

THE MYSTERY OF THE INN BY THE SHORE



Florence Warden, Author of "The Mouse on the Marsh," etc.

CHAPTER II.

Sometimes the shadowy something disappeared altogether for a few seconds, to reappear stealthily creeping round the walls of the little room.

The sleep-walking notion had brought him some comfort, and he felt quite hopeful about clearing up the mystery, when a faint noise outside his door made him start up and listen.

He remained motionless, imitating the breathing of sleep. He felt that a hand was upon the hood, creeping softly toward his face.

When once the stealthy fingers had touched these articles, however, they were snatched away with such rapidity that Clifford had to spring up and fling out his arm to catch the thiefly hand.

As his fingers closed upon those of the thief, however, he was struck with a sudden and awful chill on finding that the skin was smooth as satin, that the snubbing fingers were slender and soft, the hand small and delicate—a hand that he knew.

Who are you? Who are you? he cried hoarsely.

But he got no answer, but the fingers of his own hand, his attention was so great that the little hand wringed out of his, still bearing his watch and his purse, and in another moment the door had opened and closed and he was alone.

CHAPTER III.

Clifford King sat up in bed when the door had closed with a flicker of dim light and a rush of cool air, shaking from head to foot with excitement and horror which made him cold and sick.

Was she a thief, then, a woman? This blue-eyed, pink-checked girl who had introduced him the evening before? This Nell of the soft words and the bright hair, in whose pretty talk he had listened with delight, whom he had been ready to worship for her gentleness, her affectionate kindness for her much older brother? No, it was impossible.

He would walk presently to find that the experiences of the last few minutes had been a nightmare only.

With a wish to this effect so strong that it was almost a belief, he closed his hand under his pillow and felt about for his watch and his purse. But they were gone, without the possibility of a doubt.

He sprang out of bed, opened his way to the window and drew back the heavy curtains. The dawn was breaking, and a pale, golden light was on the sea. The rain of the night before had made the air cool and fresh, and Clifford's brain was as clear as it could be as he threw open the window and had to confess that the visit of the woman with the soft hand had been a terrible reality.

He observed by the dimming light that it was nearly four o'clock. He examined his clothes, aware that they had been disarranged, and then he went to the door, turned the handle softly, and looked out.

The landing was small and narrow, and two doors opened on it besides that of Clifford's room. A steep and very narrow wooden staircase led up to the top of the house, and looking up, Clifford could just discern that at the top there was one door on either side.

He went back into his room, dressed himself, and sat by the open window in a state of great agitation. Far from yielding at once to the apparently inextinguishable condition, Clifford fought against it with all his might, quickly as his passion for the girl had sprung up, it was strong enough to make him ready to overcome any hypothesis, however improbable, rather than assent to the evidence of his own senses, which that evidence was against her.

He was ready to believe that there was in the house another woman with a hand as small as soft as smooth satin, and as the one he had held in his hand when he had Nell's coat.

And then the desperate improbability of this supposition struck him with the force of a light. He remembered the sad, sweet, polished country wench who had been helping the landlord in the inn, and he was forced to admit that the hand which had taken his watch and purse was not hers.

But he could not get his mind away from the thought of a woman with a hand as small as soft as smooth satin, and as the one he had held in his hand when he had Nell's coat.

Long before breakfast time the occurrence of the night had become a half-forgotten nightmare, and Clifford was enjoying Nell's unaffected, lively chatter as much as on the previous day. Only when his hand retained her, as she took the basket of eggs from him, did Clifford remember, with a shudder, that it was the same touch which he had felt in the night, the same smooth soft skin, the same slender little fingers.

It was a disagreeable business, that of having known his loss to George Charles. But it had to be done, and as soon as he had had his breakfast Clifford followed the landlord to the front of the house, where he was talking down the stairs, and told him he had something unpleasant to relate to him.

The young man at once perceived, by a sudden change to sullen expectancy in the landlord's manner, that he was not wholly unprepared for the sort of story to which he was listening. He heard with attention the whole story, and only looked up when Clifford described how he had actually touched the hand as it was withdrawn from under his pillow.

Who touched it, you say? said George Charles, sharply. Then why on earth didn't you hold on and about?

WOMAN'S BENEFIT

Various Schemes of Embroidery Noted on Warm Weather Finery.

Judging by the examples shown at an imposing opening of summer robes these fascinating affairs are to be more desirable than ever.

"Well," grumbled Clara, with apparent suspicion on his side, "it seems to me a strange thing that a man should feel a thing like that without calling out! It's the first time a man would do as wasn't quite a born fool, to jump up and make for the fellow."

"Ah!" exclaimed Clifford, sharply. George Charles looked at him with a deepening frown. "What do you mean, sir?"

"I'm not sure that I'm very far from sure—that the intruder was a man."

"Who do you think it was, then? Who do you think it was that took your watch and your money? Speak out, sir, speak out, if you dare!"

The blood rose in Clifford's face. The man's ugly, defiant tone seemed to show that he had either some knowledge or some fear of the truth. But again there rushed over the young man an overwhelming sense of shame, which prevented him from being more explicit.

"I have spoken out," he said, simply. "I have spoken out," he said, simply.

For a few minutes the men stood silent, each afraid to say too much. Then Charles, as softly as he could, followed him into the inn.

"Come on," he said, "come on," he said. "I'm not sure that I'm very far from sure—that the intruder was a man."

Clifford followed him in silence into the little bar, allowing Charles to point out to him that the window was still barred, and had evidently not been tampered with. And so in turn they examined together the windows and the doors of the whole inn, and Clifford saw that, unless Charles himself had been in collusion with the thief, no one could have got in from the outside during the night.

But then Clifford himself had not suspected a thief from the outside.

As for the persons who had slept in the house that night, George Charles said they were five in number. Himself, his niece, Clifford, the servant who Clifford had seen in the bar, and old Nannie, a woman between a sixty and seventy years of age, who slept in a small room, which was scarcely more than a cupboard, on the ground floor, because she was too infirm to go upstairs.

Clifford made the excuse of wishing to converse a little with the old woman, that he might have an opportunity of examining her hands. They were wrinkled and hard, reddened coarse by old work, and enlarged at the joints by rheumatism. Without a doubt it was not the hand of old Nannie which had taken his watch and purse.

When he left the kitchen, where he and the landlord had thus conversed, he was a staff of the establishment, Clifford followed Charles again into the road in front of the inn.

"Now," said Charles, "don't you've seen every blessed creature as was in the house last night, which of them was it as you think took your things?"

"I have an idea," he said, "and I want you to listen to it, since it is a correct idea. It takes away all suspicion of anyone having acted dishonestly. In there is your house—no woman who works in her sleep?"

"Not into folks' bedrooms to steal their money, anyhow," answered Charles, "silly. And I've never heard of a sort of sleep-walker by either of these here."

"Father of the servants, you mean?" said Clifford with a slight emphasis.

"Yes, of course. Why, man alive! You wouldn't sure dare to say so. My niece, my lovely Nell, was a thief to take your dirty money!"

Clifford, with sudden fury, all the more fierce that, as Clifford could see, he had heard whispers of the same sort before. "Here, Nell, Nell! Where are you?"

"And not hearing Clifford's noisy protest, Charles rushed into the house, and thence into the arms of his niece, who, apparently unsuspecting, came running obediently from the garden at the sound of her own name.

"What is it, uncle?" she said, with a smile, and her pink and white face, glowing with the wholesome heat of the fresh morning air, smiled at the hot and agitated faces of the two men.

"This man, this gentleman says you're a thief, my girl! Say you what you like, but you'll have to take your watch and your money, and you'll have to take your dirty money, and you'll have to take your dirty money, and you'll have to take your dirty money."

"I don't know anything about it," she said, with a smile, and her pink and white face, glowing with the wholesome heat of the fresh morning air, smiled at the hot and agitated faces of the two men.

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SOUTHERN FARM NOTES

TOPICS OF INTEREST TO THE PLANTER, STOCKMAN AND TRUCK GROWER.

The Seal of the Irish Potato.

The potato is the staple crop of the South, and its success depends upon the soil, the weather, and the care of the grower. The seal of the potato is the key to its success.

Home Made Egg Tester.

There is no more reliable test of an egg than the one made at home. It is a simple matter to make one, and it is a great help to the grower.

Soil Analysis Not Reliable.

A soil may have an abundance of phosphoric acid, as shown by analysis in the laboratory, while the application of phosphates in an available form will greatly increase the crop.

Handy Sawbuck.

The sawing table and poles have been used for many years, but they are not as handy as the sawbuck. It is a simple matter to make one, and it is a great help to the grower.

Teach Your Daughter to Work.

Any American girl is, possibly, and probably, going to have to look after her own resources some day. It is a simple matter to teach her to work, and it is a great help to the grower.

The Bath Proper.

It is a simple matter to give a bath, but it is not as simple as it seems. It is a simple matter to give a bath, but it is not as simple as it seems.

White Cloth Washers.

White cloth washers are a great help to the grower. They are simple and easy to use, and they are a great help to the grower.

Soiling Sweet Potatoes.

The Arkansas Experiment Station reports on soiling sweet potatoes. It is a simple matter to soil sweet potatoes, and it is a great help to the grower.

How Deep to Cover Dates.

It is a simple matter to cover dates, and it is a great help to the grower. It is a simple matter to cover dates, and it is a great help to the grower.

Thor Mention.

The Boston Post says that some of the Thor Mention is a great help to the grower. It is a simple matter to Thor Mention, and it is a great help to the grower.

News of the Day.

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