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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.

CHAPTER XI—(Continued.)

"No, Miss Van Arsdale, you would not work more intelligently, and you know it. But you have the natural curiosity of one whose very heart is bound up in this business. I could deny you what you ask, but I won't, for I want you to work with quiet confidence, which you would not do if your mind were taken up with doubts and questions. Miss Van Arsdale, one surprise of yours was correct. A man was sent that night to the Ramsdell house with a note from Miss Grey. We know this because he boasted of it to one of the bellboys before he went out, saying that he was going to have a glimpse of one of the sweetest parties of the season. It is also true that this man was Mr. Grey's valet, an old servant who came over with him from England. But what adds weight to all this and makes us regard the whole affair with suspicion is the additional fact that this man received his dismissal the following morning and was not seen since by any one we could reach. This looks bad to begin with, like the suppression of evidence, you know. Then Mr. Grey has not been the same man since that night. He is full of care, and this care is not entirely in connection with his daughter, who is doing very well and bids fair to be up in a few days. But all this would be nothing if we had not received advices from England which prove that Mr. Grey's visit here has an element of mystery in it. There was every reason for his remaining in his own country, where a political crisis is approaching, yet he crossed the water, bringing his only daughter with him. The explanation as volunteered by one who knew him well was this: that only his desire to see or acquire some precious object for his collection could have taken him across the ocean at this time, nothing else rivaling his interest in governmental affairs. Still this would be nothing if a stiletto similar to the one employed in this crime had not once formed part of a collection of curios belonging to a cousin of his whom he often visited. This stiletto has been missing for some time, stolen, as the owner declared, by some unknown person. All this looks bad enough, but when I tell you that a week before the fatal ball at Mr. Ramsdell's, Mr. Grey made a tour of the jewelers on Broadway and, with the pretext of buying a diamond for his daughter, entered into a talk about famous stones, ending always with some question about the Fairbrother gem, you will see that his interest in that stone is established and that it only remains for us to discover if that interest is a guilty one. I cannot believe this possible, but you have our leave to make your experiment and see. Only do not count too much on his superstition. If he is the deep dyed criminal you imagine, the cry which startled us all at a certain critical instant was raised by himself and for the purpose you suggested. None of the sensitiveness often shown by a man who has been surprised into crime will be his. Relying on his reputation and the prestige of his great name, he will, if he thinks himself under fire, face every shock unmoved."

make this attempt, which I had undertaken in such loyalty of spirit, a misery to myself and ineffectual to the man I had hoped to save by it. When I did look up and catch the first beams of Mr. Grey's keen blue eyes fixed inquiringly on me, I neither knew what to think nor how to act. He was tall and firmly built and had an intellectual aspect altogether. I was conscious of regarding him with a decided feeling of awe and found myself forgetting why I had come there and what my suspicions were, suspicions which had carried hope with them, hope for my-



"This is your patient."

self and hope for my lover, who would never escape the opprobrium, even if he did the punishment, of this great crime, were this the only other person who could possibly be associated with it, found to be the fine, clear souled man he appeared to be in this first interview with him.

Perceiving very soon that his apprehensions in my regard were limited to a fear lest I should not feel at ease in my new home under the restraint of a presence more accustomed to intimidate than attract strangers, I threw aside all doubts of myself and met the advances of both father and daughter with that quiet confidence which my position there demanded. The result both gratified and I grieved. As a nurse entering on her first case I was happy. As a woman with an ulterior object in view verging on the audacious and unspicable, I was wretched and regretful and just a little shaken in the conviction which had hitherto upheld me.

I was therefore but poorly prepared to meet the ordeal which awaited me, when, a little later in the day, Mr. Grey called me into the adjoining room and, after saying that it would afford him great relief to go out for an hour or so, asked if I were afraid to be left alone with my patient. "Oh, no, sir," I began, but stopped in secret dismay. I was afraid, but not on account of her condition—rather on account of my own. What if I should be led into betraying my feelings on finding myself under no other eye than her own? What if the temptation to probe her poor sick mind should prove stronger than my duty toward her as a nurse? My tones were hesitating, but Mr. Grey paid little heed. His mind was too fixed on what he wished to say himself.

"Before I go," said he, "I have a request to make—I may as well say a caution to give you. Do not, I pray, either now or at any future time, carry or deliver any one else to carry newspapers into this room. They are just now so alarming. There has been, as you know, a dreadful tragedy in this city. If she caught one glimpse of the headlines or saw so much as the name of Fairbrother—which which is a name she knows, the result might be very harmful to her. She is not only extremely sensitive from illness, but from temperament. Will you be careful?" "I shall be careful."

It was such an effort for me to say these words, to say anything in the state of mind into which I had been thrown by his unexpected allusion to this subject, that I unfortunately drew his attention to myself, and it was with what I felt to be a glance of doubt that he added with decided emphasis:

"You must consider this whole subject as a forbidden one in this family. Only cheerful topics are suitable for the sickroom. If Miss Grey attempts to introduce any other, stop her. Do not let her talk about anything which will not be conducive to her speedy recovery. These are the only instructions I have to give you. All others must come from her physician."

I made some reply with as little show of emotion as possible. It seemed to satisfy him, for his face cleared as he kindly observed: "You have a very trustworthy look for one so young. I shall rest easy while you are with her, and I shall expect you to be always with her when I am not—every moment, mind. She is never to be left alone with gossiping servants. If a word is mentioned in her hearing about this crime, which seems to be in everybody's mouth, I shall feel forced, greatly as I should regret the fact, to blame you." This was a heart stroke, but I kept my face as calm as possible, and I kept my tongue as steady as I could. I did not to such a marked degree as to arouse any deeper suspicion in his

mind than that I had been wounded in my amour propre.

"She shall be well guarded," said I. "You may trust me to keep from her all avoidable knowledge of this crime."

He bowed, and I was about to leave his presence when he detained me by remarking, with the air of one who felt that some explanation was necessary:

"I was a, the ball where this crime took place. Naturally it has made a deep impression on me and would on her if she heard of it."

"Assuredly," I murmured, wondering if he would say more and how I should have the courage to stand there and listen if he did.

"It is the first time I have ever come in contact with crime," he went on with what in one of his reserved nature seemed a hardly natural insistence. "I could well have spared the experience. A tragedy with which one has been even thus remotely connected produces a lasting effect upon the mind."

"Oh, yes; oh, yes!" I murmured, edging involuntarily toward the door. Did I not know? Had I not been there, too—little I, whom he stood gazing down upon from such a height, little realizing the fatality which united us, and what was even a more overwhelming thought to me at the moment, the fact that of all persons in the world the shrinking little being into whose eyes he was then looking was perhaps his greatest enemy and the one person, great or small, from whom he had the most to fear?

But I was no enemy to his gentle daughter and the relief I felt at finding myself thus cut off by my own promise from even the remotest communication with her on this forbidden subject was genuine and sincere.

But the father! What was I to think of the father? Alas! I could have but one thought, admirable as he appeared in all lights save the one in which his too evident connection with this crime had placed him. I spent the hours of the afternoon in alternately watching the sleeping face of my patient, too sweetly calm in its repose, or so it seemed, for the mind beneath to harbor such doubts as were shown in the warning I had ascribed to her, and vain efforts to explain by any other hypothesis than that of guilt, the extraordinary evidence which linked this man of great affairs and the loftiest repute to a crime involving both theft and murder.

Nor did the struggle end that night. It was renewed with still greater positiveness the next day, as I witnessed the glances which from time to time passed between this father and daughter—glances full of doubt and question on both sides, but not exactly such doubt or such question as my suspicions called for. Or so I thought, and spent another day or two hesitating very much over my duty, when, coming unexpectedly upon Mr. Grey one evening, I felt all my doubts revive in view of the extraordinary expression of dread—I might with still greater truth say fear—which informed his features and made them, to my unaccustomed eyes, almost unrecognizable.

He was sitting at his desk in reverie over some papers which he seemed not to have touched for hours, and when, at some movement I made, he started up and met my eye, I could swear that his cheek was pale, the firm carriage of his body shaken, and the whole man a victim to some strong and secret apprehension he vainly sought to hide. When I ventured to tell him what I wanted, he made an effort and pulled himself together, but I had seen him with his mask off, and his usually calm visage and self-possessed mien could not again deceive me.

My duties kept me mainly at Miss Grey's bedside, but I had been provided with a little room across the hall, and to this room I retired very soon after this for rest and a necessary understanding with myself.

For, in spite of this experience and my now settled convictions, my purpose required whitening. The indescribable charm, the extreme refinement and nobility of manner observable in both Mr. Grey and his daughter were producing their effect. I felt gaily-constrained. Whatever my convictions, the impetus to act was leaving me. How could I resist it? By thinking of Anson Durand and his present disgraceful position.

Anson Durand! Oh, how the feeling surged up in my breast as that name slipped from my lips on crossing the threshold of my little room! Anson Durand, whom I believed innocent, whom I loved, but whom I was betraying with every moment of hesitation in which I allowed myself to indulge! What if the Hon. Mr. Grey is an eminent statesman, a distinguished scholar, and to all appearance, high-minded man? What if my patient is sweet, dove-eyed and affectionate? Had not Anson qualities as excellent in their way, rights as certain, and a hold upon myself superior to any claims which another might advance? Drawing a much crumpled little note from my pocket, I eagerly read it. It was the only one I had of his writing, the only letter he had ever written me. I had already reread it a hundred times, but as I once more repeated to myself its well known lines, I felt my heart grow strong and fixed in the determination which had brought me into this family.

Restoring the letter to its place, I opened my grip-sack and from its inmost recesses drew forth an object which I had no sooner in hand than a natural sense of disquietude led me to glance apprehensively, first at the door, then at the window, though I had locked the one and shaded the other. It seemed as if some other eye besides my own must be gazing at what I held so gingerly in hand; that the walls were watching me, if nothing else, and

the sensation this produced was so exactly like that of guilt (or what I imagined to be guilt), that I was forced to repeat once more to myself that it was not a good man's overthrown I sought, or even a bad man's immunity from punishment, but the truth, the absolute truth. No name could equal that which I should feel it, by any over-delicacy now, I failed to save the man who trusted me.

The article which I held—have you guessed it?—was the stiletto with which Mrs. Fairbrother had been killed. It had been entrusted to me by the police for a definite purpose. The time for testing that purpose had come, or so nearly come, that I felt I must be thinking about the necessary ways and means.

Unwinding the folds of tissue paper in which the stiletto was wrapped, I



It seemed as if some other eye besides my own must be gazing at what I held.

scrutinized the weapon very carefully. Illicitly I had seen only pictures of it; now I had the stiletto itself in my hand. It was not a natural one for a young woman to hold, a woman whose taste ran more toward beading than inflicting wounds, but I forced myself to forget why the end of its blade was rusty and looked mainly at the devices which ornamented the handle. I had not been mistaken in them. They belonged to the house of Grey and to none other. It was a legitimate inquiry I had undertaken. However the matter ended, I should always have these historic devices for my excuse.

(Continued Next Friday.)

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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, 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 notice and setting Monday, the 6th day of April, 1908, at the hour of 10 o'clock a. m. for the hearing of objections, if any, to said account and for the final settlement of said estate. RALPH W. STONE, Administrator of the estate of Joseph H. Stone, deceased.

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.



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