

# **The Woman of the Inner Room**

W. C. Morrow

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Dr. Osborne, hastily summoned to the receiving hospital, found there a handsome, well-dressed young man with an ugly hole in his skull about an inch and a half above the left ear. The injured man evidently was not suffering, but the desperate nature of his hurt was seen in the deep pallor of his face. His expression was placid, unintelligent, and absolutely silly. Yet he was freely alive his breathing was good, his heart observed its functions, his temperature was normal, and his skin was warm and moist. Dr. Osborne cleared the wound with a sponge.

"How was the lad hurt?" he asked of the officers who were standing about.

No one could tell. A few minutes ago some one had seen him staggering along the street, clinging to the house-walls to keep from falling, a thin stream of blood trickling down his face, and had pointed him out to a policeman.

Dr. Osborne looked closely at the wound. Then he tried to insert a finger in the opening, but failed. He looked around upon the men, and asked them to show him their hands.

"No," he said, after examining them; "your fingers are all too blunt Farley, go and call my daughter she is sitting in my buggy at the door."

Before she came, Dr. Osborne asked:

"Do you know who he is?"

None could inform him. Not a scrap of paper by which he might be identified could be found upon him.

The surgeon's daughter entered. She was an attractive girl rather tall and slight, had brown eyes and hair, and carried herself with a fine unconscious grace. She glanced at the man lying on the operating-table, suddenly checked her advance, and became pale. Her father, with a reassuring manner, took her by the arm, and led her forward.

"Don't be alarmed, Agnes," he said; "I have tested your nerve before, and have never seen it fail. Let me see your hand." He took it in his and examined it closely. "That is just what I need,"

he resumed; "long, slender fingers you have a beautiful hand, Agnes."

This embarrassed her, but she became stronger.

"Now, my child, I must learn the nature of the wound in this young man's head. Come a little closer, my dear; he does not know what is going on. Have you ever seen him before?"

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"No," she replied, approaching nearer and regarding his face steadily; "but he appears to be a man of means and refinement."

"Yes; that is clear. But come closer, Agnes. Why, you are all right! You see, it is a small hole, and that probably accounts for the fact that he is still alive; but it has penetrated the skull, and that makes the case a very serious one. It is necessary that I know what made the wound, in order to determine what to do; and the quickest way in the world is to let the wound tell its own story.

My fingers are so thick that I can do nothing. Yours are exactly suited."

"My fingers? What do you want me to do, father?"

"I want you to insert a finger in the wound and tell me what you find, after a careful examination of the edges of the bone."

The girl hesitated. "But why?" she asked.

"So that I may know what instrument was employed, if the hole is round and has rather clean edges, it was made by a bullet in which event, there is no reasonable hope of recovery, If, however, it is three-cornered, or otherwise angular, or in any great degree ragged, then something else made it a pick-axe or some other instrument; and in that case there is a bare chance of saving his life. Besides, the knowledge will be very useful to the officers in digging up what appears to be a mysterious crime. You can ascertain that, can't you?"

"I will try."

Under her father's direction, but in a gingerly manner, she stood behind the young man's head, her face close above his, and put the fine, long forefinger of her left hand into the wound. As she did so, her eyes met the empty stare of his. Very slowly and carefully, watching his face all the time, she felt the edges of the bone and then withdrew her finger.

"It is smooth and round," she said.

"Ah!" exclaimed her father; "then there is no hope, poor fellow! But let us try a little further Agnes, my dear, you did that bravely, as I knew you would: but now I want you to put your finger in again, and push it very slowly and carefully as far as you can. The bullet may not have gone far."

The girl, again looking down upon the calm, peaceful face, with its blank stare and senseless smile, explored the wound with her finger. Her touch was sure and gentle, but as her finger came in contact with the brain, and she felt its warmth and the regular and smooth pressure of the pulsations, her nerves went upon a strain. Still she looked down into the handsome young face, but she was growing pale. All of a sudden, for some wholly unaccountable reason, the young man's blank expression and silly smile passed away, and a certain intelligence sat upon his face.

The surgeon saw this, and it appeared to him to be a matter of uncommon importance. At the same moment, a peculiar look came into his daughter's face. She had begun to relax in the course of fainting, but instantly she swung back upon a nervous balance which was so prominent as to suggest a strong stimulation. The young man looked up into her eyes with a vague interest; she looked down into his with fear and horror. Then she suddenly withdrew her finger and stepped back beyond the range of his vision. The look of vacuity again took a hold upon him.

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The girl, without addressing any one particularly, said, nervously and hurriedly; "You had better send to the bank and tell his father."

"What bank?" asked her father, in surprise.

"The Citizens' Bank."

"Who is his father?"

"Mr. Blanchard, the president of the bank. This is his son, Charles."

Her father regarded her with amazement, but he refrained from asking her questions. He merely remarked; "But you said just now that you did not know him"

The girl looked confused and made no reply.

The surgeon sent an officer to the bank. His attention returned to the patient, and as his daughter had not made as thorough an examination as he desired, he asked her if she felt strong enough to make another attempt. She complied, but with much hesitation. Again did a sickness and weakness assail her as her finger slipped into the wound, and again did the young man's face brighten. He fixed his eyes on her face, seemingly in recognition, and in a thick, stammering voice, he said:

"Why, Agnes, is it you? So, you are the one this is what jealousy has done. This is what I get for being his friend."

"Do you blame me, Charles?"

"Why should I? It is too late for that now."

"Does Frank know?"

"He does not; but she is madly in love with him."

"And she is a stranger to you?"

"Absolutely. I never saw her before. I believe he has her in hiding, and that he will shield her."

"But he is not a traitor."

"She may have some unaccountable hold upon him."

"He would not deceive me so."

"Who can tell?"

The excitement which had kept back the encroachment of weakness now failed of purpose.

The girl withdrew her finger, and the young man sank back into his former lethargic condition.

All color fled the girl's face; her eyes were fixed vacantly in a stare of horror.

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"Agnes," said her father, approaching her hastily, "what is the matter? Are you faint?"

"I I don't know, father." She trembled, as though with apoplexy.

"What is all this he has been telling you?" he asked.

She was too far gone to reply, but her father mistook her weakness for hesitation.

"Come into the open air, my child. This repulsive ordeal and the ravings of that delirious man have borne too heavily upon your nerves. Come, my daughter."

Those were his words, but a great dread had arisen within him. As soon as they had stepped without, he pressed the question upon her with a certain hardness which came from his anxiety:

"What does all this mean? What do you know about the shooting?"

Her voice was kept back by a gasp, and with a lurch she slipped from her father's grasp and went all disorganized down to the ground before he could save her. He picked her up, placed her in the buggy, and drove rapidly to his home. When she recovered she found her mother in anxious watch upon her, for her father had gone to see what could be done for the wounded man.

Mrs. Osborne had been informed by her husband of the singular occurrence at the receiving hospital, and the good woman was unhappy over it. But with her usual fair tact she asked no questions, believing that the close understanding between her and her daughter would bring forth an explanation in safe time. She was disappointed, therefore, when Agnes, upon coming into consciousness, spoke no word of the most important matter. More than that, she said she had a grievous headache and desired to be left alone, that she might sleep. Mrs. Osborne withdrew, and immediately the girl went about the task of slipping away from the house unseen. She did this with whole success. In a few minutes she was in the office of a young physician named Frank Armour.

There was nothing commonplace in this young man's appearance. He was tall, slender, and pale, and to the manifest effects of rigorous study were added evidences of some kind of trouble that was wearing him out. He occupied two rooms a reception-room and, behind it, a consultation-room. She found him sitting in the front room; the door leading into the other was closed. His face brightened greatly when he saw her standing before him.

"Agnes!" he cried; "I am very glad to see you. All loads drop from my shoulders when your sweet face appears. You said the other day that you were not coming to the office any more, for fear people would talk about you as though that should make any difference, seeing that we are soon to be married!"

His manner was so gentle, so full of evidences of genuine affection, that her suspicions concerning him were much weakened. But she had come to make sure of her position, and the mysteries of the wounded man's speech had to be cleared up.

"Frank," she asked, "have you seen your friend Charles Blanchard to-day?"

"No; I haven't seen him since last night. By the way, he scolded me again for not taking him around to your house and introducing him to you. Now, really, Agnes, I don't think you ought to keep putting me off about bringing him, as he is really a very delightful man, and I am sure you will like him."

"We will talk about that some other time, Frank. There is something else I want to ask you now. Do you really think you love me and me alone?"

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"I am very certain of it, Agnes; but I don't see any reason for such a question."

"I know that you never go into society, and you have told me that you pay attentions to no one except me."

"That is the truth, Agnes; but to save my life I don't understand you. You are pale and ill.

Something has happened to give you trouble and you have suddenly become suspicious of me."

Should she tell him of the fatal wounding of his best friend? Was it not possible first to extort from him some explanation of that friend's singular disclosures? The fact that she had received this knowledge from him if, indeed, knowledge it was troubled her greatly. The man had sown distrust in her mind, and it was like poison.

"Frank," she said, presently, unable to see him longer in ignorance of his friend's condition, "Charles Blanchard has been seriously hurt, and I came to tell you so."

"Seriously hurt?" asked Armour, in alarm; "when and how?"

"He was found less than two hours ago and taken to the receiving hospital, where my father is attending him now."

The young physician was now upon his feet, nervous and excited.

"How was he hurt, Agnes? Tell me all about it."

"Nothing is known except that he was found staggering along the street with a pistol wound in the head."

Armour's face was livid, and his trembling legs nearly failed to support his weight.

"He was not killed instantly?" he asked.

"No; but he is unconscious."

"Certainly."

"The bullet must have been a small one."

"No doubt, no doubt!" cried the unhappy man; "I must go to see him at once."

He picked up his hat and was starting away, expecting her to leave the room with him. But she sat still, remarking:

"I will wait until you return, if you promise to come back soon."

Armour's disappointment and annoyance were visibly manifest. He shot a quick glance toward the door of the adjoining room, and then walked over to it and cautiously tried the knob. The door was locked. He made a show of feeling in his pocket for the key, but his whole manner was so openly embarrassed that the sharp-sighted girl noticed it.

"Agnes," said he, turning upon her somewhat impatiently, "there is no doubt I shall be gone a long time, and it would be unreasonable for me to ask you to wait."

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"Nevertheless," she said, in rather a hard tone, looking him steadily in the eyes, "I will stay here and wait for you. If you stay away long I will turn on the spring-latch and thus lock the door when I leave."

An evident fear seized upon the young physician. He was anxious to go to his suffering friend, and was unwilling to leave Agnes in his office. She saw all this very plainly.

"And, by the way, Frank," she resumed, "as I am very tired, I will go into the back room and rest on the lounge." She started toward the door, pretending not to have noticed that it was locked, and tried to open it.

"Why, it is locked!" she exclaimed.

Armour's uneasiness had increased to positive suffering.

"Yes he stammered.

"Is any one in there?"

"Agnes "Well?"

"You are acting in a strange and unaccountable way to-day."

"I?" she asked, in great astonishment; "I don't understand you, Frank." Then she walked straight up to him, and, placing her hands on his shoulders, said, with dignity and tenderness: "I merely asked you if there was any one in the room, and you are offended. Let us be candid with each other, Frank. What does it mean?"

"I may have a patient in that room, and A low moaning in a woman's voice, indistinctly heard from the inner room, interrupted him, His faced turned scarlet and then pale, and all the time the steady gaze of the surgeon's daughter was upon him. She took her hands from his shoulders, looking much humiliated; and, with a painful sadness which he had never before seen in her conduct, she simply said:

"I don't think it is customary for physicians to lock their patients up; but if I have been rude I beg you to forgive me. I will not annoy you by staying. Good-bye, Frank."

She extended her hand, which he seized eagerly; but she quickly withdrew it and left the room.

He followed her into the passage-way.

Agnes he said "you surely don't suspect that but she was fleeing down the stairs so rapidly that he could not finish the foolish sentence.

The girl went so quickly along the crowded street that people turned in wonder to look at her.

Her eyes were filled with tears, her face was very pale, and her lips were tightly caught between her teeth. "I never would have dreamed it," she said to herself, over and over; "never, never, never! Oh, it will kill me, it will kill me!" She reentered her home as secretly as she had left it, flung herself wearily upon her bed, and cried as though her heart was broken.

The police had gone intelligently to work upon the mystery of the shooting. Mr. Blanchard, the father of the wounded man, had arrived, overcome with grief and horror. Dr. Armour, he said, was the only intimate friend his son had. He was entirely unable to suggest any cause for the shooting, which undoubtedly had not been done with a suicidal hand. The police repeated to him all that they could remember of the disjointed and unintelligible

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conversation between his son and Agnes Osborne, and this account puzzled him sorely. What mysterious blind was there between his son and this young woman? She had denied all knowledge of him, and yet she gave the information of his identity. When and how had he been her friend, not knowing her? Why had she discovered an anxiety that he should not blame her for the deed that would cost him his life? Why was she desirous of learning from him whether Frank Armour knew anything about the tragedy? Who was this that was madly in love with Armour, and what possible connection could there be between this fact and that of the shooting? Who was the woman referred to in their conversation, and why should Armour keep her in hiding? How could her jealousy of young Blanchard be the moving cause of the desperate assault?

Mr. Blanchard was not the only one who tried to bring some light out of the darkness of all this singular and deplorable transaction. A broken-hearted girl, tossing and weeping on her bed, asked herself these questions, or some of them, many times, and the police were weighing them with all the care and precision of trained hunters of crime. With Dr. Osborne the matter was far more serious than with the police. Lacking his knowledge that the young man's temporary restoration to a state of consciousness was not explainable on ordinary grounds, they did not see the true value of the fact. Dr. Osborne reasoned that a wound of that character must necessarily produce a disorganization of the mental functions and present a condition of unconsciousness. This had been the case until his daughter had inserted her finger far into the wound, when at once the sufferer's face brightened and a condition resembling consciousness ensued. Dr. Osborne was too wise to assume that young Blanchard's ability to speak and apparently carry forward a conversation was positive evidence of consciousness, for he knew that the vagaries of a disorganized mind are of unimaginable variety. But this case was unique nothing in the books or his experience had a suggestion of its form or color. The whole case was this: His daughter had betrayed fright upon seeing the wounded man at the station, but had recovered from that; and, indeed, her condition might have been construed as one of natural repugnance, overcome by an intelligent direction of the will. It was clear enough so far. When she placed her finger in the edge of the wound there was sign neither of recognition on her part nor consciousness on his; it was only when she had pushed her finger into the brain that those two facts came into existence.

This appeared to the surgeon to be a very strange coincidence. Not only was the young man apparently restored to consciousness, but the two, supposed to have been strangers, recognized each other, and, worse than all else, betrayed a certain ill-defined common knowledge of the crime. All these things threw Dr. Osborne into the most conflicting surmises and brought him into a condition of positive unhappiness. The extraordinary scientific features of the case were overshadowed by his anxieties. His daughter had engaged herself, with his assent, to marry Dr.

Armour, and yet this young physician had been placed in a peculiar light by the words of the dying man. Prolonged thinking brought only wider distraction, and the unhappy father determined to question his daughter, depending on the close sympathy between them to bring the whole truth from her.

It was some time, however, before he could find the opportunity. Mr. Blanchard had removed his son to his home and had retained Dr. Osborne to attend him. When the surgeon had done all that was possible, he went to his home and sought his daughter. But she could not be found.

After nearly crying her heart out upon her return from Armour's office, she got up, brought herself under control, and then realized that she had been treated shamefully by the man whom she loved above all others in the world. It was easy for her grief to become shame and her shame anger. It was not possible for her yet to think seriously upon any plan that might bring suffering or ruin to her lover; but it was within her power to work serious mischief to some mysterious woman who had come between her and him, and this was a matter to be attended to. Accordingly she cleared up her face, made herself very bright and pretty, and went at once to consult the chief of police.

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That functionary was vastly surprised so see her. He had been given a full report of the scene at the receiving hospital, and when he saw the girl enter his office looking so bright, confident, and handsome, and announce her name and mission, he was sorely perplexed. In truth, Chief Holloway had certain ideas which would have given Miss Agnes discomfort if she had known of their existence.

"I have come to ask you, Mr. Holloway," she said, "if you have made any discoveries concerning the shooting of Mr. Blanchard."

The officer, somewhat taken aback by her directness, tried, after a heavy fashion, to cover his position under some remarks in which discretion was outlined as a duty. "But this is rather a singular question from you, Miss Osborne, considering that you yourself are supposed to know all about the matter."

The very boldness and brutality of the assault served an excellent purpose; for the girl, not dreaming that her talk with young Blanchard had taken wings, or that any one suspected her of knowledge, was shocked with surprise.

"What makes you think that?" she quickly asked.

This put him in command of the situation, for he felt his power.

"Your conversation with young Blanchard showed that both you and he know all about it, and then, after you left him you went to see Dr. Armour, who also appears to be pretty badly mixed up in the whole affair."

All this came like a whirlwind, and badly frightened the girl.

"Now," resumed Holloway, "although you have come ostensibly to make inquiries, I think your ultimate purpose was to give some very important information. I should be pleased to hear it."

Agnes caught her breath. "How can I know anything?" she asked, realizing that her time had come, but with a rush that unnerved her; "Mr. Blanchard spoke in a rambling way."

"But he was not as evasive as you are at this moment."

"Evasive? Really, sir "This is no time for by-play." sternly interrupted the officer; "no doubt you understand that you yourself are in a very peculiar position. If what you know would endanger your own safety by your telling it, I can easily understand your feelings."

The sting was felt, but the girl rallied and gave this opinion:

"You said something just now that makes me think you suspect Dr. Armour of having a guilty knowledge of the affair. If you mean by that to charge him with the crime, you are entirely in error."

"But you are careful not to deny that he knows something of importance. Why do you not say openly that you and Armour know who fired the shot, and that you two, possibly for prudential reasons, are doing all you can to conceal your knowledge and shield the criminal?"

The very brutality and directness of the question roused the inmost nature of the girl. With scarlet face and flashing eyes she said:

"If you will come with me, I will show you the murderer."

This was a windfall that Holloway had not dared to hope for. He promptly followed Agnes.

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When they had reached the street, she said:

"It will be necessary to see Dr. Armour first, and I think he is at Mr. Blanchard's. We will go there first."

"As you please."

They found both Dr. Amour and Dr. Osborne at the young man's house. The two physicians the father and the lover were vastly surprised so see Agnes and the chief of police walk in together. For her part, Agnes felt so guilty that she could not bear to look Armour full in the face.

She felt that a wild jealousy had led her so take a desperate and dangerous step, the end of which she could not foresee. But did her lover really deserve to be spared? Had he not deceived her shamefully? The young man felt that a high barrier had come between him and Agnes, and hence he had nothing to say to her. Holloway readily saw that a heavy constraint rested upon them both, and it appeared, in his eyes, an important affair.

"Agnes," said her father, taking her by the hand, and looking her anxiously in the eyes, "where have you been?"

"To see Mr. Holloway, father."

"For what purpose?"

"To learn if he had discovered anything."

This was not the place for pressing the matter, and so her father asked her no more questions.

There was a moment of general embarrassment among the four persons in the room, and it was broken by the chief, who asked that in the cause of justice Miss Osborne be permitted to repeat the experiment of inserting her finger in the wound. With surprising alacrity both the physicians objected, saying that the wound had been dressed, that the sufferer was then very low from shock, and that such an experiment would likely have a fatal issue. Holloway smiled in a peculiar manner, and, looking steadily at Armour, added:

"I hardly expected that you would consent."

This thrust cut the young man to the quick, and he shot a look at Agnes that revealed his suspicion of her hand in the policy of the officer.

"Of course I have no desire to increase the young man's danger," remarked Holloway; "but the result of the former experiment was so important that I deemed it advisable to repeat it if possible. However, I think it is hardly necessary. As soon as I had learned all the particulars of that experiment, I laid them before a prominent physician of this city, and requested his written opinion concerning them. I think this is the proper time to inform you concerning it, for several reasons, which will appear later."

Thereupon Holloway read an ingenious paper, only a short extract from which can be set forth here. It is as follows:

"Admitting a wide latitude for deception on the part of the young woman, and the possibility of error in your account, the whole affair seems preposterous and not worthy of serious attention.

But we shall treat it, not as a fact, but as a hypothetical case." (The hypothesis was here stated in agreement with the reported facts, and this explanation followed:) "The bullet was small, and hence the laceration of the brain matter was not extensive nor the primary shock very great. The unconsciousness observed apparently resulted

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from the severing of the nerves ramifying throughout the brain and from the rupturing of the innumerable chains of brain-cells in the path of the bullet. These lacerations, by destroying the continuity of the brain texture, disorganized the mind by interrupting the coordination of its functions.

"If, now, some plan could have been devised for bringing together the severed ends of tissue in such a manner as would permit of their resuming their normal occupation of transmitting molecular activity, there is a rare possibility that its employment would have restored consciousness. By a very singular accident, the young woman may have performed that service when she inserted her finger deep into the brain; but, in order for this result to have been accomplished, a most extraordinary series of events must have occurred.

"The finger is a sensitive member, from the fact that it contains so large a number of nerves.

These nerves, called peripheral, terminate under a thin cuticle, through which sensation is easily experienced. When her finger was inserted in the brain tissue, her nerve-ends came approximately in contact with the severed nerves of the brain over the entire field of laceration.

Thus the mechanical condition of nerve-continuity was restored in the brain of the wounded man, and consciousness was the result.

"But it is evident that the molecular transmission did not occur directly through her finger.

That was not possible, for the reason that her nerves do not run straight through her finger from one side to the other. If we should trace one of these nerves, we should find that, starting at the termination in the finger, it runs up the arm into the brain. A sensation, starting from the end and going to the brain, would there meet and be assimilated by a large number of other sensations, this being the result of coordination. The brain would then decide what action to take, and then would direct the efferent, or outrunning, nerves to move the muscles with a definite purpose. It is clear, then, that the movement of sensation through the wounded man's brain tissue, after the restoration of continuity, must have become communicated to the nervous system of the woman.

In other words, no sensation could pass through his brain without passing through hers also. In this way, their two brains would act largely as one, and the active thoughts of one would be known to the other. By this sort of reasoning we may account for the fact that, although the two persons were strangers to each other, mutual recognition came when the knowledge of both became the possession of each. Hence we must infer that the young woman knows as much concerning the person who did the shooting as does the wounded man himself?

The effect of this extraordinary document can hardly be imagined. From Dr. Osborne it lifted a load that was likely to crush him. But why had not his daughter been candid with him? Now that there no longer could be a fair suspicion that she had any criminal association with the crime, why had she acted in so strange a manner?

Armour's thoughts took a very different turn. His pallor increased until it became alarming, and his knees were unsteady from weakness. The man's agony was so painfully visible that Agnes felt a fearful dread for the end that must come.

The immediate result of all this was that the three men fixed a steady gaze upon her, in which was a commingling of peculiar motives and sensations.

"Miss Osborne," finally said Holloway, "this scientific report leads us to believe that you are fully aware of the identity of the one who fired the shot. In corroboration of these conclusions, you have confessed your knowledge by offering your services to point out the murderer to me.

Will you be so kind as to keep your promise?"

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All that was womanly in the girl found cause both for alarm and encouragement in this situation. Against her sense of wrong weighed that of tenderness and affection. She found courage to look Armour squarely in the face, hoping to receive some sign that might guide her; but she found as she read his expression only contempt and defiance struggling through the cloud of anguish which sat upon him.

"I will keep my promise," she said, with much firmness; "we will now go to Dr. Armour's office."

Besides becoming somewhat more rigid, as though bracing himself to meet some fearful ordeal, Armour betrayed no emotion. Dr. Osborne appeared to be overcome with astonishment and anxiety. Chief Holloway only smiled.

These four went at once to Armour's office in utter silence, each feeling the imminence of a catastrophe. The young physician admitted them into the outer room, and then closed the door.

With great abruptness, he then asked this question:

"Will some one be kind enough to explain the object of this visitation?"

Holloway was on the point of speaking, but Agnes stepped before him, and, looking Armour firmly in the face, said:

"I believe that the person who committed this crime is concealed in your consultation-room. If I am wrong, heaven will punish me as I deserve. So far as I am able to discover, no reason exists why I should pretend to deny the knowledge which I have. The murderer is a woman, and you are concealing and shielding her in that room."

Armour, though pale as death, did not flinch before this accusation. On the contrary, his chest expanded, his eyes flashed, and, with head thrown back, he said: "It was a woman who did the shooting, as I now believe, and it is true that she at this moment is kept in concealment by me in my inner office. I had hoped to be able to conceal her act from the world, for if ever there was an occasion for the exercise of the noblest human traits, it is in the case before us. Let me tell you something you who mistake suspicion for skill in unearthing crime, and you who are moved by even less worthy motives crime can not exist in the absence of accountability. Has it occurred to you to imagine that this woman may not have been responsible for her act? Do you know what an epileptic fit is? Surely you do, Dr. Osborne. You are familiar with the strange forms which this disease may take. You know that the sweetest natures are at times wholly perverted by it; that its manifestations are complex and obscure; that sometimes, instead of the violent spasms with which we are all familiar the malady takes the form of mental and physical activity, in which we find an impulse to commit extraordinary acts as the result of monstrous misconceptions. When this condition occurs, all the principles of the victim's nature may be wholly eclipsed, conscience entirely suppressed, and the power to discriminate between right and wrong completely lost. After the attack has passed, there remains no recollection of what was done during its continuance.

"I inform you and I am able to prove my assertion that the woman who shot my dearest friend is now in my inner office; that she came to me from a distant city only yesterday to be treated for this very malady; that very soon after her arrival, I informed her, as was my duty and pleasure, that I was engaged to marry a very charming and kind-hearted young lady. It is a breach of delicate confidence on my part to inform you that, in spite of a brave effort to appear glad for my good fortune, she could not conceal a certain unhappiness which I know was perfectly natural, but it is my duty now to tell you everything. I now know that the sorrow which my news caused her brought on an attack of what is known as masked epilepsy, to which she is subject. The thing uppermost in her mind was that some one was dearer to me than she was; although normally a woman of unexampled sweetness and goodness, she determined, in her condition of temporary insanity, to kill that person. I need not inform you that she most have started out with the clear purpose of killing the young lady to whom I was affianced. But she knew, also, that young Blanchard was my dearest friend, and, in her wild mental condition, she happened to find him fast, and she fired into his brain the bullet that was intended for another."

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The young man paused awhile, but he did not cast a glance at Agnes, who, feeling unaccountably faint as these strange revelations were made, had sunk helpless upon a chair "Ms. Holloway," resumed Armour, "I ask your promise that you will not arrest this woman now, but that you take proper steps to verify my assertions; and as she has recovered from her attack, and has no recollection whatever of the tragedy, you say nothing to her about it now, and that you never mention it to a soul if you find that what I have told you is true.

"I cheerfully give those two promises," said Holloway.

"Then," said Armour, "I will present the lady to you."

With that he went to the door of the inner room, unlocked it, and stepped within. In the next moment he returned, supporting on his arm a pale, sweet-faced, beautiful woman of fifty, in whose sad and gentle face was no trace of the fearful thing she had done. Armour, with his head thrown back and glowing with all the pride of a gentleman, thus presented her:

"Miss Osborne and gentlemen, I have the honor to make you acquainted with my mother."