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The New Store.
JAMES S. McMANUS

The Woman In the Alcove

By ANNA KATHARINE GREEN,

Author of "The Millionaire Baby," "The Filling Bell," "The House in the Mist," "The Amethyst Box," Etc.

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pieces, and soon she was engaged in holding a regular court in this favored retreat.

Why should this interest me? Why should I notice her or look that way at all? Because Mr. Durand did? Possibly. I remember that for all his ardent loveliness I felt a little plighted that he should divide his attentions in this way. Perhaps I thought that for this evening at least he might have been blind to a mere coquette's fascinations.

I was thus doubly engaged in listening to my lover's words and in watching the various gentlemen who went up and down the steps when a former partner advanced and reminded me that I had promised him a walk.

Loath to leave Mr. Durand, yet seeing no way of excusing myself to Mr. Fox, I cast an appealing glance at the former and was greatly chagrined to find him already on his feet.

"Enjoy your dance," he cried. "I have a word to say to Mrs. Fairbrother," and was gone before my new partner had taken me on his arm.

Was Mrs. Fairbrother the lady with the diamond? Yes. As I turned to enter the parlor with my partner I caught a glimpse of Mr. Durand's tall figure just disappearing from the step behind the sage curtain.

"Who is Mrs. Fairbrother?" I inquired of Mr. Fox at the end of the dance.

Mr. Fox, who is one of society's perennial beaux, knows everybody.

"She is—well, she was Abner Fairbrother's wife. You know Fairbrother, the millionaire who built that curious structure on Eighty-sixth street. At present they are living apart—an amicable understanding, I believe. Her diamond makes her conspicuous. It is one of the most remarkable stones in New York, perhaps in the United States. Have you observed it?"

"Yes—that is, at a distance. Do you think her very handsome?"

"Mrs. Fairbrother? She's called so, but she's not my style." Here he gave me a killing glance. "I admit women of mind and heart. They do not need to wear jewels worth an ordinary man's fortune."

I looked about for an excuse to leave this none too desirable partner.

"Let us go back into the long hall," I urged. "The ceaseless whirl of these dancers is making me dizzy."

With the ease of a gallant man he took me on his arm, and soon we were promenading again in the direction of the alcove. A passing glimpse of its interior was afforded me as we turned to retrace our steps in front of the yellow divan. The lady with the diamond was still there. A fold of the superb pink velvet she wore protruded across the gap made by the half drawn curtains, just as it had done a half hour before. But it was impossible to see her face or who was with her. What I could see, however, and did was the figure of a man leaning against the wall at the foot of the steps. At first I thought this person unknown to me; then I perceived that he was no other than the chief guest of the evening, the Englishman of whom I have previously spoken.

His expression had altered. He looked now both anxious and absorbed—particularly anxious and particularly

and for a few minutes at least tend an ear to Mr. Fox's rapid compliment and trite-optimisms. Then my attention wandered.

I had not moved nor had I shifted my gaze from the scene before me—the ordinary scene of a gay and well filled supper room—yet I found myself looking, as if through a mist I had not even seen develop, at something as strange, unusual and remote as any phantasm, yet distinct enough in its outlines for me to get a decided impression of a square of light surrounding the figure of a man in a peculiar pose not easily imagined and not easily described. It all passed in an instant, and I sat staring at the window opposite me with the feeling of one who has just seen a vision. Yet almost immediately I forgot the whole occurrence in my anxiety as to Mr. Durand's whereabouts. Certainly he was amusing himself very much elsewhere or he would have found an opportunity of joining me long before this. He was not even in sight, and I grew weary of the endless menu and the senseless chitchat of my companion and, finding him amenable to my whims, rose from my seat at table and made my way to a group of acquaintances standing just outside the supper room door.

As I listened to their greetings some impulse led me to catch another glance down the hall toward the alcove. A man—a waiter—was issuing from it in a rush. Bad news was in his face, and as his eyes encountered those of Mr. Ramsdell, who was advancing hurriedly to meet him, he plunged down the steps with a cry which drew a crowd about the two in an instant.

What was it? What had happened? Mad with an anxiety I did not stop to define, I rushed toward this group now swaying from side to side in ir- repressible excitement, when suddenly everything swam before me, and I fell in a swoon to the floor.

Some one had shouted aloud: "Mrs. Fairbrother has been murdered and her diamond stolen! Lock the doors!"

CHAPTER II.

I MUST have remained insensible for many minutes, for when I returned to full consciousness the supper room was empty and the 200 guests I had left seated at table were gathered in agitated groups about the hall. This was what I first noted. Not till afterward did I realize my own situation. I was lying on a couch in a remote corner of this same hall, and beside me, but not looking at me, stood my lover, Mr. Durand.

How he came to know my state and find me in the general disturbance I did not stop to inquire. It was enough for me at that moment to look up and see him so near. Indeed, the relief was so great, the sense of his protection so comforting, that I involuntarily stretched out my hand in gratitude toward him, but, failing to attract his attention, slipped to the floor and took my face to his side. This roused him, and he gave me a look which steeled me in spite of the thrill of surprise with which I recognized his extreme pallor and a certain peculiar hesitation in his manner not at all natural to it.

Meanwhile some words uttered near us were slowly making their way into my benumbed brain. The waiter who had raised the first alarm was endeavoring to describe to an important group in advance of us what he had come upon in that murderous alcove.

"I was carrying about a tray of ices," he was saying, "and, seeing the lady sitting there, went up. I had expected to find the place full of gentlemen, but she was all alone and did not move as I picked my way over her long train. The next moment I had dropped ices, tray and all. I had come face to face with her and seen that she was dead. She had been stabbed and robbed. There was no diamond on her breast, but there was blood."

A hubbub of disordered sentences seasoned with horrified cries followed this simple description. Then a general movement took place in the direction of the alcove, during which Mr. Durand stooped to my ear and whispered:

"We must get out of this. You are not strong enough to stand such excitement. Don't you think we can escape by the window over there?"

"What, without wraps and in such a snowstorm?" I protested. "Besides, uncle will be looking for me. He came with me, you know."

An expression of annoyance—or was it perplexity?—crossed Mr. Durand's face, and he made a movement as if to leave me.

"I must go," he began, but stopped at my glance of surprise and assumed a different air, one which became him very much better. "Pardon me, dear, I will take you to your uncle. This, I dreadfully regret, interrupting so gay a scene, has quite upset me. I was always sensitive to the sight, the smell, even to the very mention of the word blood."

So was I, but not to the point of cowardice. But then I had not just come from an interview with the murdered

woman. Her glance, her smiles, the lift of her eyebrows were not fresh memories to me. Some consideration was certainly due him for the shock he must be laboring under. Yet I did not know how to keep back the vital questions.

"Who did it? You must have heard some one say."

"I have heard nothing," was his somewhat fierce rejoinder. Then as I made a move—"What! You do not wish to follow the crowd there?"

"I wish to find my uncle, and he is in that crowd."

Mr. Durand said nothing further, and together we passed down the hall. A strange mood pervaded my mind. Instead of wishing to fly a scene which under ordinary conditions would have filled me with utter repugnance, I felt a desire to see and hear everything.

Not from curiosity, such as moved most of the people about me, but because of some strong instinctive feeling I could not understand, as if it were my heart which had been struck and my fate which was trembling in the balance.

We were consequently among the first to hear such further details as were allowed to circulate among the now well nigh frenzied guests. No one knew the perpetrator of the deed, nor did there appear to be any direct evidence calculated to fix his identity. Indeed the sudden death of this beautiful woman in the midst of festivity might have been looked upon as suicide if the jewel had not been missing from her breast and the instrument of death removed from the wound. So far the casual search which had been instituted had failed to produce this weapon. But the police would be here soon and then something would be done.

As to the means of entrance employed by the assassin, there seemed to be but one opinion. The alcove contained a window opening upon a small balcony. By this he had doubtless entered and escaped. The long plush curtains, which during the early part of the evening had remained looped back on either side of the casement, were found at the moment of the crime's discovery closely drawn together. Certainly a suspicious circumstance. However, the question was one easily settled. If any one had approached by the balcony there would be marks in the snow to show it. Mr. Ramsdell had gone out to see. He would be coming back soon.

"Do you think this a probable explanation of the crime?" I demanded of Mr. Durand at this juncture. "If I remember rightly, this window overlooks the carriage drive. It must therefore be within plain sight of the door through which some 300 guests have passed tonight. How could any one climb to such a height, lift the window and step in without being seen?"

"You forget the awning." He spoke quickly and with unexpected vivacity. "The awning runs up very near this window and quite shuts it off from the sight of arriving guests. The drivers of departing carriages could see it if they chanced to glance back. But their eyes are usually on their horses in such a crowd. The probabilities are against any of them having looked up." His brow had cleared; a weight seemed removed from his mind. "When I went into the alcove to see Mrs. Fairbrother she was sitting in a chair near this window looking out. I remember the effect of her splendor against the snow sitting down in a steady stream behind her—the pink velvet, the soft groom of the curtains on either side, her brilliant and the snow for a background. Yes, the murderer came in that way. Her figure would be plain to any one outside, and if she moved and the diamond shone—Don't you see what a probable theory it is? There must be ways by which a desperate man might reach that balcony. I believe."

How eager he was and with what a look he turned when the crowd came filtering through the crowd that, though footprints had been found in the snow pointing directly toward the balcony, there was none on the balcony itself, proving, as any one could see, that the attack had not come from without, since no one could enter the alcove by the window without stepping on the balcony.

(Continued)

St. Joseph, Levis, July 14, 1903. MINARD'S LINIMENT CO., LIMITED.

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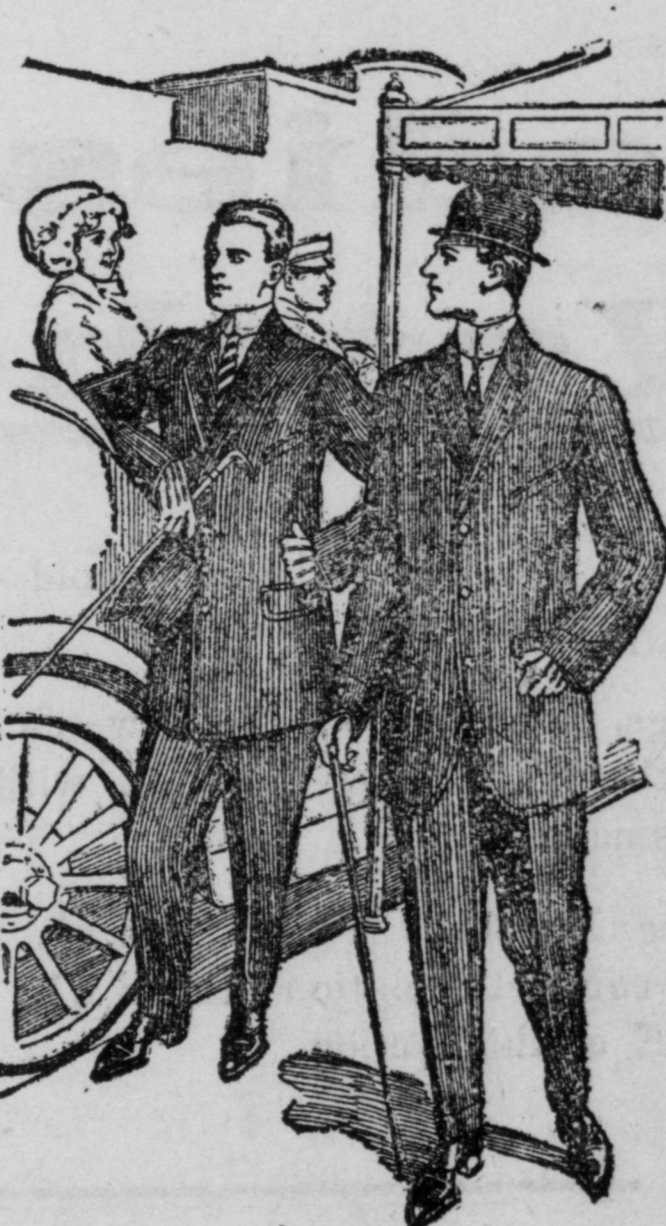
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Synopsis of Canadian North-west Land Regulations.

ANY person who is the sole head of a family or any male over 18 years of age, may homestead a quarter-section of available land in Manitoba, Saskatchewan or Alberta. The applicant must appear in person at the Dominion Lands Agency or Sub-Agency at any agency, on certain conditions, by father, mother, son, daughter, brother or sister of intending homesteader.

Duties.—Six months' residence upon and cultivation of the land in each of three years. A homesteader may live within nine miles of his homestead on a farm at least 30 acres in size, or on a farm at least 100 acres in size, if the required to earn homestead, patent and cultivate fifty acres extra.

In certain districts a homesteader in good standing may pre-empt a quarter-section of land. The applicant must appear in person from date of homestead entry (including the required to earn homestead, patent) and cultivate fifty acres extra.

A homesteader who has exhausted his homestead right and cannot obtain a pre-emption may take a purchased homestead in certain districts. Price \$3.00 per acre. Duties.—Must reside six months in each of three years, cultivate fifty acres and erect a house worth \$2000.

W. W. COOK,
Registrar of the Dominion Lands Office.