extreme to the other, and was imputing perfect probity to Mr. Grey and an honorable if mysterious reason for all his acts, when the door opened and he came in. Instantly my last doubt vanished. I had not expected him to return so soon.

He was glad to be back; that I could see, but there was no other gladness in him. I had looked for some change in his manner and appearance—that is, if he returned at all—but the one I saw was not a cheerful one, even after he had approached his daughter's bedside and found her greatly improved. She noticed this and scrutinized him strangely. He dropped his eyes and turned to leave the room, but was stopped by her loving cry; he came back and leaned over her.

"What is it, father? You are fatigued," worried.

"No, no; quite well," he hastily assured her. "But you are as well as you seem?"

"Indeed yes. I am gaining every day. See, see! I shall soon be able to sit up. Yesterday I read a few words."

He started, with a side glance at me which took in a table near by on which a little book was lying.

"Oh, a book?"

"Yes, and—Arthur's letters."

The father flushed, lifted himself, patted her arm tenderly and hastened into another room.

Miss Grey's eyes followed him longingly, and I heard her give utterance to a soft sigh. A few hours before this would have conveyed to my suspicious mind deep and mysterious meanings, but I was seeing everything now in a different light, and I found myself no longer inclined either to exaggerate or to misinterpret these little marks of filial solicitude. Trying to rejoice over the present condition of my mind, I was searching in the hidden depths of my nature for the patience of which I stood in such need when every thought and feeling were again thrown into confusion by the receipt of another communication from the inspector in which he stated that something had occurred to bring the authorities round to my way of thinking and that the test with the stiletto was to be made at once.

Could the irony of fate go further?

I dropped the letter half read, querying if it were my duty to let the inspector know of the flaw I had discovered in my own theory before I proceeded with the attempt I had suggested when I believed in its complete soundness. I had not settled the question when I took the letter up again. Rereading its opening sentence, I was caught by the word "something." It was a very indefinite one, yet was capable of covering a large field. It must cover a large field or it could not have produced such a change in the minds of these men, conservative from principle and in this instance from discretion. I would be satisfied with that word "something" and quit further thinking. I was weary of it. The inspector was now taking the initiative, and I was satisfied to be his simple instrument and no more.

Arrived at this conclusion, however, I read the rest of the letter. The test was to go on, but under different conditions. It was no longer to be made at my own discretion and in the upstairs room; it was to be made at luncheon hour and in Mr. Grey's private dining room, where, if by any chance Mr. Grey found himself outraged by the placing of this notorious weapon beside his plate, the blame could be laid on the waiter, who, mistaking this directions, had placed it on Mr. Grey's table when it was meant for Inspector Dalzell's, who was lunching in the adjoining room. It was I, however, who was to do the placing. With what precautions and under what circumstances will presently appear.

Fortunately the hour set was very near; otherwise I do not know how I could have endured the continued strain of gazing on my patient's sweet face, looking up at me from her pillow, with a shadow over its beauty which had not been there before her father's return.

And that father! I could hear him pacing the library floor with a restlessness that struck me as being strangely akin to my own inward anguish of impatience and doubt. What was he dreading? What was it I had seen darkening his face and disturbing his manner when from time to time he pushed open the communicating door and cast an anxious glance our way, only to withdraw again without uttering a word? Did he realize that a crisis was approaching, that danger menaced him, and from me? No, not the latter, for his glance never strayed to me, but rested solely on his daughter. I was therefore not connected with the disturbance in his thoughts. As far as that was concerned, I could proceed fearlessly; I had not him to dread, only the event. That I did dread, as any one must who saw Miss Grey's face during these painful moments and heard that restless tramp in the room beyond.

At last the hour struck—the hour at which Mr. Grey always descended to lunch. He was punctuality itself, and under ordinary circumstances I could depend upon his leaving the room within five minutes of the stroke of 1. But would he be as prompt today? Was he in the mood for luncheon? Would he go downstairs at all? Yes, for the tramp, tramp stopped, I heard him approaching his daughter's door for a last look in and managed to escape just in time to procure what I wanted and reach the room below before he came.

My opportunity was short, but I had time to see two things—first, that the location of his seat had been changed so that his back was to the door leading into the adjoining room; secondly, that this door was ajar. The usual waiter was in the room and showed no surprise at my appearance, I having been careful to have it understood that hereafter Miss Grey's appetite was to be encouraged by having her soup served from her father's table by her father's own hands, and that I should be there to receive it.

"Mr. Grey is coming," said I, approaching the waiter and handing him the stiletto loosely wrapped in tissue paper. "Will you be kind enough to place this at his plate, just as it is? A man gave it to me for Mr. Grey; said we were to place it there."

The waiter, suspecting nothing, did as he was bidden, and I had hardly time to catch up the tray laden with dishes, when Mr. Grey came in and was welcomed to his seat.

The tramp was not there, but I advanced with my tray and stood waiting, not daring, lest the violent beating of my heart should betray me. As I did so the waiter disappeared and the door behind us opened. Though Mr. Grey's eye had fallen on the package, and I saw him start, I darted one glance at the room thus disclosed, and

saw that it held two tables. At one the inspector and some one I did not know sat eating. At the other a man alone, whose back was to us all and who seemingly was entirely disconnected with the interests of this tragic moment. All this I saw in an instant—the next my eyes were fixed on Mr. Grey's face.

He had reached out his hand to the package, and his features showed an emotion I hardly understood.

"What's this?" he murmured, feeling it with wonder. I should almost say anger. Suddenly he pulled off the wrapper, and my heart stood still in expectancy. If he quailed—and how could he help doing so if guilty?—what a doubt would be removed from my own breast, what an impediment from police action! But he did not quail. He simply uttered an exclamation of intense anger and laid the weapon back on the table without even taking the precaution of covering it up. I think he muttered an oath, but there was no fear in it, not a particle.

My disappointment was so great, my humiliation so unbounded, that, forget-



I staggered back and let the tray with all its contents slip from my hands.

ting myself in my dismay, I staggered back and let the tray with all its contents slip from my hands. The crash that followed stopped Mr. Grey in the act of rising. But it did something more. It awoke a cry from the adjoining room which I shall never forget. While we both started and turned to see from whom this grievous sound had sprung, a man came stumbling toward us with his hands before his eyes and this name wild on his lips:

"Grizel! Grizel!"

Mrs. Fairbrother's name, and the man—

CHAPTER XXII.

WAS he Wellgood? Sears? Who? A lover of the woman certainly. That was borne in on us by the passion of his cry:

"Grizel! Grizel!"

But how here? And why such fury in Mr. Grey's face and such amazement in that of the inspector?

This question was not to be answered offhand. Mr. Grey, advancing, laid a finger on the man's shoulder. "Come," said he, "we will have our conversation in another room."

The man, who in dress and appearance looked oddly out of place in those gorgeous rooms, shook off the stupor into which he had fallen and started to follow the Englishman. A waiter crossed their track with the soup for our table. Mr. Grey motioned him

TO BE CONTINUED.

What Have We Done Today?

We shall do so much in the years to come;

But what have we done today?

We shall give our gold in a princely sum;

But what did we give today?

We shall lift the heart and dry the tear,

We shall plant a hope in the place of fear,

We shall speak the words of love and cheer;

But what did we speak today?

We shall be so kind in the after while;

But what have we been today?

We shall bring each lonely life a smile;

But what have we brought today?

We shall give to truth a grander birth,

And to steadfast faith a deeper worth,

We shall feed the hungry souls of earth;

But whom have we fed today?

We shall reap such joys in the by-and-by;

But what have we sown today?

We shall build us mansions in the sky;

But what have we built today?

'Tis sweet in idle dreams to bask,

But here and now do we our task?

Yes, this is the thing our souls must ask:

"What have we done today?"

—Nixon Waterman.

She—"Frankly, now if you had to choose between me and a million, what would you do?"

He—"I'd take the million. Then you would be easy."

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As he entered the restaurant the cut of his clothes betrayed him as a member of the sporting fraternity. Choosing a corner seat, he ordered oyster stew. When the dish was brought to him he looked at it with a critical frown, and then he began excitedly to peel off his coat and vest.

"What's the matter? What's the matter?" said the landlord, hurrying to the table.

The man looked at the stew, then at the landlord and said:

"Bet you five shillings I can swim from one oyster to another."

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