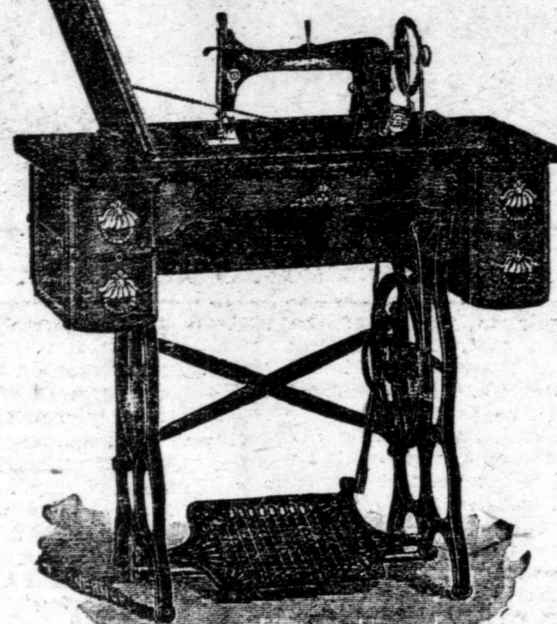


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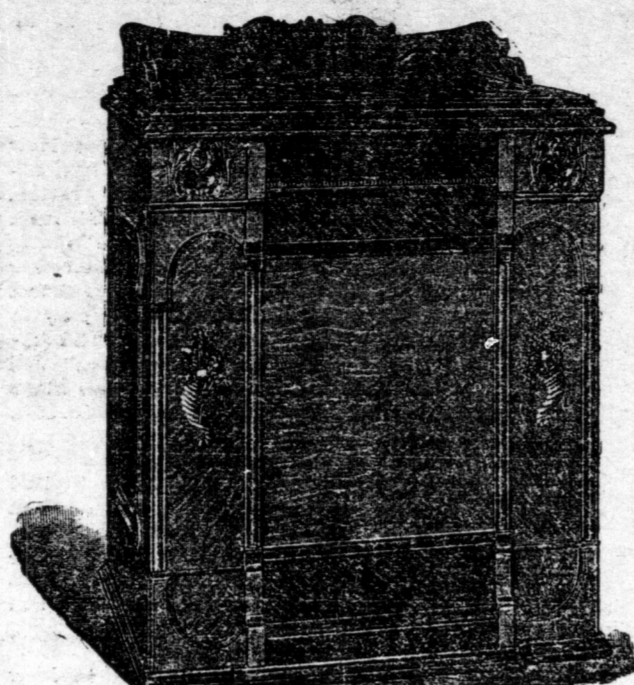
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**Positive Action, Double Locking,
No Springs, No Vibration,
Perfect Durability,
Dust-Proof Stationary Head
Case, Ready Adjustment,
No Belting Up of Balance Wheel.**

The woodwork is quarter sawed golden oak of the latest "swell front" design with hand rubbed finish.

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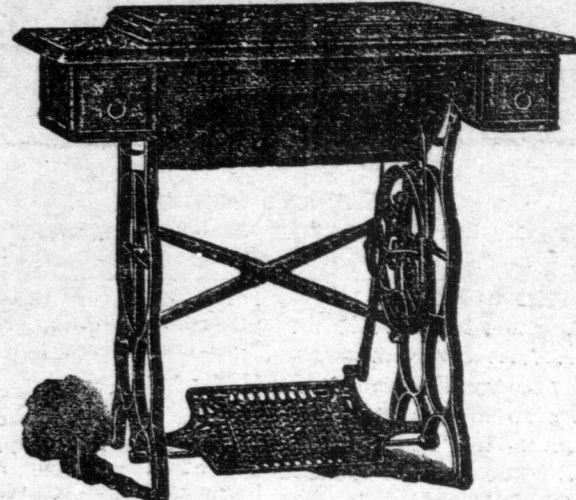


STYLE No. 34 DROP.

The woodwork is "swell front" in design, selected golden oak, handsomely finished. Every machine warranted for five years.

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The VICTORIA No. 2

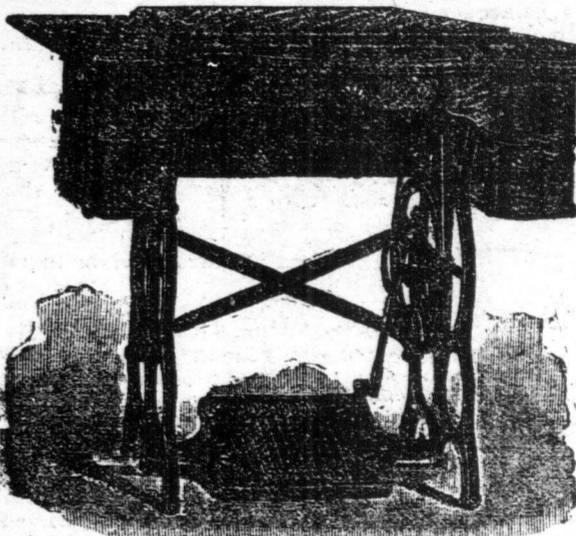


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THE GUARDED SECRET

Absorbed in his thoughts he walked on past the strip of fence in front of the cottage a few paces down the street, without observing that he was directly before the tall, imposing, gray stone mansion known as Delaney House. It stood well back among its leafless trees and gloomy evergreen shrubberies and cedars that showed like sober-suited sentinels in the cold, white light of the moon. The house looked gloomy enough with its closed doors and heavily shuttered windows, from whence no friendly light streamed forth to cheer the weary passer-by, but Mr. Lane did not notice it as he walked slowly past absorbed in his own vexing thoughts.

Absorbing as they were they were doomed to have a sudden and startling interruption.

The night had been intensely still, save for the low whisperings of the winter wind as it swung past in restless sighs, but suddenly its calm was broken by a long, low wail that broke shudderingly upon the silence and repose of the hour, and swelled higher and still higher until it became a fearful shriek of mad rage and impotent anger most terrible to hear.

"Ah—h—h! Ah—h—h!"

That loud, terrible, prolonged shriek fell suddenly and startlingly upon the ears of the detective. He sprang backward with a smothered cry, and stared upward to where the sound seemed to issue forth.

His eyes fell upon the dark, silent facade of Delaney House.

"Ah!" he breathed again, and like a horrible echo came that fearful shriek again.

"Ah—h—h! Ah—h—h!"

It seemed to float over his head and die away in the wandering breeze. Again he glanced up at the dark, lowering front of Delaney House. This time its darkness was illumined by a line of light that glanced momentarily through the shutters, then abruptly disappeared.

CHAPTER XXXII.

He stood silently gazing at the windows where the light had so strangely flickered and disappeared with almost the swiftness of a flash of lightning. He was full of wonder over what he had heard and seen.

"What a horrible voice!" he said to himself. "It was neither that of a man or woman, and yet it sounded distinctly human. What was it? I have heard such shrieks within the walls of madhouses, nowhere else. Can it be that some unfortunate lunatic is confined in Delaney House?"

He stood still, listening and watching some time, but he never saw nor heard anything more. The mansion had returned to its usual gloom and silence. It almost seemed to him as if those fearful shrieks and that swift flash of light had been the figment of his own disordered imagination.

He went up to the front gate, which, like the fence, was of tall ornate iron-work, surmounted by bristling spear-

heads, and softly tried the latch. It was unlocked and yielded readily to his touch. He entered the lovely neglected grounds, and stroiled through the quiet paths, careful to keep in the shadow and well out of the patches of wintry moonlight that gleamed on some of the white, graveled paths. He did not himself understand the strong compulsion that had driven him to enter the private grounds of one who was wholly a stranger to him, but it led him blindly on.

"If the owner should catch me trespassing on his grounds, I might find myself rather de trop," he thought, grimly, but he did not turn back. He did not think it likely that the master of Delaney House would wander in that dreary, deserted garden on such a night.

Leaving the vicinity of the house, he strolled slowly on and came out at that end of the garden which was simply walled by the gable end of Mr. Rodney's cottage. Still in the shadow, he saw a sudden light thrown on the ground by the reflection of the light from a window. He glanced up quickly and saw that it shone from the casement of Aline Rodney's room.

He drew back further into the convenient shadow cast by a tall, dark, evergreen tree, and looked up. He saw that the curtain at the window had been drawn aside by a small white hand. The next moment he saw a fair young face gazing out wistfully through the shadows into the moonlit night whose mystic shadows lay long and dark around Delaney House.

It was Aline Rodney's face. He gazed upon it, eagerly, as it stared out, with parted lips and wide, despairing eyes, at the dark and gloomy house.

"What is she doing there? What interest can she have in Delaney House?" Mr. Lane asked himself, soberly.

The beautiful, grave, young face gave no answer to his question. There was upon it an expression of wistful sadness and pathetic sorrow that went to his heart, strong man though he was. She remained for some time, gazing sadly out into the wintry darkness, then slowly retired and dropped the heavy curtain between herself and the dreary scene.

Mr. Lane retraced his steps back through the shrubbery toward the house again. He went around to the front entrance and looked curiously at the great carved oaken door.

He was struck by a coincidence with Dr. Anthony's story.

The front door was reached by a flight of wide, marble steps.

"Strange!" he muttered to himself. "What if this should prove to be the house?"

He gazed longingly at the dark stone walls. He would have given anything could his gaze have pierced through them in quest of the hidden blue room of Dr. Anthony's story. A dozen vague suspicions were floating formlessly through his mind, but

each thought hovered like a dark-winged bird of omen around Delaney House.

"Can it be that the secret is hidden here?" he asked himself. "Have we all been searching far and wide for Aline Rodney while she lay wounded and hidden at her father's very door?"

The suspicion took hold upon his mind with startling pertinacity. It grew into a settled belief even while he stood there gazing fixedly at the close-shut, forbidding-looking door.

"Well, if it be so or not, I shall find out before I leave Chester again," he said to himself, with a certain resolution in his tone, as he let himself out at the gate into the street again.

He went back to the cottage and met Dr. Anthony coming out to look for him.

"I thought you had run away, Lane. Where have you been?" asked the doctor.

"I came out to smoke a cigar. You know my old bachelor habits," Mr. Lane answered, indifferently.

"You must be half-frozen. It is a very cold night. Come in and warm your fingers before we go," said his friend.

They went in, and though they talked Mr. Lane on his long absence in the cold night air, he did not say one word on what he had seen and heard. The time had not come yet.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

The next night was the wedding night. It was the first day of January. Dr. Anthony and Effie had chosen to begin their new life with the new year.

No invitations had been issued for the marriage, but the church doors had been thrown open for the accommodation of those who cared to attend. When the bridal party entered the church, they were surprised to find that it was closely packed by the population of Chester. Curiosity had drawn hither all those among whom Effie had formerly moved, and who had scornfully dropped her because of the mysterious secret that had darkened her sister's life.

Effie had always been considered very beautiful and graceful. She had never looked more so than when she glided up the aisle on the arm of her handsome, noble-looking lover. She was so proud to have been chosen by him that she carried her head up undauntedly, in quiet indifference to the whispers and glances on every side.

They could not withhold the meed of praise that her beauty claimed. After all, she had done nothing herself to merit blame. It was only the shadow of Aline's dishonor that was reflected upon her. Everyone knew how wild and willful Aline had always been, and how her mother and sister had tried to curb her in her mischievous pranks and thoughtless ways. Seeing the constancy and devotion of the handsome young physician, some were moved to repentance for the slights they had put upon the bride who looked so queenly in her simple maid robe of white satin and the long flowing veil fastened to her dark-brown hair with snowy orange blossoms. The bridegroom's gift, a lovely pearl locket containing the face-smile of his own handsome face, rested against her heart, sus-

pended by a slender golden chain. It was an amulet of happiness to Effie. In spite of the world's scorn, an in- chible joy had come to her through her sister's adventure, since but for it she might never have become acquainted with the doctor.

But curiously as the crowd gazed upon Effie, they regarded Aline with even more interest.

She entered the church in advance of the bride, and leaning lightly on the arm of Mr. Lane, having been preceded by her parents, who entered first of all.

Every eye turned on the tall, slight young figure in its graceful drapery of white silk and cashmere. The long, childish curls had been put up in womanly fashion on the small head in loose waves and puffs, as if in mute protest or defiance of their censures. Aline had fastened a pure white lily in their silken darkness. She carried her head high as if in conscious rectitude, and her air was that of one whose thoughts were turned wholly inward upon herself with no jarring consciousness of the hostile eyes that followed her with scorn and suspicion in their cold and curious gaze.

Passing before the chancel rail, Aline and her companion silently stepped to pass between them to where the white-robed rector waited, book in hand, to pronounce the solemn words of an irrevocable union.

The loud triumphant peal of the wedding March died away into silent echoes. The rustle and murmur of the perfumed throng grew still. All waited in thrilling silence while the beautiful words of the marriage service fell slowly on the air.

Aline had never been present at a marriage before. She was deeply impressed by the solemn, beautiful service and a grave, sweet look on her fair face.

"What solemn words, and yet how sweet!" she said to herself. "Dr. Anthony and my sister will have to love each other very dearly to live up to those heavenly words."

She had never given one serious thought to the subject of marriage before; but now, as she gazed at the happy faces of the two, and listened to the beautiful, thrilling vows that bound them, some idea of the bliss of a true marriage came into her mind.

"It must be like a heaven upon earth," she said to herself, and then quite suddenly she recalled some words her teacher had said to her one day:

"No one will ever wish to marry you, my dear Aline. No man would take you with such a stain upon your life as that hideous mystery you guard so jealously."

Was it true? Would no one ever love her as Dr. Anthony loved her sister Effie? Would nothing so beautiful ever come into her life? She sighed unconsciously, and with the sigh she lifted her eyes—she could never have told you why—lifted them, and at a little distance met a pair of eyes gazing straight into her own with a strange, magnetic fire—Oran Delaney's!

She did not know what had caused her to look up at that moment, and she knew just as little why she blushed

when she met that intent gaze—a blush, that burned her pure face like fire.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

Mr. Lane felt rather proud than otherwise as he walked up the aisle of the church with Aline Rodney by his side. Her exquisite beauty filled him with admiration, and he had already decided in his mind that she was as pure and innocent as she was fair.

He did not care in the least for the opinion of censorious Chester. If Aline had been a princess he could not have shown her more deferential respect than that which he now accorded her.

He had the greatest admiration for her, mingled with pity and sympathy. He said to himself that he would help her out of her trouble if he could, and he honestly believed that the surest way to do that would be to find out the secret she held and make it public. He had been vexed with her before he saw her—vexed because she had baffled investigation and curiosity, and her air was that of one whose thoughts were turned wholly inward upon herself with no jarring consciousness of the hostile eyes that followed her with scorn and suspicion in their cold and curious gaze.

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