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"SALADA" TEA

701

'Fresh from the gardens'

The Affair at Flower Acres

by CAROLYN WELLS

BEGIN HERE TODAY

Douglas Raynor is found shot through the heart in the early evening on the oor of the sun room of Flower Acres, his Long Island home. 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 light switch. Then Nancy; her brother, Orville Kent; Ezra Goddard, friend of Finley; Miss Mattie, Raynor's sister, and others, enter the room. Lionel Raynor, son of Douglas Raynor by first marriage, comes to claim his father's estate. Nurse Turner confesses to attempting to poison Douglas Raynor for revenge. Pennington Wise, a celebrated detective, and his girl assistant, Zizi, are called to take the case out of the hands of Detective Dobbins. Grimshaw Gannon tells Wise that Nancy married Douglas Raynor because she wrongly thought she could save her ailing father from a forgery charge.

NOW GO ON WITH THE STORY.

"I'm inclined to think so, too," said Pennington Wise, gravely. "All this puts a new light on it. The fearful truth coming home to her, the impossibility of living with that man after she had learned of his perfidy, and then the added agony of seeing again the man whom she must have loved before her marriage—whom she surely loves now—oh, what other theory is there?"

"Does her brother—does Mr. Kent know?" Zizi asked.

"I'm not sure," said Gannon. "If he does, she has told him lately, for she has tried to keep it from him all along. No, I don't think he knows anything about it at all. But, of course, he knows of the terrible life his sister led with her husband and it has made him sad and ill. Orville Kent is a queer man, but he has a sound heart and a deep affection for his sister. She has cared for him like a mother all his life.

Grim Gannon leaned back in his chair as if he had now settled the affairs of the universe.

He scarcely noticed his callers' farewells, and they left him drowsing over his old pipe.

Crossing the lawns they met Orville Kent coming toward them.

"I want to give myself up," he said, speaking steadily, but with a nervous twitching of his long fingers. "I killed my brother-in-law, Douglas Raynor."

Wise gave a quick glance at Zizi.

"Mr. Kent," he said kindly, "I know you think this sacrifice of yourself for your sister is a right thing to do. And I appreciate the love and affection that it shows to have you willing to take even crime on your shoulders to lift it from hers. I know how black the case is against her—I know how you have tried to devise some means of getting her freed from suspicion. And I know that now, when you can't help seeing that the net is tightening round her—the last doubts of her guilt vanishing—I know that in your utter desperation you have concluded to avow the crime yourself and take her punishment. But, Mr. Kent, this is not so easy a matter to accomplish as it seems to you, and I'm going to advise you against your plan. I'm going to ask you to give me 24 hours at least to find out the real truth."

"Take your 24 hours, Mr. Wise," said Kent, slowly.

CHAPTER XVI.

Pennington Wise was in the sun parlor studying the room once more.

"A little late for clews, isn't it, Mr. Detective?" Lionel Raynor said, in a tone more jovial than sarcastic.

Young Raynor, though not liked at first, had gradually made himself more acceptable to the family. He had quite won the heart of Miss Mattie, he got on well with the men, and except for Nan, he was friendly all round. But he was so positive that it was Nan who shot his father that no arguments could change his opinion.

As to the inheritance he was jauntily confident in his present ownership of the whole estate, and reserved any discussion of Nan's rights or claims until the matter of the murder should be settled, one way or another.

Orville Kent puzzled Wise. The young man was so moody, as well as physically upset that Wise was interested in him aside from the matter in hand. Kent's strongest trait—or, so it seemed to Wise—was his affection for his sister. He worshipped her with a dumb, dog-like devotion, often evident in his glances at her, while he said no word.

Wise was not at all surprised when Kent assumed the burden of the guilt. He held that there are some natures not onl capable of a great sacrifice for a loved one, but who really glory in it. It is the stuff of which the early martyrs were made.

After Kent had made his sudden and impulsive confession and Wise had asked for 24 hours' further search, the detective was a very busy man.

And so, later that evening, he was going over the sun parlor floor again.

It was this that Wise was studying—although he had long ago agreed that it was merely the impression of the right side of the right shoe worn by some one who had entered the room at some time.

Wise looked up at Lionel Raynor's chaff, and smiled a little.

"It's never too late for clews," he said, "and this print is such a good one I hate not to utilize it. To me it is exceedingly indicative, and I am pretty nearly ready to state it was left here by the murderer himself."

"Or herself," amended Lionel. "I tell you, Mr. Wise, a soon as you get away from the one who is most concerned, the most interested in the absence of my father, you get away from the truth."

"This overshoe is of too large a size for the one you have in mind," said Wise.

"Nonsense! It is just the thing a clever woman would do—put on the large shoes of a man, over her little slippers. Then, she would think, the clew would be misleading, as," he looked at Wise, "as it seems to be."

"Oh, I don't know," said Wise. "have you noticed the direction in which this points?"

"Well, it is pointed toward the place where my father fell, if that's what you mean."

"That isn't what I mean,' said Wise.

And then, with a murmur of excuse, the detective left the room and went into the house. In the hall, he met Zizi and drew her aside for a word.

"Come with me, Zizi, to talk with Kent. And watch him. You know when anybody is making up a yarn, if you pretend to believe him, he will go on and elaborate his falsification until he defeats his own ends. Now, Kent is putting up a confession to save his sister. If we can persuade him that his sister is in no danger, he will doubtless retract, but I propose to let him think she is strongly suspected, and see him insist on his own guilt. Any way, we must learn all he knows—if he is so certain of Mrs. Raynor's guilt, he must know more than we do."

The two went to Orville Kent's rooms.

These were two sunny, pleasant rooms on the south side of the house.

Kent received them in his sitting room—which was more like a studio, not a working studio, but the room of an art lover and dilettante.

"Come in," he said, gravely. "You want to see me? Take a seat, Miss Zizi."

"Thank you," and Zizi slid toward the chair indicated. "Oh!" she cried, pausing en route, "what a dear face! Who is it?"

She took up a photograph, and Kent's eyes smiled as he said: "That's Dolly Fay, a neighbor, and a harum-scarum. That's only an enlarged snapshot, but it shows her at her best."

"Now, just a few words as to your somewhat startling statement, 'Mr. Kent," Wise began. "I shall start out by saying that I don't believe you shot your brother-in-law, and that I do believe you claimed that you did, in order to lift suspicion from your sister. It is better to tell me the details, than to rehearse them to the police—though if you prefer that—"

"No, no—" Orry's fingers were working nervously.

"Well, then, let us start by assuming that your story is true. Why did you kill your brother-in-law?"

"Because—because he made my sister's life a burden."

"But he had done that for two years—"

"Oh, it was much worse of late. He was—he was brutal to her—"

"Yes—I know—but that equally explains why she should kill him."

"Oh, she didn't—she never could—I tell you, Mr. Wise, my sister is incapable of such a deed!"

"Then she didn't do it—then she can't be convicted of it—then—then, Mr. Kent, why do you take the blame and pretend to a crime you never committed?"

"Do you mean that?" Orry looked up eagerly. "Do you mean my sister can't be convicted if she is innocent? Can't she be wrongly suspected and—"

"She is suspected, of course. And there is a strong tendency on the part of some to suspect an outsider—on account of the print of the overshoe."

(To be continued.)

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'Twas not so that night of dread,
In the wild woods lost was I.
Darkness reigned and overhead
Not a star was in the sky,
And the prowling wolf was near,
And there was the sense of fear.

And those eyes! I see them yet,
Gleaming from the fallen tree
As the great cat crouched and let
Forth one cry, then sprang at me,
Sprang to rend and tear and kill,
I behold her fury still.

But she didn't count on you
As you met her strength and rage.
On the instant then she knew
With what foe she must engage.
Fight more sudden, fierce and keen
Seldom has the forest seen.

She fought to protect her lair
And her tawny oyung ones too.
You fought in the night out ther
To protect some one you knew.
Then you loosed the grip you had,
She escaped, and I was glad.

Still the storm's foud voice I hear,
But it's cosy here, old friend,
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Towser, Towser, dog of mine.

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