



In the Club Window.

Scandal

By
VICTOR ROSSEAU

Novelized from the
Broadway Universal
Feature in Five Reels.
Written by Lois Weber
and produced at Universal
City by the Smalleys

(Copyright by Western Newspaper Union)

CHAPTER I.

Old Cadman Green knew everybody in town. Those whom he did not know were not, in his opinion, worth knowing; and his friends agreed with him before his face. Behind his back they voted him an amusing old bore. But it was the thing to think as Cadman Green thought, for he had the tradition of distinction, acquired through bluff and brass, perhaps, but held tenaciously and acknowledged.

Green was maintaining his reputation in the same way as that in which he had acquired it.

"You see that woman in the carriage?" he inquired. "Second Mrs. Perceval. Artist's model before Perceval married her, and had a little scandal all her own in the home town. Well, she's—hello!"

This time Cadman Green contended himself with a whistle, and, as he whistled, most of his friends whistled too.

"William Wright with his pretty stenographer!" said the old man. The person in question, seated in his automobile beside a decidedly pretty young woman, passed under the club windows, and the car, after speeding a short way farther, turned off in the direction of a respectable but modest suburb.

"What do you think of that?" demanded Green. "Wright and a lady friend, and seeing her home through the town in broad daylight! And I live underneath him!"

He burst into a chuckle and slapped his fat leg, while the others exchanged smiles and nods.

"Their servant told our girl that Mrs. Wright is infernally jealous of her husband," continued Green. "I wonder—I wonder what she would say if she could see that?"

He glanced about him. He had kept up his reputation among his peers. Now the news must be spread. It was too good to retain. Green did not wish Wright any harm, but he felt that the joke was on him, and he wanted Mrs. Green to agree with him.

By the time he reached the apartment house he was bursting with the news. Dinner was ready, and he held it only through the soup, indulging in the joys of anticipation until he could bear them no longer.

"I saw an interesting sight today," he said, with an affectation of casualness.

"What was that, Cadman?" inquired his wife.

"Only our friend upstairs, Willie Wright, speeding through the town in his new auto, with his pretty stenographer. Right under our club windows, Lizzie, and then out toward Dotsboro. You don't happen to know if the woman lives in Dotsboro, do you?"

"For goodness sake, Cadman, how should I know? Do you suppose I have time to inquire the residence of Mr. Wright's stenographer?"

"Well, I guess it's Dotsboro all right," said Cadman Green.

The maid, who was waiting for him to take his arms off the table before setting down the roast, listened with an air of judicial impassivity. The Greens knew that their girl was a model of discretion, and did not hesitate to discuss anything in front of her. And, until the meal was ended, Margaret maintained her own reputation.

Then she called up the dumbwaiter: "Mae! Is that you, Mae?" "Hello, Margaret! Say, I'm mighty tired tonight. They're only just getting ready to sit down to dinner. Mr. Wright was late, as usual. I'm about tired of this job. I think I'll move next month."

"I guess I could tell somebody where Wright spent the afternoon, if I cared to. Say, listen, Mae!"

"I can't, Margaret. She's calling me."

"Just a minute. Listen! Wright was joy-riding through the town with his stenographer in his auto, as loving as you please, with half the town watching him. Took her home afterward. Mr. Green was just telling the old woman about it."

"You don't say! Say, this is no place for a respectable girl. I'm going to move on, for sure. Oh, goodness! There she is calling again!"

Mrs. Wright had called peremptorily to hide the shock of the news. She had stood with her hand upon the jamb of the door during the entire conversation. She had seen Daisy Dean, her husband's stenographer, two or three times, and she had noticed with disapproval the little affectation of the girl always to have a bunch of daisies upon her desk. Once or twice her husband had come home wearing one of the flowers in his buttonhole. He had come home with one that night.

Wright, who loved his wife sincerely, had not failed to note the little sign of jealousy against the girl who was his business confidant. On that account he had said nothing about the reason for his automobile drive with her that day. Perhaps he would have been wiser had he done so. But the meal passed almost in silence, and he attributed his wife's moroseness to her plea of a nervous headache.

CHAPTER II.

"As I live, Daisy Dean getting out of a car at her door with a man!" "Look how he's helping her! Who is he? What will Austin Clark say when he hears?"

"Robert, this thing has got to be stopped right away!"

Miss Susan Minturn looked at her younger brother with all her habitual determination. The prim old maid disliked Daisy intensely. First, because she was stylishly dressed; second, because she was pretty; thirdly, because she knew of her brother's hopeless passion for her.

"I can't stop it," muttered Robert, surlily.

"You can, too. I'm going to make it my business to see that Austin Clark hears about it. What right has an engaged girl to go joy-riding with a middle-aged man? He's married, too, as like as not. Those married ones are usually the worst ever!"

Daisy, having been assisted to her house, entered and watched her employer from the window as he drove away. Her foot still pained her a good deal. It had been wrenched in the door of the elevator as she was leaving the office and Mr. Wright had considerably driven her home.

He had told her not to come to the office for several days. In fact, he planned to employ a public stenographer. But when he began his dictation the next morning he suddenly realized that he could not risk the possibility of publicity in his correspondence at such a critical hour. In the end he dismissed the girl and called up Daisy.

"How is your foot this morning, Miss Dean?" he asked.

"I think it's a little better, Mr. Wright. The doctor won't let me come to the office this week, though." "Of course not," answered Wright quickly. "But, Miss Dean, if I were to call for you in my car and take you home, don't you think you could help me out with a few letters? You know I simply can't let anybody else know about that matter."

"Why, certainly, Mr. Wright. I am sure I can come, if you really need me."

"I'll be round in ten minutes," answered Wright, and telephoned for the chauffeur.

Half an hour later Wright was congratulating himself upon his move. He could not possibly have confided to the public stenographer that he was heavily tied up. His wife's father, a cautious man of business, had gone through his books and promised him a substantial loan. This necessitated a good deal of correspondence, and only Daisy could help him. Before she left that evening it had been arranged that he should call for her every morning during the ensuing week and take her home at night.

He helped her from the elevator into the street, where his car stood waiting, and drove her to Dotsboro. Cadman Green, posted at his club window, looked down upon the sight. "The poor chap's losing his head," he muttered. "Woman, too, I guess. If I was one of Wright's clients who come to him to invest their money for them, I'd draw it all out before the inevitable—yes, sir, the inevitable elopement."

From her window Miss Susan Minturn watched Daisy drive up with her employer.

"It's a disgrace to the neighborhood, Robert," she said to her brother angrily. "And it's going to be stopped." "I can't stop it," Robert muttered. "I know you can't," said his sister, mimicking him. "But I've done it. I wrote an unsigned letter to Austin Clark yesterday."

Daisy had hardly got home that evening when Austin Clark appeared before her, hot, indignant and declamatory.

"I want to know who the fellow is!" he thundered, after he had launched forth in bitter accusation against her. "See here, Daisy," he continued, a little more mildly as he realized that he had aroused her spirit, "this thing isn't right. You and I are engaged, and you are seen driving out every morning with this fellow, and he comes home with you at night. I know who he is, too. I can put things together. He's Wright."

He looked at her triumphantly, as if he had made a wonderful discovery.

"If you had asked me in the beginning I should have told you that it was Mr. Wright," said Daisy quietly.

"But that makes it worse," snarled Austin. "See here, what business have you to let your boss drive you around town and make a talk of you in this way? It reflects on me, too. You ought to have seen the letter I got this morning."

"From whom?"

"I don't know from whom. It isn't signed. People don't sign that sort of letter."

"And you dare—you dare to make such accusations against me on the strength of an anonymous letter, Austin?"

She would not dream now of telling him the simple explanation. The thought that he should have listened to invidious gossip instead of trying to protect her was maddening. She drew his ring off her finger.

"I think we made a mistake, Austin," she said.

He swung upon his heel. "I think so, too," he answered with bitter emphasis, and slammed the door behind him.

Daisy, with compressed lips, sat brooding over his treatment of her. She was stunned by the malignity that seemed suddenly to envelop her. But she would fight it down. Her anxiety over her employer's affairs, her desire to be loyal to him forbade any other course. And never should he know what she had suffered because of him.

She let him drive her to and from the office for days, even after she was able to walk. That was youth's unwise reply to envy. And daily Cadman Green, seated at the club window, watched and waited for the elopement. Gradually, too, the news permeated the gossip little town. Wright alone remained serenely in ignorance of what was being said. All he knew was that his wife's headaches were more frequent than usual, and his business worries overshadowed that fact.

In two or three days her father had promised to place a substantial amount to his credit. That would enable him to meet his obligations. Daisy knew it and rejoiced with him. Miss Susan, watching like a cat for her return each night, had to admit that the girl did not look like the victim of a designing scoundrel.

"Maybe I wronged her in my thoughts, Robert," she said. "But there's evil in her—and you'll remember it."

"I'm sorry you think that, Susan," answered Robert, "because, now that she has broken with Clark, I mean to ask her again to be my wife."

"Heaven help you if ever you marry her," Miss Susan answered.

It was strange, but not even the lynx-eyed watcher at the window detected the frequency with which a certain woman was to be seen passing and repassing along the street, morning and evening. For five days Mrs. Wright haunted the neighborhood, mad with jealousy, and each time she saw her husband driving Miss Dean

to her home she hurried back, biting her lips and sobbing, to fling herself upon her bed and indulge in the bitterness of her self-immolation.

She felt the universal suspicion, she felt that she was an object of scorn and pity. On the last evening of these automobile rides, when Daisy had at length recovered, Wright returned to his home thankful that matters at the office would thenceforward assume their old routine. The following day his wife's father would deposit the sum to his credit, and all would be plain sailing.

He came home to find the flat empty and his wife's belongings gone.

CHAPTER III.

Miss Susan Minturn smacked her thin lips as she read the item in the evening newspaper.

"Wife of Broker Leaves Him on Eve of Bankruptcy," she read. "Mrs. William Wright returns to her father's house. She will apply for divorce from her husband, naming his stenographer, Daisy Dean, as co-respondent."

She folded the paper and laid it down. "That's one for Robert," she said. "And I, unsuspecting that I am, never even suspected that anything was really wrong."

She swung round as the door opened. Her brother Robert stood on the threshold, livid and trembling. In his hand he held a copy of the same newspaper.

"Do you know what this infamous sheet is printing?" he demanded.

Miss Susan laid her hand on his shoulder. "Yes, Robert, my poor boy," she answered. "I am so sorry. We never suspected, even though we used our eyes, how bad it really was. It is a scandal to the whole neighborhood. She must be forced to leave Dotsboro—"

Robert glared at his sister. "She will come to this house to be my wife!" he shouted, slamming down his fist on the table. "Susan, do you suppose I believe those infamous stories? Do you think I am going to abandon her in her trouble?"

"Robert, you are mad! To bring that girl to our house—"

"If she'll have me," said Robert, humbly.

"Oh, she'll have you fast enough!" his sister sneered. "Only if you bring her here I walk out. Thank heaven I am a respectable woman. There is a limit, and I draw it here, Robert. Why, do you want people to say that you married a girl Austin Clark wouldn't look at after he found her out?"

Her brother, unable to trust himself to answer her, stamped out of the room.

In her own home Daisy Dean sat in a chair and stared, dry-eyed, at the newspaper.

She had found her employer's office closed that morning when she arrived, and the office boy waiting outside. Mr. Wright was habitually so punctual that Daisy had telephoned to his apartment. She learned that it was closed. Mr. Wright had come home the evening before and gone out again. That was all that was known. Mrs. Wright was away on a visit.

Again that morning Daisy went down to the office, to find the door still locked. The office boy had grinned sheepishly at her this time. He told her everything except the one salient fact, and that he would not have blurted out for all the raises that his imagination had ever devised.

"The boss has had a row with Mrs. Wright, Miss Dean," he said. "She's left him, and he's gone after her to bring her back. No, I don't know what trouble's about. The colored man's kid in the apartment house told me about it."

What had happened was this: Mr. Wright had gone, rather frantically, to his father-in-law's house, thinking that his wife might be there. Even then he did not surmise the nature of the trouble. Yes, she was there, but she refused to see him. Instead, the old man had come downstairs, and a stormy interview followed.

Mrs. Wright's father was a matter-of-fact man. He did not feel so much the moral obliquity of his son-in-law's behavior as the scandal that he had brought about. He had heard the rumors that were flying over the town and had disbelieved them; but his daughter's hysterical return the same afternoon had convinced him as to their truth. He wasn't going to finance a son-in-law who made such a fool of himself, especially since his daughter announced that she would never return to him.

"You've played the fool, William, and you'll have to get out of your trouble as best you can," he said. "If my daughter goes back to you again I'll see if I'm willing to help you. As matters stand, she says she won't, and that's enough for me."

"But I've made all my arrangements in view of that loan," cried Wright. "Don't you see, sir, that my wife's hysterical and wrought up about nothing, so far as I can see? Why the whole charge is preposterous."

"I don't care what it is," shouted the old man. "I've done with you, and I've better uses for my money than to lend it to a fool like you."

And suddenly Wright's anger cooled. The utter malignancy of the whole thing, which had come home to Daisy, struck home to him also. He looked at the old man in a dazed way.

"You'll be sorry," he said. "But it'll be too late tomorrow."

And he walked slowly out of the house and back to his apartment.

At a late hour the following afternoon he pulled himself together and went down to his office. Seated alone there, he went through the hopeless

task of going over his affairs once more.

An hour later he gathered his papers together and thrust them away. He opened a private drawer and pulled out a revolver. Quietly he inserted a cartridge in one chamber and raised the weapon to his forehead.

Daisy Dean looked up to see Robert standing in the doorway. He hesitated, and came forward impetuously. He knelt beside her and took her hands in his.

The girl, overcome by the first token of sympathy she had received, burst into unrestrained sobbing. Robert drew her head down on his shoulder.

"It is not true, Daisy," he cried. "Dear, you know how long I have loved you. Be my wife and let us give the lie to the world."

Before he left Daisy had promised to become his wife.

As Robert was leaving her, elated with happiness, Wright was raising the revolver to his forehead.

And he, too, suddenly became aware that someone was standing in the doorway. It was his mother. She had seen the newspapers, had hurried to his apartment, and then, instinctively guessing where he had gone, had hastened to the office.

She saw him seated at the desk and knew that a minute later would have been too late. She ran to him with a cry. The weapon dropped from his hand and rolled under the desk.

"Will, my dear boy!" she sobbed. "Come home with me now. You must not think of that. Remember that you are my boy through everything—and who has ever cared for you as much as I?"

He rose from his desk and put his arms about her.

"You are right, mother," he said; and they went out of the office together.

CHAPTER IV.

"Daisy, dear, I wronged you." "But that is all forgotten now, Susan."

Miss Susan had come to stay with her sister-in-law at the seaside resort during her brother's absence on business. Robert's marriage had been ideally happy, and the lonely old maid had welcomed the opportunity to be reconciled to her sister-in-law and meet her little nephew.

Nothing had been heard of either Mr. Wright or Austin since Daisy's marriage. Only the girl knew her former lover's regret, and the wild, incoherent letter that Austin had written her on the day before her wedding. Daisy had put the letter and Austin's photograph away. She had meant to destroy them; but in her new happiness she would not even reopen her bitter memories by recalling their existence.

Strolling along the sea front, the two women, completely reconciled, laughed and chatted with never a thought of the past. Suddenly Daisy gave a little gasp. Approaching them came Austin and a girl. To turn back was impossible. Susan saw the look on Daisy's face, and her heart suddenly hardened.

But Austin, taking off his hat, shook hands cordially with both and introduced his fiancée. They, too, were spending their vacation at Seabury. Before they parted Austin had suggested that many pleasant hours might be spent together. There was nothing in his manner to indicate that he remembered that foolish and impetuous letter.

Daisy, alone in her room, opened her trunk and took out the letter and photograph. How weak she had been, when their discovery might have prejudiced her own and Robert's happiness! She struck a match and lit them, watching till the flames had eaten almost across both of them. She flung the debris into her wastebasket and went down. She knew that the past had been obliterated by that act as fully as in Austin's own mind.

Days passed. Robert's return was expected on the Friday. On Thursday evening Austin, who, with his sweetheart, had been a frequent visitor, suggested a motor party.

"You must go, Daisy, dear," said Susan.

"But you'll come, too?"

"No, I have a headache. I think I shall go to bed."

"Then I shall stay and take care of you."

"No, Daisy, dear. Robert would never forgive me if I let you wait on me. Go and enjoy yourself with the party."

Daisy at last yielded. Carrying the little boy in her arms she stepped into the car. The merry voices died away in the distance. Susan returned to her room and sat down with compressed lips and frowning brows.

"I gave her her chance," she said, in self-condemnation. "Now let Robert know her for what she is tomorrow."

And she began pacing the room, while the hours passed. It was eleven, it was twelve; the party had not returned. At one o'clock a step sounded outside. Susan opened the door, to confront Robert, wild-eyed and haggard.

"Where is she?" he cried fiercely.

"Gone motoring with Austin," answered Susan. "Well, Robert, perhaps you believe my warning now."

"It was his writing," groaned Robert, sinking down into a chair. From his pocket he extracted his sister's letter. Inside the folded sheet was the scrap of burned paper that Susan had taken from the wastebasket, containing the words:

"I have never ceased to love you, Austin."

Robert sat in the chair in silence.

It was two now—it was three in the morning. It began to grow light. It was daylight when the sound of the automobile was heard. It stopped before the house and Austin conducted Daisy up to the door.

Robert stood on the threshold, facing them.

Daisy sprang toward him, and recoiled from the look on his face.

"You did not expect me till tomorrow," he said grimly.

"Robert, dear, there was an accident—"

"Where are the rest?"

"We saw them home by eleven and were on the way back when the accident—"

"I'll talk to you, Clark," said Robert. "What have you to say, you thief, you—"

"Listen, Robert; you are mistaken. The car broke down, and—"

"You lie! You planned this, thinking I would not be home. I have your letter to my wife, you cur!"

"Whatever you have to say can be said when we are alone, not in front of your wife."

Daisy stared, horror-stricken, at the pair. Had Robert no reason left. She ran to him again, she tried to speak. She clasped her arms about him. He flung her, staggering, away.

"I'm ready to meet you when and where you will, but I will not help you to humiliate your wife," cried Austin. "Meanwhile I'll take the car back to the garage."

"I'll be ready for you when you return," cried Robert wildly.

Daisy saw Austin driving away. She shrank from her husband in increasing fear, clutching the crying child. Would he never believe? He was pacing the porch like a madman, oblivious of her presence. She tried to enter the house. The door had been locked by Susan, ensconced grimly behind the curtains, her thin lips, drooping at the corners, set in a sardonic smile.

Presently the sound of footsteps was heard. It was Austin returning. At the sight of him Robert seemed to stiffen into a statue.

Austin came toward them. "See here," he began more easily, "if you'll only let me explain. It was an—"

With an inarticulate cry Robert pulled a revolver from his pocket and fired. Austin staggered and dropped. The ball had pierced his heart.

For an instant Daisy stared speechlessly at the murderer; the next she snatched up the child and ran wildly along the road into the marshes.

She ran, gasping and sobbing, till she had left the village far behind her. And day came up, lurid and scorching, and the sun beat down on her. She ran till she could go no farther. The child, which had ceased to cry, had become a dead weight in her arms.

At last, looking about her, she saw only the marsh and forest, and, far in the distance, a little blur against the sea, Seabury.

And she realized that all this had been prepared for her, and that it was part of the same evil thing which had entered her life that afternoon when she wrenched her foot in the elevator. Nothing remained now—except death.

She sank down by the roadside. Vaguely she was aware that the leafy curtain of trees across the way concealed a little cottage. The presence of humanity impelled her once more to rise. She would go down to the sea and end their two lives there, far from all eyes. She rose.

A man was coming out of the cottage. He was approaching her. He stood before her and placed his hands on her shoulders. She looked into the face of William Wright.

At a glance he understood that the same Nemesis had followed her. There was no need for questioning. He had seen Austin pass in his motor car the day before, and he had read Daisy's and Robert's names among those of the newly arrived.

"Come with me. My mother is waiting to welcome you," he said.

He led her into the cottage.

CHAPTER V.

"See that funeral!" asked Cadman Green at the club window. "That's Minturn's mother, the murderer's, you know. He killed young Clark when he came home and found he and his wife had been out all night together. Acquit him? Sure, any jury would acquit him. Wouldn't you? But the old woman's heart was weak, and it killed her."

"Say, don't you remember that day we saw Wright joy-riding with his stenographer and I prophesied trouble? And didn't it follow? Wright a bankrupt fugitive, stenographer bad as ever, and, after ruining one man, causes her husband to shoot her lover? They tell me her own mother wired her not to go home. If her husband was through with her, she guessed the disgrace was enough for her, too."

"And, say, do you know what I heard. She's living with Wright outside the jurisdiction of the state. You see, they got together again, and mark my words, she'll cause his death too. A woman like that can't help going through life like wildfire. Slimmons! She was bad from birth, and it's a pity she ever lived through childhood. Decent enough family, too, I've heard. And to think I once lived in the same apartment house with the Wrights! By the way, I heard his wife's married again. Good riddance of him, I say."

"I tell you, boys, life's pretty swift, even in a small town, and there's more real fun in watching what's going on from this window than in going to a show. It almost tempts a man to gossiping—this sort of thing."