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'Fresh from the gardens'

The Affair at Flower Acres

by CAROLYN WELLS

BEGIN HERE TODAY

Malcolm Finley, returning from Japan, is invited to Flower Acres, the Long Island home of Douglas Raynor, husband of Nancy, who is a former sweetheart of Finley's. Finley discovers that Raynor is tyrannizing over Nancy and is incensed. At Flower Acres are Ezra Goddard, friend of Finley; Nancy; her devoted brother, Orville Kent; Douglas Raynor; Raynor's sister, Miss Mattie, and others. Finley realizes that he is regarded with suspicion by Raynor and Miss Mattie because of his old love affair with Nancy. This—and the constant abuse Raynor heaps upon his wife—anger Finley extremely. Raynor overhears a conversation between Finley and Nancy and orders Finley to leave the house. "I promise that if you will remove your presence I will at once transform myself into the most gentle, loving and kind-tempered of husbands," he sneers.

NOW GO ON WITH THE STORY

"You can never say another word to me, of any sort whatever!" And in a fury Finley left them.

He was sure he had made a fool of himself. Sure he had harmed Nan rather than helped her.

Finley went to his room, but he did not at once begin to pack his things. He sat down by a window and gazed out over the flowers, to the sea and sky, and let his thoughts grow calmer and more practical.

Was there no way he could help Nan? No task would be too hard, no service too difficult, if he could but make up for the trouble and annoyance he had caused her.

For he had small doubt but that Raynor would wreak on his wife the anger he must feel toward himself, Finley.

A long time he thought and sighed as he pondered.

And then, instead of packing his kit and starting for the train, he bathed and dressed and presented himself on the western terrace just as tea was being brought there.

Finley did not look at his host or speak to him, but as there were present most of the family, and a few neighbors, this omission was not noticed.

"Oh, yes, then you may," she beamed. "After I pass the buns we'll talk it over."

Finley had seated himself, not near Nan, but where he could watch her. In fact, he was beside Miss Mattie, who was more than ready to entertain him.

And it was during one of her long and ramblings discourse that Finley, watching Nan, again saw that quick, furtive motion as of dropping something in Raynor's teacup.

"Saccharine, sure," he thought.

"She can fool him then," he thought. "But seems to me she could fool him oftener and better than she does."

Tea over, they lingered on the terrace. Another gorgeous sunset was under way.

"Rarely does that old sun get a chance to sink to rest in such a bed of beauty," said Eva Turner, who was always loquacious at tea time.

"There she goes!" cried Dolly, as the last of the great flaming disk dropped out of sight. "And I must go, too, or mother will blow me up sky-high. Who'll walk to the bridge with me?"

"I will," said Orry, who was a born cavalier, and likewise fond of gay little Dolly.

But they tarried until the other guests had taken leave and then, as they sauntered across the lawn, down toward the bridge over the tiny brook that separated the two estates, the sinister dusk was creeping in from the darkening horizon.

"I'm jealous of your other prince," Kent bantered, and Dolly said, seriously, "He isn't really mine, he's Nan's."

"Nonsense! What has Nan to do with princes?"

"Oh, it doesn't matter that she's married to that old hobgoblin. I mean that can't stop her loving her prince."

"Don't, Dolly; it isn't nice for a little girl to say things like that."

"Nice or not—it's true talk. You see, Nan ought to have married Mr. Finley in the first place."

"Hush, Dolly," Kent spoke sternly. 'Nan's my sister, and I forbid you to gossip about her."

"All right, Orry, I won't. Miss Mattie isn't your sister, is she? May I talk about her?"

"Yes, if you like," and the young man smiled.

"Well, she's a meddlesome Mattie. What do you suppose she's doing now? She's looking down here at us!"

The two were on the bridge now, the little rustic affair that added picturesqueness to the scene. Dolly had turned and was looking back toward the house.

"What sharp eyes you have," Kent said, looking, too. "I can scarcely see her. The dark comes quickly."

"Yes." Dolly looked at her wristwatch. "It's just seven o'clock. I must run. Goodby, Orry."

"Goodby," Kent said, looking at his own watch, and starting off toward the house.

Meddlesome Mattie had been looking out her window at the two strolling across the lawn, but there was no more to it than idle curiosity.

It was her habit to watch everything and everybody, in hope of learning something she was not meant to know.

From her own room, with the windows all open, she had heard her brother leave the terrace and go into the sun parlor—that was doubtless to avoid the dampness.

She had heard Malcolm Finley, at the same time, leave the terrace and go into the house, walking through the rear hall, and out on the east verandah. She had listened intently but didn't hear Nan follow him—a distinct disappointment to Miss Mattie.

Mr. Goddard, she knew, was in his own room. And Eva Turner was bustling about, now in her bedroom, then on the stairs, then to the kitchen and back again—of course, intent upon her dietary duties.

Despairing of any further sounds of interest, Miss Mattie snapped on her lights and looked at her clock It was five minutes to seven then, time to begin to dress for dinner. And then, though not listening intently, Miss Mattie's ears were startled by the sound of a single shot.

Indeed, at first she didn't recognize it as a shot. So often a supposed shot had been a blow-out or a burst tire, that now, when it was really a shot, she naturally thought it something else. For a moment no sounds followed, and then various light footsteps could be heard below.

Still unthinking of tragedy, Miss Mattie stepped out into the hall, and, though hall and stairs were as yet unlighted, she felt her way to the banister rail and started slowly down the stairs.

When half way down she could discern a white figure standing in the door between the hall and the sun parlor, but as she went on, the figure which she knew to be that of Eva Turner went through the doorway and the next instant the lights of the sun parlor were flashed on.

Miss Mattie scurried the rest of the way down and peered through the hall door into the sun room.

On the floor lay her brother in an ungainly heap, near him stood Malcolm Finley, an automatic pistol in his hand, and by the door, her hand still on the light switch, stood Eva Turner.

She was not looking at Finley, but in the opposite direction, toward the west door of the sun room.

And at that door, in another moment, appeared Nan, white-faced and terrified.

Then, as Nan stepped into the room, Orville Kent also came in from the south side, through the outside door that opened on the lawns and flower beds that ran down to the brook.

"What is it?" he cried; then, catching sight of Raynor's fallen figure, and taking in Finley with the pistol, Kent sprang across the room to put his arm around the shaking form of his sister.

"Move, somebody! Do something!" came from Miss Turner in an hysterical shriek.

"Oh, Douglass!" Miss Mattie cried, and tottered to a chair.

"Who—who did it?" gasped Nan, her voice almost inaudible.

"Who did it?" mocked Miss Turner. "There he stands—with his weapon still in his hand!"

ON THE FLOOR LAY HER BROTHER IN AN UNGAINLY HEAP, NEAR HIM STOOD FINLEY.

"I—I didn't do it," Malcolm Finley said, and quickly added, "I don't think I did."

"Oh, you don't!" and Miss Turner's scorn fell on him. "Well, then, Mrs. Raynor did it! As I came to this door I heard the shot, and before I could get the light on I saw you both—"

"How could you see without the lights on?" asked Orville Kent, sternly.

Ezra Goddard came then, shocked and wondering; Hatfield, the butler, appeared, and several maid servants huddled in the background.

"Somebody must take charge here," Goddard said, going toward the stricken man; "perhaps he isn't dead."

"Oh," said Nan, her frightened eyes staring, isn't he?"

"Hush, Nan," said her brother. "Will you let me take you to your room?"

"No, no, Orry, I must stay here—I must! You stay by me."

"Yes, Nan," and Kent placed her in a big chair, and then sat near her.

(To be continued.)

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Chestnuts

Where was the first nail struck?—Upon the head.

When is a Scotsman like a donkey?—When he wanders along his banks and braes (brays).

Why does a stork stand on one leg?—Because if he lifted the other one as well he would fall down.

If an old lady with a scarlet cloak met a goat in a lane, what would happen?—The old lady would become a scarlet runner, and the goat would turn to butt her (utter).

Why are grocers always very heavy?—Because their business makes them weigh tea (weighty).

Why is a boxing match usually a short affair?—Because it only takes two seconds to arrange it.

What becomes of the pieces when dawn breaks?—They go into morning (mourning).

Why do you always make a mistake when you put your shoe on?—Because you put your foot in it.

Why is a dentist like a bowler at cricket?—Because they both try to remove the stumps.

What is the difference between a man looking upstairs, and a woman walking upstairs?—The man stares up steps, and the woman steps upstairs.

Why is a bad workman like a wax vesta?—Because he will strike on anything.

When is a lady not a lady?—When she is a little pale (pail).

When is a not a girl?—When she is a little hoarse.

Why are you angry with a servant when he announces an unmarried lady?—Because what he says is misbecoming (Miss be coming.)

Why should an artist never be short of money.—Because if he is good at his trade he can draw money.

Which is the best way to obtain a ripe old age?—Live a long time.

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