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BY

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ONE DOLLAR PER YEAR!
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The Greyson Mystery

—AND—

HOW IT WAS SOLVED.

BY F. D. L.

I WILL NOT undertake to describe my heroine, for I hate such descriptions, but will simply introduce her by the name of Theodosia Ericsson—a very hard name says the reader—but then I am not responsible for that. Her friends for short called her Dote, and Phil Meredith who was her lover, thought that a very appropriate name.

They both were adopted children of "Father Greyson," as they called him, and lived with him at Greyson Hall, a fine old mansion delightfully located among the Berkshire hills in the old Bay State.

When Dote came home from the seminary "finished," she brought with her a friend, Honoria Wyndham, who soon became domesticated at Greyson Hall. Honoria was a singularly beautiful woman, and one to attract attention anywhere. Her face was a perfect oval, generously tinged with the rich blood of a warmer latitude than ours. The lips were lusciously red; dead-black hair dropped in close, clinging rings about the white brow; dreamy, almond-shaped eyes looked out from underneath the fringed lids with a real starry lustre; the figure was slight, supple and graceful.

Men generally go rapturously mad over such a woman—her own sex enviously so. But Phil was true as steel. He had given his heart to Dote, and was not one to be turned aside by the sight of every fresh face. He was content to admire Honoria, but never thought of loving her. Besides she had a friend, Arthur Clayton by name who had taken up his quarters at the hotel in the village soon after she became an inmate of Greyson Hall. This Arthur Clayton seemed to divide his attentions very nearly equally between Honoria and Dote, and Phil may have thought there was an understanding of some sort between him and the first mentioned of the young ladies.

Miss Wyndham, Dote and Phil were coming in from a drive, one day. The door of Father Greyson's study was wide open, and he called to them as they passed through the hall. Going in, they found him in an easy-chair by the window, a strangely haggard and ghastly look upon his face. Dote uttered a cry of surprise and alarm, and went straight up to him, holding out both her hands.

"You are ill, Father Greyson!" she exclaimed, helplessly. "What is the matter?"

"A touch of the old trouble, dear," and he tried to smile. "I am subject to these spells, you know. I have always said they would eventually prove the death of me."

Honoria was standing beside Phil. A stifled sob came from her lips, and she suddenly turned away her face.

"I am so sorry that I was not with you!" cried Dote. "Has the doctor been summoned? What can I do for you, sir?" asking both questions in the same breath.

Father Greyson put out his arm, drawing her close to him.

"Dear Dote," he whispered, stroking her hair tenderly, "you ought to know the truth. It is too late to call in medical skill. This attack is likely to prove fatal, though I may linger for weeks yet. I wanted to tell you of this myself; I thought you would bear it better."

She uttered a cry of despair, clinging convulsively to his neck, and ejaculating—"Not that! O, don't tell me you are going to die!"

He tried to soothe her. "Don't grieve, Dote," he said presently. "It troubles me to see your tears. Besides, I want you to attend to what I have to say."

I have been hiding a strange secret from you. Now answer me one question. You will forgive me for it, when I am dead, no matter what may have been the nature of that secret?"

He looked at her in an agony of suspense.

"Yes, yes," she sobbed, anxious to reassure him.

He then made a sign for Phil to come nearer.

"Promise me that you will always be faithful to Dote," he cried, eagerly. "That you will stand by her in every trouble and affliction—that you will teach her to love and cherish my memory even in the face of facts that may distress and perplex you."

Phil knelt beside her.

"I promise. May God help me to keep my oath," he said, solemnly.

Throughout this scene Miss Wyndham had stood leaning against the wall, very white, her lips trembling. She now came gliding toward the three, and threw herself on the cushions at Father Greyson's feet, like a person in the very abandonment of grief.

"Go!" she cried, pushing both Dote and Phil away. "This is my place. I have something to say to Father Greyson. Go!"

Even the old man seemed surprised, but she spoke in a tone of such fierce command that nobody thought of refusing obedience. Dote laid her hand in Phil's and the two went away together.

"I don't understand Honoria," whispered Dote, in momentary distrust of her friend. "What does she mean by such unaccountable conduct?"

But Phil was equally puzzled. "This is not the first time Father Greyson has hinted of some secret that directly concerns you," he finally returned. "Perhaps Miss Wyndham has become possessed of that secret, and wishes to discuss it with him."

Dote was not wholly convinced of this. "It may be," she said, doubtfully.

That was an anxious day for the whole household. Father Greyson was subject to these sudden attacks, but this seemed more than usually severe. Honoria remained with him most of the time. Her devotion to the invalid was singular, to say the least. She would not suffer even Dote to take her place, and seemed jealous of the presence of a third person.

Phil watched her rather curiously. "She does know the secret that distresses Father Greyson so unaccountably, and for some purpose of her own is averse to having it revealed," was the conclusion at which he arrived.

Contrary to all expectations, Father Greyson rallied, and was much better the next morning, appearing to gradually improve throughout the day. Towards evening he fell into a quiet slumber, and was left in charge of the nurse; Dote, Honoria and Phil collecting in the back parlor, where Arthur Clayton soon joined them.

Of course they spoke of the sick man, upon which Mr. Clayton manifested a singular interest in the subject, and an extreme reluctance to suffer it to drop.

"Your adopted father is reputed to be very wealthy?" he finally said, addressing the remark to Phil.

"Yes," replied the young man, curtly.

Miss Wyndham was standing by the piano, sorting some music. Her back was towards them but looking in that direction

Phil saw that her hands were nervously unsteady.

"Of course you are informed as to the amount of his fortune?" persisted Mr. Clayton, his keen black eyes scanning Phil's face in a way that made him chafe with inward rage.

"No, I am not," he replied shortly.

At that Miss Wyndham faced about.

"I can tell you, Arthur," came in her cool, composed tones. "He is worth half a million."

"Half a million?" repeated Mr. Clayton in a raised voice. "That is a large sum of money—a very large sum. I suppose, Mr. Meredith, it will be divided between you and Miss Ericsson?"

The question was exceedingly ill-bred, of course. Dote heard it, though quite across the apartment, having just taken up some delicate piece of embroidery. The rich color flamed suddenly into her cheeks. She arose, throwing aside her work, and went straight across the room to the spot where sat the man who had put it.

"Phil and I do not puzzle our brains over such questions," she said, coolly and quietly. "I am sorry that you should have suffered the matter to perplex you, Mr. Clayton."

He saw that she was incensed, and justly so. He raised his hands deprecatingly.

"I crave your pardon, Miss Ericsson."

"Grant it, Dote," put in Honoria, smilingly. "You and Arthur must not quarrel over a few ill-timed words of which he heartily repents, I am sure."

They were her guests, and Dote could not cherish resentment against either. Once afterwards, though, she heard Arthur Clayton mutter to himself—

"Half a million of money. Why, it would be a king's ransom."

"It is singular that he should be so deeply interested in Father Greyson's affairs," she thought.

She endeavored to play the agreeable hostess none the less. But it was a real relief when Mr. Clayton arose to take his departure.

When the hall clock was on the stroke of ten, Phil Meredith went up stairs to the room occupied by Father Greyson. The light was out, and not a sound was to be heard within. After listening a moment at the door, he passed on to his own apartment, very naturally concluding that the invalid was still asleep.

A few minutes later some errand took him down stairs again. There was a light in the study, and to his surprise and alarm, as he passed the door a voice sounded from within that seemed like a low cry of anger or fear. The conviction flashed suddenly upon his mind that Father Greyson was there, and that something dreadful had happened to him.

He opened the door and went in, when to his surprise, he thought he saw the figure of some person passing hastily from the opposite door, while the apartment was filled with a peculiar odor.

The desk was open and the papers were scattered around in great disorder. Lying on the floor where it had apparently been dropped, by the one who had so hurriedly left, was a paper which Phil picked up and put in his pocket-book, thinking it might furnish a clue to the cause of this singular visit.

He had no time to follow the retreating figure, as the condition of the occupant of the room was such as to call for his immediate attention.

Father Greyson was lying on the floor apparently perfectly insensible while a sort of spasm seemed to have possession of his frame.

Phil loosened his cravat, and summoned the housekeeper, quietly and expeditiously. Mrs. Henderson seemed very much alarmed at first, but after studying the symptoms of her patient a moment, she began to sniff the air keenly as any bloodhound on the scent.

"Is there no danger?" asked Phil, when

they had placed Father Greyson in a comfortable position.

"No," shortly. "He only wants a chance to get over it."

"Get over what?" asked Phil.

"Don't you know?" looking at him sharply.

"No."

"Master is under the influence of chloroform!"

"Impossible!" he exclaimed. "By whom was it administered?"

"How can I tell? Himself, perhaps. In any event, it is fortunate the dose was no larger."

Phil thought of the cry he had heard, and the ghost-like form he had seen, but said nothing. Such a revelation would have but added to the mystery of the whole affair.—Being assured there was no danger to be apprehended from what had occurred, and feeling anxious to be alone where he could quietly consider the matter, he passed out, leaving Mrs. Henderson in charge.

In the hall he met Honoria Wyndham.—She was pale, even to ghastliness, and was trembling all over like a person under the influence of some dreadful fear. She caught his arm in feverish impatience.

"What has occurred?" she asked, breathlessly. "What is the meaning of such a commotion at this time of night?"

Phil could not answer the question for thinking of some one else, who would have more cause for alarm than Honoria.

"Where is Dote? Has she, too, heard the unusual bustle?"

"I neither know nor care," impatiently. "Will you not tell me what has happened?"

Phil merely informed her of the condition in which he had found Father Greyson, carefully avoiding all allusion to the mysterious visitor, and keeping back the fact that his insensibility had been caused by chloroform administered, in all probability, by some ghostly intruder. She heard in silence, and then hurried into the study where Father Greyson was lying.

Dote made her appearance on the landing at almost the same moment. She came running down, quite breathless, crying out to know the cause of so much noise about the house.

"Father Greyson is not worse?" she asked, with pale lips.

"No." Phil went on to repeat the same story he had told to Honoria. She seemed much relieved to learn it was no worse.

As she entered the study, Honoria came out, still very pale, and passed swiftly up stairs.

Phil took refuge in the library. He wanted time to pierce this sudden haze of mystery. It might be vitally important to more than one that he should do this speedily.

He sat down by an open window, his head in one palm. Balmy breezes fresh from the heart of the summer night stole softly in to fan his brow. A maze of doubts beset him. Whose was the spectral form, and why had its treacherous hand administered that deadly drug? What, fell purpose had he frustrated by his opportune appearance?—Above all, what mad project had called Father Greyson from his couch at that time of night?

Twenty minutes went by while these thoughts passed through his brain. He heard no rustling garments, no gliding footsteps over the grass, and yet he suddenly became conscious of a white, shapely hand being stretched out of the darkness towards him, and knew that the same subtle sickening odor he had detected in the study was being distilled on the air he was then inhaling.

His first feeling was one of overpowering terror. His heart seemed to stand still, and all pulsation to stop. Then he shook off the spell and jumped to his feet, crying out in real horror. The hand was quickly withdrawn, and on looking from the window he saw the same white-robed form he

had beheld once before, go gliding away through the starless night.

He did not attempt to follow, though the smell of chloroform it had left behind was amply sufficient to convince him that his mysterious visitant was mortal, like himself, and that it had tried to benumb his faculties in the same way Father Greyson's had been benumbed. The reason for this was not so clear, however. A common burglar would not have resorted to such an expedient while the whole house was in commotion. What did it mean?

He suddenly remembered the scrap of paper he had laid away in his pocket-book. It would seem that the ghostly intruder had attempted to gain possession of that paper, in the first instance. What was more probable than that he had been seen to pick it from the floor? which would be amply sufficient to explain why he had been made the subject of the second attempt. Of the contents of the paper he was wholly ignorant, however.

His name was presently called from the hall outside. Hurrying out, he found Mrs. Henderson looking for him.

"Master is terribly worked up over some paper or other that he has lost," she said.—"We told him you were the first to find him, and he thinks you may have seen it.—He is asking for you."

Phil hurried to the study. As he entered, Father Greyson half raised himself from the sofa on which he was lying, beckoning for him to approach.

"The paper, Phil," he whispered, excitedly. "You have it?"

The question must have been audible in all parts of the room. Miss Wyndham came gliding in just in season to hear it, and seemed to await the answer quite as eagerly as did Father Greyson himself.

Phil nodded assent. "I thought the paper might be of value, and so took care of it."

The sick man caught it eagerly. "Thank you, Phil," he said, looking very much relieved.

"What was the cause of this last attack?" he asked, curious to learn how much the old man suspected.

A look of fear crept into Father Greyson's face. He put his lips close to Phil's ear.

"I shall tell you the truth, though I have kept it back from the others," he said, in an almost inaudible voice. "I could not rest in my bed up stairs for thinking of a duty I owe to Dote, one which I have kept putting off from time to time. So I arose and came down to my study, and straightway wrote out the secret contained in this precious paper for her to read when I am gone. These lines were scarcely penned when I became conscious of another presence in the room, and looking about, I saw a tall white form standing just behind my chair. The next moment a hand—a woman's hand—was held out for the paper. I held it all the tighter, and cried out, for a sponge was suddenly thrust under my nose. Will you believe it, Phil, that sponge exhaled chloroform?"

His tone was expressive of dread. The young man thought it best to make no comments.

"You have not told Dote this?"

"No. She thinks I over-exerted myself, and became faint. Mrs. Henderson knows, but I have cautioned her to be silent."

Miss Wyndham had taken a position by the window opposite. As Phil turned away, she signalled him to approach.

"Mr. Greyson has been making some revelations," she said, fixing her eyes curiously upon his face. "What is it?"

"You are mistaken," Phil answered, amazed at her inquisitiveness. "There is nothing to tell."

"Then you have not read that paper of his, and know nothing of its purport?"

She paused in breathless expectancy, and seemed singularly relieved when he denied all knowledge of its contents.

"I have no right to ask so many questions," she resumed, laughing lightly. "But mother Eve was a very inquisitive woman, and I have only inherited her failing."

[CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK.]