

# THE SEARCH

By Grace Livingston Hill-Lutz  
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"Not likely, on this road. But we're not taking any chances," and with that the car bumped down across a gully and lurched up to a grassy approach to a big stoned barn that loomed above them, then slid down another bank and passed close to a great haystack, whose clutching straw fingers reached out to brush their faces, and so swept softly around to the rear of the barn and stopped. Cameron shut off the engine instantly and they sat in utter silence listening to the oncoming car.

"It's they, all right!" whispered Cameron softly. "That's Passmore's voice. He converses almost wholly in choice profanity."

His mother's hand stole out to touch his shoulder and he reached around and held it close.

"Don't tremble, mother, we're all safe!" he whispered in a tone so tender that Ruth felt a shiver of pleasure pass over her for the mother who had such a son. Also there was the instant thought that a man could not be wholly "rotten" when he could speak to his mother in that tone.

There was a breathless space when the car paused on the road not far away and their pursuers stood up and looked around, shouting to one another. There was no mistaking their identity now, Ruth shivered visibly. One of them got out of the car and came toward the barn. They could hear him stepping over the stony roadside. Cameron laid a quiet hand of reassuring protection on her arm that steadied her and made her feel wonderfully safe once more, and strange to say she found herself lifting up another queer little kind of a prayer. It had never been her habit to pray much except in form. Her heart had seldom needed anything that money could not supply.

The man had stumbled across the gully and up toward the barn. They could hear him swearing at the unevenness of the ground, and Ruth held her breath and prayed again. A moment more and he was fumbling about for the unevenness of the ground, flash light. Then, like the distant sound of a mighty angel of deliverance came the rumble of a car in the distance. The men heard it and took it for their quarry on ahead. They climbed into their car again and were gone like a flash.

John Cameron did not wait for them to get far away. He set the car in motion as soon as they were out of sight, and its expensive mechanism obeyed his direction almost silently as he guided it around the barn, behind the haystack and back again into the road over which they had just come.

Now!" he said as he put the car to its best speed and switched on its headlights again. "Now we can beat them to it, I guess, if they come back this way, which I don't think they will."

The car dashed over the ground and the three sat silent while they passed into the woods and over the place where they had first met Cameron. Ruth felt herself trembling again, and her teeth beginning to chatter from the strain. Cameron seemed to realize her feeling and turned toward her:

"You've been wonderful!" he said flashing a warm look at her, "and you, too, mother!" lifting his voice a little and turning his head toward the back seat. "I don't believe any other two women in Bryne Haven could have gone through a scene like that and kept absolutely still. You were great!" There was that in his voice that lifted Ruth's heart more than any praise she had ever received for anything. She wanted to make some acknowledgment, but she found to her surprise that tears were choking her throat so that she could not speak. It was the excitement, of course, she told herself, and struggled to get control of her emotion.

They emerged from the woods and in sight of the Pike at last, and Cameron drew a long breath of relief.

"There, I guess we can hold our own with anyone, now," he said settling back in his seat, but relaxing none of his vigilance toward the car which sped along the highway like a winged thing. "But it's time I heard how you

came to be here. I haven't been able to explain it, during the intervals when I've had any chance at all to think about it."

"Oh, I just called up your mother to know if it would help you any to be taken to your train," said Ruth quickly, "and she mentioned that she was worried lest you would miss it; so I suggested that we try to catch you and take you on to Wilmington or Baltimore or wherever you have to go. I do hope this delay hasn't spoiled it all. How long does it take to go from Baltimore to camp. I've taken the Baltimore trip myself in five hours. It's only quarter past six yet, do you think we can make it?"

"But you can't go all the way to Baltimore!" he exclaimed. "What would you and mother do at that time of night alone after I go to camp? You see, it isn't as if I could stay and come back with you."

"Oh, we'll just go to a hotel in Baltimore, won't we, Mrs. Cameron? We'll be all right if we only get you safe to camp. Do you think we can do it?"

"Oh, yes, we can do it all right with this car. But I'm quite sure I ought not to let you do it just for me. What will your people think?"

"I've left word that I've gone to a friend in trouble," twinkled Ruth. "I'll call them up when I get to Baltimore, and make it all right with auntie. She will trust me."

Cameron turned and looked at her wondering, reverently.

"It's wonderful that you should do this for me," he said in a low tone, quite low, so that the watching wistful mother could not even guess what he was saying.

"It's not in the least wonderful," said Ruth brightly. "Remember the hedge and Chuck Woodcock!" She was beginning to get her self possession again.

"You are paying that old score back in compound interest," said Cameron.

That was a wonderful ride rushing along beneath the stars, going back to childhood's days and getting acquainted again where they left off. Ruth forgot all about the cause of her wild chase, and the two young men she had left disconsolate in her library at home; forgot her own world in this new beautiful one, wherein her spirit really communed with another spirit; forgot utterly what Wainwright had said about Cameron as more and more through their talk she came to see the fineness of his character.

They flashed on from one little village to another, leaving one clustering glimmer of lights in the distance only to pass to other clustering groups. It was in their favor that there were not many other travellers to dispute their way, and they were hindered very little. Cameron had made the trip many times and knew the roads well. They did not have to hesitate and enquire the way. They made good time. The clocks were striking 10 when they reached the outskirts of Baltimore.

"Now," said Ruth in a sweetly imperious tone, consulting her timepiece to be sure she had counted the clock strokes correctly, "do you know what you are going to do, Mr. Corporal? You are going to land your mother and me at the nearest hotel, and take the car with you back to camp. You said one of the fellow's had his car down there, so I'm sure you'll be able to find a place to put it over night. If you find a way to send the car back to us in the morning, well and good. If not your mother and I will go home by train and the chauffeur can come down tomorrow and bring back the car; or, better still, you can drive yourself up the next time you get leave off."

There was much argument about the matter within a brief space of time, but in the end (which came in five minutes) Ruth had her way, and the young soldier departed for his camp in the gray car with ample time to make the short trip, leaving his mother and Ruth at a Baltimore hotel; after having promised to call up in the morning and let them know what he could do about the car.

Ruth selected a large double room and went at once to the

telephone to call up her aunt. She found to her relief that that good lady had not yet returned from her day with a friend in the city, so that no explanations would be necessary that night. She left word with the servant that she was in Baltimore with a friend and would probably be at home the next day sometime. Then she turned to find to her dismay that her companion was sitting in a low arm chair with tears running down her cheeks.

"Oh, my dear!" she exclaimed rushing over to her, "you are all worn out!"

"Not a bit of it!" sobbed the mother with a smile like sunshine through her tears. "I was so happy I couldn't keep from crying. Don't you ever get that way? I've just been watching you and thinking what a dear beautiful child you are and how wonderful God has been to send you to help my boy. Oh, it was so dreadful to me to think of him going down to camp with those men! My dear, I smelt liquor on their breath when they came for him, and I was just crying and praying about it when you called me up. Of course, I knew my boy wouldn't drink, but so many accidents can happen with automobiles when the driver is drunk! My dear, I never can thank you enough!"

They were both too excited to sleep soon, but long after the mother was asleep Ruth lay awake going over the whole day and wondering. There were so many things about the incident of the afternoon and evening, now that they were over, that were utterly out of accord with her whole life heretofore. She felt intuitively that her aunt would never understand if she were to explain the whole proceeding. There were so many laws of her little world of conventionalities that she had transgressed, and so many qualms of a belated conscience about whether she ought to have done it at all. What would Cameron think of her, anyway? Her cheeks burned hot in the dark over that question. Strange she had not thought of it at all either beforehand or while she sat beside him during that wonderful ride! And now the thing that Wainwright had said shouted itself out to her ears: "Rotten! Rotten! Rotten!" like a dirge.

Suppose he were? It couldn't be true. It just couldn't, but suppose he were? Well, suppose he were! How was she hurt by doing a kind act? Having taken that stand against all her former ideas Ruth had instant peace and drifted into dreams of what she had been enjoying, the way suddenly lit by a sleepy remembrance of Wetherill's declaration: "He won't drink! You can't make him! It's been tried again and again!" There was evidence in his favor. Why hadn't she remembered that before? And his mother! She had been so sure of him!

The telephone bell awakened her with a message from camp. His voice greeted her pleasantly with the word that it was all right, he had reached camp in plenty of time, found a good place for the car, and it would be at the hotel at 9 o'clock. Ruth turned from the phone with a vague disappointment. He had not said a word of thanks or good-bye or anything, only that he must hurry. Not even a word to his mother. But then, of course, men did not think of those little things, perhaps, as women did, and maybe it was just as well for him to take it all as a matter of course. It made it less embarrassing for her.

But when they went down to the car, behold he was in it!

"I got leave off for the morning," he explained smiling. "I told my captain all about how you got me back in time when I'd missed the train and he told me to see you as far as Wilmington and catch the noon train back from there. He's a peach of a captain. If my lieutenant had been there I wouldn't have got a chance to ask him. I was afraid of that last night. But for good luck the lieutenant has a two-days' leave this time. He's a mess!"

Ruth looked at him musingly. Was Harry Wainwright the lieutenant?

They had a golden morning together, and talked of many things that welded a friendship already well begun.

"Weren't you at all frightened last night?" asked Cameron once, looking at the delicate beauty of the face beside him and noting the strength and sweetness of it.

Mrs. Cameron was dosing in the back seat and they felt quite alone and free. Ruth looked up at him frankly.

"Why, yes, I think I was for a minute or two while we were behind that barn, but— Did you ever pray when you were in a trying situation?"

He looked down earnestly into her face, half startled at her words:

"Why, I don't know that I ever did. I'm not quite sure if it was praying."

"Well, I don't know what I ever did before," she went on thoughtfully, "but last night when those men got out of their car in front of the barn so near us again, I found myself praying." She dropped her eyes half embarrassed. "Just as if I were a frightened little child I found myself saying: 'God help us! God help us!' And right away we heard that other car coming and the men went away! It somehow seemed—well, strange! I wondered if anybody else ever had an experience like that."

"I've heard of them," said Cameron gravely. "I've wondered sometimes myself. Do you believe in God?"

"Oh, yes!" said Ruth quite firmly. "Of course. What use would there be in anything if there wasn't a God?"

"But do you believe we humans can ever really—well, find Him? On this earth, I mean."

"Why, I don't know that I ever thought about it," she answered bewildered. "Find Him? In what way do you mean?"

"Why, get in touch with Him? Get to know Him, perhaps. Be on such terms with Him that one could call out in a time like last night, you know; or—well, say in a battle! I've been thinking a lot about that lately—naturally."

"Oh!" gasped Ruth softly, "of course. I hadn't thought about that much, either. We've been so thoughtless—and—sort of happy you know, just like butterflies, we girls! I haven't realized that men were going out to face Death!"

"It isn't that I'm afraid to die," said Cameron proudly lifting his chin as if dying were a small matter, "not just the dying part. I reckon I've been through worse than that a dozen times. That wouldn't last long. It's—the other part. I have a feeling there'll be a little something more expected of me than just to have tried to get the most fun out of life. I've been thinking if there is a God He'd expect us to find it out and make things straight between us somehow. I suppose I don't believe I know myself just what I mean."

"I think I understand just a little," said Ruth. "I have never thought about it before, but I'm going to now. It's something we ought to think about, I guess. In a sense it's something that each one of us has to think, whether we are going into battle or not, isn't it?"

"I suppose it is, only we never realize it when things are going along all right," said Cameron. "It seems queer that everybody that's ever lived on this earth has had this question to face sooner or later and most of them haven't done much about it. The few people who profess to have found a way to meet it we call cranks, or else pick flaws in the way they live; although it does seem to me that if I really found God so I was sure He was there and cared about me, I'd manage to live a little decenter life than some do."

They drifted into other topics and all too soon they reached Wilmington and had to say good-bye. But the thought stayed with Ruth more or less during the days that followed, and crept into her letters when she wrote to Corporal Cameron, as she did quite often in these days; and still no solution had come to the great question which was so like the one of old, "What shall I do to be saved?" It came and went during the days that followed, and now and again the fact that it had originated in a talk with Cameron clashed badly in her mind with that word "Rotten" that Wainwright had used about him. So that at last she resolved to talk to her cousin, Captain La Rue, the next time he came up.

"Cousin Captain," she said, "do you know a boy at your camp from Bryne Haven named John Cameron?"

"Indeed I do!" said the captain.

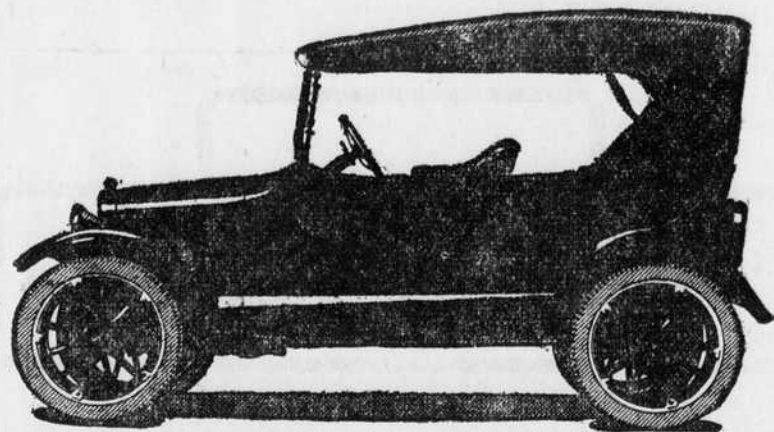
"What kind of a man is he?"

"The best young man I know in every way," answered the captain promptly. "If the world were made up of men like him it would be a pretty good place in which to live. Do you know him?"

(To Be Continued Next Week)

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#### Then Father Flared.

A young man was wheeling a perambulator to and fro in front of his house. He looked hot, but contented. "My dear!" came a voice from an upper window of the house.

"Now let me alone!" he called back. "We're all right."

An hour later the same voice, in earnest pleading tones: "Arthur, dear!"

"Well, what do you want?" he responded. "Anything wrong in the house?"

"No, dear; but you have been wheeling Dora's doll all the afternoon. Isn't it time for the baby to have a turn?"—Chicago Herald.

#### And It Doesn't Diminish.

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