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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CHAPTER XV—(Continued.)

"I know," he murmured, "I know. But it will come, at least I think so."

This should have reassured me, no doubt, and sent me away quiet and happy. But something—the tenacity of a deep conviction, possibly—kept me lingering before the inspector and finally gave me the courage to say:

"I know I ought not to speak another word; that I am putting myself at a disadvantage in doing so, but I cannot help it, inspector. I cannot help it when I see you laying such stress upon the few indirect clews connecting the suspicious Sears with the crime, and ignoring the direct one we have against one whom we need not name."

Had I gone too far? Had my presumption transgressed all bounds and would he show a very natural anger? No; he smiled instead, an enigmatical smile no doubt, which I found it difficult to understand, but yet a smile.

"You mean," he suggested, "that Sears' possible connection with the crime cannot eliminate Mr. Grey's very positive one. Nor can the fact that Wellgood's hand came in contact with Mr. Grey's at or near the time of the exchange of the false stone with the real make it any less evident who was the guilty author of this exchange."

The inspector's hand was on the door knob, but he dropped it at this and, surveying me very quietly, said:

"I thought that a few days spent at the bedside of Miss Grey in the society of so renowned and cultured a gentleman as her father would disabuse you of these damaging suspicions."

"I don't wonder that you thought so," I burst out. "You would think so all the more if you knew how kind he can be and what solicitude he shows for

The inspector's hand was on the door knob.

all about him. But I cannot get over the facts. They all point, it seems to me, straight in one direction."

"All? You heard what was said in this room—I saw it in your eye—how the man who surprised the steward in his own room last night heard him talking of love and death in connection with Mrs. Fairbrother. 'To kiss what I hate! It is almost as bad as to kill what I love'—he said something like that."

"Yes, I heard that. But did he mean that he had been her actual slayer? Could you convict him on those words?"

"Well, we shall find out. Then, as to Wellgood's part in the little business, you choose to consider that it took place at the time the stone fell from Mr. Grey's hand. What proof have you that the substitution you believe it was not made by him? He could easily have done it while crossing the room to Mr. Grey's side."

"Inspector!" Then hotly, as the absurdity of the suggestion struck me with full force: "He do this! A waiter, or, as you think, Mr. Fairbrother's steward, to be provided with so hard-to-come-by an article as this counterfeit of a great stone? Isn't that almost as incredible a supposition as any I have myself presumed to advance?"

"Possibly, but the affair is full of incredibilities, the greatest of which, to my mind, is the persistence with which you, a kind hearted enough little woman, persevere in ascribing the deepest guilt to one you profess to admire and certainly would be glad to find innocent of any complicity with a great crime."

I felt that I must justify myself.

"Mr. Durand has had no such consideration shown him," said I.

"I know, my child, I know; but the cases differ. Wouldn't it be well for you to see this and be satisfied with the turn which things have taken without continuing to insist upon involving Mr. Grey in your suspicions?"

A smile took off the edge of this remark, yet I felt it keenly, and only the confidence I had in his fairness as a man and public official enabled me to say:

"But I am talking quite confidentially. And you have been so good to me, so willing to listen to all I had to say, that I cannot help but speak my whole mind. It is my only safety, also. Remember how I have to sit in the presence of this man with my thoughts all choked up. It is killing me. But I think I should go back content if you will listen to one more suggestion I have to make. It is my last."

"Say it. I am nothing if not indulgent."

He had spoken the word. Indulgent, that was it. He let me speak, probably had let me speak from the first, from pure kindness. He did not believe one little bit in my good sense or logic. But I was not to be deterred. I would empty my mind of the ugly thing that lay there. I would leave there no miserable dregs of doubt to ferment and work their evil way with me in the dead watches of the night which I had yet to face. So I took him at his word.

"I only want to ask this. In case Sears is innocent of the crime, who wrote the warning and where did the assassin get the stiletto with the Grey arms chased into its handle? And the diamond? Still the diamond! You hint that he stole that, too. That with some idea of its proving useful to him on this gala occasion, he had provided himself with an imitation stone, setting and all—he who has never shown so far as we have heard, any interest in Mrs. Fairbrother's diamond, only in Mrs. Fairbrother herself. If Wellgood is Sears and Sears the medium by which the false stone was exchanged for the real, then he made this exchange in Mr. Grey's interests and not his own. But I don't believe he had anything to do with it. I think everything goes to show that the exchange was made by Mr. Grey himself."

"A second Daniel," muttered the inspector lightly. "Go on, little lawyer." But, for all this attempt at banter on his part, I imagined that I saw the beginning of a very natural anxiety to close the conversation. I therefore hastened with what I had yet to say, cutting my words short and almost stammering in my eagerness.

"Remember the perfection of that imitation stone, a copy so exact that it extends to the setting. That shows plan—forgive me if I repeat myself—preparation, a knowledge of stones, a particular knowledge of this one. Mr. Fairbrother's steward may have had the knowledge, but he would have been a fool to have used his knowledge to secure for himself a valuable he could never have found a purchaser for in any market. But a fancier—one who has his pleasure in the mere possession of a unique and invaluable gem—ah, that is different! He might risk a crime. History tells us of several."

Here I paused to take breath, which gave the inspector a chance to say:

"In other words, this is what you think. The Englishman, desirous of covering up his tracks, conceived the idea of having this imitation on hand, in case it might be of use in the daring and disgraceful undertaking you ascribe to him. Recognizing his own inability to do this himself, he delegated the task to one who in some way, he had been led to think, cherished a secret grudge against its present possessor—a man who had had some opportunity for seeing the stone and studying the setting. The copy thus procured, Mr. Grey went to the ball, and, relying on his own seemingly unassailable position, attacked Mrs. Fairbrother in the alcove and would have carried off the diamond, if he had found it where he had seen it earlier blazing on her breast. But it was not there. The warning received by her—a warning you ascribe to his daughter, a fact which is yet to be proved—had led her to rid herself of the jewel in the way Mr. Durand describes, and he found himself burdened with a dastardly crime and with nothing to show for it. Later, however, to his intense surprise and possible satisfaction, he saw that diamond in my hands, and, recognizing an opportunity, as he thought, of yet securing it, he asked to see it, held it for an instant, and then, making use of an almost incredible expedient for distracting attention, dropped, not the real stone but the false one, retaining the real one in his hand. This, in plain English, as I take it, is your present idea of the situation."

Astonished at the clearness with which he read my mind, I answered: "Yes, inspector, that is what was in my mind."

"Good! Then it is just as well that I is out. Your mind is now free, and you can give it entirely to your duties." Then, as he laid his hand on the door knob, he added: "In studying so intently your own point of view, you seem to have forgotten that the last thing which Mr. Grey would be likely to do, under those circumstances, would be to call attention to the falsity of the gem upon whose similarity to the real stone he was depending. Not even his confidence in his own position, as an honored and highly esteemed guest, would lead him to do that."

"Not if he were a well known connoisseur," I faltered, "with the pride of one who has handled the best gems? He would know that the deception would be soon discovered and that it would not do for him to fail to recognize it for what it was, when the make believe was in his hands."

"Forced, my dear child, forced; and as chimerical as all the rest. It cannot stand putting into words. I will go further—you are a good girl and can deal to heal the truth from me. I don't believe in your theory; I can't. I have not been able to from the first, nor have any of my men; but if your ideas are true and Mr. Grey is involved in this matter, you will find that there has been more of a hitch about that diamond than you, in your simplicity, believe. If Mr. Grey were in actual possession of this valuable, he would show less care than you say he does. So would he if it were in Wellgood's hands with his consent and a good prospect of its coming to him in the near future. But if it is in Wellgood's hands without his consent, or any near prospect of his regaining it, then we can easily understand his present apprehensions and the growing uneasiness he betrays."

"True," I murmured.

"If, then," the inspector pursued giving me a parting glance not without its humor, probably not without something really serious underlying its humor, "we should find, in following up our present clew, that Mr. Grey has had dealings with this Wellgood or this Sears! or if you, with your advantages for learning the fact, should discover that he shows any extraordinary interest in either of them, the matter will take on a different aspect. But we have not got that far yet. At present our task is to find one or the other of these men. If we are lucky, we shall discover that the waiter and the steward are identical, in spite of their seemingly different appearance. A rogue such as this Sears has shown himself to be would be an adept at disguise."

"You are right," I acknowledged. "He has certainly the heart of a criminal. If he had no hand in Mrs. Fairbrother's murder, he came near having one in that of your detective. You know what I mean. I could not help hearing, inspector."

He smiled, looked me steadfastly in the face for a moment and then bowed me out.

The inspector told me afterward that, in spite of the cavalier manner with which he had treated my suggestion, he spent a very serious half hour, head to head with the district attorney. The result was the following order to Sweetwater, the detective:

"You are to go to the St. Regis, ma' yourself solid there and gradually, a you can manage it, work yourself into a position for knowing all that goes on in room —. If the gentleman (mind you, the gentleman; we care nothing about the women) should go out, you are to follow him if it takes you to —. We want to know his secret, but he must never know our interest in it and you are to be as silent in this matter as if possessed of neither ear nor tongue. I will add memory, for if you find this secret to be one in which we have no lawful interest you are to forget it absolutely and forever. You will understand why when you consult the St. Regis register."

But they expected nothing from it; absolutely nothing.

CHAPTER XVI.

I PRAYED uncle that we might be driven home by the way of Eighty-sixth street. I wanted to look at the Fairbrother house. I had seen it many times, but I felt that I should see it with new eyes after the story I had just heard in the inspector's office. That an adventure of this nature could take place in a New York house taxed my credulity. I might have believed it of Paris, wicked, mysterious Paris, the home of intrigue and every redoubtable crime, but of our own homely, commonplace metropolis—the house must be seen for me to be convinced of the fact related.

Many of you know the building. It is usually spoken of with a shrug, the sole reason for which seems to be that there is no other just like it in the city. I myself have always considered it imposing and majestic, but to the average man it is too suggestive of old world feudal life to be pleasing. On this afternoon—a dull, depressing one—it looked undeniably heavy as we approached it, but interesting in a very new way to me, because of the great turret at one angle, the scene of that midnight descent of two men, each in deadly fear of the other, yet quailing not in their purpose—the one of flight, the other of pursuit.

There was no railing in front of the house. It may have seemed an unnecessary safeguard to the audacious owner. Consequently, the small door in the turret opened directly upon the street, making entrance and exit easy enough for any one who had the key. But the shaft and the small room at the bottom—where were they? Naturally in the center of the great mass, the room being without windows.

It was, therefore, useless to look for it, and yet my eye ran along the peaks and pinnacles of the roof, searching for the skylight in which it undoubtedly ended. At last I espied it, and, my curiosity satisfied on this score, I let my eyes run over the side and face of the building for an open window or a lifted shade. But all were tightly closed and gave no more sign of life than did the boarded up door. But I was not deceived by this. As we drove away, I thought how on the morrow there would be a regular procession passing through this street to see just the little I had seen today. The detective's adventure was like to make the house notorious. For several minutes after I had left its neighborhood my imagination pictured room after room shut up from the light of day, but bearing within them the impalpable aura of those two shadows flitting through them like the ghosts of ghosts, as the detective had tellingly put it.

The heart has its strange surprises. Through my whole ride and the indulgence in these thoughts I was conscious of a great inner revulsion against all I had intimated and even hopefully felt while talking with the inspector. Perhaps this is what this wise old official expected. He had let me talk, and the inevitable reaction followed. I could now see only Mr. Grey's goodness and claims to respect, and began to hate myself that I had not been immediately impressed by the inspector's views, and shown myself more willing to drop every suspicion against the august personage I had presumed to associate with crime. What had given me the strength to persist? Loyalty to my lover? His innocence had not been involved. Indeed, every word uttered in the inspector's office had gone to prove that he no longer occupied a leading place in police calculations; that their eyes were turned elsewhere, and that I had only to be patient to see Mr. Durand quite cleared in their minds.

But was this really so? Was he as safe as that? What if this new clew failed? What if they failed to find Sears or lay hands on the doubtful Wellgood? Would Mr. Durand be released without a trial? Should we hear nothing more of the strange and, to many, the suspicious circumstances which linked him to this crime? It would be expecting too much from either police or official discrimination.

No; Mr. Durand would never be completely exonerated till the true culprit was found and all explanations made. I had therefore been simply fighting his battles when I pointed out what I thought to be the weak place in their present theory, and, sore as I felt in contemplation of my seemingly heartless action, I was not the unimpressionable, addle-pated nonentity I must have seemed to the inspector.

Yet my comfort was small and the effort it took to face Mr. Grey and my young patient was much greater than I had anticipated. I blushed as I approached to take my place at Miss Grey's bedside, and, had her father been as suspicious of me at that moment as I was of him, I am sure that I should have fared badly in his thoughts.

But he was not on the watch for my emotions. He was simply relieved to see me back. I noticed this immediately; also that something had occurred during my absence which absorbed his thought and filled him with anxiety.

A Western Union envelope lay at his feet—proof that he had just received a telegram. This under ordinary circumstances would not have occasioned me a second thought, such a man being naturally the recipient of all sorts of communications from all parts of the world; but at this crisis, with the worm of a half stifled doubt still gnawing at my heart, everything that occurred to him took on importance and roused questions.

When he had left the room, Miss Grey nestled up to me with the seemingly ingenuous remark:

"Poor papa! Something disturbs him. He will not tell me what. I suppose he thinks I am not strong enough to share his troubles, but I shall be soon. Don't you see I am gaining every day?"

"Indeed I do," was my hearty response. In face of such a sweet confidence and open affection doubt vanished, and I was able to give all my thoughts to her.

"I wish papa felt as sure of this as you do," she said. "For some reason he does not seem to take any comfort from my improvement. When Dr. Freligh says, 'Well, well, we are getting on finely today!' I notice that he does not look less anxious, nor does he even meet these encouraging words with a smile. Haven't you noticed it? He looks as careworn and troubled about me now as he did the first day I was taken sick. Why should he? Is it because he has lost so many children he cannot believe in his good fortune at having the most insignificant of all left to him?"

"I do not know your father very well," I protested, "and cannot judge what is going on in his mind, but he must see that you are quite a different girl from what you were a week ago and that, if nothing unforeseen happens, your recovery will only be a matter of a week or two longer."

"Oh, how I love to hear you say that! To be well again! To read letters!" she murmured, "and to write them!" And I saw the delicate hand falter up to pinch the precious packet awaiting that happy hour. I did not like to discuss her father with her, so took this opportunity to turn the conversation aside into safer channels. But we had not proceeded far before Mr. Grey returned and, taking his stand at the foot of the bed, remarked, after a moment's gloomy contemplation of his daughter's face:

"You are better today, the doctor says. I have just been telephoning to him. But do you feel well enough for me to leave you for a few days? There is a man I must see—must go to, if you have no dread of being left alone with your good nurse and the doctor's constant attendance."

Miss Grey looked startled. Doubtless she found it difficult to understand what man in this strange country could interest her father enough to induce him to leave her while he was yet laboring under such solicitude. But a smile speedily took the place of her look of surprised inquiry, and she affectionately exclaimed:

"Oh, I haven't the least dread in the world, not now. See, I can hold up my arms. Go, papa, go; it will give me a chance to surprise you with my good looks when you come back."

He turned abruptly away. He was suffering from an emotion deeper than he cared to acknowledge. But he gained control over himself speedily and, coming back, announced with forced decision:

"I shall have to go tonight. I have no choice. Promise me that you will not go back in my absence; that you will strive to get well; that you will put all your mind into striving to get well."

"Indeed, I will," she answered; a little frightened by the feeling he showed. "Don't worry so much. I have more than one reason for living, papa."

He shook his head and went immediately to make his preparations for departure. His daughter gave one sob, then caught me by the hand.

"You look dumfounded," said she. "But never mind, we shall get on very well together. I have the most perfect confidence in you."

Was it my duty to let the inspector know that Mr. Grey anticipated absenting himself from the city for a few days? I decided that I would only be impressing my own doubts upon him after a rebuke which should have allayed them.

Yet when Mr. Grey came to take his departure I wished that the inspector might have been a witness to his emotion, if only to give me one of his very excellent explanations. The parting was more like that of one who sees no immediate promise of return than of a traveler who intends to limit his stay to a few days. He looked her in the eyes and kissed her a dozen times, each time with an air of heartbreak which was good neither for her nor for himself, and when he finally tore himself away it was to look back at her from the door with an expression I was glad she did not see or it would certainly have interfered with the promise she had made to concentrate all her energies on getting well.

What was at the root of his extreme grief at leaving her? Did he fear the person he was going to meet or were his plans such as involved a much longer stay than he had mentioned? Did he even mean to return at all?

Ah, that was the question! Did he intend to return or had I been the unconscious witness of a flight?

CHAPTER XVII.

A FEW days later three men were closeted in the district attorney's office. Two of them were officials—the district attorney himself and our old friend the inspector. The third was the detective, Sweetwater, chosen by them to keep watch on Mr. Grey.

Sweetwater had just come to town. This was evident from the gripsack he had set down in a corner on entering; also from a certain tousled appearance which bespoke hasty rising and but few facilities for proper attention to his person. These details counted little, however, in the astonishment created by his manner. For a hardy chap he looked strangely nervous and indisposed—so much so that after the first short greeting the inspector asked him what was up and if he had had another Fairbrother house experience.

He replied with a decided no; that it was not his adventure which had upset him, but the news he had to bring.

Here he glanced at every door and window, and then, leaning forward over the table at which the two officials sat, he brought his head as nearly to them as possible and whispered five words.

They produced a most unhappy sensation. Both the men, hardened as they were by duties which soon sap the sensibilities, started and turned as pale as the speaker himself. Then the district attorney, with one glance at the inspector, rose and locked the door.

It was a prelude to this tale which I give, not as it came from his mouth,

"I want you to get me a room at a very quiet hotel."

but as it was afterward related to me. The language, I fear, is mostly my own.

The detective had just been with Mr. Grey to the coast of Maine. Why there will presently appear. His task had been to follow this gentleman, and follow him he did.

Mr. Grey was a very stately man, difficult of approach, and was absorbed besides by some overwhelming care. But this fellow was one in a thousand and somehow during the trip he managed to do him some little service, which drew the attention of the great man to himself. This done, he so improved his opportunity that the two were soon on the best of terms, and he learned that the Englishman was without a valet, and, being unaccustomed to move about without one, felt the awkwardness of his position very much. This gave Sweetwater his cue, and when he found that the services of such a man were wanted only during the present trip and for the handling of affairs quite apart from personal attendance upon the gentleman himself, he showed such an honest desire to fill the place, and made out to give such a good account of himself, that he found himself engaged for the work before reaching C—.

This was a great stroke of luck, he thought, but he little knew how big a stroke or into what a series of adventures it was going to lead him.

Once on the platform of the small station at which Mr. Grey had bidden him to stop, he noticed two things—the utter helplessness of the man in all practical matters and his extreme anxiety to see all that was going on about him without being himself seen. There was method in this curiosity, too much method. Women did not interest him in the least. They could pass and repass without arousing his attention, but the moment a man stepped his way, he shrank from him only to betray the greatest curiosity concerning him the moment he felt it safe to turn and observe him. All of which convinced Sweetwater that the Englishman's errand was in connection with a man whom he equally dreaded and desired to meet.

Of this he was made absolutely certain a little later. As they were leaving the depot with the rest of the arrivals Mr. Grey said:

"I want you to get me a room at a very quiet hotel. This done, you are to hunt up the man whose name you will find written in this paper, and when you have found him make up your mind how it will be possible for me to get a good look at him without his getting any sort of a look at me. Do this and you will earn a week's salary in one day."

Sweetwater, with his head in air and his heart on fire—for matters were looking very promising indeed—took the paper and put it in his pocket; then he began to hunt for a hotel. Not till he had found what he wished and installed the Englishman in his room did he venture to open the precious memorandum and read the name he had been speculating over for an hour. It was not the one he had anticipated, but it came near to it. It was that of James Wellgood.

(Continued Next Week.)

ED WILES STARTS NEW BRICK YARD

Ed Wiles, a well-known brick mason of this city, has begun the erection of a brick manufacturing plant on the Dan Linton place north of the city, and will be in a position to furnish a large number of brick for building operations in Eugene this summer. He will have the plant in operation within a short time, and when running to its full capacity it will turn out 16,000 to 18,000 bricks each day.

There is going to be a big demand for brick this summer, in fact there is now, and no doubt Mr. Wiles will be able to dispose of all he can manufacture. The clay on the Linton place is said to be admirably adapted to the manufacture of a first-class building brick.

RANCHER ACCUSED OF SERIOUS CRIME

Prineville, Or., April 17.—Larkin K. Elliott has been arrested at his ranch on the Ococho river on the charge of burning and otherwise destroying property belonging to ex-Congressman J. M. Williamson.

On March 28 the shearing plant and corrals, together with a house and other buildings, belonging to J. N. Williamson, were burned to the ground, his barn alone being saved. A fire was started in the manger of the barn, but for some reason it went out, though not without leaving some very valuable evidence for the use of the detectives who were put to work as soon as the authorities were notified of the burning. Because of the location of this property in a rather remote part of the Horse Heaven country, it was some time before the fact was reported.

A few days prior to this a sheep camp belonging to Mr. Williamson was destroyed on a tributary of the Ococho, about fifteen miles east of Prineville. Evidence is in the hands of the sheriff that indicates that a party or parties were the same in both the incendiary acts. The value of the property destroyed by the fire was about $3000, only $500 of which was secured by insurance.

HAYES SEES DARK WAR CLOUDS GATHER

Washington, April 17.—"Somebody has got to whip Japan and I am very much afraid that the important duty will fall upon us." This sensational statement was made today by Representative Hayes, of California, after a visit to the White House. Continuing, Hayes said:

"What do you suppose is in Japan's mind while all this preparation is going on in her shipyards? What nation is she preparing to go to war with that she is spending $100,000,000 annually? It is the United States and there is no use trying to fool ourselves into believing anything else."

The representative refused to say what actuated the utterance at this time.

JULIA MARLOWE WILL FILE SUIT

Boston, April 17.—The elimination of the names of Julia Marlowe and Mrs. Maude Backus from the divorce petition filed by Clara von Hermann against her husband, Karl von Hermann, the newspaper and magazine writer, is expected to be followed shortly by suits for criminal libel. Miss Marlowe is averse to going into court, but her managers are said to be determined that Mrs. von Hermann should be punished.

Needless Alarm.

Miss Tartun—Mr. McBash, this being leap year, let me ask you—

Diffident Young Man (hastily interrupting)—Oh, I beg of you, Miss—

Miss Tartun—If you think any self-respecting young woman would go out of her way to ask a dub like you to marry her?

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For Infants and Children.
The Kind You Have Always Bought
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THE COME AND SEE SIGN

This sign is permanently attached to the front of the main building of the Lydia E. Pinkham Medicine Company, Lynn, Mass.

What Does This Sign Mean?

It means that public inspection of the Laboratory and methods of doing business is honestly desired. It means that there is nothing about the business which is not "open and aboveboard."

It means that a permanent invitation is extended to anyone to come and verify any and all statements made in the advertisements of Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound.

Is it a purely vegetable compound made from roots and herbs — without drugs?

Come and See.

Do the women of America continually use as much of it as we are told?

Come and See.

Was there ever such a person as Lydia E. Pinkham, and is there any Mrs. Pinkham now to whom sick woman are asked to write?

Come and See.

Is the vast private correspondence with sick women conducted by women only, and are the letters kept strictly confidential?

Come and See.

Have they really got letters from over one million, one hundred thousand women correspondents?

Come and See.

Have they proof that Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound has cured thousands of these women?

Come and See.

This advertisement is only for doubters. The great army of women who know from their own personal experience that no medicine in the world equals Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound for female ills will still go on using and being benefited by it; but the poor doubting, suffering woman must, for her own sake, be taught confidence, for she also might just as well regain her health.

Gophers, Sage Rats and Prairie Dogs annually devastate our fields of growing grain. Their number may be greatly diminished by a systematic warfare upon them. Every female killed before the young are born, reduces the number of pests at least ten later on.

"Woodlark" Squirrel Poison is the most reliable and destructive agent yet devised for their extermination. It is absolutely certain in its action and every kernel is warranted to kill. Climatic changes or moisture of the earth do not destroy its strength. It requires no mixing or preparation, and is always ready for use. No other is so good. Dealers will refund the purchase price, if not as claimed.

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