

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 is not to be Standish and calls their engagement off. Standish protests undying devotion.

CHAPTER II - Wanda Kelly, telephone girl at the Hotel Kenwick, 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.

CHAPTER V - Jim Blake finds out about the episode 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.

CHAPTER VI - Tom Blake and his father have a family row over the father's political theories. Jim Blake sends for Standish.

CHAPTER VII - He 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.

(Continued from last week.)

Standish, his face still a mask, was staring at the floor. At last he raised his eyes—the dark tired eyes in whose depths Self and Love and Happiness had so long ago burned out. And turning to Blake, he said evenly:

"So you have dug all that up, have you? I might have expected it. In fact I have expected it. But it hasn't worried me. Because you can't harm me with such a story."

"No," asked Blake, with real interest. "Why not?"

"You know perfectly well why not," answered Standish, "the story won't amount to the paper you would print it on unless you can supply the name of the woman. And you can't do that."

"What makes you think we can't supply the woman's name?" demanded Blake. "What makes you think we haven't found her?"

"Because," began Standish; then he checked himself and said somewhat lamely, "because—I have good reasons for knowing you haven't."

"H'm! Still keep as close in touch with her as all that? Mark's detectives must be foolah-house graduates. Well, I'll admit I haven't found her—yet. But we will before midnight. You left some pretty easy clues and they're being followed. That's the trouble with a man who has something to hide. He'll lock and double-bar nine doors to discovery; and leave the tenth wide open with a 'Welcome' sign over it. And that's just what you did. Why, son," he went on, noting Standish's half-smile of incredulity, "if I wasn't dead sure of getting her, would I be such a fool as to tell you all this? And whatever else Jim Blake's been called, no one's yet tied 'fool' to his name. I tell you once more, we'll have her name by midnight at the very latest. Of course she doesn't know we're tracking her," he continued, chuckling as at his own shrewdness. "I've seen to it that she hasn't the slightest suspicion. And that makes our work all the easier. She doesn't know. And there's no one to warn her. It's a cinch!"

His voice trailed off into a self-satisfied laugh. Nor was the laugh wholly assumed. For he saw Standish's hands slowly clench again. And a few beads of sweat were beginning to show themselves upon the insurgent's forehead.

CHAPTER VIII.

The Trap is Sprung.

There was a pause. Neither man seemed desirous to be first to return to the attack. The buzz of the city crept in from outside. The half-stilled rhythm of the dining-room orchestra reached them in snatches.

Standish got to his feet; slowly and more like a very old man than one in his prime. But he looked down with crass stolidity at his tormentor. And in his deep tones there was more of sorrow than of nervous dread.

"Mr. Blake," he said, "there's one point I can't quite grasp. Even your admiration for my worthy qualities and your very kind desire to save me trouble, can not wholly explain your action in telling me. Why are you giving away your hand like this?"

Blake looked pained.

"Can't a man do a decent thing for once," he grumbled, "without having his motives picked apart?"

"I'm afraid not—in your case," answered Standish.

"All right," agreed Blake in no whit

chagrined. "Let's look at it from a business standpoint, then. If you'll decide suddenly to let this Mullins bill pass, and if you'll support Mark Robertson for the speakership, everything will be perfectly smooth and harmonious. And we won't have to use these painful means—"

"Oh, I see. A bargain!"

"One that you won't lose by," said Blake. "A mighty good one, since it saves you your political skin, instead of forcing us to nail it to the barn."

Despite his confidence Blake was vaguely worried. He knew men, as a pianist knows his key-board. And now a subtle intuition, quite at variance with all his keen logic, warned him that Standish was not in the least frightened by the threat of political death. Knowing the insurgent's high ambitions as he did, Blake could not account for this absence of terror. So, feeling his way, he shifted to the other tack.

"The woman, too," he added. "Think of her!"

He grinned under his sparse mustache. For again he saw Standish's hands clench. And he knew he had struck the one right note.

"Yes," went on Blake. "Think of the woman! She's walking blindly, unsuspectingly, right straight into the trap we've set for her. It'll be hell for her. Pure, unadulterated, sky-blue hell. If she's got a husband or kids or parents it'll blacken the whole world for them all. Oh, don't make us do this thing, man! Think it over. Don't decide in a rush. Take your time. By eleven o'clock or so I'll have her name. Then it will be early enough for you to tell me your decision. You'll find me somewhere about the hotel, if I'm not over at the Capitol. Good-by."

He strolled off toward the dining-room. As he passed Wanda he glanced covertly at her through his lowered lids. She was raptly absorbed in the novel she was reading. And her dainty lower jaw moved slowly up and down in a gum-chewing cadence that bespoke years of practice.

Standish watched Blake out of sight. His face, now that the mask was no longer needful, worked almost grotesquely. And his swarthy skin was a pallid yellow. He looked like a puglist who tries dazedly to rise after a knock-out.

He was thinking rapidly; despite his daze. After a moment or two he crossed hastily to the telephone switchboard.

"Get me a New York wire, please," he said, looking nervously down the corridor, "as quickly as you can."

As he spoke he was running over the pages of one of the telephone books on the desk. Wanda drove a plug into the switchboard and droned:

"H'lo! Long distance? That you, Jesse? This is Wanda. Say, get me a New York wire—on the jump, please. Yes. Oh, have you? Good! Let the other party wait, and give it to me, won't you? Thanks. I've got one all ready," she added, glancing over her shoulder at Standish. "What number, please?"

"One thousand and one, Plaza," he answered, looking up from the directory.

"Plaza one—o—o—one!" she droned into the transmitter. "Any name, Mr. Standish?"

"No," he answered huskily. "Just the number."

"A'rl! Here you are—number one booth, please. H'lo New York!" she continued into the transmitter, showing a plug in and out of the switchboard three or four times, "Plaza one—o—o—one. Yes, Plaza one—o—o—ONE!"

Standish had gone to the first of the numbered booths. At its door he paused.

"Miss Kelly," said he, "would you mind taking that receiver off your head while I'm telephoning?"

"Certainly," she answered in evident ill-temper at the slur implied by the request.

She carefully removed and hung up the metal crescent that held the receiver to her left ear. Standish had closed the booth door and, from the corner of her eye, Wanda could see

him through the glass pane, speaking into the transmitter. But she had barely noted the first movement of his

lips when Blake and Mark Robertson appeared from the dining-room. She turned her attention to them.

Blake glanced unobtrusively toward the row of telephone booths and his half-shut eyes lighted ever so little as he made out Standish's figure behind the glass. But he made no other sign that he noted the successful springing of the trap he had so painstakingly set. In fact, he was talking interestedly to Robertson on indifferent topics.

"Tom tells me," Wanda heard him say, "that Grace is coming down."

"Yes," answered Robertson, his face brightening at mention of his wife's name, either tonight or tomorrow morning. And that reminds me: I meant to call her up and ask which I want to meet her at the station. Miss Kelly," he went on, "can you get me a New York wire?"

"Yes, sir," said Wanda; "but it'll take a few minutes to get the connection."

"All right," replied Robertson, as he busied herself amid the labyrinth of switchboard plugs, "I'll wait here for it. I—"

He stopped as Standish came out of the booth and laid down a bill for Wanda to change. Robertson, the happy light of anticipation dying out of his face at sight of his foe, turned his back ostentatiously upon him. Nor did he speak again till Standish had gone away. Then he looked around, to find his father-in-law in eager conversation with the telephone operator.

"Well," Blake was saying. "Could you hear anything?"

"No," answered Wanda, still deeply offended at Standish's request. "Not a word. He made me hang up the receiver."

"Huh!" grunted Blake. "He's got more sense than I thought. But the number? You got the number, of course. Didn't you?"

"Oh, yes," she returned, "I got the number, all right."

Blake unceremoniously reached over the rail and picked up the pad on which a list of numbers was jotted down.

"Is that the one?" he asked, pointing to the last number inscribed there.

"Oh, no," said Wanda, recovering her pad and laying it back in its place on the desk, with a little slam to emphasize Blake's rudeness in taking it away. "That isn't the one. I'm leaving the line blank, so I can fill in the number later. It's too valuable to put on paper—just yet."

"You're a born diplomat," he approved, a trifle grudgingly. "Well, what was the number?"

"Just a minute," she interrupted. "Wasn't there a question of—of—?"

"Of a thousand dollars for you. Yes, there was. That goes."

"Does it?" she queried sweetly. "Not with me, it doesn't."

"Look here, young woman!" snarled Blake, his habitual calm giving place to a sort of vulpine savagery. "Don't you try to hold me up! If you do you'll find you've got a wildcat by the tail."

"Dear me!" she cried in pretty terror. "Well, I'll—I'll have to think it over. Here's your New York wire, Governor Robertson," she called to Mark. "What was the number you wanted, please?"

Robertson came across to the rail. Get Mrs. Robertson—my wife—on the phone," said he. If she's not in, get one of the servants. I—"

"You didn't tell me the number," she reminded him.

"Oh," he laughed. "Careless of me! I forgot I wasn't talking to my secretary. He generally calls up my New York home for me. The number is 'Plaza one—double o—one.'"

There was an imperceptible pause. A momentary contraction of Wanda's throat. Then, in her everlasting professional monotone she droned into the receiver:

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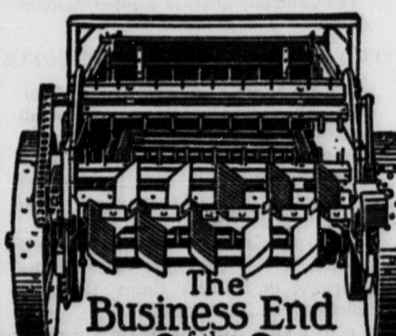
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