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The Woman in the Alcove

BY ANNA KATHARINE GREEN

Author of "The Millionaire Baby," "The Pilligree Ball," "The Leavenworth Case," Etc., Etc.

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"Inspector, I do not intend to have you live with me through the five mortal hours which followed. I was enabled to pierce that plaster with my knife, and even to penetrate deep enough to afford a place for the tips of my fingers and afterward for the point of my toes, digging, prying, sweating, panting, listening, first for a sudden opening of the doors beneath, then for some shout or wicked interference from above as I worked my way up inch by inch, foot by foot, to that might not be safety after it was attained.

"Five hours—six. Then I struck something which proved to be a window; and when I realized this and knew that with but one more effort I should breathe freely again, I came as near falling as I had at any time before I began this terrible climb.

"Happily, I had some premonition of my danger, and threw myself into a position which held me till the dizzy minute passed. Then I went calmly on with my work, and in another half-hour had reached the window, which, fortunately for me, not only opened inward, but was off the latch. It was with a sense of inexpressible relief that I clambered through this window and for a brief moment breathed in the

pungent odor of cedar. But it could have been only for a moment. It was 3 o'clock in the afternoon before I found myself again in the outer air. The only way I can account for the lapse of time is that the strain to which both body and nerve had been subjected was too much for even my heady body and that I fell to the floor of the cedar closet, and from a faint went into a sleep that lasted until two. I can easily account for the last hour, because it took me that long to cut the thick paneling from the door of the closet. However, I am here now, sir, and in very much the same condition in which I left that house. I thought my first duty was to tell you that I had seen Hiram Sears in that house last night and put you on his track."

I drew a long breath—I think the inspector did. I had been almost rigid from excitement, and I don't believe he was quite free from it either. But his voice was calmer than I expected when he finally said:

"I'll remember this. It was a good night's work. Then the inspector put to him some questions, which seemed to fix the fact that Sears had left the house before Sweetwater did, after which he bade him send certain men to him and then go and fix himself up. I believe he had forgotten me. I had almost forgotten myself.

CHAPTER XV.
Sears or Wellgood.

Not till the inspector had given several orders was I again summoned in to his presence. He smiled as our eyes met, but did not allude, any more than I did, to what had just passed. Nevertheless, we understood each other.

When I was seated, he took up the conversation where we had left it.

"The description I was just about to read to you," he went on, "will you listen to it now?"

"Gladly," said I; "it is Wellgood's, I believe."

He did not answer save by a curious glance from under his brows, but, taking the paper again from his desk, went on reading:

"A man of 55 looking like one of 60. Medium height, insignificant features, head bald save for a ring of scanty dark hair. No beard, a heavy nose, long mouth and sleepy, half-shut eyes, capable of shooting strange glances. Nothing distinctive in face or figure save the depth of his wrinkles and a scarcely observable stoop in his right shoulder. Do you see Wellgood in that?" he suddenly asked.

"I have only the faintest recollection of his appearance," was my doubtful reply. "But the impression I get from this description is not exactly the one I received of that waiter in the momentary glimpse I got of him."

"So others told me before," he remarked, looking very disappointed. "The description is of Sears given me by a man who knew him well, and if we could fit the description of the one to that of the other, we should have it easy. But the few persons who have seen Wellgood differ greatly in their remembrances of his features, and even of his coloring. It is astonishing how superficially most people see a man, even when they are thrown into daily contact with him. Mr. Jones says the man's eyes are gray, his hair a wig and dark, his nose pugy, and his face without much expression. His landlady, that his eyes are blue, his hair, whether wig or not, a dusty asburn, and his look quick and piercing—a look which always made her afraid. His nose she don't remember. Both agree, or rather all agree, that he wore no beard—Sears did, but a beard can be easily taken off—and all of them declare that they would know him instantly if they saw him. And so the matter stands. Even you can give me no definite description—one, I mean, as satisfactory or unsatisfactory as this of Sears."

I shook my head. Like the others, I felt that I should know him if I saw him, but I could go no further than that. There seemed to be so little that was distinctive about the man.

The inspector, hoping, perhaps, that all this would serve to rouse my memory, shrugged his shoulders and put the best face he could on the matter.

"Well, well," said he, "we shall have to be patient. A day may make all the difference possible in our outlook. If we can lay hands on either of these men—"

He seemed to realize he had said a word too much, for he instantly changed the subject by asking if I had succeeded in getting a sample of Miss Grey's writing. I was forced to say no; that everything had been very carefully put away. "But I do not know what moment I may come upon it," I added. "I do not forget its importance."

"Very good. Those lines handed up to Mrs. Fairbrother from the walk outside are the second most valuable clue we possess."

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I did not ask him what the first was. I knew. It was the stiletto. "Strange that no one has testified to that handwriting," I remarked. He looked at me in surprise. "Fifty persons have sent in samples of writing which they think like it," he observed. "Often of persons who never heard of the Fairbrothers. We have been bothered greatly with the business. You know little of the difficulties the police labor under."

"I know too much," I sighed. He smiled and patted me on the hand.

"Go back to your patient," he said. "Forget every other duty, but that of your calling until you get some definite word from me. I shall not keep you in suspense one minute longer than is absolutely necessary."

He had risen. I rose too. But I was not satisfied. I could not leave the room with my ideas (I might say with my convictions), in such a turmoil. "Inspector," said I, "you will think me very obtuse, but all you have told me about Sears, all I have heard about him, in fact—this I emphasized—'does not convince me of the entire folly of my own suspicions. Indeed, I am afraid that, if anything, they are strengthened.' This steward, who is a doubtful character, I acknowledge, may have had his reasons for wishing Mrs. Fairbrother's death, may even have had a hand in the matter; but what evidence have you to show that he, himself, entered the alcove, struck the blow or stole the diamond? I have listened eagerly for some such evidence, but I have listened in vain."

"I know," he murmured. "I know. But it will come; at least, I think so." This should have assured me, no doubt, and sent me away quiet and happy. But something—the tenacity of a deep conviction, possibly—kept me lingering before the inspector, and finally gave me the courage to say:

"I know I ought not to speak another word; that I am putting myself at a disadvantage in doing so; but I cannot help it, Inspector; I cannot help it when I see you laying such stress upon the very quickest clues connecting Sears with this crime, and ignoring the direct clues we have against one whom we need not name."

"Had I gone too far? Had my presumption transgressed all bounds and would he show a very natural anger? No, he smiled instead, an enigmatical smile, no doubt, which I found it difficult to understand, but yet a smile.

"You mean," he suggested, "that Sears' possible connection with the crime can not eliminate Mr. Grey's very positive one; nor can the fact that Wellgood's hand came in contact with Mr. Grey's, at or near the time of the exchange of the false stone with the real one, make it any less evident who was the guilty author of this exchange?"

The inspector's hand was on the door-knob, but he dropped it at this, and surveying me very quietly, said: "I thought that a few days spent at the bedside of Miss Grey in the society of so renowned and cultured a gentleman as her father would disabuse you of these damaging suspicions."

"I don't wonder that you thought so," I burst out. "You would say so to all the more, if you knew how kind he can be and what solicitude he shows for all about him. But I can not get over the facts. They all point, it seems to me, straight in one direction."

"All? You heard what was said in this room—I saw it in your eyes—how the man, who surprised the steward in his own room last night, heard him talking of love and death in connection with Mrs. Fairbrother. To kiss what I hate—it is almost as bad as to kill what I love!" he said something like that.

"Yes, I heard that. But did he mean that he had been her actual slayer? Can you convict him on those words?"

"Well, we shall find out. Then, as to Wellgood's part in the little business, you choose to consider that it took place at the time the stone all from Mr. Grey's hand. What proof have you that the substitution you believe in was not made by him? He could easily have done it while crossing the room to Mr. Grey's side."

"Inspector," then hotly, as the absurdity of the suggestion occurred to me with full force: "He do this! A waiter, or as you think, Mr. Fairbrother's steward, to be provided with so hard-to-come-by an article as this counterpart of a great stone? Isn't that almost as incredible a supposition as any I have myself presumed to make?"

"Possibly, but the affair is full of incredibleities, the greatest of which, to my mind, is the persistence with which you, a kind-hearted enough little woman, persevere in ascribing the deepest guilt to one you profess to admire and certainly would be glad to find innocent of any complicity with a great crime."

I felt that I must justify myself. "Mr. Durand has had no such consideration shown him," said I.

"I know, my child, I know; but the cases differ. Wouldn't it be well for you to see this man and be satisfied with the turn which things have taken, without continuing to insist upon involving Mr. Grey in your suspicions?"

A smile took off the edge of this rebuke, yet I felt it keenly; and only the confidence I had in his fairness as a man and public official enabled me to say:

"But I am talking quite confidentially. And you have been so good to me, so willing to listen to all I had to say, that I cannot help but speak my whole mind. It is my only safety valve. Remember how I have to sit in the presence of this man, and how he has choked up. It is killing me. But I think I should go back content if you will listen to one more suggestion I have to make. It is my last."

"Say it. I am nothing if not indulgent."

He had spoken the word. Indulgent, that was it. He let me speak, probably had let me speak from the first, from pure kindness. He did not believe one little bit in my good sense or logic. But I was not to be deterred. I would empty my mind of the ugly things that I must leave behind me in order to escape dregs of doubt to ferment and work their evil way with me in the dead watches of the night, which I have yet to face. So I took him at his word.

[To be Continued.]

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It assists in the development of delicate infants and children, and it is particularly valuable for boys and girls at the period of transition into manhood and womanhood, when they are so likely to outgrow their

strength and the system is rendered peculiarly susceptible to the attacks of disease.

It strengthens the muscles, tones up the nerves, improves the vitality, strengthens the action of the heart, and builds up the whole system so that the germs of disease can obtain no foothold.

It has a wonderful recuperative effect on the Brain—bringing it to its proper form. Phosphorus, the Brain's chief constituent, attacks of depression and morbidness, "brain fog," etc., are dispelled—the cure is basal, constructive and complete.

WHAT IT IS NOT.—It is not a "Patent Medicine"—The ingredients are freely made known, only the method of manufacture being secret.

REMEMBER—There is only one Emulsion of Cod Liver Oil, Iron and Phosphorus, and that one is FERROL.

If you feel the need of a Restorative see that you get FERROL and do not be put off with something "just as good"—there is nothing half so good as FERROL—Just the same. Free to you!

Cod Liver Oil, Iron and Phosphorus are not new remedial agents; for ages their merits have been known and recognized, and for many years physicians have indulged the hope that some day a satisfactory combination of these remedies would be perfected and the full

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In "FERROL" that hope has at last been fully realized, and the practical benefits resulting from its use have far exceeded the most sanguine expectations.

These agents are combined in a scientifically prepared Emulsion so palatable that even a nursing infant can and will take it readily, even greedily; so easily assimilated that the most delicate digestive organs will dispose of it with less difficulty than they would expectance in the digestion of the plainest food.

WHAT IT IS—"FERROL" as its name implies, is composed mainly of Oil and Iron—it is, in short, a Restorative or Cod Liver Oil and Iron, with a medium of Phosphorus added, and is positively the only preparation combining these ingredients.

The apparently extravagant claim that it has no equal in its peculiar sphere is based on the following common sense reasons:

It combines in palatable form Cod Liver Oil, the greatest tissue-builder and flesh-producer known to medical science, with Iron, the one and only agent which will supply impoverished Blood with the red corpuscles which it must have in order to insure a healthy condition, and Phosphorus, which has no equal as a Nerve tonic.

This Coupon must be presented by adults.