

LOST MAN'S LANE.

A SECOND EPISODE
IN THE LIFE OF AMELIA BUTTERWORTH
BY ANNA KATHARINE GREEN

CHAPTER VIII ON THE STAIRS.

I did not wake up till morning. The room was so dark that I do not know as I should have wakened then if my habits of exact punctuality had not been aided by a gentle knock at my door. "Who's there?" I called, for I could not say "Come in" till I had moved my bed and made way for the door to open. "Hannah with warm water," said a voice, at which I made haste to rise. Hannah was the woman who had waited on us at dinner.

The sight of her pleasant countenance, which nevertheless looked a trifle haggard I thought, was a welcome relief after the somber features of the night. Addressing her with my usual brusqueness, but with quite my usual kindness, I asked how the young ladies were feeling this morning.

Her answer made a great show of frankness. "Oh, they are much as usual," said she. "Miss Loren is in the kitchen and Miss Lucretia will soon be here to inquire how you are. I hope you passed a good night yourself, ma'am."

I had slept more than I ought to perhaps and made haste to reassure her as to my own condition. Then seeing that a little talk would not be unwelcome to this hearty woman, tired to death possibly with life in this dreary house, I made some excuse for keeping her a few minutes, saying as I did so:

"What an immense dwelling this is for four persons to live in, or have you another inmate which I have not seen?" I thought her buxom color showed a momentary sign of failing, but it all came back with her answer, which was given in a round, hearty voice.

"Oh, I'm the only maid, madam. I cook and sweep and all. I couldn't abide another near me. Even Mr. Simsbury, who tends the cow and horse and who only comes in for his dinner, worries me by spells. I like to have my own way in the kitchen, except when the young ladies choose to come in. Is there anything more you want, ma'am, and will you have tea or coffee for breakfast?"

I told her that I always drank coffee in the morning and would have liked to have added another question or two, but she gave me no chance. As she went out I saw her glance at my candlestick. There was only a half burned end in it. She is calculating, too, how long I sat up, thought I.

Lucretia stood at the head of the stairs as I went down. "Will you excuse me for a few moments?" said she. "I am not quite ready to follow you, but will be soon. I will take a look at the grounds."

I thought she hesitated for a moment; then her face lighted up. "Be sure you don't encounter the dog," she cried and slipped hastily down a side hall I had not noticed the night before.

"Ah, a good way to keep me in," thought I. "But I shall see the grounds yet if I have to poison that dog." Notwithstanding, I made no haste to leave the house. Some might think that Lucretia had got the better of me, but that is not a good reason for placing myself in uncalculated danger. I don't believe in tempting Providence, especially where a dog is concerned.

Instead of that I stood still and looked up and down the halls, endeavoring to get some idea of their plan and of the location of my own room in reference to the rest.

I found that the main hall ran at right angles to the long corridor down which I had just come, and noting that the doors opening into it were of a size and finish vastly superior to those I had passed in the corridor just mentioned. I judged that the best bedrooms all lay front and that I had been quartered at the end of what had once been considered as the servants' hall. At my right, as I looked down the stairs, ran a wall with a break beyond which was what looked like an opening into another corridor, and indeed I afterward learned that the long series of rooms of which mine was the last had its counterpart on the other side of this enormous dwelling, giving to the house the shape of a long, square U.

found on their poverty had been but subterfuges after all. Grieved on their account, but inwardly grateful for the independence of this more than reckless brother for this not to be mistaken glimpse into the truth, I slowly descended the stairs in that state of complete self-possession which is given by a secret knowledge of the intentions formed against us by those whose actions we have reason to suspect.

Henceforth I had but one duty—to penetrate the mystery of this household. Whether it was the one suspected by Mr. Gryce or another of a less evil and dangerous character hardly mattered in my eyes. While the blight of it rested upon this family eyes would be lowered and heads shaken at their name. This, if I could help it, must no longer be. If I could lay at the bottom of all this fear and subterfuge, then this guilt must be known; if innocence—I thought of the brother's lowering brow and felt it incompatible with innocence, but remembering Mr. Gryce's remarks on this subject read an instant lecture to myself and, putting all conclusions aside, devoted the few minutes in which I found myself alone in the dining room to a careful preparation of my mind for its duty, which was not likely to be of the simplest character if Lucretia's keen wits were to be pitted against mine.

CHAPTER IX. A VISITOR.

When my mind is set free from doubt and fully settled upon any course, I am capable of much good nature and seeming simplicity. I was therefore able to maintain my own at the breakfast table with some success, so that the meal passed off without any of the disagreeable experiences of the night before. Perhaps the fact that Loren presided at the coffee urn instead of Lucretia had something to do with this. Her calm, even looks seemed to put some restraint upon the boisterous outbursts to which William was only too liable, while her less excitable nature suffered less if by any chance he did break out and startle the decorous silence by one of his rude guffaws.

I am a slow eater, but I felt forced to hurry through that meal or be left eating alone at the end. This did not put me in the best of humor toward its close, for I hated to risk an indigestion just when my faculties needed to be unusually alert. I compromised by leaving the board hungry, but I did it with such a smile that I do not think Miss Knollys ever knew that I had not risen from any table so ill satisfied in years.

"I will leave you to my brother for a few minutes," said she, hastily tripping from the room. "I pray that you will not think of going to your room till we have had an opportunity of arranging it."

I instantly made up my mind I would go there, and that, too, before the arranging process was over. But I must see what I could make of William first. I thought that he was not a very promising subject as I turned back to him and followed his huge but ungainly figure toward the front of the house.

"I thought you might like to see the grounds," he growled, evidently not enjoying the role assigned him. "They are so attractive," he sneered. "Children hereabout call them the jungle."

"Who's to blame for that?" I asked, with only a partial humoring of his ill nature. "You have a sturdy pair of arms of your own, and a little trimming here and a little trimming there would have given quite a different appearance to this undergrowth. A gentleman usually takes pride in his place."

"Yes, when it's all his. This belongs to my sisters as much as to me. What's the use of my bothering myself about it?" The man was so selfish he did not even seem to realize the extent of the exhibition he made of it. Indeed he seemed to take pride in what he probably called his independence. I began to feel the most intense aversion for him, and only with the greatest difficulty could I prolong this conversation unmoved.

"I should think," said I, "that it would be a pleasure for you to give that much assistance to your sisters. They do not seem to be sparing in their attempts to please you."

He snapped his fingers, and I was afraid a dog or two would come leaping around the corner of the house. But it was only his way of expressing disdain. "Oh, the girls are well enough," he grumbled, "but they will stick to the place. Lucretia might have married a half dozen times, and one time I thought she was going to, but she turned straight around and sent him off, and that made me mad beyond everything. Why should she hang herself on to me like a bur when there are other folks willing to take on the burden?"

ward the house. As he spoke he looked up and made a rude sort of gesture toward the blank expanse of empty and frequently curtainless windows.

"I would like that great house all to myself, to make one, huge bachelor's hall of it. I would like to feel that I could tramp from one end of it to the other without awakening an echo I did not choose to hear there. I would not find it too big. I would not find it too lonesome. I and my dogs would know how to fill it, wouldn't we, Saraevn? Oh, I forgot; Saraevn is locked up."

The way he mumbled the last sentence showed displeasure, but I gave little heed to that. The gloating way in which he said he and his dogs would fill it had given me a sort of turn. I began to have something more than an aversion for the man. He inspired me with something like terror.

"Your wishes," said I with as little expression as possible, "seem to leave your sisters entirely out of your calculations. How would your mother regard that if she could see you from the place where she is gone?"

He turned upon me with a look of anger that made his features positively ugly.

"What do you mean by speaking of her to me. Have I spoken of her to you? Is there any reason why you should lug my mother into this conversation? If so, say so and be done."

He did not swear at me; he did not dare to, but he came precious near to it and that was enough to make me recoil.

"She was my friend," said I. "I knew and loved her before you were born. That was why I spoke of her, and I think it very natural myself."

He seemed to feel ashamed. He grumbled out some sort of apology and looked about quite helplessly, possibly for the dog he manifestly was in the habit of having forever at his heels. I took advantage of this look to smooth my own ruffled features.

"She was a beautiful girl," I remarked on the principle that the ice once broken, it is not best to hesitate about jumping in. "Was your father equally handsome for a man?"

"My father—yes, let's talk of father. He was judge of horses, he was. When he died, there were three mares in that stable not to be beat this side of Albany, but those devils of executors sold them, and I—well, you had a chance to test the speed of old Bess yesterday. You weren't afraid of being thrown out, I take it. Great Scott, to think of a man of my tastes owning no other horse than that!"

"You have not answered my question," I suggested, turning him about and moving toward the gate.

"Oh, about the way my father looked! What does that matter? He was handsome though. Folks say that I got whatever good looks I have from him. He was big—bigger than I am, and while he lived—what did you make a fellow talk for?"

I don't know why I did, but I was certainly astonished at the result. This great, huge lump of selfish clay had actually shone feeling and was ashamed of it, like the lout he was.

"Yesterday," said I, anxious to change the subject, "I had difficulty in getting in through that gate we are pointing for. Couldn't you lift it straight with just a little effort?"

He paused, looked at me to see if I were in earnest, then took a dogged step toward the gate. I was still indicating with my resolute right hand, but before he could touch it he saw something on that deserted and ominous highway which made him start in sudden surprise.

"Why, Trohm," he cried, "is that you? Well, it's an age since I have seen you turn that corner on a visit to us."

"Some time, certainly," answered a hearty and pleasant voice, and before I could quite drop the look of mingled severity with which I was endeavoring to shame this young man into some decent show of interest in this place and assume the more becoming aspect of a lady caught unawares at an early morning hour plucking flowers from a stunted syringa a gentleman stepped into sight on the other side of the fence with a look and a bow so genial and devoid of mystery that I experienced for the first time since entering the gloomy precincts of this town a complete sensation of pleasure.

"Miss Butterworth," explained Mr. Knollys with a somewhat forced gesture in my direction. "A guest of my sister's," he went on and looked as if he hoped I would retire, though he made no motion to welcome Mr. Trohm in, but rather leaned a little conspicuously on the gate as if anxious to show that he had no idea that the other's intention went any further than the passing of a few neighborly comments at the gate.

I like to please the young even when they are no more agreeable than this host of mine, and if the gentleman who had just shown himself had been equally immature I would certainly have left them to have their talk out undisturbed, but he was not. He was older; he was even of sufficient years for the judgment to have been thoroughly matured and his every faculty developed. I therefore could not see why my society would be considered an intrusion by him, so I waited and was the recipient of his next sentence.

"I am happy," said he, "to have the pleasure of a personal introduction to Miss Butterworth. I did not expect it. The surprise is all the more agreeable. I only anticipated being allowed to leave this package and letter with the maid. They are addressed to you, ma'am, and were left at my house by mistake."

I could not hide my astonishment. "I live in the next house below," said he. "The boy who brought these from the postoffice—you see they are registered mail matter, madam—was a stupid lad, and I could not induce him to come any farther up the road. I hope you will excuse the present messenger and believe there has been no delay."

suspected, from Mr. Gryce. Somehow this fact created in me an unmistakable embarrassment. I put both letter and package in my pocket and endeavored to meet the gentleman's eye with my accustomed ease in the presence of strangers. But, strange to say, I had no sooner done so than I saw that he was no more at his ease than myself. He smiled, glanced at William, made an offhand remark or so about the weather, but he could not deceive eyes sharpened by such experience as mine. Something disturbed him, something connected with me. It made my cheek a little hot to acknowledge this even to myself, but it was so very evident in his whole look and manner that I began to cast about for the means of ridding ourselves of William when that blundering youth suddenly spoke:

"I suppose he was afraid to come up the lane. Do you know, I think you're brave to attempt it, Trohm. We haven't a very good name up here." And with a sudden, perfectly unannounced burst he broke out into one of his huge guffaws that so shook the old gate on which he was leaning that I thought it would tumble down with him before our eyes.

I saw Mr. Trohm start and cast a look in which I seemed to see both surprise and horror before he turned to me and with an air of polite deprecation anxiously said:

"I am afraid Miss Butterworth will not understand our allusions, Mr. Knollys. I hear this in her first visit in town."

As his manner showed even more feeling than the occasion seemed to warrant I made haste to answer that I was well acquainted with the tradition of the lane; that its name alone showed what had happened here.

His bearing showed an instant relief. "I am glad," said he, "to find you so well informed. I was afraid"—here he cast another very strange glance at William—"that your young friends here might have shrunk, from some sense of delicacy, from telling you what might frighten most guests from a lonely road like this. I compliment you upon their thoughtfulness."

William bowed as if the words of the other contained no other suggestion than that which was openly apparent. Was he so dull, or was he— I had not time to finish my conjectures, even in my own mind, for at this moment a quick eye rose behind us, and Lucretia's light figure appeared running toward us with every indication of excitement.

"Ah," murmured Mr. Trohm, with an appearance of great respect, "your sister, Mr. Knollys, I had better be making on. Good morning, Miss Butterworth. I am sorry that circumstances seem to make it impossible for me to offer you those civilities which you might reasonably expect from so near a neighbor. Miss Lucretia and I are at swords' points over a matter upon which I still insist she is to blame. See how shocked she is to see me even standing at her gate."

Shocked! I should rather have said terrified. Nothing but fear—her old fear aggravated to a point that made all attempt at concealment impossible—could account for her white, drawn features and trembling form. She looked as if her whole thought was, "Have I come in time?"

"What—what has procured us the honor of this visit?" she asked, moving up beside William as if she would add her slight frame to his bulky one to keep this intruder out.

"Nothing that need alarm you," said the other with a slight tone of intention in his kind and mellow voice. "I was rather unexpectedly intrusted this morning with a letter for your agreeable guest here, and I have merely come to deliver it."

Her look of astonishment passing from him to me, I thrust my hand into my pocket and drew the letter out which I had just received.

"From home," said I without properly considering that this was in some measure an untruth.

"Oh!" she murmured as if but half convinced. "William could have gone for it," she added, still eyeing Mr. Trohm with a pitiful anxiety.

"I was only too happy," said the other with a low and reassuring bow. Then, as if he saw that her distress would only be relieved by his departure, he raised his hat and stepped back into the open highway. "I will not intrude again, Miss Knollys," were his parting words. "If you want anything of Obadiah Trohm, you know where to find him. His doors will always be open to you."

Lucretia, with a start, laid her hand on her brother's arm as if to restrain the words she saw slowly laboring to his lips, and leaning breathlessly forward watched the fine figure of this perfect country gentleman till it had withdrawn quite out of sight. Then she turned, and with a quick abandonment of all self control, cried out with a pitiful gesture toward her brother, "I thought all was over; I feared he meant to come into the house," and fell stark and seemingly lifeless at our feet.

(To be Continued Next Week.)

HEAD-END COLLISION.

Passenger and Freight Collide in Arlington Yards Yesterday Afternoon. From Monday's Daily.

A head-end collision occurred on the Elkhorn yesterday afternoon at about 4 o'clock in the switching yards at Arlington, between the east bound passenger, No. 16, and a special train of empty stock cars.

The collision took place about half a mile west of the depot where the road makes a sharp curve. The freight was mostly on the siding, but the engine and one car remained on the main track. When the passenger rounded the curve the engineer caught onto the situation and put on the air and reversed the engine, but the velocity was so great that the train didn't stop until it struck the freight.

Both engine crews jumped and escaped practically uninjured with the exception of Fireman Ed Welsh of the passenger, who was bruised and out considerably about the head by coming in contact with a barbed wire fence.

The shock was sufficient to almost completely demolish the engine of the passenger and practically telescope the smoker and second baggage car. The engine of the freight was badly damaged. Two or three passengers were bruised but not seriously. One old lady, name unknown, had her hip and back wrenched.

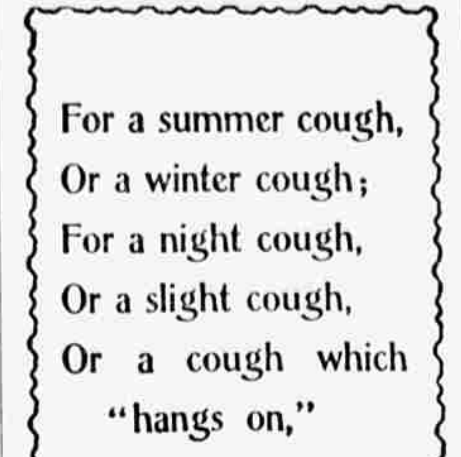
The newsboy and passengers in the smoker had narrow escapes from injury. A wrecking crew from Missouri Valley was soon on the scene and at work, but the west bound passenger didn't arrive in Norfolk until midnight.

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