

# A DESIGNING WOMAN

OR, THE

## Plot for Alhambra Court

CHAPTER II—Continued.

"You have credentials, I presume, Mr. Udy," interrogated Mrs. Urquhart, quietly. "The best—the very best."

There was a strange vivid glow in the man's shifting, little grey eyes that was not lost upon either mother or daughter. Before he could add more to the words so significantly delivered, Mrs. Urquhart said, courteously:

"He named, Mr. Udy. On second thought, I can spare you the trouble of offering them."

With the words she stepped to a bell pull, and on the appearance of a servant gave a decisive direction.

There was an uneasy expression in the stranger's eye as he watched the proceeding, and when she seated herself near him, he remarked a little sharply, though with his unpleasant smile:

"I cannot imagine what credentials my guest possesses."

Mrs. Urquhart's proud, pale face flushed at the title, but she made no response beyond a silent bow. Mr. Udy proceeded to look about him, and speculate upon the cost of the luxury and magnificence which met his eager gaze in every direction.

The entrance of the footman recalled him from his reverie.

"Ah! a picture!" he exclaimed, as, with an immense sense of relief, he leaned toward the picture.

Mrs. Urquhart barely glanced at the ambrosy. A glance was sufficient. The man before her was certainly the original of the unpleasant picture. There could be no mistake in the unpleasant little eyes, the cadaverous, beardless face, the dark locks carefully combed, grizzled, and brushed flat to the head.

Mrs. Urquhart, after that one brief glance, handed the case to her visitor, saying as she did so:

"In the early days of my marriage, sir, my attention was called to this picture, and accordingly I secured from my husband some information concerning it. It is, however, having looked upon it since that day, I had naturally quite forgotten your features. Mr. Udy, I am fully assured that you are my late husband's half-brother."

She paused an instant. There was a sharp, brief struggle with herself. Then she said, courteously:

"Mr. Udy, we shall be pleased to have you dine with us informally. The dressing will range a few minutes before your arrival, and your early dinner will shortly be served."

Mr. Udy's small grey eyes twinkled with satisfaction.

"My sister," he cried, "you do me great honour. I accept the invitation with unalloyed delight."

As he spoke, Mrs. Urquhart and Alhambra rose. Courteously begging to be excused the lady said:

"I will send a servant to conduct you to a dressing room."

With a slight inclination of the head she made a movement to turn away.

But Mr. Udy had something more to say. At intervals, as he found the opportunity, his eyes had been furtively occupied with Alhambra's lovely face. Now, as she stood before him, slight and graceful as a reed, he smiled faintly.

"And this is your ad—"

Mrs. Urquhart hurriedly interposed, her pale face flushing perceptibly.

"And this is my adored daughter, Mr. Udy."

As she spoke the words, she rivetted her beautiful blue eyes upon him with a proud, commanding significance that seemed to be fully understood.

Mr. Udy smiled meekly, and bowed faintly.

"And a daughter worthy of adoration, my dear sister."

Mrs. Urquhart drew up her stately person into unconscious haughtiness.

"Mr. Udy," she said, "you will oblige me by addressing me by name."

Again Mr. Udy bowed, again acquiesced. But as she turned away led the court with her daughter, a dark, sinister smile of malice triumphed on his thin lips.

"Fifty-fifty, my dear lady," he chuckled; "you won't be quite so independent at the end of the next forty-eight hours. Mr. Udy knows what he's about, my dear sister. He hasn't lived in South America so long without learning a thing or two. So look out! for as sure as you live, you and that adored daughter of yours are fast under this long thumb of mine."

With these ominous words he cast a glance of satisfaction about him, exclaiming in quick, keen accents:

"I did well to force my way in here, otherwise I'd have missed this early glimpse of my beautiful face, but this alone is enough to repay me for—"

He started and stopped short, a livid circle defining itself about his mouth.

"Fah!" he muttered, as if in self-contempt. With a slight gulp he shook on his emotion, whatever its cause, and went on in his former exulting accents:

"I found the place to take up a fellow's bed and board in this Alhambra Court. Ah! Charming ready, sah," announced a voice behind him.

Mr. Udy wheeled about with a violent start.

CHAPTER III

MR. UDY'S STARTLING STATEMENT.

Mr. Udy's glance fell upon the footman with a thrill of alarm.

"How could he nigger hear?" he asked himself, keenly eyeing the man.

But with a marvelous assumption of bland composure he said:

"Very good my fine fellow. Lead on."

Mrs. Urquhart and Alhambra had just descended to the drawing-room when he left his dressing-room.

Immediately on his appearance dinner was announced.

It proved a heavy affair, though both Mrs. Urquhart and Alhambra politely excused themselves to render it pleasant to their guest.

Mr. Udy's appetite however was excellent. He did not spare justice to the viands spread before him.

With the appearance of the desert, and the retirement of the servants, he seemed to arouse himself intellectually.

Selecting half a dozen magnificent strawberries from the dish before him, he smiled blandly.

"Suppose Alhambra, as I am poor Guy's brother, you are entitled to a little of my history?"

"Not at all," hastily protested Mrs. Urquhart, hoping to thus ward off the threatened infliction.

Mr. Udy had his object, and persisted; at the same time chuckling over the annoyance he perceived his familiar address occasioned both ladies.

"It is only right, Alhambra," he returned. "In strict truth, it is necessary."

He paused a moment, then said interrogatively:

"Does Guy tell you all about my adventures of South America as a home?"

Mrs. Urquhart assented with a bow, adding briefly:

"And also that he had seen you but once during the years of your residence there."

"Quite correct," nodded Mr. Udy blandly. "Or rather, quite correct to a certain degree, of which I am not sure."

An inscrutable smile gleamed in his eyes, and fitted across his lips as he uttered those last words.

Another slight pause and he again spoke, interrogatively:

"You were, I believe, married just six months after I went to Brazil?"

Mrs. Urquhart replied in the affirmative. He smiled, disposed of the last of his strawberries, and selected another half dozen. This accomplished to his satisfaction, he resumed:

"It seems odd that you and I should never

have met till to-day. But you, you know, just one of those things which could not be helped."

Mr. Urquhart bowed in response, and he proceeded:

"I thought when I got back to the States a year ago, that I'd hunt Guy up, and make you a visit. While the thought was still in my mind, what should I do but stumble upon Guy himself in New York. That meeting led to another appointment."

"You met my husband—twice—once by appointment?" interposed Mrs. Urquhart, in tones so incredulous that Udy qualified a little in a hasty reply:

"He answered boldly enough, however."

"Can it be possible," he slowly interrogated, "that he did not speak of it to you, Alhambra?"

"He certainly did not," she hastily replied, her eyes vainly striving to penetrate the mind of her guest. "And Mr. Udy, it was wholly unlike him. We had no secrets from each other," she concluded a little faintly.

Mr. Udy balanced a strawberry on the edge of his spoon, gazing at it with knitted brows. Presently he looked up at Mrs. Urquhart and said with a slight smile:

"A will is the last thing a man wants to make, and the very last he wants to talk about. I would declare it that will, and not take the matter to heart."

He paused, adding musingly, the next instant:

"Still, I naturally thought he would mention it to you."

Mrs. Urquhart and Alhambra had sat gazing at him with blank surprise, and then, as he continued to speak, the former's face assumed a look of intense interest.

Mr. Udy answered with smiling alacrity:

"Certainly, certainly, my dear sister—Alhambra—for the sake of the purpose of my explanation that I am here to-day; and I shall take pleasure in formally doing so at once."

"And he daintily dipped and dried the tips of his long, lean fingers, and otherwise signified that his meal was ended."

Mrs. Urquhart immediately rose, and they returned to her own room.

As she and Alhambra mechanically seated themselves, Mr. Udy stepped to a window, and with a blank expression, adjusted the blinds so as to throw more light into the room. He then crept, in his cat-like way, to a seat in front of Mrs. Urquhart and Alhambra.

"What should I say to you?" he asked, and with a deep sigh, and with a legal-looking document from his pocket.

He looked at the document and read it. Then he looked at Mrs. Urquhart's face, and then at Alhambra's.

"I have here, Alhambra, the last—the last will and testament of Guy Urquhart."

Struck dumb and motionless by this unexpected announcement, Mrs. Urquhart and Alhambra simply stared at him, too much confounded to be even vaguely alarmed.

Mr. Udy coolly proceeded:

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was heavy enough, even before her mother answered.

"There is no hope, Alhambra; we are in the hands of the law."

Mrs. Urquhart's words seemed prophetic. Early as Mr. Pinard called the following morning he reported that he had just parted from a lawyer, the gentleman of the law who would not be disputed.

"You cannot lay your finger on a law," he concluded, "but you can lay your finger on a man."

"You receive only the legal percentage, and even the servants are suitably remunerated. In the eye of the law Mr. Udy is sole executor, and as such, to dispute the validity of the will on the ground that he is would be utter folly. And there is my own name in it, as well as that of my clerk beneath, challenges me to say one word."

"You read it at the time you witnessed it?" asked Mrs. Urquhart, in low, pained tones.

"Mr. Pinard shook his head.

"Poor Urquhart wrote it himself, and only came to my office to have it properly witnessed. I know nothing of its contents."

"Then you are satisfied that this will is the one you witnessed, Mr. Pinard?"

Mrs. Urquhart asked the question with a keen gaze riveted upon the little lawyer's deep-set, penetrating brown eyes.

His reply was evasive but emphatic:

"I would declare it that will, and not my dear Mrs. Urquhart."

Mrs. Urquhart sighed, and soon after he rose to take leave.

"I regret," he said at parting, "that I cannot be at home just at this juncture. As I wrote you, I must be off again soon—perhaps a few weeks, perhaps in a very few days. I shall, however, see you again, and now one last charge: Never give your signature without knowing absolutely the contents of the document."

"Poor things! Poor things!" he muttered, as a little later he hurried from the door, and with a look of intense anxiety on his face, he hurried to his study.

And so the story went on. Mr. Udy, however, was not to be so easily deceived. He knew that every word you have uttered is false! And more—and more!"

"And he daintily dipped and dried the tips of his long, lean fingers, and otherwise signified that his meal was ended."

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