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JAPAN TEA

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The Affair at Flower Acres

by CAROLYN WELLS

BEGIN HERE TODAY

The body of Douglas Raynor is found in the early evening on the floor of the sunroom at Flower Acres, his Long Island home. Raynor has been shot through the heart. Standing over the dead man, pistol in hand, is Malcolm Finley, former sweetheart of Raynor's wife, Nancy. Eva Turner, Raynor's nurse, stands by the door with her hand on the light switch. In a moment Nancy appears, white-faced and terrified. Orville Kent, Nancy's brother, comes in from the south side of the room, and then Ezra Goddard, friend of Finley, with others, enter upon the scene. Detective Dobbins conducts an investigation. Finley explains that he came into the room after the shot was fired and picked up the weapon. Dolly Fay, a neighbor girl, gives Nancy a note from Finley. The note advises Nancy to remain quiet.

NOW GO ON WITH THE STORY

Silently Nan meditated on this, until Dolly, tired of waiting for her to speak, leaned over her and read the missive too.

"What does he mean, Nan?" she asked.

"What he says, I suppose. It's good advice and I shall follow it. Dolly, you wormed yourself into this thing—you had no right to read this note—"

"Oh, don't you be afraid of me, Nancy. I won't tell a single thing you don't want me to."

"Oh, why are you here at all? I shouldn't have let you stay—but I was so dazed and troubled last night I scarcely realized that you were here."

"Now, Nan, I'm here to help you. Honest, I won't tell a thing you don't want me to—why, what have you been doing? Here's a whole heap of ashes in the fireplace! You been burning things?"

"It's chilly, isn't it? Let's start a little fire."

Hastily and rather nervously, Nan laid on some wood from the basket and Dolly ran for a match. Soon a fire was blazing and into it Nan thrust the note she had just read.

She sank into a low chair before the fire and asked Dolly to ring for her maid.

"We'll have tea here, Dolly, and then we'll dress and go down to breakfast."

"Yes, dear," and Dolly fluttered around her with loving little attentions and drew a low table to her side.

Dolly adored Nan, and always endeavored to imitate her ways. So now she too was quiet and composed.

"Listen, Dolly," Nan said, after they had had their tea. "I can trust you, can't I?"

"To the end!" said Dolly.

"Then, dear, I'll tell you, that I am in deep trouble. Don't ask me any questions, don't tell anybody anything about me, but help me all you can—won't you, Dolly?"

"Indeed, I will."

"Then this is what you can do, dear. Take this little pracel and hide it somewhere among your own things until I ask you for it again. Have you some place—where nobody can get at it?"

"Oh, yes, I have a drawer in my desk that I always keep locked."

"And can you get it over home without attracting attention?"

"Don't worry, Nan, darling—trust all to me. Why, it's a small parcel; I can get it in my coat pocket—it's a big pocket, you know."

"Very well, dear. Do that—and never say a word of it to any one, not even your mother."

"Oh, I won't. What else can I do for you?"

"Nothing, now. Be true and faithful to me, won't you, Dolly?"

Nan looked utterly despairing, and Dolly put her arms round her as she reassured her of her love and loyalty.

"All right, dear," and Nan suddenly straightened up and looked brave and strong again. "Now, dress, and we'll go downstairs."

"You know who he was!" Detective Dobbins fairly jumped.

Nancy Raynor dressed herself with care, choosing a plain black gown, and massing her dark hair in a soft coil.

Downstairs, Dolly found a peremptory message from her mother to come home at once, and she had to go.

Nancy Raynor presided at the breakfast table, and at first no one was there with her but Ezra Goddard.

"Excuse me, if I speak abruptly, he said, in a low voice, as the butler left the room for a moment, "but, Mrs. Raynor, if you want any help or advice that I can give, command me. Or get a lawyer—but don't ask Malcolm Finley to help you."

"Why?"

"I think you know why"—he spoke very gently—"but much will depend on today's disclosures. And remember, I'll be glad to help in any way I can."

"Good for you, Goddard," Orville Kent said, as he came into the room, "we'll want help, I'm thinking. Nancy dear, be careful what you say."

With that, Kent lapsed into silence and devoted himself to his breakfast, paying little attention as the others of the household drifted in and took their places at the table.

Malcolm Finley, beyond formal greetings, said almost nothing, and Miss Turner was equally taciturn.

Only Miss Mattie Raynor was loquacious.

"Do you know what I think?" she asked. "I think old Grim Gannon had something to do with Douglas' death. You know Gannon is a queer dick."

But nobody commented on this statement, or responded in any way to Miss Mattie's opinion.

"Come for a walk in the gardens," Finley whispered to Nan as they left the dining room.

"I daren't," she returned, lifting piteous eyes to his.

"Come with me, Nancy," Kent said, peremptorily. And as she obeyed, he admonished her, "Are you crazy, Nan? For heaven's sake keep away from Finley at least until after the funeral.

"Yes, Orry," she said, docilely.

"Stay by me or Miss Mattie all the time. You can't be too careful, Nan."

"Of course I'll do all that—I know my duty—" and Nan once more regained the poise that was natural to her.

Doctor Fraser and Detective Dobbins arrived and called the household together in the great living room.

It was clear to be sen that they were possessed of new and important information, and Dobbins seemed scarcely able to control his own excitement as the medical examiner began his inquiries.

"We have found strange conditions," Fraser began, addressing himself principally to Nan, but taking in the rest in his roving glance. "Of course Mr. Raynor was killed by a pistol shot. It was fired at short range, the bullet entered his heart and death was practically instantaneous. But an autopsy has revealed the fact that Mr. Raynor was also the victim of poisoning."

He paused and looked at one after another of the silent group.

Only Miss Mattie showed excitement.

"Yes," Fraser went on, an examination of the contents of the stomach shows the presence of arsenic, taken very lately.

"As may not be known to you laymen, the symptoms of cumulative arsenical poisoning are anemia, shortness of breath, occasional prostration, pallor, and excessive thirst. All these things were present in Mr. Raynor's case, and I'm sure you can remember them."

"I do," Miss Mattie cried. "Oh, my poor Douglas! Yes, he was so thirsty at luncheon yesterday, he called for one glass of water after another! Poisoned! Oh, my God!"

The elderly spinster hid her face in her hands.

"This," Fraser went on, "opens up a new field of inquiry. We must assume that some one administered the arsenic from day to day—"

"Unless it was suicide," put in Ezra Goddard.

"There is that possibility," Fraser admitted, "but it is highly improbable. To resume: this process of arsenical aoisoning poisoning of Mr. Raynor must have been going on for at least a fortnight or so, and had he not been shot, and had the poisoning continued, the man must have died from its effects in the course of another fortnight."

The alert eyes of Detective Dobbins scrutinized the faces before him.

But save for the contorted and agonized countenance of Miss Mattie, they were all stonily devoid of expression.

Nancy Raynor looked like a statue cut in marble. Her face was colorless, even her lips were almost white, and her great dark eyes were piercingly fastened on the face of Doctor Fraser.

"Can any one present," Fraser went on, "suggest any explanation of this poisoning process?"

As no one replied, he questioned each in turn.

"Certainly not," Nancy Raynor said, her voice and manner perfectly composed. "I cannot imagine who would attempt to poison my husband, and I am most crtainly sure he never thought of doing such a thing himself."

"The thing is almost incredible," Orville Kent said, in turn. "Why, if somebody was successfully poisoning a man, would he also shoot him?"

"That is a question easy to ask and difficult to answer," Dobbins declared.

"Miss Turner," Fraser said, 'as nurse and dietitian to Mr. Raynor, did you not notice the symptoms I have described?"

"Not to think of them as symptoms of poisoning," Eva Turner answered. "I noticed that Mr. Raynor was pale, was anaemic, and that at times he showed shortness of breath, but these things I was trying to correct by changes in his diet. As you know, Doctor Fraser, those symptoms you mention are not exclusively the effect of arsenical poisoning."

"No, of course not. You couldn't be expected to realize their cause. But now, having discovered the presence of arsenic in his system and in his stomach, we know—we know that Mr. Raynor was being purposely and systematically dosed with arsenic."

He paused and glanced around.

(To be continued.)

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ISSUE No. 22—'29

The Imperial Conference

Madras Mail: It is desirable that, whenever possible, conferences should be held at an interval of no greater than three years.... The shortening of distances in the Empire by the ease and rapidity of modern communications provides no real substitute for personal discussions between Empire Governments. The three-year interval probably provides the most convenient interval at which conferences can be held, but there can be little doubt that many difficulties would be avoided if a Standing committee of the Conference were to hold meetings in the interim. It would act as a clearing house for the expression of the views of the respective Governments, and avoid even the appearance that one Government of the Empire takes a decision of common concern without previously consulting the other.

Poetry

"Poetry is the power of concentrating all the far-reaching resources of language at one point so that a single and apparently effortless expression rejoices the aesthetic imagination at the moment when it is most expectant and exacting, and the same time astonishes the intellect by a new aspect of the truth."—Dr. Bridges, the Poet-Laureate.

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Garden Service

Ideas Which Help to Beautify The Farm House and Makes it a Real Home

Window Boxes and Hanging Pots

It is time to start thinking of window boxes and hanging baskets which can be started now and should be placed outside about the end of May. This is a form of gardening which is within the reach of all, as those people whose backyard is entirely taken up with the garage or a dog kennel have at least a window sill from which to supports one of these concentrated flower beds. One must remember that the window box produces about six times the amount of growth for the same area as the normal garden. On this account, rich soil, plenty of fertilizer and daily watering are essential. Do not place outside or uncover before all danger of frost is over, as most of the plants used will freeze very easily. Window boxes should be as long as the window sill—about eight inches wide at the top, six at the bottom and at least nine inches deep. These are inside measurements. The corners must be strongly reinfoced with iron straps and the box well supported, as when full it weighs about 150 lbs. Have holes and a layer of broken crockery or cinders in the bottom to provide drainage. If well-rotted manure is available, put in a layer of this next and then fill up with fine garden soil. Select stocky plants and before putting them in the box remove all bloom and buds. To get them growing quickly, dissolve a scant handful of nitrate of soda in a fair-sized watering can and sprinkle this over the box, if the latter is around four feet long. If shorter, less fertilizer should be used. After this, saturate the soil with another can or two of water. Three or four more applications of fertilizer at ten-day intervals are advised, and watering should take place every day, as the evaporation from window boxes is far above normal. Along the front of the box put in trailing nasturtiums, German ivy, and similar trailing plants, while farther back, petunias, geraniums, alyssum, lobelia, ageratum, begonias, ferns and other types especially suitable should go in.

Transplanting

Tomatoes, Cabbage, head lettuce, cosmos, zinnias, and many other flowers should be transplanted at least once before being placed in their permanent position in the garden. When done carefully, this strengthens the root growth and makes a stronger and stockier plant. When plants are taken from the original flats in which the seed is grown and set directly out in the garden, they are inclined to be spindly and tender. Just after setting out in the garden sprinkle a little nitrate of soda around, dissolving this quick-acting fertilizer in water and applying in liquid form is the best way and your plants will shoot ahead.

Good Seed Important

Too much emphasis cannot be laid upon the importance of good seed. With flowers particularly, one is often inclined to save the seed of some especially choice specimen without realizing that few flowers reproduce themselves exactly from the seed unless certain very elaborate precautions are taken. A row of several different coloured sweet peas, for instance, will become hopelessly mixed in a single season. The seed from a brilliant red variety may produce nothing but indifferent weak-coloured flowers when saved in the ordinary way. On the farms of the large seed houses and in the professional horticulturists' experimental plot, each type is kept widely separated and in many cases the individual flowers are protected with netting. Otherwise bees and smaller insects will carry the pollen from one flower to another without regard for type or colour. On this account alone the amateur is well advised to depend upon seed in sealed packages only from reliable merchants. There are other reasons also for advising such a course. Most flowers, when they start going to seed, deteriorate very rapidly and succeeding blooms are few and small. To keep a garden at its best all fading blooms should be removed before there is a trace of seed pods.

Minard's Liniment for sick animals.

Self-Love

Self-love is an instrument useful but dangerous; it often wounds the hand which makes use of it, and seldom does good without doing harm.—Rousseau.

Give me but eyes to know that God knows best.

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