

# The Woman In the Alcove

By ANNA KATHARINE GREEN.

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

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CONTINUED

"A dangerous customer," thought he. "I wonder if my instinct will go so far as to make me recognize his presence. I shouldn't wonder. It has served me almost as well as that many times before."

He appeared to serve him now, for when the man finally showed himself on the crosswalk separating the two buildings he experienced a sudden indecision not unlike that of dread, and there being nothing in the man's appearance to warrant apprehension, he took it for the instinctive recognition it undoubtedly was.

He therefore watched him narrowly and succeeded in getting one glance from his eye. It was enough. The man was commonplace—commonplace in feature, dress and manner; but his eye gave him away. There was nothing commonplace in that. It was an eye to beware of.

He had taken in Sweetwater as he passed, but Sweetwater was of a commonplace type, too, and woke no corresponding dread in the other's mind, for he went whistling into the store, from which he presently reissued with a bundle of mail in his hand. The detective's first instinct was to take him into custody as a suspect much wanted by the New York police; but reason assured him that he not only had no warrant for this, but that he would better serve the ends of justice by following out his present task of bringing this man and the Englishman together and watching the result. But how, with the conditions laid on him by Mr. Grey, was this to be done? He knew nothing of the man's circumstances or of his position in the town. How, then, go to work to secure his co-operation in a scheme possibly as mysterious to him as it was to himself? He could stop this stranger in midstreet with some plausible excuse, but it did not follow that he would succeed in luring him to the hotel where Mr. Grey could see him. Wellgood, or, as he believed, Sears, knew too much of life to be beguiled by any open claptrap, and Sweetwater was obliged to see him drive off without having made the least advance in the purpose engrossing him.

But that was nothing. He had all the evening before him and, re-entering the store, he took up his stand near the sugar barrel. He had perceived that in the pauses of weighing and tasting Dick talked; if he were guided with suitable discretion, why should he not talk of Wellgood?

He was guided, and he did talk, and to some effect—that is, he gave information of the man which surprised Sweetwater. If in the past and in New York he had been known as a waiter—or should I say steward—he was known here as a manufacturer of patent medicine designed to rejuvenate the human race. He had not been long in town and was somewhat of a stranger yet, but he wouldn't be so long. He was going to make things hum, he was. Money for this, money for that, a horse where another man would walk, and mail—well, that alone would make this postoffice worth while. Then the drugs ordered by wholesale. Those boxes over there were his, ready to be carted out to his manufactory. Count them, some one, and think of the bottles and bottles of stuff they stand for. If it sells as he says it will, then he will soon be rich, and so on, till Sweetwater brought the garrulous Dick to a standstill by asking whether Wellgood had been away for any purpose, since he first came to town. He received the reply that he had just come home from New York, where he had been for some articles needed in his manufactory. Sweetwater felt all his convictions confirmed and ended the colloquy with the final question:

"And where is his manufactory? Might be worth visiting perhaps."

The other made a gesture, said something about northwest and rushed to help a customer. Sweetwater took the opportunity to slide away. More explicit directions could easily be got elsewhere, and he felt anxious to return to Mr. Grey and discover if possible whether it would prove as much a matter of surprise to him as to Sweetwater himself that the man who answered to the name of Wellgood was the owner of a manufactory and a barrel or two of drugs, out of which he earned whatever else there was to know, and, armed with definite information, he appeared before Mr. Grey, who, to his astonishment, was dining in his own room.

He had dismissed the waiter and was rather brooding than eating. He looked up eagerly, however, when Sweetwater entered and asked what news.

The detective, with some semblance of respect, answered that he had seen Wellgood, but that he had been unable to detain him or bring him within his employer's observation.

"He is a patent medicine man," he then explained, "and manufactures his own concoctions in a house he has rented here on a lonely road some half mile out of town."

"Wellgood does—the man named Wellgood?" Mr. Grey exclaimed, with all the astonishment the other secretly expected.

"Yes," Wellgood—James Wellgood. "There is no other in town."

"How long has this man been here?" the statesman inquired after a moment of apparently great discomfiture.

"Just twenty-four hours this time. He was here once before, when he rented the house and made all his plans."

"Ah!" Mr. Grey rose precipitately. His manner had changed.

"I must see him. What you tell me makes it all the more necessary for me to see him. How can you bring it about?"

"Without his seeing you?" Sweetwater asked.

"Yes, yes; certainly without his seeing me. Couldn't you rap him up at his own door and hold him in talk a minute while I looked on from the carriage or whatever vehicle we can get to carry us there? The least glimpse of his face would satisfy me—that is, tonight."

"I'll try," said Sweetwater, not very sanguine as to the probable result of this effort.

Returning to the stables, he ordered the team. With the last ray of the sun they set out, the reins in Sweetwater's hands.

They headed for the coast road.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

THE road was once the highway, but, the tide having played so many tricks with its numberless bridges, a new one had been built farther up the cliff, carrying with it the life and business of the small town. Many old landmarks still remained—shops, warehouses and even a few scattered dwellings. But most of these were deserted, and those that were still in use showed such neglect that it was very evident the whole region would soon be given up to the encroaching sea and such interests as are inseparable from it.

The hour was that mysterious one of the late twilight, when outlines lose their distinctness and sea and shore melt into one mass of uniform gray. There was no wind, and the waves came in with a soft plash, but so near to the level of the road that it was evident even to these strangers that the tide was at its height and would presently begin to ebb.

Soon they had passed the last forsaken dwelling, and the town proper lay behind them. Sand and a few rocks were all that lay between them now and the open stretch of the ocean, which at this point approached the land in a small bay, well guarded on either side by embracing rocky heads. This was what made the harbor at C—.

It was very still. They passed one team, and only one. Sweetwater looked very sharply at this team and at its driver, but saw nothing to arouse suspicion. They were now a half mile from C— and seemingly in a perfectly desolate region.

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## HOW TO CURE A HEADACHE

To attempt to cure a headache by taking a "headache powder," is like trying to stop a leak in the roof by putting a plan under the dripping water. Chronic headaches are caused by poisoned blood. The blood is poisoned by tissue waste, undigested food, and other impurities remaining too long in the system. These poisons are not promptly eliminated because of sick liver, bowels, skin or kidneys.

If the bowels do not move regularly—if there is pain in the back or wing kidney trouble—if the skin is scaly, or disfigured with pimples—it shows clearly what is causing the headache.

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"A manufactory here!" exclaimed Mr. Grey. It was the first word he had uttered since starting.

"Not far from here," was Sweetwater's equally laconic reply, and, the road taking a turn almost at the moment of his speaking, he leaned forward and pointed out a building standing on the right hand side of the road with its feet in the water. "That's it," said he. "They described it well enough for me to know it when I see it. Looks like a robber's hole at this time of night," he laughed. "But what can you expect from a manufactory of patent medicine?"

Mr. Grey was silent. He was looking very earnestly at the building.

"It is larger than I expected," he remarked at the last.

Sweetwater himself was surprised, but as they advanced and their point of view changed they found it to be really an insignificant structure, and Mr. Wellgood's portion of it more insignificant still.

In reality it was a collection of three stores under one roof; two of them were shut up and evidently unoccupied, the third showing a lighted window. This was the manufactory. It occupied the middle place and presented a tolerably decent appearance.

It showed, besides the lighted lamp I have mentioned, such signs of life as a few packing-boxes tumbled out on the small platform in front, and a whinnying horse attached to empty buggy, tied to a post on the opposite side of the road.

"I'm glad to see the lamp," muttered Sweetwater. "Now, what shall we do? Is it light enough for you to see his face, if I can manage to bring him to the door?"

Mr. Grey seemed startled.

"It's darker than I thought," said he. "But call the man and if I cannot see him plainly, I'll shout to the horse to stand, which you will take as a signal to bring this Wellgood nearer. But do not be surprised if I ride off before he reaches the buggy. I'll come back again and take you up farther down the road."

"All right, sir," answered Sweetwater with a side glance at the speaker's inscrutable features. "It's a go!" And leaping to the ground he advanced to the manufactory door and knocked loudly.

No one appeared.

He tried the latch; it lifted, but the door did not open; it was fastened from within.

"Strange!" he muttered, casting a glance at the waiting horse and buggy, then at the lighted window, which was on the second floor directly over his head. "Guess I'll sing out."

Here he shouted the man's name. "Wellgood! I say, Wellgood!"

No response to this either.

"Looks bad!" he acknowledged to himself, and, taking a step back, he looked up at the window.

It was closed, but there was neither shade nor curtain to obstruct the view. "Do you see anything?" he inquired of Mr. Grey, who sat with his eye at the small window in the buggy top.

"Nothing."

"No movement in the room above? No shadow at the window?"

"Nothing."

"Well, it's confounded strange!" And he went back, still calling Wellgood.

The tied up horse whinnied, and the waves gave a soft splash, and that was all, if I except Sweetwater's muttered oath.

Coming back, he looked again at the window; then, with a gesture toward Mr. Grey, turned the corner of the building and began to edge himself along its side in an endeavor to reach the rear and see what it offered. But he came to a sudden standstill. He found himself on the edge of the bank before he had taken twenty steps. Yet the building projected on, and he saw why it had looked so large from a certain point of the approach. Its rear was built out on piles, making its depth even greater than the united width of the three stores. At low tide this might be accessible from below, but just now the water was almost on a level with the top of the piles, making all approach impossible save by boat.

Disgusted with his failure, Sweetwater returned to the front and, finding the situation unchanged, took a new resolve. After measuring with his eye the height of the first story, he coolly walked over to the strange horse and, slipping his bridle, brought it back and cast it over a projection of the door. By its aid he succeeded in climbing up to the window, which was the sole eye to the interior.

Mr. Grey sat far back in his buggy, watching every movement.

There were no shades at the window, as I have before said, and once Sweetwater's eye had reached the level of

the sill he could see the interior with-out the least difficulty. There was nobody there. The lamp burned on a great table littered with papers, but the rude cane chair before it was empty, and so was the room. He could see into every corner of it, and there was not even a hiding place where anybody could remain concealed. Sweetwater was still looking when the lamp, which had been burning with considerable smoke, flared up and went out. Sweetwater uttered an ejaculation and, finding himself face to face with utter darkness, slid from his perch to the ground.

Approaching Mr. Grey for the second time, he said:

"I cannot understand it. The fellow is either lying low or he's gone out, leaving his lamp to go out too. But whose is the horse? Just excuse me while I tie him up again. It looks like the one he was driving today. It is the one. Well, he won't leave him."



He could see into every corner.

here all night. Shall we lie low and wait for him to come and unhitch this animal or do you prefer to return to the hotel?"

Mr. Grey was slow in answering. Finally he said:

"The man may suspect our intention. You can never tell anything about such fellows as he. He may have caught some unexpected glimpse of me or simply heard that I was in town. If he's the man I think him, he has reasons for avoiding me which I can very well understand. Let us go back, not to the hotel—I must see this adventure through tonight—but far enough for him to think we have given up all idea of routing him out tonight. Perhaps that is all he is waiting for. You can steal back."

"Excuse me," said Sweetwater, "but I know a better dodge than that. We'll circumvent him. We passed a boat-house on our way down here. I'll just drive you up, procure a boat and bring you back here by water. I don't believe that he will expect that, and if he is in the house we shall see him or his light."

"Meanwhile he can escape by the road."

"Escape? Do you think he is planning to escape?"

The detective spoke with becoming surprise, and Mr. Grey answered without apparent suspicion.

"It is possible, if he suspects my presence in the neighborhood."

"Do you want to stop him?"

"I want to see him."

"Oh, I remember. Well, sir, we will drive on—that is, after a moment."

"What are you going to do?"

"Oh, nothing. You said you wanted to see the man before he escaped."

"Yes, but—"

"And that he might escape by the road."

"Yes—"

"Well, I was just making that a little bit impracticable. A small pebble in the keyhole and—why, see now, his horse is walking off! Gee! I must have fastened him badly. I shouldn't wonder if he trotted all the way to town. But it can't be helped. I cannot be supposed to race after him. Are you ready now, sir? I'll give another shout, then I'll get in." And once more the lonely region about echoed with the cry: "Wellgood! I say, Wellgood!"

There was no answer, and the young detective, masking for the nonce as Mr. Grey's confidential servant, jumped into the buggy and turned the horse's head toward C—.

## CHAPTER XIX.

THE moon was well up when the small boat in which our young detective was seated with Mr. Grey appeared in the bay approaching the so-called manufactory of Wellgood. The looked for light on the waterside was not there. All was dark except where the windows reflected the light of the moon.

This was a decided disappointment to Sweetwater, if not to Mr. Grey. He had expected to detect signs of life in this quarter, and this additional proof of Wellgood's absence from home made it look as if they had come out on a fool's errand and might much better have stuck to the road.

"No promise there," came in a mutter from his lips. "Shall I row in, sir, and try to make a landing?"

"You may row nearer. I should like a closer view. I don't think we shall attract any attention. There are more boats than ours on the water."

Sweetwater was startled. Looking round, he saw a launch, or some such small steamer, riding at anchor not far from the mouth of the bay. But that was not all. Between it and them was a rowboat like their own, resting quietly in the wake of the moon.

"I don't like so much company," he muttered. "Something's brewing; something in which we may not want to take part."

"Very likely," answered Mr. Grey grimly. "But we must not be deterred—not till I have seen"—the rest Sweetwater did not hear. Mr. Grey seemed to remember himself. "Row nearer," he now bade. "Get under the shadow of the rocks if you can. If the boat is for him, he will show himself. Yet I hardly see how he can board from that bank."

It did not look feasible. Nevertheless, they waited and watched with much patience for several long minutes. The boat behind them did not advance, nor was any movement discernible in the direction of the manufactory. Another short period, then suddenly a light flashed from a window high up in the central gable, sparkled for an instant and was gone. Sweetwater took it for a signal and, with a slight motion of the wrist, began to work his way in toward shore till they lay almost at the edge of the piles.

"Hark!"

It was Sweetwater who spoke. Both listened. Mr. Grey with his head turned toward the launch and Sweetwater with his eye on the cavernous space, sharply outlined by the piles, which the falling tide now disclosed under each contiguous building. It had been directly shipped from these stores in the old days. This he had learned in the village. How shipped he had not been able to understand from his previous survey of the building. But he thought he could see now. At low tide, or better, at half tide, access could be got to the floor of the extension and, if this floor held a trap, the mystery would be explainable. So would be the hovering boat—the signal light and—yes! this sound overhead of steps on a rattling plank.

"I hear nothing," whispered Mr. Grey from the other end. "The boat is still there, but not a man has dipped an oar."

"They will soon," returned Sweetwater as a smothered sound of clanking iron reached his ears from the hollow spaces before him. "Duck your head, sir; I'm going to row in under this portion of the house."

Mr. Grey would have protested, and with very good reason. There was scarcely a space of three feet between them and the boards overhead. But Sweetwater had so immediately suited action to word that he had no choice.

They were now in utter darkness, and Mr. Grey's thoughts must have been peculiar as he crouched over the stern, hardly knowing what to expect or whether this sudden launch into darkness was for the purpose of flight or pursuit. But enlightenment came soon. The sound of a man's tread in the building above was every moment becoming more perceptible, and while wondering possibly at his position Mr. Grey naturally turned his head as nearly as he could in the direction of these sounds and was staring with blank eyes into the darkness when Sweetwater, leaning toward him, whispered:

"Look up! There's a trap. In a minute he'll open it. Mark him, but don't breathe a word, and I'll get you out of this all right."

Mr. Grey attempted some answer, but it was lost in the prolonged creak of slowly moving hinges somewhere over their heads. Spaces which had looked dark suddenly looked darker; hearing was satisfied, but not the eye. A man's breath panting with exertion testified to a nearby presence, but that man was working without a light in a room with shuttered windows, and Mr. Grey probably felt that he knew very little more than, before, when suddenly, most unexpectedly, to him at least, a face started out of that overhead darkness, a face so white, with every feature made so startlingly distinct by the strong light Sweetwater had thrown upon it, that it seemed the only thing in the world to the two men beneath. In another moment it had vanished, or, rather, the light which had revealed it.

"What's that? Are you there?" came down from above in hoarse and none too encouraging tones.

There was none to answer. Sweetwater, with a quick pull on the oars, had already shot the boat out of its dangerous harbor.

## CHAPTER XX.

"ARE you satisfied? Have you got what you wanted?" asked Sweetwater when they were well away from the shore and the voice they had heard calling at intervals from the chasm they had left.

"Yes. You're a good fellow. It could not have been better managed." Then, after a pause too prolonged and thoughtful to please Sweetwater, who was burning with curiosity if not with some deeper feeling, "What was that light you burned—a match?"

Sweetwater did not answer. He dared not. How speak of the electric torch he as a detective carried in his pocket? That would be to give himself away. He therefore let this question slip by and put in one of his own.

"Are you ready to go back now, sir? Are we all done here?" This with his eye turned and his eye bent forward, for the adventure they had interrupted was not at an end, whether their part in it was or not.

Mr. Grey hesitated, his glances following those of Sweetwater.

"Let us wait," said he in a tone which surprised Sweetwater. "If he is meditating an escape, I must speak to him before he reaches the launch. At all hazards," he added after another moment's thought.

"All right, sir. How do you propose?"

His words were interrupted by a shrill whistle from the direction of the bank. Promptly and as if awaiting this signal the two men in the rowboat before them dipped their oars and pulled for the shore, taking the direction of the manufactory.

Sweetwater said nothing, but held himself in readiness.

Mr. Grey was equally silent, but the lines of his face seemed to deepen in the moonlight as the boat, gliding rapidly through the water, passed them within a dozen boat lengths and slipped into the opening under the manufactory building.

"Now row!" he cried. "Make for the launch. We'll intercept them on their return."

Sweetwater, glowing with anticipation, bent to his work. The boat beneath them gave a bound, and in a few minutes they were far out on the waters of the bay.

"They're coming!" he whispered eagerly as he saw Mr. Grey looking anxiously back. "How much farther shall I go?"

"Just within hailing distance of the launch," was Mr. Grey's reply.

Sweetwater, gauging the distance with a glance, stopped at the proper point and rested on his oars. But his thoughts did not rest. He realized that he was about to witness an interview whose importance he easily recognized. How much of it would he hear? What would be the upshot and what was his full duty in the case? He knew that this man Wellgood was wanted by the New York police, but he was possessed with no authority to arrest him even if he had the power.

"Something more than I bargained for," he inwardly commented. "But I wanted excitement, and now I have got it. If only I can keep my head level, I may get something out of this, if not all I could wish."

Meantime the second boat was very nearly on them. He could mark the three figures and pick out Wellgood's head from among the rest. It had a resolute air. The face, on which, to his evident discomfiture, the moon shone, wore a look which convinced the detective that this was no patent medicine manufacturer, nor even a caterer's assistant, but a man of nerve and resources, the same, indeed, whom he had encountered in Mr. Fairbrother's house with such disastrous, almost fatal, results to himself.

The discovery, though an unexpected one, did not lessen his sense of the extreme helplessness of his own position. He could witness, but he could not act; follow Mr. Grey's orders, but indulge in none of his own. The detective must continue to be lost in the vail, though it came hard and woke a sense of shame in his ambitious breast.

Meanwhile Wellgood had seen them and ordered his men to cease rowing.

"Give way, there," he shouted. "We're for the launch and in a hurry."

"There's some one here who wants to speak to you, Mr. Wellgood," Sweetwater called out, as respectfully as he could. "Shall I mention your name?" he asked of Mr. Grey.

"No, I will do that myself." And raising his voice, he accented the other with these words: "I am the man, Percival Grey, of Darling-on-Manor."

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