

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 awakes to the fact that she does not love Standish and calls their engagement off. Standish protests undying devotion.

CHAPTER II—Wanda Kelly, telephone girl at the Hotel Newlark, 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 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.

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.

CHAPTER VIII—At the conclusion of the interview with Blake Standish gets a New York wire and calls Plaza 101. A few minutes later Robertson tells Miss Kelly to call Plaza 101 and get his wife or one of the servants on the phone.

CHAPTER IX—Miss Kelly refuses to give Jim Blake the number called by Standish.

CHAPTER X—Blake has a story of the Standish episode prepared ready to send out as soon as the Woman's name is learned. Tom Blake tells his father of his love for Wanda Kelly and a family row ensues. Blake's daughter, Grace, arrives with her husband, Governor Robertson.

CHAPTER XI—Blake sends for Standish and Grace promises to entertain him until her father's return.

CHAPTER XII—Miss Kelly calls on Grace to warn her that her good name is threatened by the impending exposure of Standish and is insulted for her pains.

[Continued from last week.]

"The machine!" rushed on Wanda. It's got the brains of all the men that are in it. And none of the heart. It burns up everything that gets in its path. And now it needs a woman's good name and happiness to keep it in fuel. It's only square that you should be the Woman. It's let them see how other people have felt when the machine crushed them—how my father felt when he came home that horrible day, with death written in his eyes, and said to my mother: "Molly, I'm done for. Blake and his machine have got me!" That's what he said. And he was innocent.

"But—"

"That's why I was going to let them get you, and break Jim Blake's vile old heart. It's the chance I've been waiting for, five endless years. Tonight I saw God's justice begin to move. I saw that Blake and his crowd were working out their own damnation without any help from me. And then—Oh, I'm a fool!—then, all at once I forgot the justice part of it. And all I could see was that a gang of strong, cruel, clever men were fighting one unhappy woman. I—I guess that's why I've stayed here, even after you called me a blackmailer."

"But your past's no business of mine," she went on more quietly. "I just came to give you a warning. Take it or leave it. It's up to you."

"I don't want your warning," said Grace sullenly. "I tell you, I admit nothing."

"Then I can't help you."

"I have not asked your help."

"Just as you like," sighed Wanda. "But the net's closing tight around you, Mrs. Robertson. And if you count on Mr. Standish to help you or to deny anything, you're making a big mistake. The minute he finds himself cornered, he'll throw you over to save his own chances. Oh, won't you drop the bluff, once and for all? Won't you let me—"

"You have had my answer. There is not one single fact on which to base this—this attack. If you try to drag my name into any unsavory scandal, so much the worse for you. If you dare make use of my name—even indirectly—in connection with this case, I shall go to my father, at once and tell him—tell him that—"

"Tell him what, Mrs. Robertson?" demanded Wanda.

"That you tried to get me to help you marry Tom. And that when I refused you threatened to blackmail me—to brand me as the Woman he's been hunting for."

A purring of the buzzer interrupted her.

"We will put it to the test now!" Grace declared, turning toward the door. "There are my husband and fa-

ther outside. 'Afraid, am I? 'Sick with fear?' You shall see. You shall tell them, here and now, that I'm the Woman they're trying to find. Tell them and see what will happen. If you haven't the courage to tell them I'll repeat your charges myself."

"Don't! Don't!" implored Wanda, as the buzzer sounded once more. Don't try it, Mrs. Robertson! You can't carry it through, I tell you. They have too much proof."

"They won't apply their proof to me—It is you who will need proofs."

"Very good!" cried Wanda, in sudden anger. "Go ahead and do it. My conscience is clear. I wanted to help you and I got insulted for my pains. Go as far as you like. I'm through."

"You are not through yet," denied Grace furiously. "Stay where you are! We'll settle this once and for all."

She threw open the door. Matthew Standish stood waiting on the threshold.

CHAPTER XIII.

Lancelot or Galahad?

Wanda, with a scared smile of recognition, slipped past Standish and out into the hall.

"My father is expecting you, Mr. Standish," she heard Grace say—in a slightly raised tone, palpably for Wanda's ears. "He told me to ask you to wait for him here in case you should come before he got back from the Capitol."

Then the door closed, and Wanda heard no more.

The moment she was alone with Standish, Grace Robertson's bearing



"Will Mr. Standish Explain to Your Husband Why He Called You Up?"

underwent an almost ludicrous change. The air of defiance was lost, leaving her face strangely drawn and haggard. She dropped into a chair and pressed her hands across her burning eyes.

Standish stood, still near the door, looking down at her. His heavy dark mask of face did not show any emotion save that its premature lines seemed all at once cut deeper. His somber eyes held no light, his deep voice no expression as he said at last: "You know, then?"

"Yes," returned Grace, starting up. "I tried to warn you," said he. "How did you find out?"

"The phone girl, Wanda Kelly."

"I see," he mused. "I ought to have guessed. She is one of the machine's spies."

"No. She wants to help me, she said. But that isn't the point. She knows, and she is the only person who does—"

"What did you say to her when she—?"

"I denied everything, of course. What else was there to do?"

"There was nothing else to do. You were wise—while the affair is in its present state."

"It was wise in any case."

"Yes," he agreed. "It was wise for you. But I suppose you haven't stopped to consider my position in the matter?"

"Your position?" she repeated uncertainly. "What do you mean? What is your position, except to stand by me and save me?"

"You forget that I owe a duty to the men who have made me their leader in this fight; who have staked everything on me."

"And to me?" she cried shrilly. "To the Woman who staked more than everything? Do you owe nothing to me?"

"I do not want to think what I owe to you," he evaded, his voice shaking ever so little. "I beg you not to remind me of it."

"You won't help me? You put these miserable constituents and politicians of yours ahead of me?"

"If you put it that way, yes."

"Oh, most noble statesman!" she mocked, raging. "Embodiment of all that is perfect and—contemptible! I didn't marry you because I no longer loved you and because I wouldn't add a blasphemous loveless marriage to my other sin. If I had become your wife—even if it ruined both our lives—you would have felt it your duty to stand by me and defend me against the entire world. But because I had the courage to stop before it made us both miserable for life, you can not in honor protect me! I wonder if you half realize how vile a thing you are!"

In the slow lifeless depths of his voice: "I loved you. I have never loved any other woman in all my miserable life. I shall keep on loving you as long as I live. I do not want to. But it is past my power. I would sooner have bitten out my tongue than betray this secret of yours. All this can not interest you. I tell you, so that you may know the punishment is not all yours. You merely risk losing what you have gained and cherished during the past few years. I act with the certainty that by doing my duty I must bring ruin and heart-break on the woman whom I love more than I love my own soul. Is my task easier than yours?"

The utter ardor of his words, combined with the dull lifelessness of his tone, was almost laughable. Grace was gazing at him in blank astonishment.

"You love me?" she muttered.

"I have told you so," came the slow measured answer. "You talk much of your love for Mark Robertson. It is easy to love when love makes one blissfully happy. But is your love worthy to be compared with mine? With the love that brings only an eternal gnawing anguish—the love that can never hope for one atom of requital and yet that cannot die—the love that would sacrifice everything for you and yet must endure sacrificing—you?"

"You love me?" she repeated; and her voice had all at once grown wondrous sweet and vibrant. "You love me—Matt?"

She had drawn closer to him as she spoke. Now she was looking straight up into his wretched eyes; her own glowing like mist-hazed stars. So near to him was she that the chignon on her breast touched the harsh texture of his coat. Her breath played lightly on his face. The faint fragrance of her hair filled the man's nostrils. The warm magic of her presence dazed him.

Matthew Standish stood, his eyes wide, his breath coming fast, the sweat beads breaking from his forehead. The heavy mask on his face twisted itself into a half-grotesque aspect of pain.

"You love me?" she murmured.

"Yes!" he groaned, his big voice breaking. "God help me! Yes!"

"And you won't—you can't—destroy my whole future. You can't, dear!"

"Ah!"

It was the cry of revulsion that might break from a forest-roamer who had all but trodden on a rattlesnake. He recoiled a step, with a shudder as of physical sickness.

"Was this needed?" he raged. "Was it necessary to defile my smashed idol still further? Wasn't it enough that you long ago taught me to look on all women as shadows? Why must you turn misery into nausea by playing Delilah? My love was a tragedy. Why must you profane it and make it foul?"

He mastered himself with an effort and fought his way back to the wonted lifeless impersonality that had become to him a second nature.

"Mrs. Robertson," he went on in his customary measured slowness. "the case stands like this: your father and husband are seeking to ruin me by raking up a story of my private life. You protect you. You sink to the methods to make me do so protect you as far as I can—so to the extreme, unless—"

"Unless what?" she asked in tired desperation. "Nothing at all," he returned, "so long as your father and husband keep this story quiet."

"But surely they won't publish it without knowing my—the Woman's name?"

"That is what I'm beginning to be afraid of. They may feel so absolutely certain of learning the name later, that they will circulate the story on the floor of the house tonight and in tomorrow's newspapers. And then, when they find out who the Woman really is, it will be too late to suppress it. You must stop that story. If it gets out I shall lose the fight. And I can not do that, even to save you."

"In other words," she retorted, "to save yourself you will hide behind me?"

"If you care to put it so."

"But," she urged, "I can't speak to father or Mark about it. I'm not supposed to know anything about it. Suppose—suppose I can't stop it?"

"You must. It's the only chance. They're delaying the house proceedings this minute just to get their proofs in order to launch the story tonight. They intend to use it to prevent my certain victory. And they must not. At the first sign that they mean to do so I shall have to go to your father and tell him who the Woman is! I would rather be shot. But—"

"Oh," she burst out hysterically, "you wouldn't—you couldn't—do that! You're not so unutterably low as to damn the future of a woman who once trusted you—who—"

"I've told you," he replied, "that I am not in this fight as a man, but as a leader. It is one woman's good name against the welfare of a nation. I haven't the right to protect you, Grace. I won't let my sin as a man defeat the great principles I stand for."

"You coward! You pitiful hypocritical coward," she raged. "You haven't the manhood to stand by your own past. You'll let a woman pay your debts—and pay them with everything that makes her life worth anything."

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