

The Woman In the Alcove

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

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CHAPTER V—(Continued.)

Two columns of gossip devoted to the family differences which had led to the separation of Mr. and Mrs. Fairbrother I shall compress into a few lines. They had been married three years before in the city of Baltimore. He was a rich man then, but now he was a millionaire. He is today, it is said, without manner, he is feared, and for this sparkling countenance whose charm was of the kind that grows with exercise. Though his eyes were never associated with a smile, he grew tired of her eyes and the conquests which she made to preserve to hide either from her or from the world at large, and at the time during the previous year she had come to a friendly understanding which led to their living together in grand style and with a certain deference to the proprieties which retained their friends and a valuable place in society.

She was not often invited where she was, and she never appeared in any company where he was expected. With this exception little feeling was shown. Matters progressed smoothly and to their credit, let it be said, no one ever heard either of them speak otherwise than considerately of the other. He was at present out of town, having started some three weeks before for the southwest, but would probably return on receipt of the telegram which had been sent him.

The comments made on the murder were necessarily hurried. It was called a mystery, but it was evident enough that Mr. Durand's detection was looked upon as the almost certain prelude to his arrest on the charge of murder.

He had had some discipline in life, though I had given up very early the prospects he held out to me of a contented enjoyment of his bounty and aided on duties which required self-denial and hard work. I did this because I enjoy having both my mind and heart occupied. To be necessary to me as a nurse is to a patient, seemed to me an enviable fate till I came under the influence of Anson Durand. Then the craving of all women for the common lot of their sex became a craving also; a craving, however, which I failed at first to yield, for I felt that it was unsharable and thus a sign of weakness. Fighting my battle, I succeeded in winning it, as I thought, just as the nurse's diploma was put in my hands. Then came the great surprise of my life. Anson Durand expressed his love for me, and I took to the fact that all my preparation had been for home joys and a woman's true existence. One hour of stay in the light of this new hope, was tragical and something approaching chaos. Truly I had been through schooling. But was it one to make me useful in the only way I could be useful now? I did not know. I did not know. I was determined on my course, but I felt, and in the relief brought by my appeal to my energy I rose and dressed and went about the duties of my day.

One of these was to determine whether Mr. Grey on his return to his father had found his daughter as ill as his fears had foreboded. A telephone message or two satisfied me on this point. Miss Grey was very ill, but not considered dangerously so; indeed, if anything, her condition was improved, and if nothing happened in the way of fresh complications the prospects were that she would be out on a fortnight.

I was not surprised. It was more than I had expected. The cry of the nurse in an American house was not belief, even in an atmosphere saturated with fear and all the horror surrounding a great crime, and in the street reckoning I was making against person I will not even name at this juncture I added it as another suspicious circumstance.

CHAPTER VI.

relate the full experiences of the next few days would be to encumber my narrative with unnecessary detail.

I did not see Mr. Durand again. My noble, so amenable in most matters, proved inexorable on this point. Till Mr. Durand's good name should be cleared by the coroner's verdict or other evidence brought to light as I had effectively placed him beyond all question I was to hold no communication with him of any sort whatever. I remember the very words with which my uncle ended the one exclusive conversation we had on the subject. They were these:

"You have fully expressed to Mr. Durand your entire confidence in his present. That must suffice him for the present. If he is the honest gentleman you think him, it will."

My uncle seldom asserted himself, but as he is in very much in earnest when he does, I made no attempt to resist this resolution, especially as it was the approval of my better judgment. But, though my power to console my thoughts and feelings remained, and these were all concentrated to the man struggling under an impetu-

ous supposition alied by the press—suppositions which fomented so much private discussion that ere long the one question most frequently heard in this connection was not who struck the blow which killed Mrs. Fairbrother (this was a question which some seemed to think settled, but whose juggling hand had palmed off the paste for the diamond, and how and when and where had the jugglery taken place?)

Opinions on this point were, as I have said, many and various. Some fixed upon the moment of exchange as that very critical and hardly approachable one elapsing between the murder and Mr. Durand's appearance upon the scene. This theory, I need not say, was advanced by such as believed that while he was not guilty of Mrs. Fairbrother's murder, he had been guilty of taking advantage of the same to rob the body of what in the terror and excitement of the moment he evidently took to be her great gem. To others, among whom were many eyewitnesses of the event, it appeared to be a conceded fact that this substitution had been made prior to the ball and with Mrs. Fairbrother's full cognizance. The effectual way in which she had wielded her fan between the glittering ornaments on her breast and the inquisitive glances constantly leveled upon it might at the time have been due to coquetry, but to them it looked much more like an expression of fear lest the deception in which she was indulging should be discovered. No one during the time where I did; but, then, no one but myself had watched the scene with the eyes of love. Besides—and this must be remembered—most people, among whom I ventured to count the police officials, were mainly interested in proving Mr. Durand guilty, while I with contrary mind was bent on establishing such facts as confirmed the explanations he had been pleased to give us, explanations which necessitated a conviction on Mrs. Fairbrother's part of the great value of the jewel she wore and the consequent advisability of ridding herself of it temporarily if, as so many believed, the full letter of the warning should read: "Be warned. He means to be at the ball. Expect trouble if you are found wearing the great diamond."

True, she may herself have been deceived concerning it. Unconsciously to herself she may have been the victim of a daring fraud on the part of some hanger on who had access to her jewels, but as no such evidence had yet come to life, as she had no recognized or so far as could be learned, secret lover or dishonest dependent and, moreover, as no gem of such unusual value was known to have been offered within the rear here or abroad, in public or private market, I could not bring myself to credit this assumption, possibly because I was so ignorant as to credit another and a different one—one which you have already seen growing in my mind and which, presuming as it was, kept my courage from falling through all those dreadful days of enforced waiting and suspense. For I was determined not to intrude my suggestions, valuable as I considered them, till all hope was gone of his being righted by the judgment of the law, who would not lightly endure the interference of such an insignificant note in the great scheme of justice as myself.

The impost, which might be trusted to bring out all these doubtful points, had been delayed in anticipation of Mr. Fairbrother's return. His testimony could not but prove valuable, if not in fixing the criminal, at least in settling the moot point as to whether the stone which the estranged wife had carried away with her on leaving the house had been the genuine one returned to him from Tiffany's or the well known imitation now in the hands of the police. He had been located somewhere in the mountains of lower Colorado; but, strange to say, it had been found impossible to enter into direct communication with him, nor was it known whether he was aware as yet of his wife's tragic death. So affairs went slowly in New York, and the case seemed to come to a standstill, when public opinion was suddenly reawakened and a more definite turn given to the whole matter by a dispatch from Santa Fe, to the Associated Press. This dispatch was to the effect that Abner Fairbrother had passed through that city some three days before on his way to his new mining camp, the Placide; that he then showed symptoms of pneumonia and from advice since received might be regarded as a very sick man.

Ill—well, that explained matters. His absence, which many had taken for indifference, was that of a man physically debilitated and unfit for exertion of any kind. Ill—a tragic circumstance which roused endless conjecture. Was he aware, or was he not aware, of his wife's death? Had he been taken ill before or after he left Colorado for New Mexico? Was he suffering mainly from shock, or, as would appear from his complaint, from a too rapid change of climate?

The whole country seethed with excitement, and my poor little unthought-of, insignificant self burned with impatience, which only those who have been subjected to a like suspense can properly estimate. Would the proceedings which were awaited with so much anxiety be further delayed? Would Mr. Durand remain indefinitely in disgrace and under such a cloud of gloom as would kill some men and might kill him? Should I be called upon to endure still longer the suffering which this entailed upon me, when I thought I knew?

Fortune was less obstinate than I feared. Next morning a telegraphic statement from Santa Fe settled one of the points of this great dispute, a statement which you will find detailed at more length in the following communication, which appeared a few days later in one of our most enterprising journals.

BOOST EXCURSION TO JUNCTION CITY A BIG SUCCESS

(From Saturdays' Daily Guard.)

The boost excursion to Junction City by members of the Eugene Commercial Club and Eugene citizens in general last night was one of the best yet, and all Junction was at the depot when the flyer arrived half an hour late, to meet the delegation from the county seat. When the train stopped at the water tank before reaching the depot, the passengers were greeted by yells from a group of Junction City high school students. They gave the "rah, rah, rah, Eugene!" yell besides their own and several manufactured for the occasion. When the train pulled into the station, prominent citizens of the railroad division point were there with the glad hands for the visitors, who were escorted over to the opera house, where the exercises of the evening were held. The Eugene Military Band, which accompanied the excursionists, first played a selection on the street.

The meeting was largely attended, the little opera house being crowded to overflowing, and was enthusiastic all the way through. Junction people have always borne a splendid reputation as entertainers, and that reputation certainly did not suffer last night. The visitors were made to feel perfectly at home and were given the liberty of the city.

As a result of the meeting last night a Commercial Club will be organized there, a call having been made for a mass meeting some time next week to arrange for the preliminary work looking toward organization.

The meeting was opened by H. L. Rip, president of the Junction City Development League, who announced that Hon. S. L. Moorhead, editor of the Times, would make the initial address. Mr. Moorhead spoke wittily and briefly, extending felicitations to the visitors. His speech was frequently interrupted by applause from the Eugene Commercial Club, who were then called upon. He thanked the citizens of Junction very heartily for the magnificent reception given the Eugene boosters. He spoke earnestly of the possibilities of Lane county soil, and stated that we could raise as good wheat as they raise at Hood River and Medford, if only the proper attention is given our orchards.

Mayor J. D. Matlock, of Eugene, also spoke on the fruit industry and reiterated Dr. Whitson's statement of producing as good apples as in any other locality mentioned. He stated that in an early day no part of the Pacific coast raised better apples than were grown right here in Lane county, and he hoped to see the day when the industry is revived. He said what Lane county and Oregon needs at present is railroads, and a railroad, no matter who is behind it, that should seek to enter this territory should be lent every encouragement by the citizens.

John H. Hartog, manager of the Commercial Club, was then called upon and in his own original manner made a witty and instructive address, probably more applauded than any other during the evening.

Dr. D. A. Paine was called upon and at the mention of his name he was greeted with applause. He told the crowd to make all the noise they wanted to; he was used to it—he was formerly superintendent of the Oregon Insane asylum. The forest crew eloquent, as usual, and pleased the audience with his witticisms thrown in between bursts of oratory.

Professor L. R. Alderman, superintendent of Eugene's schools, spoke of the usefulness of the University and made a strong and earnest appeal to the voters for their help at the coming election.

W. C. Washburne, of Junction, told of the development league of that place and what work it has done with the little means at hand toward advertising the resources of the county in the East. He said the people of Junction would vote solidly for the appropriation for the University.

Resolution Adopted.

Mr. Washburne, at the close of his address, introduced the following resolution, which was unanimously adopted:

Whereas, The interest of education is one of the greatest importance to every citizen in the state of Oregon, since through education the way is opened to every boy and girl in the state to broader opportunity and larger usefulness, and since the success of free government is necessarily founded on high intelligence and general public enlightenment; and

Whereas, The state of Oregon is certain to be brought into great political prominence in the near future by the Union in June on account of its large

use of direct legislation through the initiative and referendum, and consequently its attitude toward higher education as shown by the result of its vote on the University appropriation widely advertised in every section of the country; and

Whereas, We believe it would be a calamity to the educational interests of Oregon to cripple the University, which is the head of the system of free public schools, and also a calamity to the state as a whole to advertise it to the home-seekers throughout the great Middle West as a state, negligently in its support of higher education; therefore be it Resolved, That we place ourselves on record as heartily favorable to the appropriation of \$125,000 to the University, and pledge ourselves to do everything in our power, both individually and collectively, to insure the approval of the bill at the polls in June.

Other Speakers.

Professor Mickey, principal of the Junction schools, and W. B. Dillard, county school superintendent, spoke, Mr. Dillard congratulating the people of Junction upon voting bonds for a new school building. There were only two dissenting votes at the election, and some one previously during the evening said it was thought they were cast accidentally.

C. S. Williams, who is to become the next president of the Eugene Commercial Club, probably made the best address of the evening. He told that he taught school at Junction twenty years ago, and it did him good to see the familiar faces of the old-timers who were in the audience, and it pleased him to see the enthusiasm manifested.

He made an eloquent appeal for the University of Oregon appropriation. Mr. Williams has only recently come into prominence as a public speaker and he is always called upon on an occasion like this.

The meeting then adjourned, and after a few minutes of handshaking the visitors were invited to the hotel, where lunch was served. After an hour's wait the crowd boarded the train for home, voting the affair to have been a splendid success.

Names of Excursionists.

Those who made the trip were as follows:

Mayor J. D. Matlock, John H. Hartog, S. S. Spencer and wife, H. F. Hollenbeck and wife, G. R. Christian, E. E. Mink, G. W. Griffin and wife, D. P. Burton, N. G. Hyland, B. F. Keeney, John Hampton, D. F. Skene, H. C. Mahon, L. C. Reed, Darwin Bristow, William Hodes, W. F. Gilstrap, George Yerington, William Gross, Harry Hobbs, A. Lombard, S. R. Mosher, J. J. Hughes, Howard Woods, Walter Wilson, Leonard Gross, Geo. Eryman, P. N. McAllister, Guy Davis, A. Svarverud, Wm. Perman, Lloyd Pickard, S. E. Stevens, E. E. Quimby, H. L. Bown, Norbert Aya, Dr. L. L. Whitson, E. U. Lee, H. W. Thompson, Dr. F. M. Day, Morris Schwarzschild, R. M. Man, W. P. Morse, F. K. Lane, J. T. Greenfield, Free Thomas, Carl Myers, Clarence Stevens, L. O. Beck with, C. E. Gulliford, F. A. Rankin, E. D. Matlock, Allen H. Eaton, Geo. W. Smith and wife, Professor H. D. Sheldon, Jack Rodman, W. S. Moon, R. S. Bryan, C. E. Roberts, W. G. Man, W. B. Dillard, F. R. Washburne and wife, Dr. C. B. Willoughby, Dr. D. A. Paine, I. T. Nicklin, W. J. Gibson, Professor L. R. Alderman, H. M. Price, L. M. Travis, W. Polders, W. E. Smith, Drew Griffin, Geo. M. Miller, G. W. Dixon, Jos. Fellman, J. M. Shelley, Horace Burnett, A. M. Gilbert, H. A. Tromp, J. M. Hamilton, H. Hartzheim, A. Holtzman, B. S. Hyland, A. A. Simmons, T. W. Munroe, F. C. Potts, H. A. Cox, C. C. Coffman, Colonel R. M. Forbes.

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The regular fifty-cent and one-dollar size bottles are sold by all good druggists. Don't make any mistake, but remember the name, Swamp-Root, Dr. Kilmer's Swamp-Root, and the address, Binghamton, N. Y., on every bottle.

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MUST NAME NEW MAN FOR POSITION

Washington, Feb. 27.—"Wanted, an experienced and capable man to fill the office of district attorney of Oregon; one who can pass muster. Corporation attorneys, and counsel for land fraud defendants need not apply."

This placard has again been hung on the administration door knob and the Oregon delegation will once more undertake to pick a man who can relieve W. C. Bristol.

Objections to Cleeton.

Senator Fulton called at the White House this morning to present C. A. Johnson, of Baker City, and the president informed him that he could not see his way clear to appoint Thomas J. Cleeton. His objection to Mr. Cleeton, he said, was not on personal grounds; there was nothing whatsoever against his character, but Mr. Cleeton's past political activities made it unwise in the mind of the president and attorney-general to give him the district attorneyship. The president asked Mr. Fulton to inform the delegation that he would like to have another name sent in. Mr. Fulton did so this afternoon, and within a day or two the delegation will meet and endeavor to agree upon some new man for this appointment. No arrangement has yet been made, however. The next name presented, it is understood, must be that of some one as yet not considered for the place.

SALEM TAKES NOTICE.

(Salem Statesman.)

Eugene is to have a five-story brick, Salem must have one six stories, or higher.

The Welch people have ties on Ferry and Cottage streets.

Now for the graders and track layers.

ALBANY AND PENDELTON MAY GET BUILDINGS

Washington, Feb. 27.—Senator Fulton today appeared before the committee on public buildings in behalf of his various bills providing for public buildings at various Oregon cities. The committee practically assured him that it would favorably report two bills—one for Pendleton and one for Albany.

There will be no general public building bill, but if Mr. Fulton can have these individual bills passed through the senate they can be riders to some supply bill, and will not be subjected to a point of order.