

INITIALS ONLY

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"THE FILIGREE BALL" "THE HOUSE OF THE WHISPERING PINES"
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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. Commenting, attract 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. 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 disguised. This letter was signed by Orlando Brotherson. Anderson goes with Sweetwater to identify Brotherson, who he found in a letterbox under the name of Dunn. He is an inventor. Brotherson tells the coroner Miss Challoner repulsed him with scorn when he offered her his love. Sweetwater recalls the mystery of the murder of a washerwoman in which some details were similar to the Challoner affair. Challoner admits his daughter was deeply interested, if not in love with Brotherson. Sweetwater gets lodgings in the same building with Brotherson. He watches the inventor at work at night and is detected by the latter. The detective moves to a room adjoining Brotherson's. He borrows a hole in the wall to spy on Brotherson. He visits him and assists the inventor in his work. A girl sent by Sweetwater with Edith Challoner's letters is ordered out by Brotherson. He declares the letters were not written by him. Sweetwater is unmasked by Brotherson, who declares he recognized him at once. The discovery is made that the letters signed "O. B." were written by two different men. Sweetwater goes to Derby in search of the second "O. B.," whom he expects to locate through one Doris Scott, mentioned in the letters. She is found acting as nurse for Oswald Brotherson, who is critically sick and calls the name of Edith in his delirium.

and rose. Then he slowly sat down again. "Dr. Fenton," he began, "you are a man to be trusted. I'm in a devil of a fix, and there is just a possibility that you may be able to help me out. It is the general impression in New York, as you know, that Miss Challoner committed suicide. But the circumstances do not fully bear out this theory, nor can Mr. Challoner be made to accept it. Indeed, he is so convinced of its falsehood, that he stands ready to do anything, pay anything, suffer anything, to have this distressing blight removed from his daughter's good name. Mr. Brotherson was her dearest friend, and as such may have the clue to this mystery, but Mr. Brotherson may not be in a condition to speak for several weeks. Meanwhile, Mr. Challoner must suffer from great suspense unless—" a pause during which he searched the doctor's face with a perfectly frank and inquiring expression—"unless some one else can help us out. Dr. Fenton, can you?"

The doctor did not need to speak; his expression conveyed his answer. "No more than another," said he. "Except for what Doris felt compelled to tell me, I know as little as yourself. Mr. Brotherson's delirium took the form of calling continually upon one name. I did not know this name, but Doris did, also the danger lurking in the fact that he had yet to hear of the tragedy which had robbed him of this woman to whom he was so deeply attached. So she told me just this much. That the Edith whose name rung so continuously in our ears was no other than the Miss Challoner of New York of whose death and its tragic circumstances the papers have been full; that their engagement was a secret one unshared so far as she knew by any one but herself. That she begged me to preserve this secret and to give her all the help I could when the time came for him to ask questions. Especially did she entreat me to be with her at the crisis. I was, but his waking was quite natural. He did not ask for Miss Challoner; he only inquired how long he had been ill and whether Doris had received a letter during that time. She had not received one, a fact which seemed to disappoint him; but she carried it off so gaily (she is a wonderful girl, Mr. Sweetwater—the darling of all our hearts), saying that he must not be so egotistical as to think that the news of his illness had gone beyond Derby, that he soon recovered his spirits and became a very promising convalescent. That is all I know about the matter; little more, I take it, than you know yourself."

Sweetwater nodded; he had expected nothing from the doctor, and was not disappointed at his failure. There were two strings to his bow, and the one proving valueless, he proceeded to test the other. "You have mentioned Miss Scott, as the confidante and only confidante of this unhappy pair," said he. "Would it be possible—can you make it possible for me to see her?"

It was a daring proposition; he understood this at once from the doctor's expression; and, fearing a hasty refusal, he proceeded to supplement his request with a few added arguments, urged with such unexpected address and show of reason that Dr. Fenton's aspect visibly softened and in the end he found himself ready to promise that he would do what he could to secure his visitor the interview he desired if he would come to the house the next day at the time of his own morning visit.



A Nearer View Increased His Curiosity.

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that he could not enter the Works without a permit, and this he was hardly in a position to demand; so he strolled about the village instead, and later wandered away into the forest.

Struck by the inviting aspect of a narrow and little used road opening from the highway shortly above the house where his interests were just then centered, he strolled into the heart of the spring woods till he came to a depression where a surprise awaited him, in the shape of a peculiar structure rising from its midst where it just fitted, or so nearly fitted that one could hardly walk about it without brushing the surrounding tree trunks. Of an oval shape, with its door facing the approach, it nestled there, a wonder to the eye and the occasion of considerable speculation to his inquiring mind. It had not been long built, as was shown very plainly by the fresh appearance of the unpainted boards of which it was constructed; and while it boasted of a door, as I've already said, there were no evidences visible of any other break in the smooth, neatly finished walls. A wooden ellipse with a roof but no windows; such it appeared and such it proved to be. A mystery to Sweetwater's eyes, and like all mysteries, interesting. For what purpose had it been built and why this isolation? It was too flimsy for a reservoir and too expensive for the wild freak of a crank.

A nearer view increased his curiosity. In the projection of the roof over the curving sides he found fresh food for inquiry. As he examined it in the walk he made around the whole structure, he came to a place where something like a hinge became visible and further on another. The roof was not simply a roof; it was also a lid capable of being raised for the air and light which the lack of windows necessitated. This was an odd discovery indeed, giving to the uncanny structure the appearance of a huge box, the cover of which could be raised or lowered at pleasure. And again he asked himself for what it could be intended? Nothing in his experience supplied him with an answer.

A team was approaching. He could hear the heavy tread of horses working their laborious way through trees whose obstructing branches swished before and behind them. They were bringing in a load for this shed, whose uses he would consequently soon understand. Grateful for his good luck—for his was a curiosity which could not stand defeat—he took a few steps into the wood, and from the vantage point of a concealing cluster of bushes, fixed his eyes upon the spot where the road opened into the hollow.

Something blue moved there, and in another moment, to his great amazement, there stepped into view the spirited form of Doris Scott, who if he had given the matter a thought he would have supposed to be sitting just then by the bedside of her patient, a half mile back on the road.

She was dressed for the woods in a blue skirt and jacket and moved like a leader in front of a heavily laden wagon now coming to a standstill before the closely shut shed—if such we may call it.

"I have a key," so she called out to the driver who had paused for orders. "When I swing the doors wide, drive straight in." Sweetwater took a look at the wagon. It was piled high with large wooden boxes on more than one of which he could see scrawled the words: O. Brotherson, Derby, Pa. This explained her presence, but the boxes told nothing. They were of all sizes and shapes, and some of them so large that the assistance of another man was needed to handle them. Sweetwater was about to offer his services when a second man appeared from somewhere in the rear, and the detective's attention being thus released from the load out of which he could make nothing, he allowed it to concentrate upon the young girl who had it in charge and who, for many reasons, was the one person of supreme importance to him. She had swung open the two wide doors, and now stood waiting for horse and wagon to enter. With locks flying free—she wore no bonnet—she presented a picture of ever-increasing interest to Sweetwater. Truly she was a very beautiful girl, buoyant, healthy and sweet; as unlike as possible his preconceived notions of Miss Challoner's humble little protegee. Her brown hair, of a rich chestnut hue, was in itself a wonder.

Sweetwater watched her with admiration as she superintended the unloading of the wagon and the disposal of the various boxes on the floor within; but as nothing she said during the process was calculated to afford the least enlightenment in regard to their contents, he presently wearied of his inaction and turned back towards the highway, comforting himself with the reflection that in a few short hours he would have her to himself

when nothing but a blunder on his part should hinder him from sounding her young mind and getting such answers to his questions as the affair in which he was simply interested, demanded.

CHAPTER XXVI.

Sweetwater Returns.

"You see me again, Miss Scott. I hope that yesterday's intrusion has not prejudiced you against me." "I have no prejudices," was her simple but firm reply. "I am only hurried and very anxious. The doctor is with Mr. Brotherson just now; but he has several other equally sick patients to visit and I dare not keep him here too long." "Then you will welcome my abruptness, Miss Scott, here is a letter from Mr. Challoner. It will explain my position. As you will see, his only desire is to establish the fact that his daughter did not commit suicide. You have seen Miss Challoner, I believe. Do you think she was the woman to plunge a dagger in her heart in a place as public as a hotel reception room?"

"No, Mr. Sweetwater. I saw her once and it made me want to be quiet and kind and beautiful like her. I never shall think she did anything so horrible. Nor will Mr. Brotherson ever believe it. He could not and live. You see, I am talking to you as if you knew him—the kind of man he is and just how he feels towards Miss Challoner. He is—" Her voice trailed off and a look, uncommon and almost elevated, illumined her face. "I will not tell you what he is; you will know, if you ever see him."

Sweetwater watched her for a moment, and then remarked: "I'm going to take one thing for granted; that you are as anxious as we are to clear Miss Challoner's memory." "O yes, O yes." "More than that, that you are ready and eager to help us. Your very looks show that."

"You are right; I would do anything to help you. But what can a girl like me do? Nothing; nothing. I know too little. Mr. Challoner must see that when you tell him I'm only the daughter of a foreman."

"And a friend of Mr. Brotherson," supplemented Sweetwater. "Yes," she smiled, "he would want me to say so. But that's his goodness. I don't deserve the honor." "His friend and therefore his confidante," Sweetwater continued. "He has talked to you about Miss Challoner?"

"He had to. There was nobody else to whom he could talk; and then, I had seen her and could understand."

"Where did you see her?" "In New York. I was there once with father, who took me to see her. I think she had asked Mr. Brotherson to send his little friend to her hotel if ever we came to New York."

"That was some time ago?" "We were there in June." "And you have corresponded ever since with Miss Challoner?" "She has been good enough to write, and I have ventured at times to answer her."

Smiling a little, but in a very earnest fashion, he pointed to the letter she still held and quietly said:

"Remember that I'm not speaking for myself, Miss Scott, when I seem a little too persistent and inquiring. You have corresponded with Miss Challoner; you have been told the fact of her secret engagement to Mr. Brotherson and you have been witness to his conduct and manner for the whole time he has been separated from her. Do you, when you think of it carefully, recall anything in the whole story of this romance which would throw light upon the cruel tragedy which has so unexpectedly ended it? Anything, Miss Scott? Straws show which way the stream flows." She was vehement, instantly vehement, in her disclaimer.

"I can answer at once," said she, "because I have thought of nothing else for all these weeks. Here all was well. Mr. Brotherson was hopeful and jolly and believed in her happiness and willingness to wait for his success. And this success was coming so fast! Oh, how can we ever tell him! How can we ever answer his questions even, or keep him satisfied and calm until he is strong enough to hear the truth. I've had to acknowledge already that I have had no letter from her for weeks. She never wrote to him directly, you know, and she never sent him messages, but he knew that a letter to me was also a letter to him and I can see that he is troubled by this long silence, though he says I was quite right not to let her know of his illness and that I must continue to keep her in ignorance of it till he is quite well again and can write to her himself. It is hard to hear him talk like this and not look sad or frightened."

Sweetwater remembered Miss Challoner's last letter, and wished he had it here to give her. In default of this, he said:

"Perhaps this not hearing may act in the way of a preparation for the shock which must come to him sooner or later. Let us hope so, Miss Scott."

Her eyes filled. "Nothing can prepare him," said she. Then added, with a yearning accent, "I wish I were older and had more experience. I should not feel so helpless. But the gratitude I owe him will give me strength when I need it most. Only I wish the suffering might be mine rather than his."

Unconscious of any self-betrayal, she lifted her eyes, startling Sweetwater by the beauty of her look.

"I don't think I'm so sorry for Oswald Brotherson," he murmured to himself as he left her. "He's a more fortunate man than he knows, however deeply he may feel the loss of his first sweetheart."

That evening the disappointed Sweetwater took the train for New York. He had failed to advance the case in hand one whit, yet the countenance he showed Mr. Gryce at their first interview was not a wholly gloomy one.

"Fifty dollars to the bad!" was his first laconic greeting. "All I have learned is comprised in these two statements. The second O. B. is a fine fellow; and not intentionally the cause of our tragedy. He does not even know about it. He's down with the fever at present and they haven't told him. When he's better we may hear something; but I doubt even that."

"Tell me about it." Sweetwater complied; and such is the unconsciousness with which we often encounter the pivotal circumstance upon which our future or the future of our most cherished undertaking hangs, he omitted from his story the sole discovery which was of any real importance in the unraveling of the mystery in which they were so deeply concerned. He said nothing of his walk in the woods or of what he saw there.

CHAPTER XXVII.

The Image of Dread.

In the comfortable little sitting-room of the Scott cottage Doris stood, looking eagerly from the window which gave upon the road. Behind her, on the other side of the room, could be seen through a partly opened door, a neatly spread bed, with a hand lying quietly on the patched coverlid. Several weeks had passed since the departure of Sweetwater and the invalid was fast gaining strength. Tomorrow, he would be up.

Was Doris thinking of him? Undoubtedly, for her eyes often flashed his way; but her main attention was fixed upon the road, though no one was in sight at the moment. Some one had passed for whose return she looked; some one whom, if she had been asked to describe, she would have called a tall, fine-looking man of middle age, of a cultivated appearance seldom seen in this small manufacturing town; seldom seen, possibly, in any town. He had glanced up at the window as he went by, in a manner too marked not to excite her curiosity. Would he look up again when he came back? She was waiting there to see. Why, she did not know. She was not used to indulging in petty suppositions of this kind; her life was too busy, her anxieties too keen. The great dread looming ever before her—the dread of that hour when she must speak—left her very little heart for anything dissociated with this coming event.



"Who is That, Johnny?"

But her interest had been caught today, caught by this stranger, and when during her eager watch the small messenger from the Works came to the door with the usual daily supply of books and magazines for the patient, she stepped out on the porch to speak to him and to point out the gentleman who was now rapidly returning from his stroll up the road. "Who is that, Johnny?" she asked.

The boy looked, searched his memory, not without some show of misgiving.

"A queer name," he admitted at last. "Shally something. Shally—Shally—"

"Challoner?" "Yes, that's it. How could you guess? He's from New York. Don't seem to have no business."

"Well, never mind. Run on, Johnny. And don't forget to come earlier tomorrow; Mr. Brotherson gets tired waiting."

"Does he? I'll come quick then; quick as I can run." And he sped off at a pace which promised well for the morrow.

Challoner! There was but one Challoner in the world for Doris Scott—Edith's father. Was this he? It must be, or why this haunting sense of something half remembered as she caught a glimpse of his face. Edith's father! and he was approaching, approaching rapidly, on his way back to town. She had not closed the door; something within—a hope or a dread—had prevented that. Would he take it as an invitation to come in? No, no; she was not ready for such an encounter yet. He might speak Edith's name; Oswald might hear and—with a gasp she recognized the closeness of his step; heard it lag, almost halt just where the path to the house ran into the roadside. But it passed on.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

I Hope Never to See That Man.

Mr. Challoner continued to pass the house twice a day and the time finally came when he ventured up the walk. Doris was in the window and saw him coming. She slipped softly out and intercepted him before he had stepped upon the porch.

"Miss Scott?" he asked. "Yes, Mr. Challoner." "You know me?" he went on, one foot on the step and one still on the walk.

Before replying she closed the door behind her. Then as she noted his surprise she carefully explained:

"Mr. Brotherson, our boarder, is still recovering from typhoid. He is still weak and acutely susceptible to the least noise. I was afraid that our voices might disturb him. Do you mind walking a little way up the road? That is, if your visit was intended for me."

Her flush, the beauty which must have struck even him, but more than all else her youth, seemed to reconcile him to this unconventional request. Bowing, he took his foot from the step, saying, as she joined him:

"Yes, you are the one I wanted to see; that is, today. Later, I hope to have the privilege of a conversation with Mr. Brotherson."

She gave him one quick look, trembling so that he offered her his arm with a fatherly air. "I see that you understand my errand here," he proceeded, with a grave smile, meant as she knew for her encouragement. "I am glad, because we can go at once to the point. Miss Scott," he continued in a voice from which he no longer strove to keep back the evidences of deep feeling. "I have the strongest interest in your patient that one man can have in another, where there is no personal acquaintanceship. You who have every reason to understand my reasons for this, will accept the statement, I hope, as frankly as it is made."

She nodded. Her eyes were full of tears, but she did not hesitate to raise them.

"When I lost my daughter, I lost everything," he declared, as they walked slowly up the road. "Nothing excites my interest, save that which once excited hers. I am told that the deepest interest of her life lay here. I am also told that it was an interest quite worthy of her. I expect to find it so. I hope with all my heart to find it so, and that is why I have come to this town and expect to linger till Mr. Brotherson has recovered sufficiently to see me. I hope that this will be agreeable to him. I hope that I am not presuming too much in cherishing these expectations."

Doris turned her candid eyes upon him.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Speedy Courtship.

A man recently in New York laid a wager that he would woo, win and marry within an hour a young lady whom, with his companions, he had just seen arrive at the hotel where he was living.

There is nothing in the American marriage law to prevent this dispatch. He introduced himself to the damsel, she smiled upon his suit, a minister was called in, and they were married within an hour.

The wager, of no inconsiderable amount, was handed to the bridegroom, who left with his bride the following day. It was shortly afterwards discovered that the couple had been man and wife, and that they had been traveling about playing the same trick at various hotels.