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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 floor 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 Raynors wife, Nancy. Eva Turner, Raynors 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 Zizi, his girl assistant, are called to take the case out of the hands of Detective Dobbins. Zizi disguises herself as a ghost and goes into the superstitious Lionel Raynor's room. He is badly frightened.

NOW GO ON WITH THE STORY

Realizing the need for haste, lest her subject become too satisfied of his safety, she murmured:

"If you are right—if you are ready to do right—to restore the will—the will—the will—"

Even as she whispered the words, Zizi knew her ruse had succeeded. She had already sized up Lionel Raynor as no villain at heart; she was convinced that he had suppressed the will because of a sudden greed and because of the opportunity afforded him by the peculiar conditions of the case. Moreover, she knew he truly thought that Nancy Raynor had killed his father and believed that therefore she had no right to the inheritance. But she knew, too, that he was frightened and apprehensive at what he had done, and that this ghostly warning would, in all probability, bring about the restoration of the will.

"You promise?" she breathed, her gray draperies wavering through the air, as her hidden arms moved them, and her gleaming eyes fixed on him in the darkness.

"I promise!" he returned.

"And you will keep that promise—or" the faint voice grew winter—"or—tomorrow night—tomorrow night—" And she was gone.

As a matter of fact, Zizi merely sank to the floor but it gave all the effect of a supernatural disappearance.

She crawled to the door—which was in an alcove, and noiselessly let herself out into the dark hall.

Again in her own room, she removed her phosphorous, and powder, and slipped out of her multitudinous layers of fine tulle.

"A wonderful frock," she said, admiringly, as she folded it carefully into a surprisingly small compass and laid it away. "I doubt if there's a better ghost effect possible. That man was literally scared stiff. Penny will be pleased. And I'm sure he'll keep his promise—if not—"

And she tucked herself into bed, and slept soundly till daybreak.

Sure enough, Penny Wise was pleased the next day, when he found what a perfect success Zizi's plan had been.

Early in the day Lionel Raynor went to Nan with the news that he had found the will in question.

It was in all respects like the carbon copy Dolly Fay had unearthed, but it was signed and witnessed.

"Where was it?" Nan asked.

"It had slipped behind a drawer in father's desk," the son declared, and Wise never knew whether that was the hiding place Lionel had chosen or whether he had produced it from his own room and made up the desk story.

Nor did any one care. The will, a true document, gave Nancy Raynor the larger portion of the fortune and estate of Douglas Raynor. It provided properly and comfortably or his son and his sister, it left a goodly sum to Grimshawe Gannon and to the household servants, and was in all respects a satisfactory will—to all concerned—unless an exception might be made of Lionel.

CHAPTER XVII.

ONE MORE CONFESSION.

It was no secret that the detective Dobbins was no friend of Pennington Wise. The local sleuth was jealous.

But Zizi had a notion that there was something to be gained by a judicious quizzing of Dobbins, and with her feminine tact she flattered him until he was ready to tell her anything he knew.

To be sure, it wasn't much, but Dobbins had been on the case from the beginning and he might have scraps of information that might be of value.

"I think," Zizi said to him, as she found him in the sun room, gazing at the still visible print o the overshoe, "I think, with you, Mr. Dobbins, that the whole secret rests on the footprint."

"Yes—yes—it does—it does, I'm sure. But how to get at it—that's the thing."

"I suppose you've raked the shoe shops hereabouts."

"Oh, yes—but that could bring out nothing. Rubbers are all alike—and I couldn't find any shoe dealer who had sold rubbers to any member of this family or any of the servants lately. Most likely it was bought in New York, and of course, it's impossible to trace it."

"Of course, and it would do no good to learn that rubbers had been bought. The thing is to find out what has become of the ruber that made this print. It can't be the property of one of the servants—"

"Now, why can't it?"

First, becouse it's too large for any of the maids. And, too, girls don't wear rubbers nowadays. But, any way, this is the print of a man's rubber."

"I can, and I hold that it was Douglas Raynor's rubber, and that Mrs. Raynor wore it that evening when she came in and shot him, because it would be a sort of disguise—a false clew, you see."

"You mean she purposely put on that overshoe, and purposely made that footprint—"

"I mean just that, miss. She's a deep one, that Mrs. Raynor is, and, though I thought first off she was trying to poison Mr. Raynor, I see now she wasn't—it was that nurse who did that. And Lord knows no jury would ever convict that nurse—even if she's succeeded. But, Mrs. Raynor, now, that's another thing. She only wanted to be rid of her husband that she might marry another man—a young man and one who would be kinder to her. I don't wonder at her hating old Raynor—he was a brute if ever one lived—but she had no right to shoot him—no, ma'am, that she hadn't."

Zizi looked at Dobbins meditatively.

"You've never flinched from your suspicion of her, have you?" she asked.

"No, ma'am, not really. I've been swayed—yes, swayed, one way and another, but I always come back to her—'cause why, who else could it be? It's got to be somebody—the idea of an outsider is too ridiculous—it's got to be somebody in the house—somebody interested—desperately interested in old Raynor's death. Now, excepting Mr. Finley, who is so interested as Mrs. Raynor? And after the man became a drug fiend he was just about impossible to live with."

"But—if you argue that Mrs. Raynor killed him impulsively—after a quarrel or after he had abused her beyond all limit, I might agree; but for you to say she put on the overshoes, and deliberately planned the murder—it's too much to believe."

"Not a bit too much. I tell you she's a deep one—she planned it most likely long before she carried it out—then waited her chance."

"Having the overshoes with her all the time—in readiness?"

"Oh, them overshoes might have been a sudden freak—say she happened to see 'em sitting around and stuck her little feet in 'em as an additional precaution."

"Sounds fishy to me. What did she do with the overshoes afterward?"

"Ah, that's just it. If we could find those—but, you see, whoever shot Raynor hid those overshoes—why, there's no doubt that the murderer wore them—the print is right near where Raynor stood, it's pointed right toward him—the shoe must have been on the foot of the murderer. There's no getting away from that."

"Just like leaving a visiting card."

"Just exactly. And if we can find the rubbers—they may not give away the criminal—but I'll say they will."

"How about the nurse—shed have big feet—nurses always do. And she'd be as likely to shoot Mr. Raynor as to poison him."

"Miss Turner? Why, she was in the north door pushing on the lights."

"She says she was. Can she prove it?"

"They all saw her—Mrs. Raynor, Mr. Finley, Miss Raynor—why, all of them saw her in the doorway—"

"Yes—but that was after the shot. Why couldn't she have fired the revolver, dropped it, and then have gone to the door, and turned on the lights?"

"No—no—that won't work."

"Why not? It's as likely as that Mrs. Raynor did it—or Mr. Finley. You must admit it as possible."

(To be continued.)

"Our office lifts broke down this morning and my new typist and I were caught in it. "Who caught you, your wife?"

For Sprains—Use Minard's Liniment.

City Evening

The light that burned me up by day
Decides a little while to stay,
And writes a long and golden scrawl
In tree-leaf shadows on my wall.
The bulbous sun has spilled his fire,
Impaled upon a Jersey spire;
And hard day-objects of the street
Grow soft, in the long light, and sweet.
Noon's hot fortissimo still clings,
Muted in many murmurings;
And with the lingering light o'erspread
My thoughts are all new garmented.
Far down the block in yellow ease
Behind a row of gold-tipped trees
The "L," like some old dream, goes by
Betwixt the Avenue and sky.

—E. B. W., in "The Lady Is Cold."

How to Remain Young

Learn to relax.

Don't fight with yourself.

Keep shy of internal friction.

Don't waste time in vengeful thoughts. It never gets you anything but trouble and futility.

Don't feel that the world is set against you.

And don't let yourself cultivate the notion you're a great little fellow. For, as the paraphrasers of the beatitudes have it, "Blessed is he who expecteth nothing, for he shall not be disappointed."

I well recall how, many years ago, my dear old dad took me aside one day and told me: "Don't ever waste time, son, trying to get even with someone you fancy may have wronged you. Because, just as soon as you finish getting even with him there's bound to be someone else."

Labor and the League

London Daily Express (Ind. Cons.): The Labor politicians who are now in office ought to have learned from their previous experience what it means to commit a fundamental error in foreign policy. We warn them that if they persist in coquetting with this new Geneva vamp they will split the Cabinet, they will split the party, and they will rouse up against themselves in Parliament and throughout the country the same incensed feelings of distrust that swept them away in 1924.

"Brutal and Licentious Soldiery!"

London Daily Helegraph (Cons.): The British soldier—the "brutal mercenary" of wartime propaganda—has been discovered by thousands of Germans for the genial, good-tempered football-loving sportsman that he is, and in scores of German homes the inevitable inconveniences of billeting have been mitigated by the British soldier's chivalry to women and his incurable habit of making friends with children. When in 1923 there was some possibility of the British force being withdrawn as a protest against the French advance into the Ruhr, it was the Germans who asked most loudly that they should remain. If the British leave no rancour behind them, that is in itself the best witness to their singularly good behavior.

National Prices for Coal

London Daily Herald (lab.): A national marketing scheme has its complement in a national agreement on hours and wages. To seek to accomplish one and to ignore the other will simply lead to a continuance of the existing chaos. The Prime Minister has solemnly warned the owners against their stiff-necked attitude, and if they are wise, they will listen to the voice of reason before worse befalls them. Few things stirred the country more at the general election than the consciousness of the plight to which miners had been reduced by the owners' selfish and ignorant policy, and there will be a terrible reckoning for those who continue to obstruct the way to peace, efficieny and a decent life for Britain's underground workers.

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CJ43

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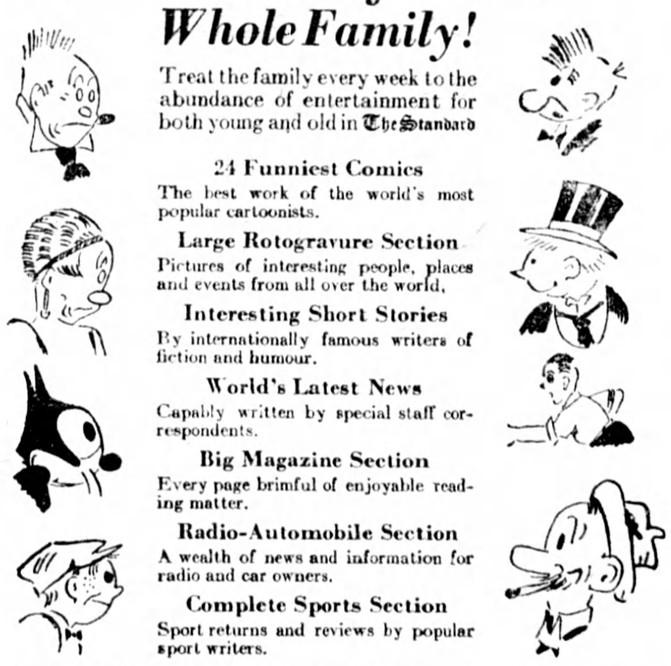

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