

# The Filigree Ball

By ANNA KATHARINE GREEN,

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

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"You cannot give us any phrase or word that was uttered there?"

"No."  
"Is this your final reply on this subject?"

"It is."  
Simultaneously with her withdrawal the gleam of sensibility left the faces of the jury, and the dark and brooding look which had marked their countenances from the beginning returned, and returned to stay.

The ceremony with which that jury arrived at its verdict was a shock to us all. It had been a quiet body, offering but little assistance to the coroner in his questioning, but when it fell to these men to act, the precision with which they did so was astonishing. In a half hour they returned from the room into which they had adjourned, and the foreman gave warning that he was prepared to render a verdict.

Mr. Jeffrey and Miss Tuttle both clinched their hands; then Miss Tuttle pulled down her veil.  
"We find," said the solemn foreman, "that Veronica Moore Jeffrey, who on the night of May 11 was discovered lying dead on the floor of her own unoccupied house in Waverley avenue, came to her death by means of a bullet, shot from a pistol connected to her wrist by a length of white satin ribbon.

"That the first conclusion of suicide is not fully sustained by the facts.  
"And that attempt should be made to identify the hand that fired this pistol."

It was as near an accusation of Miss Tuttle as was possible without mentioning her name. A groan passed through the assemblage, and Mr. Jeffrey, bounding to his feet, showed an inclination to shout aloud in his violent indignation, but Miss Tuttle, turning toward him, lifted her hand with a commanding gesture and held it so till he sat down again.  
"It was both a majestic and an utterly incomprehensible movement on her part, giving to the close of these remarkable proceedings a dramatic climax which set all hearts beating and, I am bound to say, all tongues wagging till the room cleared.

## CHAPTER XVI.

MEANWHILE, and before any of us had left this room, one fact had become apparent—

Mr. Jeffrey was not going to volunteer any fresh statement in face of the distinct disapproval of his sister-in-law. As his eye fell upon the district attorney, who had lingered near, possibly in the hope of getting something more from this depressed and almost insensible man, he made one remark, but it was an automatic one, calculated to produce but little effect on the discriminating ears of this experienced official.

"I do not believe that my wife was murdered." This was what he said. "It was a wicked verdict. My wife killed herself. Wasn't the pistol found tied to her?"

Meanwhile a fact which all had noted and commented on had recurred to my mind and caused me to ask a brother officer who was walking out beside me what he thought of Mr. Moore's absence from an inquiry presumably of such importance to all members of his family.

The fellow laughed and said:  
"Old Dave has lost none of his peculiarities in walking into his fortune. This is his day at the cemetery. Didn't you know that? He will let nothing on earth get in the way of his pilgrimage to that spot on the 23d of May, much less so trivial an occurrence as an inquest over the remains of his nearest relative."

I felt my gorge rise; then a thought struck me and I asked how long the old gentleman kept up his watch.

"From sunrise to sundown, the boys say. I never saw him there myself. My beat lies in an opposite direction."

I left him and started for Rock Creek cemetery. There were two good hours yet before sundown and I resolved to meet Uncle David at his post.

It took just one hour and a quarter to get there by the most direct route I could take, five minutes more to penetrate the grounds to where a superb vehicle stood, drawn by two of the finest horses I had seen in Washington for many a long day. As I was making my way around this equipage I came upon a plot in a condition of upheaval preparatory to new sodding and the planting of several choice shrubs. In the midst of the sand thus exposed a single headstone rose. On his knees beside this simple monument I saw the figure of Uncle David, dressed in his finest clothes and showing in his oddly contorted face the satisfaction of great prosperity battling with the dissatisfaction of knowing that one he had so loved had not lived to share his elevation. He was rubbing away the mold from the name which, by his own confession, was the only one to which his memory clung in sympathy or endearment. At his feet lay an open basket, in which I detected the remains of what must have been a rather sumptuous cold repast. To all appearance he had foregone none of his ancient customs; only those customs had

taken on elegance with his rise in fortune. The carriage and the horses and, most of all, the imperturbable driver seemed to awaken some awe in the boys. They were still in evidence, but they hung back sheepishly and eyed the basket of selected food as if they hoped he would forget to take it away. Meanwhile the clattering of chains against the harness, the pawing of the horses and the low exclamations of the driver caused me the queerest feelings. Advancing quite unceremoniously upon the watcher by the grave, I remarked aloud:

"The setting sun will soon release you, Mr. Moore. Are you going immediately into town?"

He paused in his rubbing, which was being done with a very tender hand, and as if he really loved the name he was endeavoring to bring into plainer view. Scowling a little, he turned and met me point blank with a look which had a good deal of inquiry in it.

"I am not usually interrupted here," he emphasized—"except by the boys," he added more mildly. "They sometimes approach too closely, but I am used to the lumps and scarcely notice them. Ah, there are some of my old friends now! Well, it is time they knew that a change has taken place in my fortunes. Hi, there! Hand up an' catch this and this!" he shouted. "But keep quiet about it, or no year you will get penitents again!"

And, flinging quarters right and left, he smiled in such a pompous, self-satisfied way at the hurrah and scramble which ensued, that it was well worth my journey there just to see this exhibition of combined vanity and good humor.

"Now go!" he vociferated; and the urchins, black and white, flew away, flinging up their heels in delight and shouting: "Bully for you, Uncle David! We'll come again next year, not for twenty-five, but fifty."

"I will make it dollars if I only live so long," he muttered. And deigning now to remember the question I had put to him, he grandly remarked: "I am going straight into town. Can I do anything for you?"

"Nothing. I thought you might like to know what awaits you there. The city is greatly stirred up. The coroner's jury in the Jeffrey-Moore case has just brought in a verdict to the effect that suicide has not been proved. Naturally, this is equivalent to one of murder."

"Ah!" he ejaculated, slightly taken aback for one so invariably impassive. "And to whom is the guilt of this crime ascribed?" he presently ventured.

"There was mention of no name, but the opprobrium naturally falls on Miss Tuttle."

"Miss Tuttle? Ah!"  
"Since Mr. Jeffrey is proved to have been too far away at the time to have fired that shot, while she—"

"I am following you!"  
"Was in the very house—at the door of the library in fact—and heard the pistol discharged, if she did not discharge it herself—which some believe, notably the district attorney. You should have been there, Mr. Moore."

He looked surprised at this suggestion.

"I never am anywhere but here on the 23d of May," he declared.

Uncle David on his knees at the grave



"Miss Tuttle needed some adviser."  
"Ah, probably."  
"You would have been a good one."  
"And a welcome one, eh?"  
I hardly thought he would have been a welcome one, but I did not admit the fact. Nevertheless he seized on the advantage he evidently thought he had gained and added, slyly enough, or rather, without any display of feeling:

"Miss Tuttle likes me even less than Veronica did. I do not think she would have accepted, certainly she would not have desired, my presence in her counsels. But of one thing I wish her to be assured, her and the world in general. Any money she may need at this—at this unhappy crisis in her life, she will find me amply supplied. She has no claims on me, but that makes little difference where the family honor is concerned. Her mother's husband was

my brother—the girl shall have all she needs. I will write her so."

He was moving toward his carriage. "Fine turnout?" he interrogatively remarked.

all the wonder even—which his splendid equipage seemed to invite.  
"It is the best that fortune could raise in the time I allotted him. When I really finger the money, we shall see, we shall see."

His foot was on the carriage step. He looked up at the west. The sun was almost down, but not quite. "Have you any special business with me?" he asked, lingering with what I thought a surprising display of consciousness till the last ray of the sunlight had disappeared.

I glanced up at the coachman sitting on his box as rigid as any stone.

"You may speak," said he; "Caesar neither hears nor sees anything but his horses when he drives me."

The black did not wince. He was as completely at home on the box and as quiet and composed in his service as if he had driven this man for years.

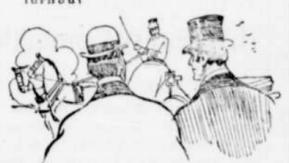
"He understands his duty," finished the master, but with no outward appearance of pride. "What have you to say to me?"

I hesitated no longer.  
"Miss Tuttle is supposed to have secretly entered the Moore house on the night you summoned us. She even says she did. I know that you have sworn to having seen no one go into that house, but notwithstanding this, haven't you some means at your disposal for proving to the police and to the world at large that she never fired that fatal shot? Public opinion is so cruel. She will be ruined, whether innocent or guilty, unless it can be very plainly shown that she did not enter the library prior to going there with the pistol."

"And how can you suppose me to be in a position to prove that? Say that I had sat in my front window all that evening and watched with uninterrupted assiduity the door through which so many are said to have passed between sunset and midnight—something which I did not do, as I have plainly stated on oath—how could you have expected me to see what went on in the black interior of a house whose exterior is barely discernible at night across the street?"

"Then you cannot aid her?" I asked.  
"With a light bound he leaped into the carriage. As he took his seat he politely remarked:  
"I should be glad to, since, though not a Moore, she is near enough the family to affect its honor. But, not having even seen her enter the house, I cannot testify in any way in regard to her. Home, Caesar, and drive quickly. I do not thrive under these evening demps."

And, leaning back with an inexpressible air of contentment with himself, his equipage and the prospect of an indefinite enjoyment of the same, the last representative of the great Moore family was quietly driven away.



CHAPTER XVII.

I MUST admit that it was not entirely owing to disinterested motives that I now took the secret stand I did in Miss Tuttle's favor.

I clung to my convictions with an almost insensate persistence, inwardly declaring her the victim of circumstances and hoping against hope that some clew would offer itself by means of which I might yet prove her so.

Had Mr. Jeffrey's alibi been less complete he could not have stood up against the suspicions which now ran riot. But there was no possibility of shifting the actual crime back to him after the testimony of so frank and trustworthy a man as Tallman. If the stopping of Mrs. Jeffrey's watch fixed the moment of her death as accurately as was supposed—and I never heard the least doubt thrown out in this regard—he could not by any means of transit then known in Washington have reached Waverley avenue in time to fire that shot. The gates of the cemetery were closed at sundown. Sundown took place that night at one minute past 7, and the distance into town is considerable. His alibi could not be gainsaid. So his name failed to be publicly broached in connection with the shooting, though his influence over Miss Tuttle could not be forgotten, suggesting to some that she had acted as his hand in the deed which robbed him of an undesirable wife. But this I would not believe. I preferred to accept the statement that she had stopped short of the library door in her suspicious visit there and that the ribbon tying, which went for so much, had been done at home.

Finding myself, with every new consideration of the tantalizing subject, deeper and deeper in the quagmire of doubt and uncertainty, I sought enlightenment by making a memorandum of the special points which must have influenced the jury in their verdict, as witness:

First.—The relief shown by Mr. Jeffrey at finding an apparent communication from his wife hinting at suicide.

Second.—The possibility, disclosed by the similarity between the sister's handwriting, of this same communication being a forgery substituted for the one really written by Mrs. Jeffrey.

Third.—The fact that, previous to Mr. Jeffrey's handling of the book in which this communication was said to have been hidden, it had been seen in Miss Tuttle's hands.

Fourth.—That immediately after this she had passed to the drawer where Mr. Jeffrey's pistol was kept.

"That while this pistol had not been observed in her hand, there was no evidence to prove that it had been previously taken from the drawer, save such as was afforded by her own acknowledgment that she had tied some unknown object, presumably the pistol, to her sister's wrist before that sister left the house."

Sixth.—That if this was so, the pistol and the ribbon connecting it with Mrs. Jeffrey's wrist had been handled again before the former was discharged, and by fingers which had first touched dust, of which there was plenty in the old library.

Seventh.—That Miss Tuttle had admitted, though not till after much prodding and apparent subterfuge, that she had extended her walk on that fatal night not only as far as the Moore house, but that she had entered it and penetrated as far as the library door at the very moment the shot was fired within.

Eighth.—That in acknowledging this she had emphatically denied having associated the firing of this shot with any idea of harm to her sister; yet was known to have gone from this house in a condition of mind so serious that she failed to recollect the places she visited or the streets she passed through till she found herself again in her sister's house face to face with an officer.

Nine.—That her first greeting of this officer was a shriek, betraying a knowledge of his errand before he had given utterance to a word.

Ten.—That the candles found in the Moore house were similar to those bought by Mr. Jeffrey and afterward delivered at his kitchen door.

Eleven.—That she was the only member of the household besides the cook who was in the kitchen at the time, and that it was immediately after her departure from the room that the package containing the candles had been missed.

Twelve.—That opportunities of coming to an understanding with Mr. Jeffrey after his wife's death had not been lacking, and it was not until after such opportunities had occurred that any serious inquiry into this matter had been begun by the police. To which must be added, not in way of proof, but as an important factor in the case, that her manner, never open, was such throughout her whole public examination as to make it evident to all that only half of what had occurred in the Jeffrey's house since the wedding had been given out by her or by the man for whose release from a disappointing matrimonial entanglement she was supposed to have worked, and this though the suspicion hanging over them both called for the utmost candor.

Verily a serious list, and opposed to this I had as yet little to offer but my own belief in her innocence and the fact, but little dwelt on and yet not without its value, that the money which had come to Mr. Jeffrey and the home which had been given her had both been forfeited by Mrs. Jeffrey's death.

As I mused and mused over this impromptu synopsis in my vain attempt to reach some fresh clew to a proper understanding of the inconsistencies in Miss Tuttle's conduct by means of my theory of her strength but mistaken devotion to Mr. Jeffrey, a light suddenly broke upon me from an entirely unexpected quarter. It was a faint one, but any glimmer was welcome. Remembering a remark made by Mr. Jeffrey in his examination that Mrs. Jeffrey had not been the same since crossing the fatal doorstep of the Moore house, I asked myself if we had paid enough attention to the mental condition and conduct of the bride prior to the alarm which threw a pall or horror over her marriage, and, caught by the idea, I sought for a fuller account of the events of that day than had hitherto been supplied by newspaper or witness.

Hunting up my friend the reporter, I begged him to tell me where he had

obtained the facts from which he made that leading article in the Star which had so startled all Washington on the evening of the Jeffrey wedding. That they had come from some eyewitness I had no doubt, but who was the eyewitness? Himself? No. Who then?

At first he declined to tell me, but after a fuller understanding of my motives he mentioned the name of a young lady who, while a frequent guest at the most fashionable functions, was not above supplying the papers with such little items of current gossip as came under her own observation.

How I managed to approach this lady and by what means I succeeded in gaining her confidence are details quite unnecessary to this narrative. Enough that I did obtain access to her and that she talked quite frankly to me and in so doing supplied me with a clew which ultimately opened up to me an entirely new field of inquiry.

We had been discussing Mr. Jeffrey and Miss Tuttle when suddenly and with no apparent motive beyond the natural love of gossip, which was her weakness, she launched out into remarks about the bride. The ceremony had been late. Did I know it? A half hour or three-quarters past the time set for it. And why? Because Miss Moore was not ready. She had chosen to stay herself in the house and had come early enough for the purpose, but she would not accept any assistance, not even that of her maid, and of course

there was no more uneasy soul in the whole party that morning than the bride." Let other people remark upon the high look in Mrs. Tuttle's face or gossip about the anxious manner of the bridegroom, she (the speaker) could tell things about the bride which would go to show that she was not all right even before that ominous death's head reared itself into view at her marriage festival. Why, the fact that she came downstairs and was married without her bridal bouquet was enough. Had there not been so much else to talk about, people would have talked about that. But the big event had so effectively swallowed up the little that only herself and possibly two other ladies she might name seemed to retain any memory of the matter.

"What ladies?" I asked.  
"Oh, it doesn't matter what ladies. Two of the very best sort. I know they noticed it, because I heard them talking about it. We were all standing in the upper hall and were all crowded into a passage leading to the room where the bride was dressing. It was before the alarm had gone around of what had been discovered in the library, and we were all impatient enough for the appearance of the bride, who, we had been told, intended to wear the old point in which her great-grandmother was married. I have a weakness for old point and I was determined to stand where I could see her come out, even if I lost sight of the ceremony itself. But it would have been tedious enough waiting in that close hall if the ladies behind me had not kept up a conversation, which I, of course, pretended not to hear. I remember it, every word, for it was my sole amusement for half an hour. What was it? Oh, it was about that same bouquet, which, by the way, I had the privilege of staring at all the time they chatted. For the boy who brought it had not been admitted into Miss Moore's room, and, not knowing what else to do with it, was lingering before her door, with the great streamers falling from his hands, and the lilies making the whole place heavy with a sickening perfume. From what I heard the ladies say, he had been standing there an hour, and the timid knock he gave from time to time produced in me an odd feeling which those ladies behind me seemed to share. 'It's a shame!' I heard one of them cry. 'Veronica Moore has no excuse for such thoughtlessness. It is an hour now that she has been shut up in her room alone. She won't have even her maid in. She prefers to dress alone, she says. Peculiar in a bride, isn't it? But one thing is certain—she cannot put on her veil without help. She will have to call some one in for that.' At which the other volunteered that the Moores were all queer, and that she didn't envy Francis Jeffrey. 'What! not with fifty thousand a year to lighten her oddities?' returned her companion with a shrug which communicated itself to me, so closely were we packed together. 'I have a son who could bear with them under such circumstances.' Indeed she has, and all Washington knows it, but the remark passed without comment, for they had not yet exhausted the main event, and the person they now attacked was Miss Tuttle. 'Why doesn't she come and see that that bouquet is taken in? I declare it's not decent. Mr. Jeffrey would not feel complimented if he knew the fate of those magnificent lilies and roses. I presume he furnished the bouquet.'

"Miss Tuttle has looked out of my room once," I heard the other reply. 'She is in splendid beauty today, but pale. But she never could control Veronica.' 'Hush! You speak louder than you think.' This amused me, and I do believe that in another moment I should have laughed outright if an other boy had not appeared in the hall before us, who, shoving aside the first, rapped on the door with a spirit which called for answer. But he was no more successful than the other boy had been. So, being a brisk fellow, with no time for nonsense, he called out: 'Your bouquet, miss, and a message which I am to give you before you go downstairs! The gentleman is quite particular about it!' These words were literally shouted at the door, but in the hubbub of voices about us I don't believe any one heard them but ourselves and the bride. I know that she heard them, for she opened the door a very little way—such a very little way that the boy had to put his lips to the crack when he spoke and then turn and place his ear where his lips had been in order to catch her reply. This, for some reason, seemed a long time in coming, and the fellow grew so impatient that he amused himself by snatching the bouquet from the other boy and thrusting it in through the crack, to the very great detriment of its roses and lilies. When she took it he bawled for his answer, and when he got it he stared and muttered doubtfully to himself as he worked his way out again through the crowd, which by this time was beginning to choke up all the halls and stairways.

"But why have I told you all this nonsense?" she asked quite suddenly. "It isn't of the least consequence that Veronica Moore kept a boy waiting at her door while she dressed herself for her wedding, but it shows that she was queer even then, and I for one believe in the theory of suicide, and in that alone, and in the excuse she gave for it, too; for if she had really loved Francis Jeffrey she would not have been so slow to take in the magnificent bouquet he had provided for her."

But comment even from those who had known these people well was not what I wanted at this moment, but facts; so, without much attention to these words, I said:

"You will excuse me if I suggest that you are going on too fast. The door of the bride's room has just been shut upon the boy who brought her a message. When was it opened again?"

There was no more uneasy soul in the whole party that morning than the bride." Let other people remark upon the high look in Mrs. Tuttle's face or gossip about the anxious manner of the bridegroom, she (the speaker) could tell things about the bride which would go to show that she was not all right even before that ominous death's head reared itself into view at her marriage festival. Why, the fact that she came downstairs and was married without her bridal bouquet was enough. Had there not been so much else to talk about, people would have talked about that. But the big event had so effectively swallowed up the little that only herself and possibly two other ladies she might name seemed to retain any memory of the matter.

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But comment even from those who had known these people well was not what I wanted at this moment, but facts; so, without much attention to these words, I said:

"You will excuse me if I suggest that you are going on too fast. The door of the bride's room has just been shut upon the boy who brought her a message. When was it opened again?"

There was no more uneasy soul in the whole party that morning than the bride." Let other people remark upon the high look in Mrs. Tuttle's face or gossip about the anxious manner of the bridegroom, she (the speaker) could tell things about the bride which would go to show that she was not all right even before that ominous death's head reared itself into view at her marriage festival. Why, the fact that she came downstairs and was married without her bridal bouquet was enough. Had there not been so much else to talk about, people would have talked about that. But the big event had so effectively swallowed up the little that only herself and possibly two other ladies she might name seemed to retain any memory of the matter.

"What ladies?" I asked.  
"Oh, it doesn't matter what ladies. Two of the very best sort. I know they noticed it, because I heard them talking about it. We were all standing in the upper hall and were all crowded into a passage leading to the room where the bride was dressing. It was before the alarm had gone around of what had been discovered in the library, and we were all impatient enough for the appearance of the bride, who, we had been told, intended to wear the old point in which her great-grandmother was married. I have a weakness for old point and I was determined to stand where I could see her come out, even if I lost sight of the ceremony itself. But it would have been tedious enough waiting in that close hall if the ladies behind me had not kept up a conversation, which I, of course, pretended not to hear. I remember it, every word, for it was my sole amusement for half an hour. What was it? Oh, it was about that same bouquet, which, by the way, I had the privilege of staring at all the time they chatted. For the boy who brought it had not been admitted into Miss Moore's room, and, not knowing what else to do with it, was lingering before her door, with the great streamers falling from his hands, and the lilies making the whole place heavy with a sickening perfume. From what I heard the ladies say, he had been standing there an hour, and the timid knock he gave from time to time produced in me an odd feeling which those ladies behind me seemed to share. 'It's a shame!' I heard one of them cry. 'Veronica Moore has no excuse for such thoughtlessness. It is an hour now that she has been shut up in her room alone. She won't have even her maid in. She prefers to dress alone, she says. Peculiar in a bride, isn't it? But one thing is certain—she cannot put on her veil without help. She will have to call some one in for that.' At which the other volunteered that the Moores were all queer, and that she didn't envy Francis Jeffrey. 'What! not with fifty thousand a year to lighten her oddities?' returned her companion with a shrug which communicated itself to me, so closely were we packed together. 'I have a son who could bear with them under such circumstances.' Indeed she has, and all Washington knows it, but the remark passed without comment, for they had not yet exhausted the main event, and the person they now attacked was Miss Tuttle. 'Why doesn't she come and see that that bouquet is taken in? I declare it's not decent. Mr. Jeffrey would not feel complimented if he knew the fate of those magnificent lilies and roses. I presume he furnished the bouquet.'

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