



INITIALS ONLY

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"THE FILIGREE BALL" "THE HOUSE OF THE WHISPERING PINES"
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CHAPTER I.

Poinsettias.
"A remarkable man!"
I pointed to a man hurrying around the corner just ahead of us.
"Yes, he's remarkably well built. I noticed him when he came out of the Clermont." This was a hotel we had just passed.

"But it's not only that. It's his height, his very striking features, his expression—" I stopped suddenly, gripping George's arm convulsively in a surprise he appeared to share. We had turned the corner immediately behind the man of whom we were speaking and so had him still in full view.

"What's he doing?" I asked in a low whisper.

The man ahead of us, presenting in every respect the appearance of a gentleman, had suddenly stooped to the kerb and was washing his hands in the snow, furtively, but with a vigor and purpose which could not fail to arouse the strangest conjectures in any chance onlooker.

"Plat!" escaped my lips, in a sort of nervous chuckle. But George shook his head at me.

"I don't like it," he muttered, with unusual gravity. "Did you see his face?" Then as the man rose and hurried away from us down the street, "I should like to follow him. I do believe—"

But here we became aware of a quick rush and sudden clamor around the corner we had just left, and turning quickly, saw that something had occurred on Broadway which was fast causing a tumult.

"What's the matter?" I cried. "What can have happened? Let's go see, George. Perhaps it has something to do with our man."

My husband, with a final glance down the street at the final disappearing figure, yielded to my impetuosity, and possibly to some new curiosity of his own. "I'd like to stop that man first," said he. "But what excuse have I? He may be nothing but a crank, with some crack-brained idea in his head. We'll soon know; for there's certainly something wrong there on Broadway."

"He came out of the Clermont," I suggested.
"I know. If the excitement isn't there, what we've just seen is simply a coincidence."

It was the last word he had time to speak before we found ourselves in the midst of a crowd of men and women, jostling one another in curiosity or in the consternation following a quick alarm. All were looking one way, and, as this was towards the entrance of the Clermont, it was evident enough to us that the alarm had indeed had its origin in the very place we had anticipated. I felt my husband's arm press me closer to his side as we worked our way towards the entrance, and presently caught a warning sound from his lips as the oaths and confused cries everywhere surrounding us were broken here and there by articulate words and we heard:

"Is it murder?"

"The beautiful Miss Challoner!"

"A millionaires in her own right!"

"Killed, they say."

"No, no! suddenly dead; that's all."

"George, what shall we do?" I managed to cry into my husband's ear.

"I'll tell you what I'll do," whispered George, who was as curious as myself. "We will try the rear door where there are fewer persons. Possibly we can make our way in there, and if we can, Slater will tell us all we want to know."

Slater was the assistant manager of the Clermont, and one of George's oldest friends.

"Then hurry," said I. "I am being crushed here."

George did hurry, and in a few minutes we were before the rear entrance of the great hotel. There was a mob gathered here also, but it was neither so large nor so rough as the one on Broadway. Yet I doubt if we should have been able to work our way through it if Slater had not, at that very instant, shown himself in the doorway, in company with an officer to whom he was giving some final instructions.

"Let us in, Slater," George begged. "My wife feels a little faint; she has been knocked about so by the crowd."
I no sooner saw the way cleared for our entrance than I made good my husband's words by fainting away in earnest.

When I came to, it was suddenly and with perfect recognition of my surroundings. The small reception room to which I had been taken was one I had often visited, and its familiar features did not hold my attention for a moment. What I did see and welcome was my husband's face bending close over me, and to him I spoke first. My words must have sounded oddly to those about. "Have they told you anything about it?" I asked. "Did he—"

A quick pressure on my arm silenced me, and then I noticed that we

were not alone. Two or three ladies stood near, watching me, and one had evidently been using some restorative, for she held a small vinaigrette in her hand. To this lady, George made haste to introduce me, and from her I presently learned the cause of the disturbance in the hotel.

Edith, the well-known daughter of Moses Challoner, had fallen suddenly dead on the floor of the mezzanine. She was not known to have been in poor health, still less in danger of a fatal attack, and the shock was consequently great to her friends, several of whom were in the building.

"Was she alone when she fell?" I asked.

"Virtually alone. Some persons sat on the other side of the room, reading at the big round table. They did not even hear her fall. They say that the band was playing unusually loud in the musicians' gallery."

"Are you feeling quite well, now?" "Quite myself," I gratefully replied as I rose slowly from the sofa.

In the hall we encountered Mr. Slater, whom I have before mentioned. He was trying to maintain order while himself in a state of great agitation. Seeing us, he could not refrain from whispering a few words into my husband's ear.

"The doctor has just gone up—her doctor, I mean. He's simply dumb-founded. Says that she was the healthiest woman in New York yesterday. I think—don't mention it, that he suspects something quite different from heart failure."

"What do you mean?" asked George, following the assistant manager down the broad flight of steps leading to the office. Then, as I pressed up close to Mr. Slater's other side, "She was by herself, wasn't she, in the half floor above?"

"Yes, and had been writing a letter. She fell with it still in her hand." "Have they carried her to her room?" I eagerly inquired, glancing fearfully up at the large semi-circular openings overlooking us from the place where she had fallen.

"Not yet. Mr. Hammond insists upon waiting for the coroner." (Mr. Hammond was the proprietor of the hotel.) "She is lying on one of the big couches near which she fell. If you like, I can give you a glimpse of her. She looks beautiful. It's terrible to think that she is dead."

"I don't know why we consented. We were under a spell, I think. At all events, we accepted his offer and followed him up a narrow staircase open to very few that night. At the top, he turned upon us with a warning gesture which I hardly think we needed, and led us down a narrow hall flanked by openings corresponding to those we had noted from below. At the furthest one he paused and, beckoning us to his side, pointed across the lobby into the large writing-room which occupied the better part of the mezzanine floor.

We saw people standing in various attitudes of grief and dismay about a couch, one end of which only was visible to us at the moment. The doctor had just joined them, and every head was turned towards him and every body bent forward in



She Fell With the Letter Still in Her Hand.

anxious expectation. I remember the face of one gray haired old man. I shall never forget it. He was probably her father. Later, I knew him to be so. Miss Challoner was stretched out upon the couch. She was dressed as she came from dinner, in a gown of ivory-tinted satin, relieved at the breast by a large bouquet of scarlet poinsettias. The doctor was pointing at these poinsettias in horror and with awful meaning, and though we could not hear his words, we knew almost instinctively, both from his attitude and the cries which burst from the lips of those about him, that something more than broken petals and disordered leaves had met his eyes; that blood was there—slowly oozing drops from the

heart—which for some reason had escaped all eyes till now.

Miss Challoner was dead, not from unsuspected disease, but from the violent attack of some murderous weapon. As the realization of this brought fresh panic and bowed the old father's head with emotions even more bitter than those of grief, I turned a questioning look up at George's face.

It was fixed with a purpose I had no trouble in understanding.

CHAPTER II.

"I know the Man."
Yet he made no effort to detain Mr. Slater, when that gentleman, under this renewed excitement, hastily left us.

"I want to feel sure of myself," he explained. "Can you bear the strain of waiting around a little longer, Laura?"

"Yes, I can bear it. Don't you think the man we saw had something to do with this? Don't you believe—"

"Hush! What are they saying over there? Can you hear?" "No. And I cannot bear to look. Yet I don't want to go away. It's all so dreadful."

"It's devilish. Such a beautiful girl! Laura, I must leave you for a moment. Do you mind?"

"No, no; yet—"

I did mind; but he was gone before I could take back my word. Alone, I felt the tragedy much more than when he was with me. I drew back against the wall and hid my eyes, waiting feverishly for George's return.

He came, when he did come, in some haste and with certain marks of increased agitation.

"Laura," said he, "Slater says that we may, possibly be wanted and proposes that we stay here all night. I have telephoned and made it all right at home. Will you come to your room? This is no place for you."

Nothing could have pleased me better. But I could not go without casting another glance at the tragic scene I was leaving. A stir was perceptible there, and I was just in time to see its cause. A tall, angular gentleman was approaching from the direction of the musicians' gallery, and from the manner of all present, as well as from the whispered comment of my husband, I recognized in him the special official for whom all had been waiting.

"Are you going to tell him?" was my question to George as we made our way down to the lobby.

"That depends. First, I am going to see you settled in a room quite remote from this business."
"I shall not like that."
"I know, my dear, but it is best. I could not gainay this. Nevertheless, after the first few minutes of relief, I found it very lonesome upstairs."

I was still struggling with this feeling when the door opened, and George came in. There was news in his face as I rushed to meet him.

"Tell me—tell," I begged.

He tried to smile at my eagerness, but the attempt was ghastly.

"I've been listening and looking," said he, "and this is all I have learned. Miss Challoner died, not from a stroke or from disease of any kind, but from a wound reaching the heart. No one saw the attack, or even the approach or departure of the person inflicting this wound. If she was killed by a pistol-shot, it was at a distance, and almost over the heads of the persons sitting at the table we saw there. But the doctors shake their heads at the word pistol-shot, though they refuse to explain themselves or to express any opinion till the wound has been probed. This they are going to do at once, and when that question is decided, I may feel it my duty to speak and may ask you to support my story."

"We can never make them understand how he looked."

"No, I don't expect to."

"Or his manner as he fled."

"Nor that either."

"We can only describe what we saw him do."

"That's all."

"Oh, what an adventure for quiet people like us! George, I don't believe he shot her."

"He must have."

"But they would have seen—have heard—the people around, I mean."

"So they say; but I have a theory—but no matter about that now. I'm going down again to see how things have progressed. I'll be back for you later. Only be ready."

In a half hour or an hour—I never knew which—George reappeared, only to tell me that no conclusions had as yet been reached; an element of great mystery involved the whole affair, and the most astute detectives on the force had been sent for. Her father, who had been her constant companion all winter, had not the least suggestion to offer in way of its solution. To no living being, man or woman, could he point as possessing

any motive for such a deed. She had been the victim of some mistake, his lovely and ever kindly disposed daughter, and while the loss was irreparable he would never make it unendurable by thinking otherwise.

Such was the father's way of looking at the matter, and I own that it made our duty a trifle hard. But George's mind, when once made up, was persistent to the point of obstinacy, and while he was yet talking he led me out of the room and down the hall to the elevator.

"Mr. Slater knows we have something to say, and will manage the interview before us in the very best manner," he confided to me now with an encouraging air. "We are to go to the blue reception room on the parlor floor."

Mr. Slater was there according to his promise, and after introducing us, briefly stated that we had some evidence to give regarding the terrible occurrence which had just taken place in the house.

George bowed, and the chief spokesman—I am sure he was a police-officer of some kind—asked him to tell what it was.

Then my husband spoke up, and related our little experience. If it did not create a sensation, it was because these men were well accustomed to surprises of all kinds.

"Washed his hands—a gentleman—out there in the snow—just after the alarm was raised here?" repeated one.

"And you saw him come out of this house?" another put in.

"Yes, sir; we noticed him particularly."

"Can you describe him?" It was Mr. Slater who put this question; he had less control over himself, and considerable eagerness could be heard in his voice.

"He was a very fine-looking man; unusually tall and unusually striking both in his dress and appearance. What I could see of his face was bare of beard, and very expressive. He walked with the swing of an athlete, and only looked mean and small when he was stooping and dabbling in the snow."

"His clothes. Describe his clothes." There was an odd sound in Mr. Slater's voice.

"He wore a silk hat and there was fur on his overcoat. I think the fur was black."

Mr. Slater stepped back, then moved forward again with a determined air.

"I know the man," said he.

CHAPTER III.

The Man.

"You know the man?" "I do; or rather, I know a man who answers to this description. He comes here once in a while."

"His name."

"Brotherson. A very uncommon person in many respects; quite capable of such an eccentricity, but incapable, I should say, of crime. He's a gifted talker and so well read that he can hold one's attention for hours. Of his tastes, I can only say that they appear to be mainly scientific. But he is not averse to society, and is always very well dressed."

Meanwhile, George had advanced to speak to a man who had beckoned to him from the other side of the room, and with whom in another moment I saw him step out. Thus deserted, I sank into a chair near one of the windows.

Where was he? The man who had carried him off was the youngest in the group. What had been wanted of George? Those who remained showed no interest in the matter. They had enough to say among themselves. But I was interested—naturally so, and, in my uneasiness, glanced restlessly from the window, the shade of which was up. The outlook was a very peaceful one. This room faced a side street, and, as my eyes fell upon the whitened pavements, I received an answer to one, and that the most anxious, of my queries. This was the street into which we had turned, in the wake of the handsome stranger they were trying at this very moment to identify with Brotherson. George had evidently been asked to point out the exact spot where the man had stopped, for I could see from my vantage point two figures bending near the curb, and even pawing at the snow which lay there. It gave me a slight turn when one of them—I do not think it was George—began to rub his hands together in much the way the unknown gentleman had done, and, in my excitement, I probably uttered some sort of an ejaculation, for I was suddenly conscious of a silence in the room, and when I turned saw all the men about me locking my way.

"They are imitating the man," I cried; "my husband and—the person he went out with. It looked dreadful to me; that is all."

Meanwhile, Mr. Slater had exchanged some words with the two officials, and now approached me with an expression of extreme consider-

ation. They were about to excuse me from further participation in this informal inquiry. This I saw before he spoke. Of course they were right. But I should greatly have preferred to stay where I was till George came back.

I was greatly interested, of course, and had plenty to think of till I saw George again and learned the result of the latest investigations.

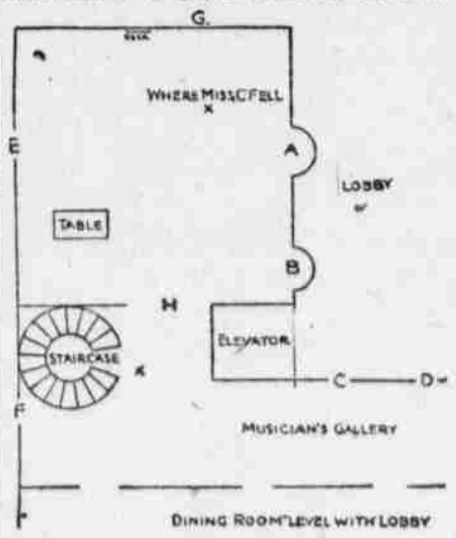
Miss Challoner had been shot, not stabbed. No other deduction was possible from such facts as were now known, though the physicians had not yet handed in their report, or even intimated what that report would be. No assailant could have approached or left her, without attracting the notice of some one, if not all of the persons seated at a table in the same room. She could only have been reached by a bullet sent from a point near the head of a small winding staircase connecting the mezzanine floor with a coat-room adjacent to the front door. This has already been insisted on, as you will remember, and if you will glance at the diagram which George hastily scrawled for me, you will see why.

A. B., as well as C. D., are half circular openings into the office lobby. E. F. are windows giving upon Broadway, and G. and party wall, necessarily unbroken by window, door or any other opening. It follows then that the only possible means of approach to this room lies through the archway H., or from the elevator door. But the elevator made no stop at the mezzanine on or near the time of the attack upon Miss Challoner; nor did any one leave the table or pass by it in either direction till after the alarm given by her fall.

But a bullet calls for no approach. A man at X, might raise and fire his pistol without attracting any attention to himself. The music, which all acknowledge was at its full climax at this moment, would drown the noise of the explosion, and the stair case, out of view of all but the victim, afforded the same means of immediate escape, which it must have given of secret and unseen approach. The coat-room into which it descended communicated with the lobby very near the main entrance, and if Mr. Brotherson were the man, his sudden appearance there would thus be accounted for.

It began to look bad for this man, if indeed he were the one we had seen under the street-lamp; and, as George and I reviewed the situation, we felt our position to be serious enough for us severally to set down our impressions of this man before we lost our first vivid idea. I do not know what George wrote, for he sealed his words up as soon as he had finished writing, but this is what I put on paper while my memory was still fresh and my excitement unabated:

"He had the look of a man of powerful intellect and determined will, who shudders while he triumphs; who outwardly washes his hands of a deed over which he inwardly gloats. This was when he first rose from the snow. Afterwards he had a moment of fear; plain, human, everyday fear. But this was evanescent. Before he had turned to go, he showed the self-



possession of one who feels himself so secure, or is so well-satisfied with himself, that he is no longer conscious of other emotions."

"Poor fellow," I commented aloud, as I folded up these words; "he reckoned without you, George. By tomorrow he will be in the hands of the police."

And with this sentence ringing in my mind, I lay down and endeavored to sleep. But it was not till very late that rest came.

At last I slept, but it was only to rouse again with the same quick realization of my surroundings, which I had experienced on my recovery from my fainting fit of hours before. Someone had stopped at our door before hurrying by down the hall. Who was that someone? I rose on my elbow, and endeavored to peer through the dark. Of course, I could see nothing. But when I woke a second time, there

was enough light in the room, early as it undoubtedly was, for me to detect a letter lying on the carpet just inside the door.

Instantly I was on my feet, catching the letter up, I carried it to the window. Our two names were on it—Mr. and Mrs. George Anderson; the writing, Mr. Slater's.

I glanced over at George. He was sleeping peacefully. It was too early to wake him, but I could not lay that letter down unread; was not my name on it? Tearing it open, I devoured its contents,—the exclamation I made on reading it, waking George.

The writing was in Mr. Slater's hand, and the words were: "I must request, at the instance of Coroner Heath and such of the police as listened to your adventure, that you make no further mention of what you saw in the street under our windows last night. The doctors find no bullet in the wound. This clears Mr. Brotherson."

CHAPTER IV.

Sweet Little Miss Clarke.

When we took our seats at the breakfast-table, it was with the feeling of being no longer looked upon as connected in any way with this case. Yet our interest in it was, if anything, increased, and when I saw George casting furtive glances at a certain table behind me, I leaned over and asked him the reason, being sure that the people whose faces I saw reflected in the mirror directly before us had something to do with the great matter then engrossing us.

His answer conveyed the somewhat exciting information that the four persons seated in my rear were the same four who had been reading at the round table in the mezzanine at the time of Miss Challoner's death.

Instantly they absorbed all my attention, though I dared not give them a direct look, and continued to observe them only in the glass.

"Is it one family?" I asked. "Yes, and a very respectable one. Transients, of course, but very well known in Denver. The lady is not the mother of the boys, but their aunt. The boys belong to the gentleman, who is a widower."

"Their word ought to be good," George nodded. "The boys look wide-awake enough if the father does not. As for the aunt, she is sweetness itself. Do they still insist that Miss Challoner was the only person in the room with them at this time?"

"They did last night. I don't know how they will meet this statement of the doctor's."

"George?"

He leaned near.

"Have you ever thought that she might have been a suicide? That she stabbed herself?"

"No, for in that case a weapon would have been found."

"And are you sure that none was?"

"Positive. Such a fact could not have been kept quiet. If a weapon had been picked up there would be no mystery, and no necessity for further police investigation."

"And the detectives are still here?"

"I just saw one."

"George?"

Again his head came nearer.

"Have they searched the lobby? I believe she had a weapon."

"Laura!"

"I know it sounds foolish, but the alternative is so improbable. A family like that cannot be leagued together in a conspiracy to hide the truth concerning a matter so serious. To be sure, they may all be short-sighted, or so little given to observation that they didn't see what passed before their eyes. The boys look wide-awake enough, but who can tell? I would sooner believe that—"

I stopped short so suddenly that George looked startled. My attention had been caught by something new I saw in the mirror upon which my attention was fixed. A man was looking in from the corridor behind, at the four persons we were just discussing. He was watching them intently, and I thought I knew his face.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Walked Out With It.

There came into the office of a western lawyer a man who was excited because his wife had left him, and he feared she would run him into debt all over the country.

"In that case," said the lawyer, "you had better post her."

His client, not knowing what posting meant, said he did not know where she had gone, and besides, she was fully as strong as he, and he did not believe he was able to post her. The attorney explained that he meant putting a notice in the newspapers saying: "Whereas, my wife Helen has left my bed and board without any just—"

"But that ain't true," interrupted the client. "She didn't leave my bed. She took it with her."—Sunday Magazine