

Filigree Ball

By ANNA KATHARINE GREEN,

Author of "The Mystery of Agatha Webb," "Lost Man's Lane," Etc.

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[TO BE CONTINUED.]

CHAPTER III.

NOT for an instant did I doubt the correctness of this identification. All the pictures I had seen of this well known society belle had been marked by an individuality of expression which fixed her face in the memory and which I now saw repeated in the lifeless features before me.

Having sent the two willing Hibbard to notify headquarters, I was on the point of making a memorandum of such details as seemed important, when my lantern suddenly went out, leaving me in total darkness.

This was far from pleasant, but the effect it produced upon my mind was not without its result; for no sooner did I find myself alone and in the unrelieved darkness of this gravenike room than I became convinced that no woman, however friendly, would make her plunge into an unknown existence from the midst of a darkness only too suggestive of the tomb to which she was hastening. It was not in nature, not in woman's nature, at all events, either she had committed the final act before such daylight as could filter through the shutters of this closed room had quite disappeared—a hypothesis instantly destroyed by the warmth which still lingered in certain portions of her body—or else the light which had been burning when she pulled the fatal trigger had since been carried elsewhere or extinguished.

Recalling the uncertain gleams which we had seen flashing from one of the upper windows, I was inclined to give some credence to the former theory, but was disposed to be fair to both. So after relighting my lamp I turned on one of the gas cocks of the massive chandelier over my head and applied a match. The result was just what I anticipated; no gas in the pipes. A meter had not been put in for the wedding. This the papers had repeatedly stated in dwelling upon the garish effect of the daylight on the elaborate costumes worn by the ladies. Candles had not even been provided—ah, candles! What, then, was it that I saw glittering on a small table at the other end of the room? Surely a candlestick, or, rather, an old fashioned candelabrum with a half burned candle in one of its sockets. Hastily crossing to it, I felt of the candle wick. It was quite stiff and hard. But not considering this a satisfactory proof that it had not been lately burning—the tip of the wick soon dried after the flame is blown out—I took out my penknife and attacked the wick at what might be called its root; whereupon I found that where the threads had been protected by the wax they were comparatively soft and penetrable.

The conclusion was obvious. True to my instinct in this matter, the woman had not lifted her weapon in darkness; this candle had been burning. But here my thoughts received a fresh shock. If burning, then by whom had it since been blown out? Not by her; her wound was too fatally sure for that. The steps taken between the table where the candelabrum stood and the place where she lay were taken, if taken at all by her, before that shot was fired. Some one else—some one whose breath still lingered in the air about me—had extinguished this candle flame after she fell, and the death I looked down upon was not a suicide, but a murder!

The excitement which this discovery caused to tingle through my every nerve had its birth in the ambitious feeling referred to in the opening paragraph of this narrative. I believed that my long sought for opportunity had come; that with the start given me by the conviction just stated I should be enabled to collect such clues and establish such facts as would lead to the acceptance of this new theory instead of the apparent one of suicide embraced by Hibbard and about to be promulgated at police headquarters. If so, what a triumph would be mine and what a debt I should owe to the crabbled old gentleman whose seemingly fantastic fears had first drawn me to this place!

Realizing the value of the opportunity afforded me by the few minutes I was likely to spend alone on this scene of crime, I proceeded to my task with that directness and method which I had always promised myself should characterize my first success in detective work.

First, then, for another look at the fair young victim herself! What a line of misery on the brow! What dark hollows disfiguring cheeks otherwise as delicate as the petals of a rose! An interesting if not absolutely beautiful face, it told me something I could hardly put into words; so that it was like leaving a fascinating but unsolved mystery when I finally turned from it to study the hands, each of which presented a separate problem. That offered by the right wrist you already know—the long white ribbon connecting it with the discharged pistol.

But the secret concealed by the left, while less startling, was perhaps fully as significant. All the rings were gone, even the wedding ring which had been placed there such a short time before. Had she been robbed? There were no

The great settle in the room of death



action by a criminal's hand. The box of delicate black net which encircled her neck rose fresh and intact to her chin; nor did the heavy folds of her rich broadcloth gown betray that any disturbance had taken place in her figure after its fall. If a jewel had flashed at her throat, or earrings adorned her ears, they had been removed by a careful, if not a loving, hand. But I was rather inclined to think that she had entered upon the scene of her death without ornaments,—such severe simplicity marked her whole attire.

Her hat, which was as plain and also as elegant as the rest of her clothing, lay near her on the floor. It had been taken off and thrown down, manifestly by an impatient hand. That this hand was her own was evident from a small but very significant fact. The pin which had held it to her hair had been thrust again into the hat. No hand but hers would have taken this precaution. A man would have flung it aside just as he would have flung the hat.

Question: Did this argue a natural expectation on her part of resuming her hat, or was the action the result of an unconscious habit?

Having thus noted all that was possible concerning her without infringing on the rights of the coroner, I next proceeded to cast about for clues to the identity of the person whom I considered responsible for the extinguished candle. But here a great disappointment awaited me. I could find nothing expressive of a second person's presence save a pile of cigar ashes scattered near the legs of a common kitchen chair which stood face to face with the bookshelves in that part of the room where the candelabrum rested on a small table. But these ashes looked old, nor could I detect any evidence of tobacco smoke in the general mustiness pervading the place. Was the

man who died here a fortnight since accountable for these ashes? If so, his unfinished cigar must be within sight. Should I search for it? No, for this would take me to the hearth and that was quite too deadly a place to be heedlessly approached.

Besides, I was not yet finished with the spot where I then stood. If I could gather nothing satisfactory from the ashes, perhaps I could from the chair or the shelves before which it had been placed. Some one with an interest in books had sat there; some one who expected to spend sufficient time over these old tomes to feel the need of a chair. Had this interest been a general one, or had it centered in a particular volume? I ran my eye over the shelves within reach, possibly with an idea of settling this question, and though my knowledge of books is limited I could see that these were what one might call rarities. Some of them contained specimens of black letter, all moldy and smothered in dust; in others I saw dates of publication which placed them among volumes dear to a collector's heart. But none of them, so far as I could see, gave any evidence of having been lately handled; and, anxious to waste no time on puerile details, I hastily quitted my chair and was proceeding to turn my attention elsewhere when I noticed on an upper shelf a book projecting slightly beyond the others. Instantly my foot was on the chair and the book in my hand. Did I find it of interest? Yes, but not on account of its contents, for they were pure Greek to me, but because it lacked the dust on its upper edge which had marked every other volume I had handled. This, then, was what had attracted the unknown to these shelves, this—let me see if I can remember its title—"Disquisition Upon Old Coast Lines." Pshaw! I was wasting my time. What had such a dry compendium as this to do with the body lying in its blood a few steps behind me, or with the hand which had put out the candle upon this dreadful deed? Nothing. I replaced the book, but not so hastily as to push it one inch beyond the position in which I found it. For, if it had a tale to tell, then was it my business to leave that tale to be read by those who understood books better than I did.

My next move was toward the little table holding the candelabrum with the glittering pendants. This table was one of a nest standing against a

nearly wall. Investigation proved that it had been lifted from the others and brought to its present position within a very short space of time, for the dust lying thick on its top was almost entirely lacking from the one which had been nested under it. Neither had the candelabrum been standing there long, dust being found under as well as around it. Had her hand brought it there? Hardly, if it came from the top of the mantel toward which I now turned in my course of investigation.

I have already mentioned this mantel more than once. This I could hardly avoid, since in and about it lay the heart of the mystery for which the room was remarkable. But, though I have thus freely spoken of it and though it was not absent from my thoughts for a moment, I had not ventured to approach it beyond a certain safe radius. Now in looking to see if I might not lessen this radius I experienced that sudden and overwhelming interest in its every feature which attaches to all objects peculiarly associated with danger.

I even took a step toward it, holding up my lamp so that a stray ray struck the faded surface of an old engraving hanging over the fireplace. It was the well known one, in Washington at least, of Benjamin Franklin at the court of France, interesting, no doubt, in a general way, but scarcely calculated to hold the eye at so critical an instant. Neither did the shelf below call for more than momentary attention, for it was absolutely bare. So was the time worn, if not blood stained, hearth, save for the impenetrable shadow cast over it by the huge bulk of the great settle standing at its edge.

I have already described the impression made on me at my first entrance by this ancient and characteristic article of furniture.

It was intensified now as my eye ran over the clumsy carving which added to the discomfort of its high, straight back and as I smelled the smell of its moldy and possibly mouse haunted cushions. A crawling sense of dread took the place of my first instinctive repugnance, not because superstition had as yet laid its grip upon me, although the place, the hour and the near and veritable presence of death were enough to rouse the imagination past the bounds of the actual, but because of a discovery I had made—a discovery which emphasized the tradition that all who had been found dead under the mantel had fallen as if from the end of this monstrous and patriarchal bench. Do you ask what this discovery was? It can be told in a word. This one end and only this end had been made comfortable for the sitter. For a space scarcely wide enough for one the seat and back at this special point had been upholstered with leather, fastened to the wood with heavy wrought nails. The remaining portion stretched out bare, hard and inexpressibly forbidding to one who sought ease there or even a moment of casual rest.

The natural inference was that the owner of this quaint piece of furniture had been a very selfish man who thought only of his own comfort. But might he not have had some other reason for his apparent niggardliness? As I asked myself this question and noted how the long and embracing arm which guarded this cushioned retreat was fattened on top for the convenient holding of decanter and glass, feelings to which I can give no name and which I had fondly believed my

self proof against began to take the place of judgment and reason. Before I realized the nature of my own impulse or to what it was driving me I found myself moving slowly and steadily toward this formidable seat under an irresistible desire to fling myself down upon these old cushions and—

But here the creaking of some far-off shutter, possibly the one I had seen swaying from the opposite side of the street, recalled me to the duties of the hour, and, remembering that my investigations were but half completed and that I might be interrupted any moment by detectives from headquarters, I broke from the accursed charm, which horrified me the moment I escaped it, and, quitting the room by a door at the farther end, sought to find in some of the adjacent rooms the definite traces I had failed to discover on this the actual scene of the crime.

It was a dismal search, revealing at every turn the almost maddened haste with which the house had been abandoned. I passed out into the kitchen and so on by a close and narrow passage to the negro quarters clustered in the rear. Here I made a discovery. One of the windows in this long disused portion of the house was not only unlocked, but partly open. But, as I came upon no marks showing that this outlet had been used by the escaping murderer, I made my way back to the

The candle in the tumbler



front of the house and thus to the stairs communicating with the upper floor.

It was on the rug lying at the foot of these stairs that I came upon the first of a dozen or more burned matches which lay in a distinct trail up the staircase and along the floors of the upper halls. As these matches were all burned as short as fingers could hold them, it was evident that they had been used to light the steps or some one seeking refuge above, possibly in the very room where we had seen the light which had first drawn us to this house. How then? Should I

proceed, or await the coming of the "boys" before pushing in upon a possible murderer? I decided to proceed, fascinated, I think, by the nicety of the trail which lay before me.

But when after a careful following in the steps of him who had so lately preceded me I came upon a tightly closed door at the end of a side passage, I gave a slight push to the door and, on seeing a crack of light leap into life along the jamb, pushed the door wider and wider till the whole room stood revealed.

The instantaneous banging of a shutter in one of its windows proved the room to be the very one which we had seen lighted from below. Otherwise all was still, nor was I able to detect in my first hurried glance any other token of human presence than a candle sputtering in its own grease at the bottom of a tumbler placed on one corner of an old fashioned dressing table. This, the one touch of incongruity in a room otherwise rich if not stately in its appointments, was loud in its suggestion of some hidden presence given to expectants and reckless of consequences, but of this presence nothing was to be seen.

Not satisfied with this short survey, I turned my attention to my surroundings, which had many points of interest. Foremost among these was the big four poster which occupied a large space at my right. I had never seen its like in use before, and I was greatly attracted by its size and the air of mystery imparted to it by its closely drawn curtains of faded brocade.

A dressing table laden with woman's fixings and various articles of the toilet, all of an unexpected value and richness, occupied the space between the two windows, and on the floor, immediately in front of a high mahogany mantel, there lay, amid a number of empty boxes, an overturned chair. This chair and the conjectures its position awakened led me to look up at the mantel, with which it seemed to be in some way connected, and thus I became aware of a wan old drawing hanging on the wall above it. Why this picture, which was a totally uninteresting sketch of a smirking girl face, should have held my eye after the first glance I cannot say even now. It had no beauty, even of the sentimental kind, and very little if any meaning. Its lines, weak at the best, were nearly obliterated and in some places quite faded out, yet I not only paused to look at it, but in looking at it forgot myself and well high my errand. Yet there was no apparent reason for the spell it exerted over me.

It may seem both unnecessary and out of character for a man of my calling to acknowledge these chance sensations, but only by doing so can I account for the minutes which elapsed before I summoned sufficient self possession to draw aside the closed curtains of the bed and take the quick look inside which my present doubtful position demanded. But, once I had broken the spell and taken the look just mentioned, I found my manhood return and with it my old ardor for clues. The bed held no gapping, chattering criminal, yet was it not quite empty. Something lay there, and this something, while commonplace in itself, was enough out of keeping with the place and hour to rouse my interest and awaken my conjectures. It was a lady's wrap, so rich in quality and of such a festive appearance that it was astonishing to find it lying in a neglected state in this crumbling old house. Though I know little of the cost of women's garments, I do know

the value of lace, and this garment was covered with it.

Interesting as was this find, it was followed by one still more so. Nested in the folds of the cloak lay the withered remains of what could only have been the bridal bouquet. Unlikely now and scentless, it was once a beautiful specimen of the florist's art. As I noted how the main bunch of roses and lilies was connected by long satin ribbons to the lesser clusters which hung from it I recalled with conceivable horror the use to which a similar ribbon had been put in the room below. In the shudder called up by this coincidence I forgot to speculate how a bouquet carried by the bride could have found its way back to this upstairs room when, as all accounts agree, she had fled from the parlor below without speaking or staying for the moment she was told of the catastrophe which had taken place in the library. That her wrap should be lying here was not strange, but that the wedding bouquet—

That it really was the wedding bouquet and that this was the room in which the bride had dressed for the ceremony was apparent to the most casual observer. But it became an established fact when in my further course about the room I chanced on a handkerchief with the name Veronica embroidered in one corner.

This handkerchief had an interest apart from the name on it. It was of dainty texture and quite in keeping so far as value went with the other belongings of its fastidious owner. But it was not clean. Indeed it was strangely soiled, and this soil was of a nature I did not readily understand. A woman would doubtless have comprehended immediately the cause of the brown streaks I found on it, but it took me several minutes to realize that this bit of cambric, delicate as a cobweb, had been used to remove dust. To remove dust! Dust from what? From the mantelshelf probably, upon one end of which I found it. But no! One look along the polished boards convinced me that whatever else had been dusted in this room this shelf had not. The accumulation of days if not of months was visible from one end to the other of its unrelieved surface save where the handkerchief had laid, and—the greatest discovery yet—where five clear spots just to the left

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of the center showed where some man's finger tips had rested. Nothing but the pressure of finger tips could have caused just the appearance presented by these spots. By scrutinizing them closely I could even tell where the thumb had rested and at once saw the possibility of determining by means of these marks both the size and shape of the hand which had left behind it so neat and unmistakable a clew.

Wonderful! But what did it all mean? Why should a man rest his finger tips on this out of the way shelf? Had he done so in an effort to balance himself for a look up the chimney? No, for then the marks made by his fingers would have extended to the edge of the shelf, whereas these were in the middle of it. Their shape, too, was round not oblong. Hence the pressure had come from above, and—ah! I had it! These impressions in the dust of the shelf were just such as would be made by a person steadying himself for a close look at the old picture. And this accounted also for the overturned chair and for the handkerchief used as a duster. Some one's interest in this picture had been greater than mine; some one who was either very near sighted or whose temperament was such that only the closest inspection would satisfy an aroused curiosity.

This gave me an idea, or, rather, impressed upon me the necessity of preserving the outline of these telltale marks while they were still plain to the eye. Taking out my penknife, I lightly ran the point of my sharpest blade around each separate impression till I had fixed them for all time in the well worn varnish of the mahogany. This done, my thoughts returned to the question already raised. What was there in this old picture to arouse such curiosity in one bent on evil if not fresh from a hideous crime? I have said before that the picture as a picture was worthless, a mere faded sketch, fit only for lumbering up some old garret. Then wherein lay its charm, a charm which I myself had felt, though not to this extent? It was useless to conjecture. A fresh difficulty had been added to my task by this puzzling discovery, but difficulties only increased my interest. It was with an odd feeling of elation that, in a further examination of this room, I came upon two additional facts equally odd and irreconcilable.

One was the presence of a penknife, with the file blade open, on a small table under the window marked by the

The penknife and the fittings on the table



loosened shutter. Scattered about it were some things which shone as the light from my lantern fell upon them, but which were so fine as to call for a magnifying glass to make them out. The other was in connection with a

closet not far from the great bed. It was an empty closet, so far as the hooks went and the two great drawers which I found standing half open at its back, but in the middle of the floor lay an overturned candelabrum similar to the one below, but with its prisms scattered and its one candle crushed and battered out of all shape on the blackened boards. If upset while alight the foot which had stamped upon it in a wild endeavor to put out the flames had been a frenzied one. Now, by whom had this frenzy been shown and when? Within the hour? I could detect no smell of smoke. At some former time, then—say on the day of the bridal?

Glancing from the broken candle at my feet to the one giving its last sputter in the tumbler on the dressing table, I owned myself perplexed.

Surely no ordinary explanation fitted these extraordinary and seemingly contradictory circumstances.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

CLOTHES AND THE MOTH.

Plans For Keeping Winter Garments Safe Through the Summer.

The most effective way to render a house moth proof is to give it each recurring spring and fall a general and thorough cleaning. One of the arch enemies of the moth is cleanliness. Another is light. This pest, like all evil doers, loves dark haunts and dirt and hates the sunlight, says a writer in Good Housekeeping.

To the possessor of a cedar chest or wardrobe the task of storing clothing is a comparatively easy one.

Moth balls are considered by many to be adequate protection if dropped among stored articles. But on account of the disagreeable odor which clings to garments long after unpacking their use becomes objectionable.

All fur garments, rugs and the like should be safely stored before there has been heat enough to transform the chrysalis into the winged insect. The preliminary step in putting away furs for the summer is to give them a thorough combing with a dressing comb, thereby dislodging any possible torpid worm or eggs. Then after beating well and airing sprinkle freely with pulverized gum camphor, cedar dust, tobacco leaves or anything else highly aromatic, and dispose of the furs in paper four sacks of ample size.

Do not tie the openings of the sacks, but instead turn the edges over and paste them down with a strip of muslin. When four sacks are not obtainable make sacks of newspapers, pasting, not sewing, the edges together. Printers' ink is said to be peculiarly obnoxious to moths and other insects. Blankets may be safely stored in such receptacles provided always the blankets are clean. Indeed too much stress cannot be laid upon the necessity for having all stored articles scrupulously clean.

The oil of cedar is said to be a sure preventive against the ravages of moths. As to oil stains, care must be taken that it does not come in contact with clothing.