

The Filigree Ball

By ANNA KATHARINE GREEN,
Author of "The Mystery of Agatha Webb," "Lost Man's Lane," Etc.

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"We had hung about this door, curious children that we were, in hopes of catching a glimpse of the queer new settle which had been put into place that day. But we scampered away at this and we were playing in and out of the halls when the library door again opened and my father came out.

"Where's Sambo?" he cried. "Tell him to carry a glass of wine to the general. I do not like his looks. I am going upstairs for some medicine." This he whispered in choked tones as he set foot on the stairs. Why I remember it I do not know, for Reuben, who was standing where he could look into the library when our father came out and saw the settle and the general sitting at one end of it, was chattering about it in my ear at the very moment our father was giving his orders.

"Reuben is a man now, and I have asked him more than once since then how the general looked at that critical instant. It is important to me, very, very important, and to him, too, now that he has come to know a man's passions and temptations. But he will never tell me, never relieve my mind, and I can only hope that there were real signs of illness on the general's brow, for then I could feel that all had been right and that his death was the natural result of the great distress he felt at opposing my father in the one desire of his heart. That glimpse which Reuben had of him before he fell has always struck me with strange pathos. A little child looking in upon a man who for all his apparent health will in another moment be in eternity—I do not wonder he does not like to talk of it, and yet—

"It was Sambo who came upon the general first. Our father had not yet descended. When he did it was with loud cries and piteous ejaculations. Word had gone upstairs and surprised him in the room with my mother. I recollect wondering in all childish simplicity why he wrung his hands so over the death of a man he so hated and feared. Nor was it till years had passed and our mother had been laid in the grave and the house had settled into a gloom too heavy and somber for Reuben to endure that I recognized in my father the signs of a settled remorse. These I endeavored to account for by the fact that he had been saved from what he looked upon as political death by the sudden but opportune decease of his best friend. This caused a shock to his feelings which had unnerved him for life.

"Don't you think this the true explanation of his invariably moody brow and the great distaste he always

The detective locks the door of the old mansion



showed for this same library? Though he would live in no other house, he would not enter that room nor look at the gloomy settle from which the general had fallen to his death. The place was virtually tabooed, and, though as the necessity arose it was opened from time to time for great festivities, the shadow it had acquired never left it, and my father hated its very door until he died. Is it not natural that his daughter should share this feeling?

"It was, and I said so, but I would say no more, though she cast me little appealing looks which acquired an eerie significance from the pressure of her small fingers on my arm and the wailing sound of the wind which at that moment blew down in one gust, scattering the embers and filling the house with banshee calls. I simply kissed her and advised her to go back with me to England and forget this old house and all its miserable memories. For that was the sum of the comfort at my poor command. When after another restless night I crept down in the early morning to peer into the dim and unused room whose story I had at last learned, I cannot say but that I half expected to behold the meager ghost of the unfortunate general rise from the cushions of the prodigious bench which still kept its mysterious watch over the deserted hearthstone."

So much for the passages culled from the book itself. The newspaper excerpts, to which I next turned, bore a much later date and read as follows: "A strange coincidence marks the death of Albert Moore in his brother's house yesterday. He was discovered lying with his head on the identical spot where General Lloyd fell forty years before. It is said that this sudden demise of a man hitherto regarded as a model of physical strength and endurance was preceded by a violent altercation with his elder brother. If this is so, the excitement incident upon such a break in their usually pleasant

relations may account for his sudden death. Edward Moore, who unfortunately was out of the room when his brother succumbed—some say that he was in his grandfather's room above—was greatly unnerved by this unexpected end to what was probably merely a temporary quarrel, and now lies in a critical condition.

"The relations between him and the deceased Albert had always been of the most amicable character until they unfortunately fell in love with the same woman."

Attached to this was another slip, apparently from a later paper.

"The quarrel between the two brothers Moore, just prior to the younger's death, turns out to have been of a more serious nature than was first supposed. It has since leaked out that an actual duel was fought at that time between these two on the floor of the old library and that in this duel the elder one was wounded. Some even go so far as to affirm that the lady's hand was to be the reward of him who drew the first blood. It is no longer denied that the room was in great disorder when the servants first rushed in at the sound he made in falling. Everything movable had been pushed back against the wall and an open space cleared, in the center of which could be seen one drop of blood. What is certain is that Mr. Moore is held to the house by something even more serious than his deep grief, and that the young lady who was the object of this fatal dispute has left the city."

Pasted under this was the following short announcement:

"Married, on the 21st of January, at the American consulate in Rome, Italy, Edward Moore of Washington, D. C., United States of America, to Antoinette Sloan, daughter of Joseph Dewitt Sloan, also of that city."

With this notice my interest in the book ceased, and I prepared to step down from the chair on which I had remained standing during the reading of the above passages.

As I did so I spied a slip of paper lying on the floor at my feet. As it had not been there ten minutes before there could be no doubt that it had slipped from the book whose leaves I had been turning over so rapidly. Hastening to recover it, I found it to be a sheet of ordinary note paper partly inscribed with words in a neat and distinctive handwriting. This was a great find, for the paper was fresh and the handwriting one which could be readily identified. What I saw written there was still more remarkable. It had the look of some of the memoranda I had myself drawn up during the most perplexing moments of this strange case. I transcribe it just as it read:

"We have here two separate accounts of how death comes to those who breathe their last on the ancestral hearthstone of the Moore house library. 'Certain facts are emphasized in both:

"Each victim was alone when he fell. "Each death was preceded by a scene of altercation or violent controversy between the victim and the alleged master of these premises.

"In each case the master of the house reaped some benefit, real or fancied, from the other's death."

A curious set of paragraphs. Some one besides myself was searching for the very explanation I was at that moment intent upon. I should have considered it the work of our detectives if the additional lines I now came upon could have been written by any one but a Moore. But no one of any other blood or associations could have indited the amazing words which followed. The only excuse I could find for them was the difficulty which some men feel in formulating their thoughts otherwise than with pen and paper, they were so evidently intended for the writer's eye and understanding only, as witness:

"Let me recall the words my father was uttering when my brother rushed in upon us with that account of my misdeeds which changed all my prospects in life. It was my twenty-first birthday, and the old man had just informed me that as the eldest son I might expect the house in which we stood to be mine one day and with it a secret which has been handed down from father to son ever since the Moores rose to eminence in the person of Colonel Alpheus. Then he noted that I was now of age and immediately went on to say: 'This means that you must be told certain facts, without the knowledge of which you would be no true Moore. These facts you must hereafter relate to your son or whoever may be fortunate enough to inherit from you. It is the legacy which goes with this house and one which no inheritor as yet has refused either to receive or to transmit. Listen. You have often noted the gold filigree ball which I wear on my watch guard. This ball is the talisman of our house, of this house. If in the course of your life you find yourself in an extremity from which no issue seems possible—mind the strictness of the injunction—an extremity from which no issue seems possible—I have never been in such a case; the gold filigree ball has never been opened by me—you will take this trinket from its chain, press upon this portion of it so and use what you will find inside, in connection with—

"Alas, it was at this point John Judson came rushing in, and those disclosures were made which lost me my father's regard and gave to the informer my rightful inheritance, together with the full secret of which I only got a part. But that part must help me now to the whole. I have seen the filigree ball many times. Veronica has it now. But its contents have never been shown me. If I knew what they were and why the master of this secret always left the library"—

Here the memorandum ceased with a long line straggling from the letter "y" as if the writer had been surprised at his task.

The effect upon me of these remarkable words was to heighten my interest and raise me into a state of renewed hope if not of active expectation.

Another mind than my own had been at work along the only groove which held out any promise of success, and this mind, having at its command certain family traditions, had let me into a most valuable secret. Another mind! Whose mind? That was a question easily answered. But one man could have written these words, the man who was thrust aside in early life in favor of his younger brother and who now by the sudden death of that brother's daughter had come again into his inheritance. Uncle David, and he only, was the puzzled inquirer whose self-communings I had just read. This fact raised a new problem for me to work upon, and I could but ask when these lines were written—before or after Mr. Pfeiffer's death—and whether he had ever succeeded in solving the riddle he had suggested or whether it was still a baffling mystery to him. I was so moved by the suggestion conveyed in his final and half finished sentence that I soon lost sight of these lesser inquiries in the more important one connected with the filigree ball. For I had seen this filigree ball. I had even handled it. From the description given I was very certain that it had been one of the many trinkets I had observed lying on the dressing table when I made my first hasty examination of the room on the evening of Mrs. Jeffrey's death. Why had no mention of its importance as a connecting link between these tragedies and their mysterious cause come to me at the time when it was within reach of my hand? It was too late now. It had been swept away with the other loose objects littering the place, and my opportunity for pursuing this very promising investigation was gone for the night.

Yet it was with a decided feeling of triumph that I finally locked the door of this old mansion behind me. Certainly I had taken a step forward since my entrance there, to which I had but to add another of equal importance to merit the attention of the superintendent himself.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE next morning I swallowed my pride and sought out Durbin. Greeting him in the off-hand way least likely to develop his suspicion, I told him that I had a great idea in connection with the Jeffrey case and that the clew to it lay in a little gold ball which Mrs. Jeffrey sometimes wore and upon which she set great store. So far I spoke the truth. It had been given her by some one—not Mr. Jeffrey—and I believed, though I did not know, that it contained a miniature portrait which it might be to our advantage to see.

"You are on a fantastic trail," he sneered, and that was all.

That, from all its seeming inconsequence, it did hold some place in his mind was evident enough to those who knew him, but that it was within reach or obtainable by any ordinary means was not so plain. Indeed, I very soon became convinced that he, for one, had no idea where it was, or after the suggestive hint I had given him he would never have wasted a half hour on me. What was I to do then? Tell my story to the major and depend on him to push the matter to its proper conclusion? "Not yet," whispered pride: "Durbin thinks you a fool. Wait till you can show your whole hand before calling attention to your cards." But it was hard not to betray my excitement and to act the fool they considered me when the boys twitted me about this famous golden charm and asked what great result had followed my night in the Moore house. But, remembering that he who laughs last laughs best, and that the cause of mirth was not yet over between Durbin and myself, I was able to preserve an impassive exterior even when I came under the major's eye. I found myself amply repaid when one of the boys who had studiously avoided chaffing me dropped the following words in my ear:

[Continued next week.]

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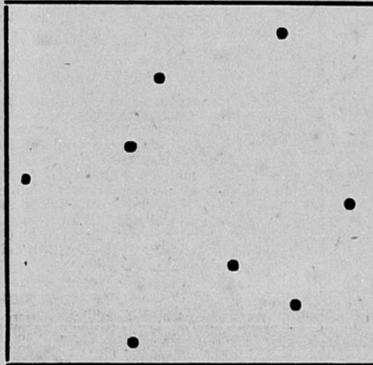
A stop to see the National Cemetery at Vicksburg, then down the Mississippi Valley—the richest in the world, where virgin soil awaits Northern energy to wake it into life—down to New Orleans, the old historic town, part French, part Spanish, all American. Take this trip.

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A Prize Competition



WE wish to adopt a unique and artistic design for use for advertising purposes. The dots in the square represent the various points at which our yards are located—Denison, Charter Oak, Schleswig, Dunlap, Dow City, Ute, Rickette, and Buck Grove. We wish a design, suitable for advertising our business and making use of these points for the basic lines of the sketch.

First Prize, \$5.00.

Second Prize, \$ 3.00.

Third Prize \$2.00.

Rules: Contest shall be open to all, except that no person connected with the Stewart Lumber Co., shall be eligible. Send sketches to Stewart Lumber Co., Denison, Iowa, Contest Dept. Do not write name on sketch, but give name and address on separate slip.

Cleverness of design—not the skill of execution, will be the chief factor in awarding prizes. All sketches must be in our hands not later than June 15th, 1905.

ALL SKETCHES CONTRIBUTED TO BECOME THE PROPERTY OF THE STEWART LUMBER COMPANY

A Competent Non-resident Judge, Name to be Announced Later, Will be Selected.

A Suggestion. As a help to contestants we would say that the Stewart Lumber Co., handles the best of everything, and only the best in Lumber, Agricultural Implements, Paints, Lime, Coal, Cement, Heating, Plumbing, Etc.

Remember the contest is open to all. Send in your sketches before June 15th.

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