

# 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

Mr. Fairbrother had had the jewel set to suit him, not in Florence, as Sears had said, but by a skillful workman he had picked up in great poverty in a remote corner of New York city. Always in dread of some complication, he had provided himself with a second facsimile in paste, this time of an astonishing brightness, and this facsimile he had had set precisely like the true



"The banshee! The banshee! My daughter will die!"

stone. Then he gave the workman \$1,000 and sent him back to Switzerland. This imitation in paste he showed nobody, but he kept it always in his pocket. Why, he hardly knew. Meantime, he had one confidant, not of his crime, but of his sentiments toward his wife, and the determination he had secretly made to proceed to extremities if she continued to disobey him.

This was a man of his own age or older, who had known him in his early days and had followed all his fortunes. He had been the master of Fairbrother then, but he was his servant now, and as devoted to his interests as if they were his own—which, in a way, they were. For eighteen years he had stood at the latter's right hand, satisfied to look no further, but for the last three, his glances had strayed a foot or two beyond his master and taken in his master's wife.

The feelings which this man had for Mrs. Fairbrother were peculiar. She was a mere adjunct to her great lord, but she was a very gorgeous one, and while he could not imagine himself doing anything to thwart him whose bread he ate and to whose rise he had himself contributed, yet if he could remain true to him without injuring her, he would account himself happy. The day came when he had to decide between them, and, against all chances, against his own preconceived notion of what he would do under these circumstances, he chose to consider her.

This day came when, in the midst of growing complacency and an intense interest in some new scheme which demanded all his powers, Abner Fairbrother learned from the papers that Mr. Grey of English parliamentary fame had arrived in New York on an indefinite visit. As no cause was assigned for the visit beyond a natural desire on the part of this eminent statesman to see this great country, Mr. Fairbrother's fears reached a sudden climax, and he saw himself ruined and forever disgraced if the diamond now so unhappily out of his hands should fall under the eyes of his owner, whose seeming quiet under its loss had not for a moment deceived him. Waiting only long enough to make sure that the distinguished foreigner was likely to accept social attentions and so in all probability would be brought in contact with Mrs. Fairbrother, he sent her by his devoted servant a peremptory message in which he demanded back his diamond and, upon her refusing to heed this, followed it up by another in which he expressly stated that if she took it out of the safe deposit in which he had been told she was wise enough to keep it or wore it so much as once during the next three months, she would pay for her presumption with her life.

This was no idle threat, though she chose to regard it as such, laughing in the old servant's face and declaring that she would run the risk if the notion seized her. But the notion did not seem to seize her at once, and her husband was beginning to take heart when he heard of the great ball about to be given by the Ramsdells and realized that if she were going to be tempted to wear the diamond at all it would be at this brilliant function given in honor of the one man he had most cause to fear in the whole world. Sears, seeing the emotion he was under, watched him closely. They had both been on the point of starting for New Mexico to visit a mine in which Mr. Fairbrother was interested, and he waited with inconceivable anxiety to see if his master would change his plans. It was while he was in this condition of mind that he was seen to shake his fist at Mrs. Fairbrother's passing figure, a menace naturally interpreted as directed against her.

which, if we know the man, was rather the expression of his anger against the husband who could rebuke and threaten so beautiful a creature. Meanwhile Mr. Fairbrother's preparations went on, and three weeks before the ball they started. Mr. Fairbrother had business in Chicago and business in Denver. It was two weeks and more before he reached La Junta. Sears counted the days. At La Junta they had a long conversation, or, rather, Mr. Fairbrother talked and Sears listened. The sum of what he said was this: He had made up his mind to have back his diamond. He was going to New York to get it. He was going alone, and as he wished no one to know that he had gone or that his plans had been in any way interrupted, the other was to continue on to El Moro and, passing himself off as Fairbrother, hire a room at the hotel and shut himself up in it for ten days on any plea his ingenuity might suggest. If at the end of that time Fairbrother should rejoin him, well and good. They would go on together to Santa Fe, but if for any reason the former should delay his return, then Sears was to exercise his own judgment as to the length of time he should retain his borrowed personality; also as to the advisability of pushing on to the mine and entering on the work there, as had been planned between them.

Sears knew what all this meant. He understood what was in his master's mind as well as if he had been taken into his full confidence, and openly accepted his part of the business with seeming alacrity, even to the point of supplying Fairbrother with suitable references as to the ability of one James Wellgood to fill a waiter's place at fashionable functions. It was not the first he had given him. Seventeen years before he had written the same, minus the last phrase. That was when he was the master and Fairbrother the man. But he did not mean to play the part laid out for him, for all his apparent acquiescence. He began by following the other's instructions. He exchanged clothes with him and other necessities, and took the train for La Junta at or near the time that Fairbrother started east. But once at El Moro—once registered there as Abner Fairbrother from New York—he took a different course from the one laid out for him, a course which finally brought him into his master's wake and landed him at the same hour in New York.

This is what he did. Instead of shutting himself up in his room, he expressed an immediate desire to visit some neighboring mines, and, procuring a good horse, started off at the first available moment. He rode north, lost himself in the mountains, and wandered till he found a guide intelligent enough to lend himself to his plans. To this guide he confided his horse for the few days he intended to be gone, paying him well and promising him additional money if, during his absence, he succeeded in circulating the report that he, Abner Fairbrother, had gone deep into the mountains, bound for such and such a camp.

Having thus provided an alibi, not only for himself but for his master, too, in case he should need it, he took the direct road to the nearest railway station and started on his long ride east. He did not expect to overtake the man he had been personating, but fortune was kinder than is usual in

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Naturally makes them shrink from the immoderate questions, the obnoxious examinations, and unpleasant local treatments, which some physicians consider essential in the treatment of diseases of women. Yet, if help can be had, it is better to submit to this ordeal than let the disease grow and spread. The trouble is that so often the woman undergoes all the annoyance and shame for nothing. Thousands of women who have been cured by Dr. Pierce's Favorite Prescription write in appreciation of the cure which dispels all the examinations and local treatments. There is no other medicine so sure and safe for delicate women as "Favorite Prescription." It cures debilitating drains, irregularity and female weakness. It always helps. It almost always cures. It is strictly non-alcoholic, non-secret, all its ingredients being printed on its bottle-wrapper; contains no deleterious or habit-forming drugs, and every native medicinal root entering into its composition has the full endorsement of those most eminent in the several schools of medical practice. Some of these numerous and strongest of professional endorsements of its ingredients, will be found in a pamphlet wrapped around the bottle, also in a booklet mailed free on request, by Dr. R. V. Pierce, Buffalo, N. Y. These professional endorsements should have far more weight than any amount of the ordinary lay, or non-professional testimonials.

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such cases, and, owing to a delay caused by some accident to a freight train, he arrived in Chicago within a couple of hours of Mr. Fairbrother, and started out of that city on the same train. But not on the same car. Sears had caught a glimpse of Fairbrother on the platform and was careful to keep out of his sight. This was easy enough. He bought a compartment in the sleeper and stayed in it till they arrived at the Grand Central station. Then he hastened out and, fortune favoring him with another glimpse of the man in whose movements he was so interested, followed him into the streets.

Fairbrother had shaved off his beard before leaving El Moro. Sears had shaved his off on the train. Both were changed, the former the more owing to a peculiarity of his mouth which up till now he had always thought best to cover. Sears therefore walked behind him without fear and was almost at his heels when this owner of one of New York's most notable mansions entered with a spruce air the doors of a prominent caterer.

Understanding the plot now and having everything to fear for his mistress, he walked the streets for some hours in a state of great indecision. Then he went up to her apartment. But he had no sooner come within sight of it than a sense of disloyalty struck him, and he slunk away, only to come sidling back when it was too late and she had started for the ball.

Trembling with apprehension, but still strangely divided in his impulses, wishing to serve master and mistress both without disloyalty to the one or injury to the other, he hesitated and argued with himself till his fears for the latter drove him to Mr. Ramsdell's house.

The night was a stormy one. The heaviest snow of the season was falling, with a high gale blowing down the sound. As he approached the house, which, as we know, is one of the modern ones in the Riverside district, he felt his heart fail him. But as he came nearer and got the full effect of glancing lights, seductive music and the cheery bustle of crowding carriages he saw in his mind's eye such a picture of his beautiful mistress, threatened unknown to herself in a quarter she little realized, that he lost all sense of what had hitherto deterred him. Making then and there his great choice, he looked about for the entrance with the full intention of seeing and warning her.

But this, he presently perceived, was totally impracticable. He could neither go to her nor expect her to come to him. Meanwhile time was passing, and if his master was there—the thought made his head dizzy, and, situated as he was among the carriages, he might have been run over in his confusion if his eyes had not suddenly fallen on a lighted window, the shade of which had been inadvertently left up.

Within this window, which was only a few feet above his head, stood the glowing image of a woman clad in pink and sparkling with jewels. Her face was turned from him, but he recognized her splendor as that of the one woman who could never be too gorgeous for his taste, and, alive to this unexpected opportunity, he made for this window with the intention of shouting up to her and so attracting her attention.

But this proved futile, and, driven at last to the end of his resources, he tore out a slip of paper from his notebook and in the dark and with the blinding snow in his eyes wrote the few broken sentences which he thought would best warn her without compromising his master. The means he took to reach her with this note I have already related. As soon as he saw it in her hands he fled the place and took the first train west. He was in a pitiable condition when, three days later, he reached the small station from which he had originally set out. The haste, the exposure, the horror of the crime he had failed to avert, had undermined his hitherto excellent constitution, and the symptoms of a serious illness were beginning to make themselves manifest. But he, like his indomitable master, possessed a great fund of energy and will power. He saw that if he was to save Abner Fairbrother (and now that Mrs. Fairbrother was dead his old master was all the world to him) he must make Fairbrother's alibi good by carrying on the deception as planned by the latter and getting his story as possible to his camp in the New Mexico mountains. He knew that he would have strength to do this, and he went about it without sparing himself.

Making his way into the mountains, he found the guide and his horse at the place agreed upon and, paying the guide enough for his services to insure a quiet tongue, rode back toward El Moro, where he was met and sent on to Santa Fe as already related.

Such is the real explanation of the well nigh unrecognizable scrawl found in Mrs. Fairbrother's hand after her death. As to the one which left Miss Grey's bedside for this same house, it was, alike in the writing and sending, the loving freak of a very sick but tender hearted girl. She had noted the look with which Mr. Grey had left her, and in her delirious state, thought that a line in her own hand would convince him of her good condition and make it possible for him to enjoy the evening. She was, however, too much afraid of her nurse to write it openly, and though she never found that scrawl, it was doubtless not very different in appearance from the one with which I had confounded it. The man to whom it was entrusted stopped for too many warming drinks on his way for it ever to reach Mr. Ramsdell's house. He did not even return home that night, and when he did put in an appearance the next morning, he was dismissed.

This takes me back to the ball and Mrs. Fairbrother. She had never had much fear of her husband till she received his old servant's note in the peculiar manner already mentioned. This, coming through the night and the wet and with all the marks of hurry upon it, did impress her greatly and led her to take the first means which offered of ridding herself of her dangerous ornament. The story of this we know.

Meanwhile a burning heart and a scheming brain were keeping up their deadly work a few paces off under the impassive aspect and active movements of the caterer's newly hired waiter, Abner Fairbrother, whose real character no one had ever been able to sound, unless it was the man who had known him in his days of struggle, was one of those dangerous men who can conceal under a still brow and a noiseless manner the most violent passions and the most desperate resolves. He was angry with his wife, who was deliberately jeopardizing his good name, and he had come there to kill her if he found her flaunting the diamond in Mr. Grey's eyes; and though no one could have detected any change in his look and manner as he passed through the room where these two were standing, the doom of that fair woman was struck when he saw the eager scrutiny and indescribable air of recognition with which this long defrauded gentleman eyed his own diamond.

He had meant to attack her openly, seize the diamond, fling it at Mr. Grey's feet and then kill himself. That had been his plan. But when he found after a round or two among the guests that nobody looked at him and nobody recognized the well known millionaire in the automaton-like figure with the formally arranged whiskers and sleekly combed hair, colder purposes intervened, and he asked himself if it would not be possible to come upon her alone, strike her blow, possess himself of the diamond and make for parts unknown before his identity could be discovered. He loved life even without the charm cast over it by this woman. Its struggles and its hard bought luxuries fascinated him. If Mr. Grey suspected him, why, Mr. Grey was English and he a resourceful American. If it came to an issue, the subtle American would win if Mr. Grey were not able to point to the flaw which marked this diamond as his own. And this Fairbrother had provided against and would succeed in if he could hold his passions in check and be ready with all his wit when matters reached a climax.

Such were the thoughts and such the plans of the quiet, attentive man who, with his tray laden with coffee and ices, came and went an unnoticed unit among the twenty other units similarly quiet and similarly attentive. He waited on lady after lady, and when, on the reissuing of Mr. Durand from the alcove, he passed in there with his tray and his two cups of coffee nobody heeded and nobody remembered.

It was all over in a minute, and he came out, still unnoticed, and went to the supper room for more cups of coffee. But that minute had set its seal on his heart forever. She was sitting there alone, with her side to the entrance, so that he had to pass around in order to face her. Her elegance and a certain air she had of remoteness from the scene of which she was the glowing center when she smiled, aved him and made his hand loosen a little on the slender stiletto he held close against the bottom of the tray. But such resolution does not easily yield, and his fingers soon tightened again, this time with a deadly grip.

He had expected to meet the flash of the diamond as he bent over her and dreaded doing so for fear it would attract his eye from her face and so cost him the sight of that startled recognition which would give the desired point to his revenge. But the tray, as he held it, shielded her breast from view, and when he lowered it to strike his blow he thought of nothing but aiming so truly as to need no second blow. He had had his experience in those old years in a mining camp, and he did not fear failure in this. What he did fear was her utterance of some cry, possibly his name, but she was stunned with horror and did not shriek—horror of him whose eyes she met with her glassy and staring ones as he slowly drew forth the weapon.

Why he drew it forth instead of leaving it in her breast he could not say. Possibly because it gave him his moment of gloating revenge. When in another instant her hands flew up and the tray tipped and the china fell the revolver came, and his eyes opened to two facts—the instrument of death was still in his grasp, and the diamond, on whose possession he counted, was gone from his wife's breast.

It was a horrible moment. Voices could be heard approaching the alcove—laughing voices that in an instant would take form on the note of horror. And the music—ah, how low it had sunk, as if to give place to the dying murmur, he now heard issuing from her lips! But he was a man of iron. Thrusting the stiletto into the first place that offered, he drew the curtains over the staring windows, then slid out with his tray, calm, speckless and attentive as ever, dead to thought.

meanwhile Mr. Grey had had his own anxieties. During this whole long evening, he had been sustained by the conviction that the diamond of which he had caught but one passing glimpse was the Great Mogul of his once famous collection. So sure was he of this, that at one moment he found himself tempted to enter the alcove, demand a closer sight of the diamond and settle the question then and there. He even went so far as to take in his hands the two cups of coffee which should serve as his excuse for this intrusion, but his naturally chivalrous instincts again intervened, and he set the cups down again—this I did not see—and turned his steps toward the library with the intention of writing her a note instead. But though he found paper and pen to hand, he could find no words for so daring a request, and he came back into the hall, only to hear that the woman he had contemplated addressing had just been murdered and her great jewel stolen.

The shock was too much, and as there was no leaving the house then, he retreated again to the library where he devoured his anxieties in silence till

# The Last Stroke.

BY LAWRENCE L. LYNCH,

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dead to feeling, but aware, quite aware in the secret depths of his being that something besides his wife had been killed that night and that sleep and peace of mind and all pleasure in the past were gone forever.

It was not he I saw enter the alcove and come out with news of the crime. He left this role to one whose antecedents could better bear investigation. His part was to play, with just the proper display of horror and curiosity, the ordinary menial brought face to face with a crime in high life. He could do this. He could even sustain his share in the gossip, and for this purpose kept near the other waiters. The absence of the diamond was all that troubled him. That brought him at times to the point of vertigo. Had Mr. Grey recognized and claimed it? If so, he, Abner Fairbrother, must remain James Wellgood, the waiter, in defiance. This would require more belief in his star than ever he had had yet. But as the moments passed and no contradiction was given to the universally received impression that the same hand which had struck the blow had taken the diamond, even this cause of anxiety left his breast, and he faced people with more and more courage till the moment when he suddenly heard that the diamond had been found in the possession of a man perfectly strange to him and saw the inspector pass it over into the hands of Mr. Grey.

Instantly he realized that the crisis of his fate was on him. If Mr. Grey were given time to identify this stone, he (Abner Fairbrother) was lost and the diamond as well. Could he prevent this? There was but one way, and that way he took. Making use of his ventriloquial powers—he had spent a year on the public stage in those early days, playing just such tricks as these—he raised the one cry which he knew would startle Mr. Grey more than any other in the world, and when the diamond fell from his hand, as he knew it would, he rushed forward and, in the act of picking it up, made that exchange which not only baffled the suspicions of the statesman, but restored to him the diamond, for whose possession he was now ready to barter half his remaining days.

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hope revived again at sight of the diamond in the inspector's hand, only to vanish under the machinations of one he did not even recognize when he took the false jewel from his hand.

The American had outwitted the Englishman and the triumph of evil was complete.

Or so it seemed. But if the Englishman is slow, he is sure. Thrown off the track for the time being, Mr. Grey had only to see a picture of the stiletto in the papers, to feel again that, despite all appearances, Fairbrother was really not only at the bottom of the thefts from which his cousin and himself had suffered, but of this frightful murder as well. He made no open move—he was a stranger in a strange land and much disturbed, besides, by his fears for his daughter—but he started a secret inquiry through his old valet, whom he ran across in the street and whose peculiar adaptability for this kind of work he well knew.

The aim of these inquiries was to determine if the person, whom two physicians and three assistants were endeavoring to nurse back to health on the top of a wild plateau in a remote district of New Mexico, was the man he had once entertained at his own board in England, and the adventures thus incurred would make a story in itself. But the result seemed to justify them. Word came after innumerable delays, very trying to Mr. Grey, that he was not the same, though he bore the name of Fairbrother, and was considered by every one around there to be Fairbrother. Mr. Grey, ignorant of the relations between the millionaire master and his man which sometimes led to the latter's personifying the former, was confident of his own mistake and bitterly ashamed of his own suspicions.

But a second message set him right. A deception was being practiced down in New Mexico, and this was how his spy had found it out. Certain letters which went into the sick tent were sent away again, and always to that one address. He had learned the address. It was that of James Wellgood, C., Maine. If Mr. Grey would look up this Wellgood he would doubtless learn something of the man he was so interested in.

This gave Mr. Grey personally something to do, for he would trust no second party with a message involving the honor of a possibly innocent man. As the place was accessible by railroad and his duty clear, he took the journey involved and succeeded in getting a glimpse in the manner we know of the man James Wellgood. This time he recognized Fairbrother and, satisfied from the circumstances of the moment that he would be making no mistake in accusing him of having taken the Great Mogul, he intercepted him in his flight, as you have already read, and demanded the immediate return of his great diamond.

And Fairbrother? We shall have to go back a little to bring his history up to this critical instant.

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