

The WOMAN

A Novel by Albert Payson Terhune

Founded on William C. de Mille's Play of the same name

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SYNOPSIS.

CHAPTER I—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 her engagement off. Standish protests andizing devotion.

CHAPTER II—Wanda Kelly, telephone girl at the Hotel Keswick, Washington, is loved by Tom Blake, son of the political boss of the house. He proposes marriage and is refused.

CHAPTER III—She gives as one of the reasons her determination to get revenge on Jim Blake for ruining her father, Congressman Frank E. Kelly. Congressman Standish, turned insurgent, is fighting the Mullins bill, a measure in the interests of the railroads. The machine is seeking means to discredit Standish in the hope of pushing the bill through.

CHAPTER IV—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.

(Continued from last week.)

"Oh, not so many," gently contradicted Blake. "Two falls would be plenty large to hold all the folks who have broken any law. And the two falls could be built real easy—just by running a high wall around the equator. But you're right in one thing, Van Dyke. We'll never get Standish in the way these boys have been going about it. So, it's lucky I happened to put a man of my own on the job."

"Yes. While I've been lying down, as you call it."

"I didn't say you had been—"

"No. But you thought it. Just because I don't run around in circles, barking, and now and then biting a piece out of the ceiling, you folks think I'm doing nothing. And I'll never teach you any better."

"But—"

"Oh, yes. I put a man of my own on to Standish's record. I told him not to bother about anything that had happened during the last three or four years. Your men would be busy on that; and there'd be nothing to find, anyhow. I set my man to scratching up ancient history. I told him to go back and back and back, in Standish's record; and to keep on going back till he found something."

"Well?" chorused the others as Blake paused and searched his clothes with maddening slowness for a match.

"Well," drawled Blake, "he's found it."

"If she has a whole pair of ears," answered Blake, stinking his own voice, "she surely could. Especially what I've been saying. For I've been straining my voice to talk loud enough for her to catch what I said, ever since we sat down here."

"The deuce you have?" exclaimed Van Dyke. "What for?"

"For the same reason I've been laying down," returned Blake. "Don't worry over that. A man whose voice is as tired as mine isn't straining that throat unless it's for a good cause. And you can leave the finding of the Woman's name to me, too, I guess. Now trot along, all of you. Mark, go in and order dinner. I'll be there in five minutes. I've a couple of things to attend to first."

The group began to drift across the corridor in the direction of the dining-room. Blake detached himself from the rest and started back toward the telephone switchboard. But Tom, noting his father's move, intercepted him. The young fellow's face looked worried and his manner had lost some of its wonted buoyancy.

"Dad," he said.

"Hey?" asked Blake, stopping and turning toward his son.

Reading Tom's face, as he was accustomed by instinct to read every countenance that came into his range of notice, Jim nodded and led the way to the amen corner.

"Now, then," he demanded, half-guilingly, half-anxiously, "what's on your mind? Speak up, son. There never yet was a delicate subject that wasn't the better for getting aired."

"Oh, the joy!" grinned Gregg, the worldling.

"You see," went on Blake, "he really expected to marry her. They were just taking time by the forelock. And then—here's the queerest tangle of all—after that week there, it seems she backed out and wouldn't marry him at all. No, Gregg, it wasn't he that threw her over. This was the other way around. The Woman flitted him and went back to her family. One week of Standish was about all she was up to. And she balked at making a life job of it. I don't wonder."

"But didn't her family find out?"

"It seems not. They thought she had been away visiting a girl friend in the country. She got home safe, and everything looked proper as a rainy Sunday in a grave yard. Some women sure have luck."

"Go on," urged Van Dyke.

"That's about all," finished Blake. "She woke up, as I told you, to find it was all-a-mistake-and-no-harm-done—thank-heaven. And as far as I can make out, they haven't seen each other since. I won't swear to that part of it. But if they have, his secretary doesn't know it. Nor—"

"Who was the Woman?" queried Robertson.

"That," answered Blake reluctantly, "is the one thing left to find out."

Van Dyke fairly groaned.

"Then," he demanded, "how is this miserable story going to help us?"

"Oh," replied Blake, "the net's closing around her. I hope to have her name tonight."

"Tonight? We've got to have it tonight. Before the Mullins bill comes up. The name's no use to us after that."

"But," asked Robertson, "even if we do get it tonight, what use can we make of it? The house will be on the final debate of the bill by ten o'clock. By making use of every trick we know we can fix only a few hours' delay at most. What good—"

"What good?" retorted Blake. "Just this: Standish's long suit is morality. A lot of us have had smirches on our names from time to time. He never has. So the clergy are for him and the people swear by him. It's his chief pull with both church and public. Now—if we can get this story, properly authenticated, on the floor of the house tonight, it'll give a lot of men—Gregg, here, for instance—an excuse to swing over to us."

"Oh, we've got him! We've got him!" muttered Robertson once more, his usually quick mind loafing blissfully over the single grand idea.

"Yes," amended Van Dyke dryly, "we've got him—if we can get the Woman's name in time. It all depends on that. Without it, our story is worthless. Thus far, it seems, no one knows her name."

"Except Standish," corrected Blake.

"What good does that do us? He won't tell."

"What one man knows," returned Blake sententiously, "another can find out."

"And," put in Gregg, lowering his voice, "speaking of finding out," reminds me. That little devil of a telephone girl over there—Do you suppose she could have heard anything we've been saying?"

"If she has a whole pair of ears," answered Blake, stinking his own voice, "she surely could. Especially what I've been saying. For I've been straining my voice to talk loud enough for her to catch what I said, ever since we sat down here."

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CHAPTER VI.

A Family Row.

"This—this story about Standish?" began Tom uncomfortably, then paused involuntarily as Blake leaned back with a grunt of relief.

"That all?" asked the father. "I was afraid I was going to get another call-down from my wise son on my follies and sins. Honestly, Tom, I don't know how I ever got through the first quarter-century of my life without your holy guidance and correction."

"Is that quite necessary?" said Tom.

"I only wanted to ask you—"

"Of course you did. You wanted to ask me some question in politics. And instead of being glad that you are beginning to show an intelligent interest in my affairs at last, I made fun of you. I'm sorry, son. I'm an old crank. Go ahead with your question. You were asking about this Standish story?"

"Yes. I suppose it will give us the fight."

"Looks that way from where I sit," replied Blake. "Such pretty romances have wrecked many a man as strong as Standish—and stronger."

"Oh!" exclaimed Tom, almost shuddering, "I wish you wouldn't use blackmail to win your fight."

"Blackmail?" echoed Blake slowly.

Then he paused. The rugged mask of a face had not changed. But the pupils of the half-shut eyes had suddenly contracted as though a blinding light had been flashed before them. Yet, a second later, when Blake spoke again, there was no trace of pain or resentment in his dry drawing voice.

"Blackmail?" he said once more.

"How about the way Standish dragged up that franchise affair of mine last year? What was that but blackmail?"

"Well," demanded Tom, in the stark mercilessness of youth, "you were stealing the franchise, weren't you, dad?"

"Yes," asserted Blake with a delightful absence of all false modesty. "I sure was. And I was doing it neatly, too. Not a ripple, not a kick, till Standish butted in with his measly reforms and queered the whole job and cost us a half million dollars. Son, every time I think of that, I want to chase some one with an ax. I don't lie awake nights thinking how cunning our friend Standish would look with seaweed in his hair and sand under his nails. But I keep that franchise memory and a few others fresh on the ice. And it sure doesn't break my heart to have a chance now of getting back at him."

"But," persisted Tom, "that was a public matter. It doesn't justify you in dragging his private life into the lime-light."

"The deuce it doesn't? Who told you that?"

"My self-respect."

"Oh! I thought maybe you might have got the tip from some reliable source. Go ahead, son. Doesn't justify me, hey?"

"No, dad, if you want truth, it doesn't. It isn't—clean!"

"Clean? Say, son, this is politics. Not a prayer-meeting. You've got in the wrong pew."

"If the right pew justifies dirty work like that," flashed the boy, "I'm glad I have. And I want to stay there. This business of making political capital of a man's dead-and-buried sins is enough to turn the stomach of a camel. A thousand times more so when one considers the Woman."

"Well," queried Blake, in high good humor, as he always was when he could stir up a quarrel between his adored only son and himself. "What about her?"

"Everything. She made a fool of herself. Presumably when she was young. She has probably repented it bitterly, ten thousand times. She may have atoned for what she did. She may even be a wife and mother, now. Respected, loved. All the world and Heaven, besides, to her husband and children. And just to pass a rotten railroad bill, you are going to drag her out into the glare of the newspaper world and crucify her! You are going to strip from her her husband's love; you are going to make her friends shun her as an outcast; you're throwing black shame on her innocent children's name. You are—"

"Excuse me, son," interrupted Blake. "But I'm not doing a single one of those terribly dramatic things. Standish is doing it—or, rather, he has done it. Not I. Catch the idea? If Standish committed a murder and I found the body, would you call me a murderer? Hey? Well, that's what has happened this time. When Standish took the lady on that little left-handed wedding trip, five years ago in March, he rendered her liable to all that and worse. A man doesn't think of such things at the time. Neither does a woman, I guess. This one sure didn't, or she'd never have thrown over her one hope of safety by jilting him."

"Listen, dad," returned Tom, choking back a hot answer. "Ever since you brought me here into the thick of the fight, you and I haven't agreed about politics. But I've stood with you, through and through. I've worked hard for the party, because I felt I was working for you. But—well—this time I'd rather be working for the other side. Because I believe they're right and we are wrong."

"Well, then," blazed his father, in a dry gust of unwonted wrath, "why don't you work for the other side? Go ahead! It's no great loss to us."

"You know perfectly well why I don't. It's because you are on this side—the wrong side just now."

"Go over to them!" snapped Blake, his rare anger still unspent. "They'd be glad enough to get you. Not that you'd be worth a hoot in hell to them in actual value. But the fact that you're the worthy son of your unworthy blackmailing father would make you welcome. Go ahead! Lord, but I wonder what I ever did in the old days to be punished by having a canting reformer for a son! Well, why don't you go over to them?"

"Just as you say," answered Tom with a philosophic shrug of the shoulders. "Good night."

"Where are you off to, now?" grunted Blake indifferently, albeit there was a glint of wistfulness in the half-shut, steely old eyes.

"To the club. To dinner," said Tom, moving away.

"To the club, hey?" growled Blake, detaining him. "Hub! Afraid it'll hurt your spotless reputation to be seen dining here with a 'black-matter'?"

"You have a positive genius for choosing the rottenest, most disagreeable thing to say," remarked Tom; and there was a note of hurt in his voice that somehow reached the far-

hidden and tortuous recesses where Jim Blake's battered old heart was supposed to be.

"Well," vouchsafed the father grumpily, "maybe that was just a trifle



"I Wish You Wouldn't Use Blackmail to Win Your Fight."

swift. Look here, lad," he went on, a soft, almost tender tone creeping into his dry voice, as he laid his hand on Tom's shoulder, "I'm the only father you've got. And you may as well make the best of it."

"You're the only father I want, dad. But—"

"There! There!" hastily admonished Blake. "Don't go spoiling it with 'buts'! You know what you are to me, boy. I guess I don't need to get mush-headed and try to tell you. And—and," he repeated, hiding his momentary tenderness under a cloud of mado-to-order impatience, "that's why I hate to see you loading up your alleged brain with these fool ideas about—"

"Let it go at that, dad," laughed Tom.

"Oh, all right. I will, if you like. And you'll stay to dinner?"

"Why, of course," quickly assented Tom.

"That's better," approved Blake. "Now, run in and start with Mark. I'll be with you in a minute or two. And—say—if Mark and I should get to talking politics at dinner—"

"Don't worry," returned Tom, smiling. "I'm getting quite used to my muzzle. But Mark won't be as likely

to be wrapped up in politics as he usually is. Grace is coming down."

"No!" cried Blake, his face alight with pleasure. "Good for her! When?"

"At eight o'clock. But she didn't bother to mention whether it was eight this evening or eight tomorrow morning. Mark was just going to call her up on long distance to find out, when we happened to meet Standish. And I suppose the prospect of a clash with Standish quite drove a minor matter like his wife out of his thoughts."

"You're wrong there," dissented Blake. "There's nothing on earth can drive Grace out of Mark Robertson's head. He's as crazy in love with her as he was the day he married her. If he didn't telephone her before he went in to dinner it's a cinch he'll do it the minute he comes out. Queer old Mark. Grace is the one thing that makes him human. Chase on in, and order for me."

Dismissing his son with a slap on the shoulder, Blake strode across to the telephone alcove. Wanda Kelly looked up inquiringly from the novel she was reading between telephone calls.

"Miss Kelly," said Jim, "will you kindly connect me with the hotel office?"

He sprawled into a vacant seat at her side, caught up the extra receiver and called:

"That the office? Perry? Hello, Perry. This is Blake. Jim Blake. Yes. In two minutes I want you to send word to Mr. Standish that he's wanted on the phone here. Yes. Here. Not in his room. Here at the phone booths. Fix it any way you like. Only get him here inside of five minutes. No, no! Do as I say, I tell you. Good-by."

He hung up the receiver, rose and stood lounging against the rail, looking down at Wanda from between his half-closed lids.

"Now, then, Miss Kelly," he began abruptly.

"Yes," Mr. Blake?" she interrogated as he paused.

CHAPTER VII.

The Trap.

For a moment Blake did not answer. Nor could Wanda read anything from his utterly expressionless face. Then he said:

"Do you know why I did that?"

"Probably," replied Wanda gravely, "because you wanted Mr. Standish to come here."

He eyed her searchingly. But her face gave no sign that her reply had been intended as impertinence.

"H'm!" he vouchsafed. "You're a bright girl."

"Thank you, sir," she replied demurely.

Again he glanced at her moveless features in quick doubt. Then, evidently making up his mind, he went on:

"You heard the story I was telling those men over there? The story about Standish and the Woman?"

"I—I happened to catch part of it."

"You" (Continued on page 7, Col. 1.)

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"Oh, Yes, I Put a Man of My Own on to Standish's Record."

honest, you know. And he and she were going to get married on the quiet and keep their marriage secret. But she had to go to Europe. And for some reason or other—the secretary didn't know why and it doesn't matter, anyhow—the wedding was sidetracked. Instead, they took a notion to run off to a little country hotel, for one of those honeymoons that—that never came through the custom-house."

"No!"

"Yes. And, as an afterthought, yes, again. I can show you the hotel register with—"

"The fool didn't register under his own name, did he?" demanded Gregg.

"No," said Blake. "Registered under the name of Fowler. But any handwriting expert can prove he wrote it, and the hotel manager can swear Standish was the man. The manager is ready to swear Standish called the woman his wife."

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