



The WOMAN A Novel by Albert Payson Terhune

founded on William C. de Mille's Play

Illustrated with Photos from the Play and Drawings by V. Barnes

SYNOPSIS.

Congressman Standish and the Woman, believing themselves in love, spend a trial week as man and wife in a hotel in northern New York under assumed names. The Woman awakens to the fact that she does not love Standish and calls their engagement off. Standish protests undying devotion. Wanda Kelly, telephone girl at the Hotel Koszwick, Washington, is loved by Tom Blake, son of the political boss of the house. He proposes marriage and is refused. She gives as one of her reasons her determination to get revenge on Jim Blake for ruining her father, Congressman Frank E. Kelly. Kelly is seeking the Mullins bill, a measure in the interests of the railroads. The machine is working to send out a delegate in the hope of pushing the bill through. Robertson, son-in-law of Jim Blake, and the latter's candidate for speaker of the house, tries to win Standish over, and failing, threatens to dig into his past. Jim Blake finds out about the episode of five years back at the northern New York hotel. He secures all the facts except the name of the Woman and proposes to use the story as a club to force Standish to allow the Mullins bill to pass. Jim Blake lays a trap to secure the name of the Woman. He tells Miss Kelly that he is going to have a talk with Standish, and that at its conclusion the latter will call up a number on the telephone to warn the Woman. He offers Miss Kelly \$100 for that number. At the conclusion of the interview with Blake, Standish gets a New York wire and calls Plaza 100. A few minutes later Robertson tells Miss Kelly to call Plaza 100 and get his wife or one of the boys on the phone. Miss Kelly refuses to give Jim Blake the number called by Standish. Blake has a story of the Standish episode prepared ready to send out as soon as the Woman's name is learned. Blake's daughter Grace arrives with her husband, Governor Robertson. Miss Kelly calls on Grace to warn her that her good name is threatened by impending exposure of Standish and is insulted for her pains. Grace appeals to Standish to give up the fight in order to protect her name. He refuses. Grace sends Miss Kelly to Wanda's assistance. Wanda declares she will never betray the Woman. The machine attempts to force Standish out of the fight, without success. Blake calls up the Associated Press to order the publication of the story, but is out of and communication is restored too late to get the story into the morning papers. Robertson attempts to force Miss Kelly to reveal the Woman's name. She is threatened with imprisonment for cutting off Blake's conversation with the Associated Press because of her refusal to give the number called by Standish. Grace admits that she knows the name of the Woman and her husband demands that she tell it.

and done with—before you married Mark!" "Father!" The Woman faced him in dry-eyed horror. Every trace of weeping was scoured away by the flame of sudden indignation. And, at the sight, Jim Blake gave a great wordless cry and gathered her into his arms as though she were a baby. "Oh, my little girl!" he choked, "Dad's own, own little girl! We've been tearing your poor heart to pieces and your old father was the bitterest against you. It's all right, I tell you, girl. It's all right. Dad'll see you through. You shan't be bothered. There, there! Oh, don't cry like that, darling. Don't!" His voice grew husky. Leaving her abruptly, he crossed to Robertson. "Mark," he faltered, avoiding his son-in-law's eye, "you promised to protect her. This is the time to do it. It was 'for better, for worse.' If that vow is any good at all, it's a good 'for worse' as for 'better.' Mark—be gentle with her, boy."

Slowly, with bent shoulders and dragging step Blake made his way to the big room's farthest end. There, in the window's embrasure, out of earshot, his back to the others, he halted. Drawing aside the curtains he glanced out into the night. The gloom of the sleeping city was below and around him. But, in one black mass, tiers upon tiers of carlight lights glowed. There, in the capital, the Mullins bill was coming to a vote. There, Matthew Standish, freed by a miracle from the toils that craftier men had woven about him, was winning the victory which was to clear for him the pathway to the very summit of political power.

But he found his subconscious self straying from the picture he was so ruthlessly drawing. His mind would not fix itself on the lighted capitol and the wreck of his life-work; but crept over back into the dim room behind him. Even his tongue tricked him. For when he would have made it recite further the tale of his losses, it muttered brokenly: "My own little girl! Dad's own, own little girl!"

CHAPTER XXII.

The Hour of Reckoning. Mark Robertson and his wife, left alone, together, in the other end of the great library, faced the situation for which Grace had so long been preparing and for which her frightened years of preparation had proved so useless.

Mark strove for speech. But for the first time in his roughly aggressive career, suitable words were denied him. Alternately he longed to tell her in naked terms what she was and how utterly he despised her. Again, a gush of self-pity urged him to reproach her for the wrecking of his ideals, the blasting of his happiness. Vanity coming part way to his aid, he framed—and left unspoken—a curt sentence of farewell. And, in the end, all he could say was:

"Why didn't you tell me?" It was not what he had intended to say. It was banal. It expressed none of the stark moods that seethed in him. Yet as she did not answer, he found himself asking once more: "Why didn't you tell me?" And now, unknown and unwished for, there crept into his bald question a note that was almost of entreaty. "Tell you?" she echoed. "Oh, if you knew how I've wanted to!" "Then—" "I didn't dare. I didn't dare."

"Truth and honor surely—" "Your love meant more to me than truth and honor. I sacrificed them to keep it. I would sacrifice them and everything else to get it back. Is that shameful? Perhaps. The truth usually is. If I had told you, you would never have forgiven me. You know you wouldn't. If I've wronged you—"

"If you had loved me as a true woman loves, you would have told me. You would have had to. You could not have deceived me like this. Love doesn't feed on lies. It was my right to know everything, so that I could decide my own course. Instead, you have led me into this trap. There is no escape now. And it is too late to reproach you or to try to make you realize what you have done. You say your love for me kept you from telling. Believe that, if it is any comfort to you. I—"

"You say I don't know what true love is," she laughed bitterly. "I'm afraid I can never learn it from you. So your love has died? Love can't die, any more than God can die. You have never loved me."

"Never. I see now that you didn't. For you don't know what love means. I lived for you. Every thought and word and act of mine was shaped for you. And for you alone. I knew you. I knew your faults, your follies, your brute savagery. And I loved you for them as well as for the good that was in you. But what was it you loved? The woman you married—or a snow-white saintly reputation? If you cared only for the reputation—that is gone forever. But if you loved me—the woman I am—then I've been everything you thought I was and wanted me to be—ever since the first moment you had the right to think of me at all. I gave you my life, from that time on and forever. And it has been all yours. Before then, it was mine."

"And yet you let me believe it was everything—your whole life—your first love."

"It was. All that was worth the giving. All that had ever been worth the giving. It was my self. Oh, can't you see that a woman's body and heart and soul belong not to her first lover but to her first love? No woman can even guess what love is until she has found it. And I found it only

when I knew you. I gave you everything. "I'm trying to make it easy. We've never had a real quarrel, you and I, Mark. So don't let us wind up our married life with one, now. You are in the right. I am hopelessly in the wrong. I have cheated you. I admit it, and I'll accept the consequences. It is in the blood. There is much in heredity. My father is a politician. I don't know who my grandfather was. And if he had been worth knowing about, I'd know. There is a bad strain running through the family. It cropped out in me. Yes, I have cheated you. You had the right to demand in our bargain the hard-and-fast terms the world has decreed: All of a wife's life in exchange for a frayed and battered remnant of her husband's. I can't meet those terms, though I tried to fool you into believing I could. So I must meekly give up the love whose price I can't pay. Don't let's make it harder by having a scene over it.

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"That's different. I—" "I'm out of politics. My own game has broken me at last. I'm old. I know it now. I never did till tonight. I'm old and I want my children around me."

"I'll tell Tom," she agreed, softened despite herself by the new suppleness in a voice that had never before been turned to the uses of entreaty. "I'll tell him. I'm sure he'll come back to you—when he understands. Good night, Mr. Blake."

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"We're—we're square, Mr. Blake," she returned in a tone she could not make wholly steady nor impersonal. "And," pursued Blake, "and—Tom?" "That's different, too," she faltered.

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CHAPTER XXIII.

The Victor? "They didn't seem exactly to be hankering after my society in there," observed Wanda Kelly, "so I came back."

Jim Blake turned from the window at sound of the telephone girl's purposely raised voice. Just within the threshold from the inner rooms of the

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Ought to Be, Anyhow. At dinner Mollie gazed for a long time at a bachelor guest, and then exclaimed: "Mother, what is an old bachelor?"

A frown was the only reply. But a laugh burst forth from the assembled company when Mollie answered the question to suit herself. "Oh, I know! An old bachelor is an old maid's husband!"

Pleasant for Mamma. "And what did my little darling do in her school today?" a mother asked of her youngest son—a second grader. "We had nature study, and it was my turn to bring a specimen. What did you buy?" "That was nice. Said did you do?" "I brought a cockroach in a bottle and I told teacher we had lots more and I'd wanted I would bring one every day."

suite, Wanda, with elaborate care, was shutting the door behind her. Blake glanced quickly about the room. "Yes," said Wanda, answering the question in his look and jerking her pretty head back in the direction of the rooms she had just quitted. "In there, I wouldn't worry if I were you."

Jim Blake's grim face took on a light as incongruous as the play of sunset rays on a mummy. The mask of age and defeat seemed to melt beneath it. He took an eager step toward the inner door. "Just a minute," Wanda halted him. "You asked me to wait. If you don't need me any longer—"

"Yes," hesitated Blake, trouble flitting across the new light in his eyes. "I wanted to ask you—not to let Tom know about this. His sister—"

"I'll never tell him," she promised. "I sent him away so he wouldn't find out."

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Henry M. Stanley was among the first to negative the prevailing idea that cannibalism was the mark of a special allotment of original sin among aborigines. In fact he preferred cannibals because of their greater intelligence and greater fidelity. Now we have the opinion of Mr. Torday, who has just returned from the neighborhood of Lake Tegah in equatorial Africa. He says that he was virtually unarmed, and unescorted except by one friend and twenty Bimbalaland porters who were all cannibals. He says they were "the most devoted and reliable companions I could ever wish to have in a tight corner."

The practice of cannibalism was originally confined to the bodies of relatives and was intended as a mark of respect. Enemies were eaten in order to absorb their valor. Probably the most degraded form of cannibalism is to be found in Thibet.

When I knew you. I gave you everything. "I'm trying to make it easy. We've never had a real quarrel, you and I, Mark. So don't let us wind up our married life with one, now. You are in the right. I am hopelessly in the wrong. I have cheated you. I admit it, and I'll accept the consequences. It is in the blood. There is much in heredity. My father is a politician. I don't know who my grandfather was. And if he had been worth knowing about, I'd know. There is a bad strain running through the family. It cropped out in me. Yes, I have cheated you. You had the right to demand in our bargain the hard-and-fast terms the world has decreed: All of a wife's life in exchange for a frayed and battered remnant of her husband's. I can't meet those terms, though I tried to fool you into believing I could. So I must meekly give up the love whose price I can't pay. Don't let's make it harder by having a scene over it.

"You're white, clear through," grudgingly admitted Blake. "Will you do one thing more?" "What?" "Bring him back to me." "If I meet him again," she assented primly, "I'll send—" "I didn't say 'send,'" corrected Blake, "I said 'bring.'"

"That's different. I—" "I'm out of politics. My own game has broken me at last. I'm old. I know it now. I never did till tonight. I'm old and I want my children around me."

"I'll tell Tom," she agreed, softened despite herself by the new suppleness in a voice that had never before been turned to the uses of entreaty. "I'll tell him. I'm sure he'll come back to you—when he understands. Good night, Mr. Blake."

"There's another thing," he broke in roughly, staying her departure, "a thing that isn't easy to say."

"Then, why say it?" "Because," he growled, "like all things that aren't easy to say, it's a thing that's got to be said. Miss Kelly, hasn't tonight pretty nearly squared the old debt between you and me? You and yours have suffered a lot at my hands. But, after what's happened here this evening, I guess you'll admit, as far as suffering goes, you haven't got much on me. Haven't I paid? Won't you say we're square?"

"We're—we're square, Mr. Blake," she returned in a tone she could not make wholly steady nor impersonal. "And," pursued Blake, "and—Tom?" "That's different, too," she faltered.

"I—" "The jangle of the telephone interrupted her. Blake, who was beside the desk, picked up the instrument. "Hello," he called into the transmitter. "Ye—yes—she's here. Who wants her? Oh! Yes, put him on this wire."

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