

# The Woman In the Alcove

By ANNA KATHARINE GREEN,

Author of "The Millionaire Baby," "The Millionaire's Daughter," "The House in the Mist," "The Amethyst Box," Etc.

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## CHAPTER V—(Continued.)

The 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 not the multimillionaire he is today. Plain featured and without manner, he was no mate for this sparkling coquette, whose charms were of the kind which grows with exercise. Though no actual scandal was ever associated with her name, she grew tired of her captives and the conquests which she made no endeavor to hide either from him or from the world at large, and at some time during the previous year they had come to a friendly understanding which led to their living apart, each in grand style and with a certain deference to the proprieties which retained them their friends and an enviable place in society.

He was not often invited where she was, and she never appeared in any assemblage where he was expected, but 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 detention was looked on as the almost certain prelude to his arrest on the charge of murder.

I had had some discipline in life. Although a favorite of my wealthy uncle, I had given up very early the prospects he held out to me of a continued enjoyment of his bounty and entered 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 some one, 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 my craving also; a craving, however, to which I failed at first to yield, for I felt that it was unsharred and thus a token 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 awoke to the fact that all my preparation had been for home joys and a woman's true existence. One hour of ecstasy in the light of this new hope, then tragedy and something approaching chaos! Truly I had been through a 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 care. I was determined on my course, fit or unfit, and in the relief brought by this appeal to my energy I rose and dressed and went about the duties of the day.

One of these was to determine whether Mr. Grey, on his return to his hotel, 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 in a fortnight.

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

## CHAPTER VI.

To 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 uncle, so amenable in most matters, proved inexorable on this point. Till Mr. Durand's good name should be restored by the coroner's verdict or such evidence brought to light as should effectually place him beyond all suspicion I was to hold no communication with him of any sort whatever. I remember the very words with which my uncle ended the one exhaustive conversation we had on the subject. They were these:

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

As uncle seldom asserted himself, and as he is very much in earnest when he does, I made no attempt to combat this resolution, especially as it met the approval of my better judgment. But, though my power to convey sympathy fell thus under a yoke, my thoughts and feelings remained free, and there were all concentrated to the man struggling under an imputation the disgrace and humiliation of

the suppositions aired 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 appreciable 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 fixed 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 light, as she had no recognized lover or dishonest dependent and, moreover, as no gem of such unusual value was known to have been offered within the year 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, presumptuous 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 those who would not lightly endure the interference of such an insignificant note in the great scheme of justice as myself.

The inquest, 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 Placida; 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 illness, which many had taken for indifference, was that of a man physically disabled 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 unthoughtful, 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 durance and under such a cloud of disgrace 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—

But fortune was less obdurate 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 some length in the following communication, which appeared a few days later in one of our most interesting journals.

It was from a resident correspondent in New Mexico, and was written, as the editor was careful to say, for his own eyes and not for the public. He had ventured, however, to give it in full, knowing the great interest which this whole subject had for his readers.

## CHAPTER VII.

NOT to be outdone by the editor, I insert the article here with all its details, the importance of which I trust I have anticipated:

Santa Fe, N. M., April 1.—Arrived in Santa Fe, I inquired where Abner Fairbrother could be found. I was told that he was at his mine, sick.

Upon inquiring as to the location of the Placida, I was informed that it was fifteen miles or so distant in the mountains, and upon my expressing an intention of going there immediately, I was given what I thought very unnecessary advice and then directed to a certain livery stable, where I was told I could get the right kind of a horse and such equipment as I stood in need of.

I thought I was equipped all right as it was, but I said nothing and went on to the livery stable. Here I was shown a horse which I took to be at once and was about to mount when a pair of leggings was brought to me.

"You will need these for your journey," said the man.

"Journey!" I repeated. "Fifteen miles?"

The livery stable keeper, a half breed with a peculiarly pleasant smile, cocked up his shoulders with the remark:

"Three men as willing, but as inexperienced as yourself, have attempted the same journey during the last week, and they all came back before they reached the divide. You will probably come back, too, but I shall give you as fair a start as if I knew you were going straight through."

"But a woman has done it," said I; "a nurse from the hospital went up that very road last week."

"Oh, women, they can do anything—women who are nurses! But they don't start off alone. You are going alone."

"Yes," I remarked grimly. "Newspaper correspondents make their journeys singly when they can."

"Oh, you are a newspaper correspondent! Why do so many men from the papers want to see that sick old man? Because he's so rich?"

"Don't you know?" I asked.

He did not seem to.

I wondered at his ignorance, but did not enlighten him.

"Follow the trail and ask your way from time to time. All the goatherds know where the Placida mine is."

Such were his simple instructions as he headed my horse toward the canyon. But as I drew off he shouted out:

"If you get stuck, leave it to the horse. He knows more about it than you do."

## (Continued Next Friday.)

Notice of Final Settlement. Estate of George Drury, deceased. Notice is hereby given that the undersigned, George A. Drury, administrator of the above-named estate, has filed his final account in the matter of said estate with the county clerk of Lane county, Oregon, and that Monday, the 6th day of April, 1908, at the hour of 1 o'clock in the afternoon of said day, has been set and fixed by said court for the hearing of objections to said final account and for the final settlement of said estate; and all objections to said account must be filed with said court on or before the said time and date so fixed by said court for said final hearing and final settlement.

Dated this 14th day of February, 1908.

GEORGE A. DRURY, Administrator of said estate.

Notice of Final Settlement. Estate of Isaac H. Tyler, deceased. Notice is hereby given that the undersigned, George A. Drury, executor of the above-named estate, has filed his final account in the matter of said estate with the county clerk of Lane county, Oregon, and that Monday, the 6th day of April, 1908, at the hour of 2 o'clock in the afternoon of said day, has been set and fixed by said court for the hearing of objections to said final account and for the final settlement of said estate; and all objections to said account must be filed with said court on or before the said time and date so fixed by said court for said final hearing and final settlement.

Dated this 14th day of February, 1908.

GEORGE A. DRURY, Administrator of said estate.

NOTICE OF FINAL SETTLEMENT. Notice is hereby given that the undersigned has filed his final account with the County Court for Lane County, Oregon, and that Monday, the 6th day of April, 1908, at the hour of 10 o'clock a. m., as the time and the county court room in Eugene, Lane County, Oregon, as the place to hear any objections to the said account.

Any person interested in the said matter are required to file their objections on or before the said day.

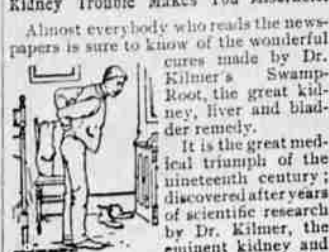
S. P. NESS, Administrator of the Estate of Lewis Halverson, deceased.

NOTICE OF FINAL SETTLEMENT. Notice is hereby given that the undersigned, administrator of the estate of Joseph H. Stone, deceased, has filed his final account with the county clerk of Lane county, Oregon, and an order has been made and entered of record directing this matter and setting Monday, the 6th day of April, 1908, at the hour of 10 o'clock a. m., for the hearing of objections to said account and for the final settlement of said estate.

RALPH W. STONE, Administrator of the estate of Joseph H. Stone, deceased.

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