

The Woman In the Alcove

By ANNA KATHARINE GREEN.

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

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CHAPTER XVI—Continued.

"What's this?" he murmured, feeling it with wonder. I should almost say anger. Suddenly he pulled off the wrapper, and my heart stood still in expectancy. If he quailed and how could he help doing so if guilty?—what a doubt would be removed from my own breast, what an impediment from police action! But he did not quail. He simply uttered an exclamation of intense anger and laid the weapon back on the table without even taking the precaution of covering it up. I think he muttered an oath, but there was no fear in it, not a particle.

My disappointment was so great, my humiliation so unbounded, that, forget-



I staggered back and let the tray with all its contents slip from my hands. ting myself in my dismay, I staggered back and let the tray with all its contents slip from my hands. The crash that followed stopped Mr. Grey in the act of rising. But it did something more. It awoke a cry from the adjoining room which I shall never forget. While we both started and turned to see from whom this grievous sound had sprung, a man came stumbling toward us with his hands before his eyes and this name wild on his lips:

"Grisel! Grisel!"

Mrs. Fairbrother's name, and the man—

CHAPTER XXII.

AS he wellgood? Sears? Who? A lover of the woman certainly. That was borne in on us by the passion of his cry:

"Grisel! Grisel!"

But how here? And why such fury in Mr. Grey's face and such amazement in that of the inspector?

This question was not to be answered offhand. Mr. Grey, advancing, laid a finger on the man's shoulder. "Come," said he, "we will have our conversation in another room."

The man, who in dress and appearance looked oddly out of place in those gorgeous rooms, shook off the stupor into which he had fallen and started to follow the Englishman. A waiter crossed their track with the soup for our table. Mr. Grey motioned him aside.

"Take that back," said he. "I have some business to transact with this gentleman before I eat. I'll ring when I want you."

Then they entered where I was. As the door closed I caught sight of the inspector's face turned earnestly toward me. In his eyes I read my duty and girded up my heart, as it were, to meet—what? In that moment it was impossible to tell.

The next enlightened me. With a total ignorance of my presence, due probably to his great excitement, Mr. Grey turned on his companion the moment he had closed the door and, setting him by the collar, cried:

"Fairbrother, you villain, why have you called on your wife like this? Are you murderer as well as thief?"

Fairbrother! This man? Then who was he who was being nursed back to life on the mountains beyond Santa Fe? Sears? Anything seemed possible in that moment.

Meanwhile, dropping his hand from the other's throat as suddenly as he had seized it, Mr. Grey caught up the stiletto from the table where he had flung it, crying, "Do you recognize this?"

Ah, then I saw guilt!

In a silence worse than any cry this so called husband of the murdered woman, the man on whom no suspicion had fallen, the man whom all had thought a thousand miles away at the time of the deed, stared at the weapon thrust under his eyes, while over his face passed all those expressions of fear, abhorrence and detected guilt which, fool that I was, I had expected to see reflected in response to the same test in Mr. Grey's equable countenance.

The surprise and wonder of it held me chained to the spot. I was in a state of stupefaction, so that I scarcely noted the broken fragments at my feet. But the intruder noticed them. Wrenching his gaze from the stiletto which

Mr. Grey continued to hold out, he pointed to the broken cup and saucer, muttering:

"That is what started me into this betrayal—the noise of breaking china. I cannot bear it since."

He stopped, bit his lip and looked around him with an air of sudden bravado.

"Since you dropped the cups at your wife's feet in Mr. Ramsdell's alcove," flashed Mr. Grey with admirable self-possession.

"I see that explanations from myself are not in order," was the grim retort, launched with the bitterest sarcasm. Then as the full weight of his position crashed in on him his face assumed an aspect startling to my unaccustomed eyes, and thrusting his hand into his pocket he drew forth a small box which he placed in Mr. Grey's hands.

"The Great Mogul," he declared simply.

It was the first time I had heard this diamond so named.

Without a word that gentleman opened the box, took one look at the contents, assumed a satisfied air and carefully deposited the recovered gem in his own pocket. As his eyes returned to the man before him all the passion of the latter burst forth.

"It was not for that I killed her," cried he. "It was because she defied me and flouted her disobedience in my very face. I would do it again, yet!"

Here his voice broke and it was in a different tone and with a total change of manner he added: "You stand appalled at my depravity. You have not lived my life." Then quickly and with a touch of sullenness: "You suspected me because of the stiletto. It was a mistake, using that stiletto. Otherwise the plan was good. I doubt if you know how I found my way into the alcove, possibly under your very eyes; certainly under the eyes of many who knew me."

"I do not. It is enough that you entered it; that you confess your guilt."

Here Mr. Grey stretched his hand toward the electric button.

"No, it is not enough." The tone was fierce, authoritative. "Do not ring the bell—not yet. I have a fancy to tell you how I managed that little affair."

Glancing about he caught up from a nearby table a small brass tray. Emptying it of its contents, he turned on us with drawn down features and an obsequious air so opposed to his natural manner that it was as if another man stood before us.

"Pardon my black tie," he muttered, holding out the tray toward Mr. Grey. Wellgood!

The room turned with me. It was he, then, the great financier, the multimillionaire, the husband of the magnificent Grisel, who had entered Mr. Ramsdell's house as a waiter!

Mr. Grey did not show surprise, but he made a gesture, when instantly the tray was thrown aside, and the man resumed his ordinary aspect.

"I see you understand me," he cried. "I, who have played host at many a ball, passed myself off that night as one of the waiters. I came and went, and no one noticed me. It is such a natural sight to see a waiter passing less than my going in and out of the alcove did not attract the least attention. I never look at waiters when I attend balls. I never look higher than their trays. No one looked at me higher than my tray. I hold the stiletto under the tray, and when I struck her she threw up her hands, and they hit the tray, and the cups fell. I have never been able to bear the sound of breaking china since. I loved her!"

A gasp, and he recovered himself.

"That is not here nor there," he muttered. "You summoned me under threat to present myself at your door today. I have done so. I meant to restore you your diamond simply. It has become worthless to me. But fate exacted more. Surprise forced my secret from me. That young lady with her damnable awkwardness has put my head in a noose, but do not think to hold it there. I did not risk this interview without precautions. I assure you, and when I leave this hotel it will be as a free man."

With one of his rapid changes, wonderful and inexplicable to me at the moment, he turned toward me, with a bow, saying courteously enough:

"We will excuse the young lady."

Next moment the barrel of a pistol gleamed in his hand.

The moment was critical. Mr. Grey stood directly in the line of fire, and the audacious man who thus held him at his mercy was scarcely a foot from the door leading into the hall. Marking the desperation of his look and the steadiness of his finger on the trigger, I expected to see Mr. Grey recoil and the man escape. But Mr. Grey held his own, though he made no move and did not venture to speak. Nerved by his courage, I summoned up all my own. This man may not escape now must Mr. Grey suffer. The pistol directed against him must be diverted to myself. Such amends were due one whose good name I had so deeply if

gravelly smiled. I had but to screen,

to call out for the inspector, but a remembrance of the necessity we were now under of preserving our secret, of keeping from Mr. Grey the fact that he had been under surveillance, was even at that moment surrounded by the police, deterred me, and I threw myself toward the bell instead, crying out that I would raise the house if he moved, and laid my finger on the button.

The pistol swung my way. The face above it smiled. I watched that



Mr. Grey stood directly in the line of fire.

smile. Before it broadened to its full extent, I pressed the button.

Fairbrother stared, dropped his pistol and burst forth with these two words: "Brave girl!"

The tone I can never convey.

Then he made for the door.

As he laid his hand on the knob, he called back:

"I have been in worse straits than this!"

But he never had. When he opened the door, he found himself face to face with the inspector.

CHAPTER XXVII.

LATER, it was all explained. Mr. Grey, looking like another man, came into the room where I was endeavoring to soothe his starved daughter and devour in secret my own joy. Taking the sweet girl in his arms he said, with a calm ignoring of my presence, at which I secretly smiled:

"This is the happiest moment of my existence, Helen. I feel as if I had recovered you from the brink of the grave."

"Me? Why, I have never been so ill as that!"

"I know, but I have felt as if you were doomed ever since I heard or thought I heard in this city, and under no ordinary circumstances, the peculiar cry which haunts our house on the eve of any great misfortune. I shall not apologize for my fears. You know that I have good cause for them, but today, only today, I have heard from the lips of the most arrant knave I have ever known that this cry sprang from himself with intent to deceive me. He knew my weakness, knew the cry. He was in Darlington Manor when Cecilia died and, wishing to startle me into dropping something which I held, made use of his ventriloquial powers (he had been a mountebank once, poor wretch!) and with such effect that I have not been a happy man since in spite of your daily improvement—and continued promise of recovery. But I am happy now, relieved and joyful, and this miserable being—would you like to hear his story? Are you strong enough for anything so tragic? He is a thief and a murderer, but he has feelings, and his life has been a curious one and strangely interwoven with ours. Do you care to hear about it? He is the man who stole our diamond."

My patient uttered a little cry.

"Oh, tell me," she entreated, excited, but not unhealthfully, while I was in an anguish of curiosity I could with difficulty conceal.

Mr. Grey turned with courtesy to me and asked if a few family details would bore me. I smiled and assured him to the contrary, at which he settled himself in the chair he liked best and began a tale which I will permit myself to present to you complete and from other points of view than his own.

Some five years before one of the great diamonds of the world was offered for sale in an eastern market. Mr. Grey, who stopped at no expense in the gratification of his taste in this direction, immediately sent his agent to Egypt to examine the stone. If the agent discovered it to be all that was claimed for it and within the reach of a wealthy commoner's purse, he was to buy it himself and so up through the various gradations of a successful life to a position among the foremost business men of New York. In all these changes he had maintained a name for honest if not generous dealing. He lived in great style, had married and was known to have but one extravagant fancy. This was for the unique and curious in art, a taste which, if report spoke true, cost him many thousands each year.

This last was the only clause in the report which pointed in any way toward this man being the possible abstractor of the Great Mogul, as Mr. Grey's famous diamond was called, and the latter was too just a man and too much of a fancier in this line himself to let a fact of this kind weigh against the favorable nature of the rest. So he recalled his agent, double locked his cabinets and continued to confine his display of valuables to articles which did not suggest jewels. Thus three years passed, when one day he heard mention made of a wonderful diamond

which had been seen in New York. From its description he gathered that it must be the one surreptitiously ab-

stracted from his cabinet, and when, after some careful inquiries, he learned that the name of its possessor was Fairbrother, he awoke to his old suspicions and determined to probe this matter to the bottom—but secretly.

He still had too much consideration to attack a man in high position without full proof.

Knowing of no one he could trust with so delicate an inquiry as this had now become, he decided to undertake it himself, and for this purpose embraced the first opportunity to cross the water. He took his daughter with him because he had resolved never to let his one remaining child out of his sight. But she knew nothing of his plans or reason for travel. No one did. Indeed, only his lawyer and the police were aware of the loss of his diamond.

His first surprise on landing was to learn that Mr. Fairbrother, of whose marriage he had heard, had quarreled with his wife and that, in the separation which had occurred, the diamond had fallen to her share and was consequently in her possession at the present moment.

This changed matters, and Mr. Grey's only thought now was to surprise her with the diamond on her person and by one glance assure himself that it was indeed the Great Mogul. Since Mrs. Fairbrother was reported to be a beautiful woman and a great society belle, he saw no reason why he should not meet her publicly, and that very soon. He therefore accepted invitations and attended theaters and balls, though his daughter had suffered from her voyage and was not able to accompany him. But alas! He soon learned that Mrs. Fairbrother was never seen with her diamond and, one evening after an introduction to the opera, that she never talked about it. So there he was, balked on the very threshold of his enterprise, and, recognizing the fact, was preparing to take his now seriously ailing daughter south, when he received an invitation to a ball of such a select character that he decided to remain for it. In the hope that Mrs. Fairbrother would be tempted to put on all her splendor for so magnificent a function and thus gratify him with a sight of his own diamond. During the days that intervened he saw her several times and very soon decided that, in spite of her reticence in regard to this gem, she was not sufficiently in her husband's confidence to know the secret of its real ownership. This encouraged him to attempt plucking her into wearing the diamond on this occasion. He talked of precious stones and finally of his own, declaring that he had a connoisseur's eye for a fine diamond, but had seen none as yet in America to compete with a specimen or two he had in his own cabinets. Her eyes flashed at this, and though she said nothing, he felt sure that her presence at Mr. Ramsdell's house would be envied by her great jewel.

So much for Mr. Grey's attitude in this matter up to the night of the ball. It is interesting enough, but that of Abner Fairbrother is more interesting still and much more serious.

His was, indeed, the hand which had abstracted the diamond from Mr. Grey's collection. Under ordinary conditions he was an honest man. He prized his good name and would not willingly risk it, but he had little real conscience, and once his passions were aroused nothing short of the object desired would content him. At once forceful and subtle, he had at his command infinite resources which his wandering and eventful life had heightened almost to the point of genius. He saw this stone and at once felt an inordinate desire to possess it. He had coveted other men's treasures before, but not as he coveted this. What had been longed in other cases was manna in this. There was a woman in America whom he loved. She was beautiful, and she was splendidly loving. To see her with this glory on her breast would be worth almost any risk which his imagination could picture at the moment. Before the diamond had left his hand he had made up his mind to have it for his own. He knew that it could not be bought, so he set about obtaining it by an act he did not hesitate to acknowledge to himself as criminal. But he did not act without precaution. Having a keen eye and a proper sense of size and color, he carried away from his first view of it a true image of the stone, and when he was next admitted to Mr. Grey's cabinet room he had provided the means for deceiving the owner, whose character

he had sounded.

He might have failed in his daring attempt if he had not been favored by a circumstance no one could have foreseen. A daughter of the house, Cecilia by name, by a certain ill at the time, and Mr. Grey's attention was more or less distracted. Still the probabilities are that he would have noticed something amiss with the stone when he came to restore it to its place if just as he took it in his hand there had not risen in the air outside a weird and walling cry which at once seized upon the imagination of the dozen gentlemen present, and so nearly prostrated their host that he thrust the box he held unopened into the safe and fell upon his knees, a totally unnerved him, crying:

"The banshee! The banshee! My daughter will die!"

Another hand than his locked the safe and dropped the key into the distracted father's pocket.

Thus a superhuman daring combined with a special intervention of fate had made the enterprise a successful one, and Fairbrother, believing more than ever in his star, carried this invaluable jewel back with him to New York.

The stiletto—well, the taking of that was a folly for which he had never ceased to blush. He had not stolen it. He would not steal so inconsiderable

an object. He had merely put it in his pocket when he saw it forgotten, passed over, given to him, as it were. That

the risk, contrary to that involved in the taking of the diamond, was far in excess of the gratification obtained he realized almost immediately; but, having made the break and acquired the curio, he spared himself all further thought of the consequences and presently resumed his old life in New York, none the wiser, to all appearances, for these escapades from virtue and his usual course of fair and open dealing.

But he was soon the worse from jealousy of the wife which his new possession had possibly won for him. She had answered all his expectations as mistress of his home and the exponent of his wealth, and for a year—nay, for two—he had been perfectly happy. Indeed, he had been more than that. He had been triumphant, especially on that memorable evening when, after a cautious delay of months, he had dared to pin that unapproachable sparkler to her breast and present her thus bedecked to the smart set—her whom his talents, and especially his far-reaching business talents, had made his own.

Recalling the old days of barrier and sale across the pine counter in Colorado, he felt that his star rode high and for a time was satisfied with his wife's magnificence and the prestige she gave his establishment. But pride is not all, even to a man of his daring ambition. Gradually he began to realize—first, that she was indifferent to him; next, that she despised him and, lastly, that she hated him. She had despised at her feet, any of whom was more agreeable to her than her own husband, and though he could not put his finger on any definite fault, he soon wearied of a beauty that only gloved for others and made up his mind to part with her rather than let his heart be eaten out by unappreciable longing for what his own good sense told him would never be his.

Yet, being naturally generous, he was satisfied with a separation, and, finding it impossible to think of her as other than extravagantly fed, waited on and clothed, he allowed her a good share of his fortune with the one proviso, that she should not disgrace him. But the diamond she stole, or rather carried off in her naturally high handed manner with the rest of her jewels. He had never given it to her. She knew the value he set on it, but not how he came by it, and would have worn it quite freely if he had not very soon given her to understand that the pleasure of doing so ceased when she left his house. As she could not be seen with it without occasioning public remark, she was forced, though much against her will, to heed his wishes and enjoy its brilliancy in private. But once, when he was out of town, she dared to appear with this fortune on her breast and again while on a visit west, and her husband heard of it.

Mr. Fairbrother had had the jewel set to suit him, not in Florence, as Sears had said, but by a skillful workman he had picked up in great poverty in a remote corner of New York city. Always in dread of some complication, he had provided himself with a second facsimile in paste, this time of an astonishing brightness, and this facsimile he had had set precisely like the true

stone. Then he gave the workman \$1,000 and sent him back to Switzerland. This imitation in paste he showed nobody, but he kept it always in his pocket. Why, he hardly knew. Meaning, he had one confidant, not of his crime, but of his sentiments toward his wife, and the determination he had secretly made to proceed to extremities if she continued to disobey him.

This was a man of his own age or older, who had known him in his early days and had followed all his fortunes. He had been the master of Fairbrother then, but he was his servant now, and as devoted to his interests as if they were his own—which, in a way, they were. For eighteen years he had stood at the latter's right hand, satisfied to look no further, but, for the last three, his glances had strayed a foot or two beyond his master and taken in his master's wife.

The feelings which this man had for Mrs. Fairbrother were peculiar. She was a mere adjunct to her great lord, but she was a very gorgeous one, and while he could not imagine himself doing anything to thwart him whose bread he ate and to whose rise he had himself contributed, yet if he could remain true to him without injuring her he would account himself happy. The day came when he had to decide between them, and, against all chances, against his own preconceived notion of what he would do under these circumstances, he chose to consider her.

This day came when, in the midst of growing complacency and an intense interest in some new scheme which demanded all his powers, Abner Fairbrother learned from the papers that

This woman says that sick Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound as she did.

Mrs. A. Gregory, of 2355 Lawrence St., Denver, Col., writes to Mrs. Pinkham:

"I was practically an invalid for six years, on account of female troubles. I underwent an operation by the doctor's advice, but in a few months I was worse than before. A friend advised Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound and it restored me to perfect health, such as I have not enjoyed in many years. Any woman suffering as I did with backache, bearing-down pains, and periodic pains, should not fail to use Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound."

FACTS FOR SICK WOMEN.

For thirty years Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound, made from roots and herbs, has been the standard remedy for female ills, and has positively cured thousands of women who have been troubled with displacements, inflammation, ulceration, fibroid tumors, irregularities, periodic pains, backache, that bearing-down feeling, flatulency, indigestion, dizziness or nervous prostration. Why don't you try it?

Mrs. Pinkham invites all sick women to write her for advice. She has guided thousands to health. Address, Lynn, Mass.

Mr. Grey of English parliamentary fame had arrived in New York on an indefinite visit. As no cause was assigned for the visit beyond a natural desire on the part of this eminent statesman to see this great country, Mr. Fairbrother's fears reached a sudden climax, and he saw himself ruined and forever disgraced if the diamond now so unhappily out of his hands should fall under the eyes of its owner, whose seeming quiet under its loss had not for a moment deceived him. Waiting only long enough to make sure that the distinguished foreigner was likely to accept social attentions and so in all probability would be brought in contact with Mrs. Fairbrother, he sent her by his devoted servant a peremptory message in which he demanded back his diamond and, upon her refusing to heed this, followed it up by another in which he expressly stated that if she took it out of the safe deposit in which he had been told she was wise enough to keep it or wore it so much as one during the next three months, she would pay for her presumption with her life.

This was no idle threat, though she chose to regard it as such, laughing at the old servant's face and declaring that she would run the risk if the notion seized her. But the notion did not seem to seize her at once, and her husband was beginning to take heart when he heard of the great ball about to be given by the Ramsdells and realized that if she were going to be tempted to wear the diamond at all it would be at this brilliant function given in honor of the one man he had most cause to fear in the whole world.

Sears, seeing the emotion he was under, watched him closely. He had both been on the point of starting for New Mexico to visit a mine in which Mr. Fairbrother was interested, and he waited with inconceivable anxiety to see if his master would change his plans. It was while he was seen in this condition of mind that he was seen to shake his fist at Mrs. Fairbrother's passing figure, a menace naturally interpreted as directed against her, but which, if we know the man, was rather the expression of his anger against the husband who could rebuke and threaten so beautiful a creature. Meanwhile Mr. Fairbrother's preparations went on, and three weeks before the ball they started. Mr. Fairbrother had business in Chicago and business in Denver. It was two weeks before he before he reached La Junta. Sears counted the days. At La Junta they had a long conversation, or, rather, Mr. Fairbrother talked and Sears listened. The sum of what he said was this: He had made up his mind to have back his diamond. He was going to New York to get it. He was going to know that and as he wished no one to know that he had gone or that his plans had been in any way interrupted, the other was to continue on to El Moro and, passing himself off as Fairbrother, hire a room at the hotel and shut himself up in it for ten days on any plan he might think might suggest. If at the end of that time Fairbrother should rejoin him, well and good. They would go on together to Santa Fe, but if for any reason the former should delay his return, then Sears was to exercise his own judgment as to the length of time he should retain his borrowed personality; also as to the advisability of paying on to the mine and entering on the work there, as had been planned between them.

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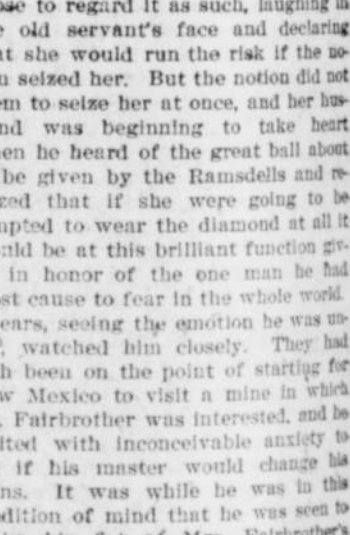
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the risk, contrary to that involved in the taking of the diamond, was far in excess of the gratification obtained he realized almost immediately; but, having made the break and acquired the curio, he spared himself all further thought of the consequences and presently resumed his old life in New York, none the wiser, to all appearances, for these escapades from virtue and his usual course of fair and open dealing.

But he was soon the worse from jealousy of the wife which his new possession had possibly won for him. She had answered all his expectations as mistress of his home and the exponent of his wealth, and for a year—nay, for two—he had been perfectly happy. Indeed, he had been more than that. He had been triumphant, especially on that memorable evening when, after a cautious delay of months, he had dared to pin that unapproachable sparkler to her breast and present her thus bedecked to the smart set—her whom his talents, and especially his far-reaching business talents, had made his own.

Recalling the old days of barrier and sale across the pine counter in Colorado, he felt that his star rode high and for a time was satisfied with his wife's magnificence and the prestige she gave his establishment. But pride is not all, even to a man of his daring ambition. Gradually he began to realize—first, that she was indifferent to him; next, that she despised him and, lastly, that she hated him. She had despised at her feet, any of whom was more agreeable to her than her own husband, and though he could not put his finger on any definite fault, he soon wearied of a beauty that only gloved for others and made up his mind to part with her rather than let his heart be eaten out by unappreciable longing for what his own good sense told him would never be his.

Yet, being naturally generous, he was satisfied with a separation, and, finding it impossible to think of her as other than extravagantly fed, waited on and clothed, he allowed her a good share of his fortune with the one proviso, that she should not disgrace him. But the diamond she stole, or rather carried off in her naturally high handed manner with the rest of her jewels. He had never given it to her. She knew the value he set on it, but not how he came by it, and would have worn it quite freely if he had not very soon given her to understand that the pleasure of doing so ceased when she left his house. As she could not be seen with it without occasioning public remark, she was forced, though much against her will, to heed his wishes and enjoy its brilliancy in private. But once, when he was out of town, she dared to appear with this fortune on her breast and again while on a visit west, and her husband heard of it.

Mr. Fairbrother had had the jewel set to suit him, not in Florence, as Sears had said, but by a skillful workman he had picked up in great poverty in a remote corner of New York city. Always in dread of some complication, he had provided himself with a second facsimile in paste, this time