

# THE OTHER WOMAN

By IDA ALEXANDER

IT was not jealousy, nothing even akin to jealousy, that prompted Florence Drager to seek the Other Woman out. She had not even been jealous when the letter fell into her hands.

"So that's where he spends his time!" she thought, with curling lip.

When he came back in a panic for the lost letter, her indifference allowed her to feign ignorance.

"Did I see a letter, Monty?" she puzzled. "It seems to me I did. I can't think just where. I'll help you look for it."

"No—no—no, don't trouble, my dear. Indeed I won't have you get up," protested Montgomery Drager.

She rather enjoyed following him from room to room, watching his anxiety increase, the perspiration starting on his puffy red face.

And, when she found the letter, she hid it playfully behind her.

"I'm going to read it," she said, "to find out why you're so disturbed about it."

"No—no—no!" he objected. "It's just a business letter, my dear, dry as could be. I wouldn't let you bother your pretty head over it. The reason I was anxious was that I stood to lose a pot of money, if I couldn't have found it. And I haven't forgotten that there's a little lady who covets a sapphire pin in a certain jeweler's shop. It'll just match her eyes—her beautiful eyes. I'm going to have it sent to her tomorrow."

"Oh, Monty!" exclaimed Florence, passing him the letter.

The relief on his face, once he possessed the letter again, would have been apparent to a child. But his wife held up her face to be kissed with eyes as free from suspicion as a baby's.

After he was gone, thoughts of the sapphire pin and of the letter alternated in her mind. The anticipation of the one was not exceeded by the anxiety as to the other.

The letter bespoke refinement and education; the address was in a good residential part of the city. What was to hinder her from seeking the writer out—satisfying her curiosity once for all—probing into the secret depths of the other woman's life and heart?

The more she thought of it, the more it appealed to her.

"I'll go," she decided at last.

After her perfumed bath, the maid arranged the masses of her yellow hair and buttoned her into the blue velvet suit. With hat to match, furs and a bunch of violets, she knew the picture that she made, even before she turned to the mirror.

"Madame es beautiful!" said the maid, honestly. "Shall I order the car?"

Her mistress hesitated for the fraction of a second, and then decided against it.

"No, not today, Elise. I'll walk."

Though she hated walking, she knew it was the one thing that could

give her the one thing that she lacked—color.

She could feel it tingling in her face as she walked. As she reached the street of her destination, she paused and drew a little glass from her purse. The brisk exercise had done what she expected. The bright, guileless eyes of a child looked back at her from the rose-tinted face. She smiled back at the reflection.

Yet it was not without emotion she climbed the stairs that led to the Other Woman's home. Her heart beat faster than its wont; her eyes sparkled; her thin lips curled. She had the expression of the mischievous school boy who proceeds to dismember the frog.

She gave her card to a wooden-faced servant, who showed her into a luminous room. She sank into a chair and waited.

Presently she heard the rustle of silk, and the Other Woman stood before her. She was not beautiful, Florence decided in that first cursory glance, but even then something in the face arrested her attention.

The Other Woman remained standing, as if she would shorten the interview. She held the card in her hand and she spoke first.

"Mrs. Drager?" she asked.

"Yes."

"You wanted to see me," began the Other Woman. "Why?"

Into the eyes of Florence flashed a light not pleasant. Her mouth set in disagreeable lines.

"Well, I found a letter of yours in my husband's coat. I thought, perhaps a call from the wife was usual in such a case."

"No," said the Other Woman, gravely. "It is not usual; nor is it wise."

Florence flushed.

"Now that I am here I hope you'll answer my questions. I won't detain you for any length of time. How long have you known my husband?"

"Four years."

"So long? You knew him, then, a year before he met me. Why didn't you marry him?"

Now it was the Other Woman who flushed—cheeks, brow and bosom. And Florence saw that she was beautiful with a beauty in which art had no part; a beauty before which her own blonde prettiness paled and faded into insignificance. She felt her anger rising. Her tiny foot tapped the heavy carpet impatiently.

"Why?" she repeated, pressing the question home, "Wouldn't he marry you?"

The color of the Other Woman faded. Her face was again an impassive mask.

"There was no question of marriage between us. We were good friends, that is all. And shortly afterward he met and purchased you."

"Purchased me!"

"Why, surely," answered the other.

"The price was high—name, fortune, everything. And for what? A woman who had no heart to give him, who ac-

cepted all and returned nothing. Yes, the price was high."

Florence was out of her chair now, eyes flashing, cheeks aflame.

"How dare you?" she cried. "How dare you say such things to me—a lawful wedded wife?"

"Why?" queried the Other Woman, in even tones, "why do I dare? Because it's true. Do you think a woman who loved her husband would have come as you have come today—with no anger, no outraged wifehood to excuse her? Come to taunt, to spy, to cast her security and opulence in my face? Let us at least be honest with each other, since you have forced yourself in here. As I said, you were bought. Any woman who marries a man with no love to give him is bought. And however little he has to offer for her, the price is high, and he is worsted in the bargain."

Florence had come to awe, and been awed in her turn. She shrank as the truth of the words struck home. She moved her dry lips before words came. But she stabbed viciously when she spoke.

"I will go," she said. "Monty would be shocked if he knew I had been in your company even so short a time." She shuddered as she turned. "I'm glad to be able to go out where honest women are—away from this horrible, horrible place!"

The tone of the other woman was still even and courteous.

"Yes, you can go. But you'll never forget that you belong here! that you are one of us, you seller of love."—The International.

## UNCLE SAM'S COMMANDMENTS

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