INITIALS ONLY

By ANNA KATHARINE GREEN
AUTHOR OF "THE LEAVENWORTH CASE"
"THE FILIGREE BALL" "THE HOUSE OF THE WHISPERING PINES"
ILLUSTRATIONS BY
CHARLES W. ROSSER

SYNOPSIS.

George Anderson and wife see a remarkable looking man come out of the Clermont hotel, look around furtively, wash his hands in the snow and pass on. Commotion attracts them to the Clermont, where it is found that the beautiful Miss Edith Challoner has fallen dead. Anderson describes the man he saw wash his hands in the snow. The hotel manager declares him to be Orlando Brotherson. Physicians find that Miss Challoner was stabbed and not shot, which seems to clear Brotherson of suspicion. Gryce, an aged detective, and Sweetwater, his assistant, take up the case. They believe Miss Challoner stabbed herself. A paper cutter found near the scene of tragedy is believed to be the weapon used. Mr. Challoner tells of a batch of letters found in his daughter's desk, signed "O. B." All are love letters except one which shows that the writer was displeased. This letter was signed by Orlando Brotherson. Anderson goes with Sweetwater to identify Brotherson, who is to address a meeting of anarchists. The place is raided by the police and Brotherson escapes without being identified. Brotherson is found living in a tenement under the name of Dunn. He is an inventor. Brotherson tells the coroner of his acquaintance with Miss Challoner.

CHAPTER X.—Continued.

"I do; it made a great impression on me. 'I shall hope for our further acquaintance,' she said. 'We have one very strong interest in common.' And if ever a human face spoke eloquently, it was hers at that moment. I thought it sprang from personal interest, and it gave me courage to pursue the intention which had taken the place of every other feeling and ambition by which I had hitherto been moved. If she could ignore the social gulf between us, I felt free to take the leap. Cowardice had never been a fault of mine. I realized that I must first let her see the manner of man I was and what life meant to me and must mean to her if the union I contemplated should become an actual fact. I wrote letters to her, but I did not give her my address or even request a reply. I was not ready for any word from her. I am not like other men and I could wait. And I did, for weeks, then suddenly appeared at her hotel."

"This was when?" put in Dr. Heath, anxious to bridge the pause which must have been very painful to the listening father.

"The week after Thanksgiving. I did not see her the first day, and only casually the second. But she knew I was in the building, and when I came upon her one evening at the very desk in the mezzanine which we all have such bitter cause to remember, I could not forbear expressing myself in a way she could not misunderstand. The result was of a kind to drive a man like myself to an extremity of self-denunciation and rage. She rose up as if insulted, and flung me one sentence and one sentence only before she hailed the elevator and left my presence. A cur could not have been dismissed with less ceremony."

"That is not like my daughter. What was the sentence you allude to? Let me hear the very words." Mr. Challoner had come forward and now stood awaiting his reply, a dignified but pathetic figure, which all must view with respect.

"I hate the memory of them, but since you demand it, I will repeat them just as they fell from her lips," was Mr. Brotherson's bitter retort. "She said, 'You of all men should recognize the unseemliness of these proposals. Had your letters given me any hint of the feelings you have just expressed, you would never have had this opportunity of approaching me.' That was all; but her indignation was scathing. Ladies who have supped exclusively off silver, show a fine scorn for the common ware of the cottager."

The assertive boldness—some would call it bravado—with which he thus finished the story of his relations with the dead heiress, seemed to be more than Mr. Challoner could stand. With a look of extreme pain and perplexity he vanished from the doorway, and it fell to Dr. Heath to inquire:

"Is this letter—a letter of threat you will remember—the only communication which passed between you and Miss Challoner after this unfortunate passage of arms at the Clermont?"

"Yes. I had no wish to address her again. I had exhausted in this one outburst whatever humiliation I felt."

"And she? Did she give no sign, make you no answer?"

"None whatever." Then, as if he found it impossible to hide this hurt to his pride, "she did not even seem to consider me worthy the honor of an added remark. Such arrogance is, no doubt, commendable in a Challoner."

This time his bitterness did not pass unrebuked by the coroner: "Remember the gray hairs of the only Challoner who can hear you, and respect his grief."

Mr. Brotherson bowed.

"I have finished," said he. "I shall have nothing more to say on the subject." And he drew himself up in expectation of the dismissal he evidently thought pending.

But the coroner was not done with him by any means. He had a theory in regard to this lamentable suicide which he hoped to establish by this man's testimony, and, in pursuit of this plan, he not only motioned to Mr. Brotherson to reseat himself, but began at once to open a fresh line of examination by saying:

"You will pardon me, if I press this matter. I have been given to understand that notwithstanding your break with Miss Challoner, you have kept up your visits to the Clermont and were even on the spot at the time of her death."

"On the spot?"

"In the hotel, I mean."

"There you are right; I was in the hotel."

"At the time of her death?"

"Very near the time. I remember hearing some disturbance in the lobby behind me, just as I was passing out at the Broadway entrance."

"You did, and did not return?"

"Why should I return? I am not a man of much curiosity. There was no reason why I should connect a sudden alarm in the lobby of the Clermont with any cause of special interest to myself."

This was so true and the look which accompanied the words was so frank that the coroner hesitated a moment before he said:

"Certainly not, unless—well, to be direct, unless you had just seen Miss Challoner and knew her state of mind and what was likely to follow your abrupt departure."

"I had no interview with Miss Challoner."

"But you saw her? Saw her that evening and just before the accident?"

Sweetwater's papers rattled; it was the only sound to be heard in that moment of silence. Then—

"What do you mean by those words?" inquired Mr. Brotherson, with studied composure. "I have said that I had no interview with Miss Challoner. Why do you ask me then, if I saw her?"

"Because I believe that you did. From a distance possibly, but yet directly and with no possibility of mistake."

"Do you put that as a question?"

"I do. Did you see her figure or face that night?"

"I did."

Nothing—not even the rattling of Sweetwater's papers—disturbed the silence which followed this admission.

"From where?" Doctor Heath asked at last.

"From a point far enough away to make any communication between us impossible. I do not think you will require me to recall the exact spot."

"If it were one which made it possible for her to see you as clearly as you could see her, I think it would be very advisable for you to say so."

"It was—such—a spot."

"Then I think I can locate it for you, or do you prefer to locate it yourself?"

"I will locate it myself. I had hoped not to be called upon to mention what I cannot but consider a most unfortunate coincidence. I met Miss Challoner's eye for one instant from the top of the little staircase running

Mr. Brotherson Rose as He Heard It.

up to the mezzanine. I had yielded thus far to an impulse I had frequently combatted, to seek by another interview to retrieve the bad effect which must have been made upon her by my angry note. I knew that she frequently wrote letters in the mezzanine at this hour, and got as far as the top of the staircase in my effort to join her. But I got no further. When I saw her on her feet, with her face turned my way, I remembered the scorn with which she had received my former heartfelt proposals and, without taking another step forward, I turned away from her and fled down the steps and so out of the building by the main entrance. She saw me, for her hand flew up with a startled gesture, but I cannot think that my presence on the same floor with her could have caused her to strike the blow which terminated her life. Why should I? No woman sacrifices her life out of mere regret for the disdain she has shown a man she has taken no pains to understand."

"You saw Miss Challoner lift her hand, you say. Which hand, and what was in it? Anything?"

"She lifted her right hand, but it would be impossible for me to tell you whether there was anything in it or not. I simply saw the movement before I turned away. It looked like one of alarm to me. I felt that she had some reason for this. She could not know that it was in repentance I came rather than in fulfilment of my threat."

A sigh from the adjoining room, Mr. Brotherson rose, as he heard it, and in doing so met the clear eye of Sweetwater fixed upon his own. Its language was, no doubt, peculiar and it seemed to fascinate him for a moment, for he started as if to approach the detective, but forsook this intention almost immediately, and addressing the coroner, gravely remarked:

"Her death following so quickly upon this abortive attempt of mine at an interview startled me by its coincidence as much as it does you. If in the weakness of her woman's nature, it was more than this—if the scorn she had previously shown me was a cloak she instinctively assumed to hide what she was not ready to disclose, my remorse will be as great as any one here could wish. But the proof of all this will have to be very convincing before my present convictions will yield to it. Some other and more poignant source will have to be found for that instant's impulsive act than is supplied by this story of my unfortunate attachment."

Doctor Heath was convinced, but he was willing to concede something to the secret demand made upon him by Sweetwater, who was bundling up his papers with much clatter.

Looking up with a smile which had elements in it he was hardly conscious of perhaps himself, he asked in an offhand way:

"Then why did you take such pains to wash your hands of the affair the moment you had left the hotel?"

"I do not understand."

"You passed around the corner into —— street, did you not?"

"Very likely. I could go that way as well as another."

"And stopped at the first lamppost?"

"Oh, I see. Some one saw that childish action of mine."

"What did you mean by it?"

"Just what you have suggested. I did go through the pantomime of washing my hands of an affair I considered defintely ended. I had resisted an irrepressible impulse to see and talk with Miss Challoner again, and was pleased with my firmness. Unaware of the tragic blow which had just fallen, I was full of self-congratulations at my escape from the charm which had lured me back to this hotel again and again in spite of my better judgment, and I wished to symbolize my relief by an act of which I was, in another moment, ashamed. Strange that there should have been a witness to it. (Here he stole a look at Sweetwater.) Stranger still, that circumstances, by the most extraordinary of coincidences, should have given so unforeseen a point to it."

"You are right, Mr. Brotherson. The whole occurrence is startling and most strange. But life is made up of the unexpected, as none know better than we physicians, whether our practice be of a public or private character."

As Mr. Brotherson left the room, the curiosity to which he had yielded once before, led him to cast a glance of penetrating inquiry behind him full at Sweetwater, and if either felt embarrassment, it was not the hunted but the hunter.

But the feeling did not last.

"I've simply met the strongest man I've ever encountered," was Sweetwater's encouraging comment to himself. "All the more glory if I can find a joint in his armor or a hidden passage to his cold, secretive heart."

CHAPTER XI.

Alike in Essentials.

"Mr. Gryce, I am either a fool or the luckiest fellow going. You must decide which."

A grunt from the region of the library table, then the sarcastic remark:

"I'm just in the mood to settle that question. This last failure to my account ought to make me an excellent judge of another's folly. I've meddled with the old business for the last time, Sweetwater. You'll have to go it alone from now on. But what's the matter with you? Speak out, my boy. Something new in the wind?"

"No, Mr. Gryce; nothing new. You're not satisfied with the coroner's verdict in the Challoner case?"

"No. I'm satisfied with nothing that leaves all ends dangling. Suicide was not proved. There was no blood-stain on that cutter-point."

"Nor any evidence that it had ever been there."

"No. I'm not proud of the chain which lacks a link where it should be strongest."

"That chain we must throw away."

"And forge another?"

Sweetwater approached and sat down.

"Yes; I believe we can do it; yet I have only one indisputable fact for a starter. Mr. Gryce, I don't trust Brotherson. Though he should tell a story ten times more plausible than the one with which he has satisfied the coroner's jury, I would still listen to him with more misgiving than confidence. Perhaps it is simply a deeply rooted antipathy on my part, or the rare one feels at finding he has placed his finger on the wrong man. Again it may be—"

"What, Sweetwater?"

"A well-founded distrust, Mr. Gryce, I'm going to ask you a question."

"Ask away. Ask fifty if you want to."

"Did you ever hear of a case before, that in some of its details was similar to this?"

"No, it stands alone. That's why it is so puzzling."

"You forget. The wealth, beauty and social consequence of the present victim has blinded you to the strong resemblance which her case bears to one you know, in which the sufferer had none of the worldly advantages of Miss Challoner. I allude to—"

"Wait! The washerwoman in Hicks street!"

"The same. Mr. Gryce, there's a startling similarity in the two cases if you study the essential features only. Startling, I assure you."

"Yes, you are right there. But what if there is? We were no more successful in solving that case than we have been in solving this. Yet you look and act like a hound which has struck a hot scent."

The young man smoothed his features with an embarrassed laugh.

"I shall never learn," said he, "not to give tongue till the hunt is fairly started. If you will excuse me, we'll first make sure of the similarity I have mentioned. Then I'll explain myself. I have some notes here, made at the time it was decided to drop the Hicks street case as a wholly inexplicable one. Shall I read them?"

"Fire away, my boy, though I hardly see your purpose or what real bearing the affair in Hicks street has upon the Clermont one. A poor washerwoman and the wealthy Miss Challoner! True, they were not unlike in their end."

"The connection will come later," smiled the young detective, with that strange softening of his features which made one at times forget his extreme plainness.

And he read:

"'On the afternoon of December 4, 1910, the strong and persistent screaming of a young child in one of the rooms of a rear tenement in Hicks street, Brooklyn, drew the attention of some of the inmates and led them, after several ineffectual efforts to gain an entrance, to the breaking in of a door which had been fastened on the inside by an old-fashioned door-button.

"'The tenant, whom all knew for an honest, hard-working woman, had not infrequently fastened her door in this manner, in order to safeguard her child who was abnormally active and had a way of rattling the door open when it was not thus secured. But she had never refused to open before, and the child's cries were pitiful.

"'This was no longer a matter of wonder, when, the door having been wrenched from its hinges, they all rushed in. Across a tub of steaming clothes lifted upon a bench in the open window, they saw the body of this good woman, lying inert and seemingly dead; the frightened child tugging at her skirts. She was of a robust make, fleshy and fair, and had always been considered a model of health and energy, but at the sight of her helpless figure, thus stricken while at work, the one cry was 'A stroke!' till she had been lifted off and laid upon the floor. Then some discoloration in the water at the bottom of the tub led to a closer examination of her body, and the discovery of a bullet-hole in her breast directly over the heart.

"'As she had been standing with face towards the window, all crowded that way to see where the shot had come from. As they were on the fourth story it could not have come from the court upon which the room looked. It could only have come from the front tenement, towering up before them some twenty feet away. A single window of the innumerable ones confronting them stood open, and this was the one directly opposite.

"'Nobody was to be seen there or in the room beyond, but during the excitement, one man ran off to call the police and another to hunt up the janitor and ask who occupied this room.

"'His reply threw them all into confusion. The tenant of that room was the best, the quietest and most respectable man in either building.

"'Then he must be simply careless and the shot an accidental one. A rush was made for the stairs and soon the whole building was in an uproar. But when this especial room was reached, it was found locked and on the door a paper pinned up, on which these words were written: Gone to New York. Will be back at 6:30! Words that recalled a circumstance to the janitor. He had seen the gentleman go out an hour before. This terminated all inquiry in this direction, though some few of the excited throng were for battering down this door just as they had the other one. But they were overruled by the janitor, who saw no use in such wholesale destruction, and presently the arrival of the police restored order and limited the inquiry to the rear building, where it undoubtedly belonged.'

"Mr. Gryce," (here Sweetwater laid by his notes that he might address the old gentleman more directly), "I was with the boys when they made their first official investigation. This is why you can rely upon the facts as here given. I followed the investigation closely and missed nothing which could in any way throw light on the case. It was a mysterious one from the first, and lost nothing by further inquiry into the details.

"The first fact to startle us as we made our way up through the crowd which blocked halls and staircases was this: A doctor had been found and, though he had been forbidden to make more than a cursory examination of the body till the coroner came, he had not hesitated to declare after his first look, that the wound had not been made by a bullet but by some sharp and slender weapon thrust home by a powerful hand. (You mark that, Mr. Gryce.) As this seemed impossible in face of the fact that the door had been found buttoned on the inside, we did not give much credit to his opinion and began our work under the obvious theory of an accidental discharge of some gun from one of the windows across the court. But the doctor was nearer right than we supposed. When the coroner came to look into the matter, he discovered that the wound was not only too small to have been made by the ordinary bullet, but that there was no bullet to be found in the woman's body or anywhere else. Her heart had been reached by a thrust and not by a shot from a gun. Mr. Gryce, have you not heard a startling repetition of this report in a case nearer at hand?

"Up three flights from the court, with no communication with the adjoining rooms save through a door guarded on both sides by heavy pieces of furniture no one person could handle, the hall door buttoned on the inside, and the fire escape some fifteen feet to the left, this room of death appeared to be as removed from the approach of a murderous outsider as the spot in the writing-room of the Clermont where Miss Challoner fell.

"Otherwise, the place presented the greatest contrast possible to that scene of splendor and comfort. I had not entered the Clermont at that time, and no such comparison could have

"I Was With the Boys When They Made the First Official Investigation."

struck my mind. But I have thought of it since, and you, with your experience, will not find it difficult to picture the room where this poor woman lived and worked. Bare walls, with just a newspaper illustration pinned up here and there, a bed—tragically occupied at this moment—a kitchen stove on which a boiler, half-filled with steaming clothes still bubbled and foamed—an old bureau—a large pine wardrobe against an inner door which we later found to have been locked for months, and the key lost—some chairs—and most pronounced of all, because of its position directly before the window, a pine bench supporting a wash-tub of the old sort.

"As it was here the woman fell, this tub naturally received the closest examination. A board projected from its further side, whither it had evidently been pushed by the weight of her falling body; and from its top hung a wet cloth, marking with its lugubrious drip on the boards beneath the first heavy moments of silence which is the natural accompaniment of so serious a survey. On the floor to the right lay a half-used cake of soap just as it had slipped from her hand. The window was closed, for the temperature was at the freezing point, but it had been found up, and it was put up now to show the height at which it had then stood. As we all took our look at the house wall opposite, a sound of shouting came up from below. A dozen children were sliding on barrel staves down a slope of heaped-up snow. They had been engaged in this sport all the afternoon and were our witnesses later that no one had made a hazardous escape by means of the ladder of the fire escape, running, as I have said, at an almost unattainable distance towards the left.

"And that is as far as we ever got. The coroner's jury brought in a verdict of death by means of a stab from some unknown weapon in the hand of a person also unknown, but no weapon was ever found, nor was it ever settled how the attack could have been made or the murderer escape under the conditions described. The woman was poor, her friends few, and the case seemingly inexplicable. So after creating some excitement by its peculiarities, it fell of its own weight. But I remembered it, and in many a spare hour have tried to see my way through the no-thoroughfare it presented. But quite in vain. Today, the road is as blind as ever, but—" here Sweetwater's face sharpened and his eyes burned as he leaned closer and closer to the older detective—"but this second case, so unlike the first in non-essentials but so exactly like it in just those points which make the mystery, has dropped a thread from its tangled skein into my hand, which may yet lead us to the heart of both. Can you guess—have you guessed—what this thread is? But how could you without the one clue I have not given you? Mr. Gryce, the tenement where this occurred is the same I visited the other night in search of Mr. Brotherson. And the man characterized at that time by the janitor as the best, the quietest and most respectable tenant in the whole building, and the one you remember whose window o[redacted]

Mr. Gryce Finds an Antidote for Old Age.

"Sweetwater, how came you to discover that Mr. Dunn of this ramshackle tenement in Hicks street was identical with the elegantly equipped admirer of Miss Challoner?"

"Just this way. The night before Miss Challoner's death I was brooding very deeply over the Hicks street case. It had so possessed me that I had taken this street in on my way from Flatbush. I walked by the place and I looked up at the windows. No inspiration. Then I sauntered back and entered the house with the fool intention of crossing the courtyard and wandering into the rear building where the crime had occurred. But my attention was diverted and my mind changed by seeing a man coming down the stairs before me, of so fine a figure that I involuntarily stopped to look at him.

"My interest, you may believe, was in no wise abated when I learned that he was that highly respectable tenant whose window had been open at the time when half the inmates of the two buildings had rushed up to his door, only to find a paper on it displaying these words: Gone to New York; will be back at 6:30. Had he returned at that hour? I don't think anybody had ever asked; and what reason had I for such interference now? But an idea once planted in my brain sticks tight, and I kept thinking of this man all the way to the bridge. Instinctively and quite against my will, I found myself connecting him with some previous remembrance in which I seemed to see his tall form and strong features under the stress of some great excitement. But there my memory stopped, till suddenly as I was entering the subway, it all came back to me. I had met him the day I went with the boys to investigate the case in Hicks street. He was coming down the staircase of the rear tenement then, very much as I had just seen him coming down the one in front.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Little Misunderstood.

One morning Miss Lillian De Vincent, leading lady of "When a Man's Married," No. 2 road company, concluded she would press some collars. "Bring me a hot iron," she told the hallboy, who answered the bell. In a few moments he returned empty-handed. "I can't get it for you, lady. The bartender says as how there's lots of them fancy New York drinks he ain't never learned how to mix."