

1911 MAN'S LANE.

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

CHAPTER XXVII.
A DISCOVERY.

I have a grim will when I choose to exert it. After Mr. Gryce left the hotel I took a cup of tea with the landlady and then made a round of the stores. I bought dimity, sewing silk and what not, as I said I would, but this did not occupy me long (to the regret probably of the country merchants, who expected to make a fool of me and found it a by no means easy task) and was quite ready for William when he finally drove up.

The ride home was a more or less silent one. I had conceived such a horror of the man beside me that talking for talk's sake was impossible, while he was in a mood which it would be charity to call noncommunicative. It may be that my own reticence was at the bottom of this, but I rather think not. The remark he made in passing Deacon Spear's house showed that something more than spite was working in his slow but vindictive brain.

"There's a man of your own sort," he cried. "You won't find him doing anything out of the way; oh, no. Pity your visit wasn't paid there. You'd have got a better impression of the land."

To this I made no reply.

At Mr. Trohm's he spoke again.

"I suppose," said he, "that you and Trohm had the devil of a say about Lucetta and the rest of us. I don't know why, but the whole neighborhood seems to feel they've a right to use our name as they choose. But it isn't going to be so long. We have played poor and pinched and starved all I'm going to. I'm going to have a new horse, and Lucetta shall have a dress, and that might be quick too. I'm tired of all this shabbiness and mean to have a change."

I wanted to say, "No change yet; change under the present circumstances would be the worst thing possible for you all," but I felt that this would be treason to Mr. Gryce and refrained, saying simply, as he looked sideways at me for a word:

"Lucetta needs a new dress. That no one can deny. But you had better let me get it for her, or perhaps that is what you meant."

The grunt which was my only answer might be interpreted in any way. I took it, however, for assent.

As soon as I was relieved of his presence and in that of the girls again I altered my whole manner and cried out in querulous tones:

"Mrs. Carter and I have had a difference." (This was true. We did have a difference over our cup of tea. I did not think it necessary to say this difference was a forced one. Some things we are perfectly justified in keeping to ourselves.) "She remembers a certain verse in the New Testament one way and I in another. We had not time to settle it by a consultation with the sacred word, but I cannot rest till it is settled, so will you bring your Bible to me, my dear, that I may look that verse up?"

We were in the upper hall, where I had taken a seat on the old-fashioned sofa there. Lucetta, who was standing before me, started immediately to do my bidding, without stopping to think, poor child, that it was very strange I did not go to my own room and consult my own Bible as any good Presbyterian would be expected to do. As she was turning toward the large front room where I knew the one Bible I wanted could not be I stopped her with the quiet injunction:

"Get me one with good print, Lucetta. My eyes won't bear much straining."

At which she turned and to my great relief hurried down the corridor toward William's room, from which she presently returned, bringing the very volume I was anxious to consult.

Meanwhile I had laid aside my hat. I felt flurried and unhappy and showed it. Lucetta's pitiful face had a strange sweetness in it this morning, and I felt sure as I took the sacred book from her hand that her thoughts were all with the lover she had sent from her side and not at all with me or with what at the moment occupied me. Yet my thoughts at this moment involved, without doubt, the very deepest interests of her life, if not that very lover she was brooding over in her darkened and resigned mind.

As I realized this I heaved an involuntary sigh, which seemed to startle her, for she turned and gave me a quick look as she was slipping away to join her sister, who was busy at the other end of the hall.

The Bible I held was an old one of medium size and most excellent print. I had no difficulty in finding the text and settling the question which had been my ostensible reason for wanting the book, but it took me longer to discover the indication which I had made in one of its pages; but when I did I may imagine my awe and the turmoil into which my mind was cast when I found that it marked those great verses in Corinthians which are so universally read at funerals:

"Behold I show you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed.

"In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye—"

CHAPTER XXVIII. AN INTRUSION.

I was so moved by this discovery that I was not myself for several instants. The reading of these words over the body which had been laid away under the flower parlor was in keeping with the knot of crape on the window shut-

ter and argued something more than remorse on the part of some one of the Knollys family. Who was this one, and why, with such feelings in the breast of any of the three, had the deceit and crime to which I had been witness succeeded to such a point as to demand the attention of the police? An impossible problem to which I dare seek no solution, even in the faces of these seemingly innocent girls.

What plan Mr. Gryce intended to pursue I was of course in no position to determine. I only knew what course I meant to pursue myself, which was to remain quiet and sustain the part I had already played in this house as their visitor and friend. It was therefore as such both in heart and manner that I hastened from my room late in the afternoon to inquire the meaning of the cry I had just heard issue from Lucetta's lips. It had come from the front of the house, and as I hastened thither I met the two Miss Knollys, looking more openly anxious and distraught than at any former time of anxiety and trouble.

As they looked up and saw my face Lucetta paused and laid her hand on Lucetta's arm. But Lucetta was not to be restrained.

"He has dared," she cried, "dared to enter our gates, bringing a police officer with him. We know he is a police officer because he was here once before, and though he was kind enough then he cannot have come the second time, and with this man, except to—"

Here the pressure of Lucetta's hand was so strong as to make the feeble Lucetta quiver. She stopped, and Miss Knollys took up her words:

"Except to make us talk on subjects much better buried in oblivion. Miss Butterworth, will you go down with us? Your presence may act as a restraint. Mr. Trohm seems to have some respect for you."

"Mr. Trohm?"

"Yes. It is his coming which has so agitated Lucetta. He and a man named Gryce are just coming up the walk. There goes the knocker. Lucetta, you must control yourself or leave me to face these unwelcome visitors alone."

Lucetta, with a sudden, fierce effort, subdued her trembling.

"If he must be met," said she, "my anger and disdain may give some weight to your quiet acceptance of the family's disgrace. I shall not accept his denunciations quietly, Loren. You must expect me to show some of the feelings that I have held in check all these years." And without waiting for reply, without waiting even to see what effect these strange words had had upon me, whom she must presume to have been entirely unprepared for them, she dashed down the stairs and pulled open the front door.

We had followed rapidly, too rapidly for speech ourselves, and were therefore in the hall when the door swung back, revealing the two persons I had been led to expect. Mr. Trohm spoke first, evidently in answer to the defiance to be seen in Lucetta's face.

"Miss Knollys, a thousand pardons. I know I am transgressing, but the occasion warrants it, I assure you. I am sure you will acknowledge that when you hear what my errand is."

"Your errand—what can it be," she cried, "but to—"

Why did she pause? Mr. Gryce had not looked at her. Yet that it was under his influence she ceased to commit herself I was as certain as we can be of anything in a world which is half-dead.

"Let us hear your errand," put in Loren, with that gentle emphasis which is no sign of weakness.

"I will let this gentleman say," returned Mr. Trohm. "You have seen him before—a New York detective of whose business in this town you cannot be ignorant."

"He professed," fell from Lucetta's lips in cold and distinct tones, "to have visited this lane for the purpose of seeking out a clew to the many disappearances which have unfortunately taken place within its precincts."

"Yes," Mr. Trohm's nod seemed to say. But Lucetta was looking at the detective.

"Is that your business?" she asked. "Miss Knollys," he began—how quiet and fatherly his accents fell after the alternate fire and iciness with which she herself had addressed his companion and herself—"I hardly know how to answer you without arousing your just anger. If your brother is in—"

"My brother would face you with less patience than we. Talk to us, Mr. Gryce, and not till we fail to answer you or to satisfy all your demands call in my brother, who will not answer you and will not satisfy your demands."

"Very well," said he. "The quickest explanation is the kindest in these cases. I merely wish, as a police officer whose business in this lane is to locate those disappearances and who believes the surest way to do this is to find out once for all where they did not and could not have taken place, to make an official search of these premises as I already have those of Mother Jane and of Deacon Spear."

"And my errand here," said Mr. Trohm, "is to make all easier by the assurance that my house will be the next which will undergo a complete investigation. As all the houses in the lane will be visited alike, none of us need complain or feel our good name attacked."

This was certainly thoughtful, but

knowing what I did I could not expect Loren or Lucetta to show any great sense either of his kindness or Mr. Gryce's consideration. They were in no position to have a search made of their premises, and, serene as was Loren's nature and powerful as was Lucetta's will, the apprehension under which they labored was evident, though neither attempted either subterfuge or evasion.

"If the police wish to search this house, it is open to them," said Loren. "But not to Mr. Trohm," quoth Lucetta quickly. "Our poverty should be our protection from the curiosity of neighbors."

"Mr. Trohm has no wish to intrude," said Mr. Gryce, but Mr. Trohm said nothing. He probably understood why Lucetta wished to curtail his stay in this house better than Mr. Gryce did.

CHAPTER XXVIII. IN THE CELLAR.

I had meanwhile stood silent. There was no reason for me to obtrude myself, and I was happy not to do so. This does not mean, however, that my presence was not noticed. Mr. Trohm honored me with more than one glance during these trying moments, in whose expression I read the anxiety he felt lest my peace of mind should be too much disturbed, and when in response to the undoubted dismissal he had received from Lucetta he prepared to take his leave it was upon me he bestowed his final look and most deferential bow. It was a tribute to my position and character which all seemed to feel, and I was not at all surprised when Lucetta, after carefully watching his departure, turned to me with childlike impetuosity, saying:

"This must be very unpleasant for you, Miss Butterworth, yet must we ask you to stand our friend. God knows we need one."

"I shall never forget I occupied that position toward your mother," was my straightforward reply, and I did not forget it, not for a moment.

"I shall begin with the cellar," said Mr. Gryce.

Both girls quivered. Then Loren lifted her proud head and said quietly:

superfluous. William evidently did know.

"I was not going to descend the cellar stairs, but the girls made me."

"We wish you," said Loren, and in no ordinary tones, while Lucetta paused and would not go on till I followed. This surprised me. I no longer seemed to have any clew to their motives, but I was glad to be one of the party.

Hannah, under Loren's orders, had furnished one of the men with a lighted lantern, and upon our descent into the dark labyrinth below it became his duty to lead the way, which he did with due circumspection. What all this underground space into which we were thus introduced had ever been used for it would be difficult to tell. At present it was mostly empty. After passing a small collection of stores, a wine cellar, the very door of which was unhung and lay across the cellar bottom, we struck into a hollow void, in which there was nothing worth an instant's investigation save the earth under our feet.

This the two foremost detectives examined very carefully, detaining us often longer, I thought, than Mr. Gryce desired or Lucetta had patience for. But nothing was said in protest nor did the older detective give an order or manifest any special interest in the investigation till he saw the men in front stoop and throw out of the way a coil of rope, when he immediately hurried forward and called upon the party to stop.

The girls, who were on either side of me, crossed glances at this command, and Lucetta, who had been tottering forward feebly for the last few minutes, fell upon her knees and hid her face in the hollow of her two hands. Loren came around and stood by her, and I do not know which presented the most striking picture of despair, the shrinking figure of Lucetta or the straight but quivering form of Loren lifted to meet the shafts of fate without a drop of her eyelids or a murmur from her lips. The light of the one lantern which intentionally or unintentionally was concentrated on this pathetic group made it stand out from the midst of the surrounding darkness in a



"STOP YOUR DESECRATING HAND!" SHE CRIED.

"The whole house is at your disposal. Only I pray you to be as expeditious as possible. My sister is not well, and the sooner our humiliation is over the better it will be for her."

And, indeed, Lucetta was in a state that aroused even Mr. Gryce's anxiety. But when she saw us all hovering over her she roused herself with an extraordinary effort, and, waving us all aside, took the first steps herself in the direction of the kitchen, from which, as I gathered, the only direct access could be had to the cellar. Mr. Gryce immediately followed, and behind him came Loren and myself, both too much agitated to speak.

At the flower parlor Mr. Gryce paused as if he had forgotten something, but Lucetta urged him feverishly on, and before long we were all standing in the kitchen. Here a surprise awaited us. Two men were sitting there who appeared to be strangers to Hannah at least, for the lowering look she cast them as she pretended to be busy over her stove was so out of keeping with her usual good humor as to attract the attention even of her young mistress.

"What is the matter, Hannah?" asked Lucetta. "And who are these men?"

"They are my men," said Mr. Gryce. "The job I have undertaken cannot be carried on alone."

The quick look the two sisters interchanged did not escape me, or the quiet air of resignation which was settling slowly over Loren.

"Must they go into the cellar, too?" she asked.

Mr. Gryce suited his most fatherly smile.

"My dear young ladies," said he, "these men are interested in but one thing—they are searching for a clew to the disappearances that have occurred in this lane. As they will not find this in your cellar nothing else that they may see there will remain in their minds for a moment."

Lucetta said no more. Even her indomitable spirit was giving way before the inevitable discovery she saw before them.

"Do not let William know," were her low words as we passed by Hannah, but from the short glimpse I caught through the open kitchen door of that same William's burly figure standing, guarded by two other men, on the stable floor I felt that this injunction was quite

CHAPTER XXIX. INVESTIGATION.

The shock of these words—if false, most horrible; if true, still more horrible—threw us all aback and made even Mr. Gryce's features assume an aspect quite uncommon to them.

"Your mother's grave?" said he, looking from her to Loren with very evident doubt. "I thought your mother died seven or more years ago, and this grave has been dug within three days."

"I know," she whispered. "To the world my mother has been dead many, many years, but not to us. We closed her eyes right before last, and it was to preserve this secret, which involves others affecting our family honor, that we resorted to expedients which have perhaps attracted the notice of the police and drawn this humiliation down upon us. I can conceive no other reason for this visit, ushered in as it was by Mr. Trohm."

"Miss Lucetta," Mr. Gryce spoke up quite quickly—if he had not I certainly could not have restrained some expression of the emotions awakened in my own breast by this astounding revelation—"Miss Lucetta, it is not necessary to bring Mr. Trohm's name into this matter or that of any other person than myself. I saw the coffin lowered here, which you say contained the body of your mother. Thinking this a strange place of burial and not knowing it was your mother, Miss Knollys, to whom you were paying these last dutiful rites, I took advantage of my position as detective to satisfy myself that nothing wrong lay behind so mysterious a death and burial. Can you blame me, Miss Knollys? Would I have been a man to trust if I had let such an event go by unchallenged in this lane?"

She did not answer. She had heard but one sentence of all this long speech.

"You saw my mother's coffin lowered? Where were you that you should see that? In some of those dark passages, let by I know not what traitor to our peace of mind?" And her eyes, which seemed to have grown almost supernatural large and bright under her emotions, turned slowly in their sockets till they rested with something like doubtful accusation upon mine. But not to remain there, for Mr. Gryce recalled them almost instantly back by this short, sharp negative.

"No, I was nearer than that. I lent my strength to this burial. If you had thought to look under Mother Jane's hood, you would have seen what would have forced these explanations then and there."

"And you?"

"And I was Mother Jane for that night. Not from choice, miss, but from necessity. It was I your brother saw in the cottage. I could not give away my plans by refusing the task your brother offered me."

"It is well," Lucetta had risen and was now standing by the side of Loren. "Such a secret as ours defies secrecy. Even Providence takes part against us. What you want to know we must tell, but I assure you it has nothing to do with the business you profess to be chiefly interested in—nothing at all."

"Then perhaps you and your sister will retire," said he. "Distraught as you are by family griefs, I would not wish to add one iota to your distress. This lady, whom you seem to regard with more or less favor as friend or relative, will stay to see that no dishonor is paid to your mother's remains. But her face we must see, Miss Knollys, if only to lighten the explanations you will doubtless feel called upon to make."

It was Loren who answered this.

"If it must be," said she, "remember your own mother and deal reverently with ours." Which word and the way it was uttered gave me my first distinct conviction that it was truth these girls had been telling and that the girl child we had come to unearth was the Althea of my early friendship, whose fairlike form I had for so long a time believed to have mingled with foreign dust. The thought was almost too much for my self possession, and I advanced upon Loren with a dozen burning questions on my lips when the voice of Mr. Gryce stopped me.

"Explanations later," said he. "For the present we want you here."

It was not an easy task for me to linger there with all my doubts unsolved, waiting for the decisive moment when Mr. Gryce should say: "Come! Look! Is it she?" But the will that had already sustained me through so much did not fail me now, and, grave as was the ordeal, I passed steadily through it, being able to say, though not without some emotion, I own: "It is she! Changed almost beyond conception, but still she," which was a happier end to this adventure than that we had first feared, mysterious as the fact was, not only to myself, but as I could see, to the acute detective as well.

The girls had withdrawn long before this, just as Mr. Gryce had desired, and I now thought I might be allowed to join them, but Mr. Gryce detained me till the grave was refilled and made decent again, when he turned and to my intense astonishment—for I had thought the matter was all over and the exorcisation of this household complete—said softly and with telling emphasis in my ear:

"Our work is not done yet. They who make graves so readily in cellars must have been more or less accustomed to the work. We have still some digging to do."

(To be Continued Next Week.)

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