

THE MYSTERY GIRL

By CAROLYN WELLS. (Copyright, 1922.)

(Continued from Yesterday.)

"Ho wives anyone get cold?" she said, trying to smile "perhaps sitting in a draught—perhaps by means of a germ. It is almost well now."

"Perhaps by walking in the snow and getting one's feet wet," Mr. Adams suggested, and the girl turned frightened eyes upon him.

"Don't," she breathed; "Mr. Adams, don't!"

Her voice was pitious; her eyes implored him to stop torturing her.

"Why, what's the harm in my saying that?" he went on, inexorably. "You wouldn't go anywhere that you wouldn't want known, would you, Miss Mystery?"

He spoke the last two words in a meaning way, and the great dark eyes faced him with the look of a stag at bay.

Then again by a desperate effort the girl recovered herself and said coldly:

"Please speak plain, Mr. Adams. Is there a special meaning in your words?"

"There is, Miss Austin. Perhaps I have no right to ask you why, but I do ask you if you went over to Dr. Waring's house late in the evening night before last?"

"Sunday night, do you mean?"

Miss Mystery controlled her voice, but her hands were clenched and her foot tapped the floor in her stifled excitement.

"Yes, Sunday night."

"No, of course, I did not go over there at night. I was there in the afternoon with Mrs. Bates and Mr. Payne."

"I know what. And you then met Dr. Waring for the first time?"

"For the first time." She spoke with downcast face.

"The first time in your life?"

"The first time in my life." But if ever a statement carried its own denial that one seemed to. The long dark lashes fell on the white cheeks. The pale lips quivered, and if Anita Austin had been uttering deepest perjury she could have shown no more convincing evidence of guilt.

Old Salt looked at her benevolently. She was so young, so small, so alone—and so mysterious.

"I can't make you out," he shook his head. "But if you, Miss Austin, that is, he looked, "unless I find out something definite against you, I feel I ought to tell you, that you're enemies—yes, as the girl looked up surprised, "you've made enemies in this house. Small wonder—the way you've acted! Now, why can't you be chummy and sociable like?"

"Chummy? Sociable? With whom?"

"With all the boarders. There's young Lockwood now—and there's young Bascom."

"Yes, yes, I know. I will—Mr. Adams—I will try to be more sociable. Now—as to—Dr. Waring—why did he kill himself?"

Old Salt eyed her narrowly. "We don't know that he did," he began.

"But Mrs. Adams told me all the details," she shuddered, "and if that room he was in was so securely locked that they had to break in, how could it be the work of another?"

"Well, Miss Austin, as they found a hand wound in the man's neck, just under his right ear, a wound that produced instant unconsciousness and almost instant death, and as no weapon of any sort could be found in the room, how could it have been suicide?"

"Which would you rather think it?" the strange girl asked, looking gravely at him.

"Well, to me—I'm an old-fashioned chap—suicide always suggests cowardice, and Doc Waring was no coward, that I'll swear."

"No, he was not—"

"How do you know?"

Miss Mystery started at the sudden question.

"I heard him lecture, you know," she returned; "and, too, I saw him in his home—Sunday afternoon—and he seemed a fine man—a fine man."

"Well, Miss Austin, old Salt rose to go. "I'm free to confess you're a mystery to me. I consider myself a fair judge of men—yes, and of women, but when a slip of a girl like you acts so strange, I can't make it out. Now, I happen to know—"

He paused at the panic-stricken look on her face, and lamely concluded:

"Never mind—I won't tell."

With which cryptic remark he went away.

"Well, what you been saying to her?" demanded his aggrieved spouse, as the Adamses met in their own little sitting room.

"Why, nothing," Old Salt replied, and his troubled eyes looked at her pleadingly. "I don't think she's wrong, Esther."

"Well, I do. And maybe a whole lot wrong. Why Saltontall, Miss Bascom says she saw Miss Austin traipsing across the field late Sunday night."

"She didn't! I don't believe a word of it! She's a meddling old maid—a snooping busybody!"

"There, now, you carry on like that because you're afraid we will discover something wrong about Miss Mystery."

"Look here, Esther," Adams spoke sternly; "you remember she's a young girl, without anybody to stand up for her, hereabouts. Now, you know what a bobbery a few words can kick up. And we don't want that poor child's name touched by a breath of ill gossip that isn't true. I don't believe Liza Bascom saw her out on Sunday night. I don't even believe she thought she did!"

"Well, I believe it. Liza Bascom's no fool—"

"She's worse, she's a knave! And she hates little Austin, and she'd say anything, true or false, to harm the girl."

"But, Salt, she says she saw Miss Austin, all in her fur coat and cap going cross lots to the Waring house Sunday evening—late."

"Can she prove it?"

"I don't know about that. But she saw her."

"How does she know it was Miss Austin? It might have been somebody who looked like her."

"You know those footprints."

"The Jap's?"

"You can't say they're the Jap's, Miss Bascom says they're the Austin girl's."

"Esther!" Old Saltontall Adams rose in his wrath. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself to let that girl's name get into the Waring matter at all! Even if she did go out Sunday night, if Miss Bascom did see her, you keep still about it. If that girl's wrong it'll be discovered without our help. If she isn't, we must not be the ones to bring her into notice."

"She couldn't be—implicated—could she, Salt?"

"Oh," he thundered. "Esther, you astound me. That Bascom woman has turned your brain. She's a viper, that's what she is!"

He stormed out of the room, and getting into his great coat, tramped down to the village.

Gordon Lockwood was in his room. This was much to the annoyance of Esther, the impatient chambermaid, who wanted to get her work done.

Lockwood was himself impatient to get over to the Waring house, for he had much to do with the mass of coming mail and the necessary interviews with reporters and other callers.

Yet he tarried, in his pleasant bedroom at Mrs. Adams', his door securely locked, and his own attitude one of stupefaction.

For the hundredth time he reread the crumpled paper that he had taken



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