LOST MAN'S LANE

A SECOND EPISODE IN THE LIFE OF AMELIA BUTTERWORTH

BY ANNA KATHARINE GREEN

AUTHOR OF "THE LEAVENWORTH CASE," "BEHIND CLOSED DOORS," "THAT AFFAIR NEXT DOOR," ETC. ETC.

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CHAPTER XXXIII.

AT THE GATE.

But in another moment she was back, her eyes dilated and her whole person breathing out a terrible purpose.

"Do not look at me, do not notice me," she cried, but in a voice so hoarse no one but Mr. Gryce could fully understand her "I am for no one's eyes but God's. Pray that he may have mercy upon me." Then as she saw us all instinctively fall back she controlled herself, and, pointing toward Mother Jane's cottage, said more distinctly: "As for those men, let them dig. Let them dig the whole day long. Secrecy is for us, a secrecy so absolute that not even the birds of the air must see that our thoughts range beyond the 40 rods surrounding Mother Jane's cottage."

She turned and would have fled away for the second time, but Mr. Gryce stopped her. "You have set yourself a task beyond your strength. Can you perform it?"

"I can perform it," she said, "if Loreen does not talk, and I am allowed to weep my tears alone."

"But"— I had never seen Mr. Gryce so agitated—no, not when he left Olive Randolph's bedside after an hour of vain pleading. "But to wait all day! Is it necessary for you to wait all day?"

"It is necessary." She spoke like an automaton. "Tonight at twilight, when the sun is setting, at the great tree just before the road turns. Not a minute sooner, not an hour later. I will be calmer then." And waiting now for nothing, not for a word from Loreen or a detaining touch from Mr. Gryce, she flew away for the second time. This time Loreen followed her.

"Well, that is the hardest thing I ever had to do," said Mr. Gryce, wiping his forehead and speaking in a tone of real grief and anxiety. "Do you think her delicate frame can stand it? Will she survive this day and carry through whatever it is she has set herself to accomplish?"

"She has no organic disease," said I, "but she loved that young man very much, and the day will be a terrible one to her."

Mr. Gryce sighed.

"I wish I had not been obliged to resort to such means," said he, "but women like that only work under excitement, and she does know the secret of this affair."

"Do you mean," I demanded, almost aghast, "that you have deceived her with a false telegram; that that slip of paper you hold"—

"Read it," he cried, holding it out toward me.

I did read it. Alas, there was no deception in it. It was bona fide and read very much as he had said it did.

"However"— I began.

But he had pocketed the telegram and was several steps away before I had got any further.

"I am going to start these men up," said he. "You will breathe no word to Miss Knollys of my sympathy nor let your own interest slack in the investigations which are going on under our noses."

And with a quick, sharp bow he made his way to the gate, whither I followed him in time to see him set his foot upon a patch of rosemary.

"You will begin at this place," he cried, "and work east, and, gentlemen, something tells me that we will be successful."

With almost a simultaneous sound a dozen spades and picks struck the ground. The digging up of Mother Jane's garden had begun in earnest.

I staid about that gate most of the day. If I moved away, I imagined that Mr. Gryce was uneasy and wanted me back under his eye. So as Lucetta was invisible and Loreen in a strained and anxious mood, I followed the example of many of the other villagers who had ventured into the lane for the first time in months, and now stood watching every shovelful of earth that was thrown out, disappointing as the task had become as hour after hour passed without any discovery.

Along toward noon I had a diversion if the rest had not. Mr. Trohm came riding up in his buggy, and somewhat later in the day Deacon Spear came boldly upon the field, though none too near our gate, at which Saracen sat growling. The talk I had with Mr. Trohm was of a delicate nature, not bearing repetition, but the few curt words I exchanged with Deacon Spear may amuse the reader or at least satisfy some of my good friends that I am not so given over to vanity as to be misled by every passing compliment a man may pay me.

He was, as I was saying, drawn up on the opposite side of the road, but when he saw me he made a very low bow and sidled a step forward. This made me draw myself up a bit, though I had no idea what was coming. He seemed to take that for an invitation, for, pointing toward Saracen, he asked if the dog was quiet, and when I in a superior way answered that he was as quiet as a lamb he edged up to where I was standing and sheepishly held out his hand.

"I have been thinking," he drawled, "that it was only neighborly for me to call upon you, Miss Butterworth. But this business which has occupied the lane these last few days has put us all into such a mood of unpleasantness that there was no use of trying sociability on any one."

His hair was so sleek, his eyes so small and so twinkling, that I began to have respect for William's opinion of him, but I said nothing, possibly because I only half heard what he had just said himself.

"I'm no lady's man"—these were the next words I heard—"but, then, I judge, you're not in for flattery and all that kind of thing yourself. So now I've got the chance, I'll just say the thing I've got on my tongue to say. Miss Butterworth, I'm 53 and I have been a widower two years. I'm not fitted for a solitary life, and I am fitted for a comfortable life with an affectionate wife to keep my hearth swept clean and my own affections in good working order. Will you be that wife? I have a neat cottage"—

"Yes," said I, "in Lost Man's lane."

"Oh," he exclaimed, "you do not like this place? Well, we could go elsewhere. I am not set against the city myself"—

"Nor against the comfortable little income somebody has told you I possessed," cried I. "I see your disinterestedness, but I should be sorry to profit by it. Why, man, I never spoke to you before in my life, and do you think"—

"Oh," said he, "I see you are not above flattery and those things. Well, madam, I know a tremendous fine woman when I see her without talking away a dozen evenings on politics, religion and what not. I don't need to know any more about you than I can take in with my two eyes, but if you would like a little more acquaintance with me, why, I can wait a couple of weeks till we've rubbed the edges a little off of our strangeness, when"—

"When you think I will be so charmed with Deacon Spear that I will be ready to settle down with him in Lost Man's lane, or if that will not do carry him off to Gramercy park, where he will be the admiration of all New York and Brooklyn to boot. Why, man, if I was so easily satisfied as that I would not be in a position today for you to honor me with this proposal. I am not easy to suit, so I advise you to turn your attention to some one much more anxious to be married than I am, but not before this mystery is settled in Lost Man's lane. If you were an honest man, you would ask no one to share your fortunes while any cloud rests upon your honor."

"My honor! Madam, be careful. I admire you, but"—

"No offense," said I. "For a stranger I have perhaps indulged in a little freedom. I only mean that any one who lives in this lane must feel that the shadow which envelops it rests also a little upon him. When that is lifted, each one will feel himself a man again. From indications yonder that day may not be far away. Mother Jane is a likely source for such a mystery. She knows just little enough to have no proper idea of the value of a human life."

"Madam," said Deacon Spear, "I have not that much interest in what is going on over there." Here he snapped his fingers. "If men have been killed in this lane—which I do not believe—she never had no hand in it. What I think is that it's all a coincidence. Each and every person who has disappeared has disappeared naturally. No one has been killed. That is my theory, madam, and you will find it correct. On this point I have expended much thought."

I was irate; I was also dumfounded at his audacity. Did he think I was the woman to swallow that? But I shut my lips tight lest I should say something, and he, not finding that agreeable, being no conversationalist himself, drew off after awhile with some pompous expression of hoping to see me again after his honor was cleared up in my very particular eyes.

It was the second proposal I had received that day, but the first—well, I did not accept that either, though my declination was a little kinder than the one I thought best to inflict upon Deacon Spear.

A day of unparalleled anxiety broken by such episodes as these!

CHAPTER XXXIV.

UNDER A CRIMSON SKY.

At 5 o'clock the diggers began to go home. Nothing had been found, and the excitement of search which had animated them early in the day had given place to a dull resentment mainly directed toward the Knollys, if one could judge of these men's feelings by the heavy scowls and significant gestures with which they passed its broken down gateway.

By 6 the last man had filed by, leaving Mr. Gryce free for the work which lay before him.

I had retired long before this to my room, where I awaited the hour set by Lucetta with a feverish impatience quite new to me. As none of us could eat, the supper table had not been laid, and though I had no means of knowing what was in store for us the somber silence and oppression under which the whole house lay seemed a portent that was by no means encouraging.

Suddenly I heard a knock at my door. Rising hastily, I opened it. Loreen stood before me, with parted lips and terror in all her looks.

"Come!" she cried. "Come and see what I have found in Lucetta's room."

As she was already half way down the hall I hastened to follow her, and in a few moments found myself on the threshold of the room I knew to be Lucetta's.

"She made me promise," cried Loreen, halting to look back at me, "that I would let her go alone and that I would not enter the highway till an hour after she had left. But after this how can we stay in this house?" And dragging me to a table, she showed me lying on its top a folded paper and two letters. The folded paper was Lucetta's will, and the letters were directed severally to Loreen and to myself with the injunction on them that they were not to be read till she had been gone six hours.

"Serious!" I murmured. "But Mr. Gryce is with her."

"No one is with her. Mr. Gryce may be near, but she has undertaken her task alone. Miss Butterworth, I have never broken a promise before in all my life, but I am going to break this. Come, let us fly to her. She has her lover's memory, but I have nothing in all the world but her."

I immediately turned, and we hastened down the stairs, but at the foot Loreen gave me a look and said:

"My promise was not to enter the highway. Would you be afraid to follow me by another road—secret road—all overgrown with thistles and blackberry bushes which have not been trimmed up for years?"

I thought of my thin shoes, my neat silk dress, but only to forget them the next moment.

"I will go anywhere," said I. "But where, where has Lucetta gone? Is it to Deacon Spear's? If so"—

But Loreen was already too far in advance of me to answer. She was young, she was lithe and was down as far as the kitchen before I had passed the flower parlor. But when we had sped clear of the house I found that my progress bade fair to be as rapid as hers, for her agitation was a hindrance to her, while excitement always brings out my powers and heightens both my wits and my judgment.

Our way lay past the stables, from which I expected every minute to see two or three dogs jump. But William, who had been discreetly sent out of the way early in the afternoon by the two sisters, had taken Saracen with him, and possibly the rest, so our passing by disturbed nothing, not even ourselves. The next moment we were in a field of prickers, through which we both struggled till we came into a sort of swamp. This was bad going, but we floundered through it, edging continually as I could not but see toward a distant fence beyond which rose the symmetrical lines of an orchard.

"Loreen," I cried, "Loreen, those are Mr. Trohm's grounds! Must we pass through them?"

"It's the shortest way," she shouted back, for among the hummocks of the swamp she had got the start of me again.

And, unpleasant as I felt this intrusion to be, I hastened on, overtaking her once more just as we reached a tiny gateway so covered with vines that there was no need for Loreen to say:

"I do not believe this has been opened for years, but it must be opened now." And, throwing her young strength against it, she burst it through with all its vines, and bidding me pass she stepped herself over the trailing branches and made without a word for the winding path we now saw clearly defined on the edge of the orchard before us.

"Oh," exclaimed Loreen, stopping one moment to catch her breath, "I do not know what I fear or to what our steps will bring us. I only know that I must hunt for Lucetta till I find her. If there is danger where she is, I must share it. You can rest here or come farther on. But what is this?"

It was a man. He had started suddenly from some one of the shadows near the hedgerow.

"Silence!" he whispered, putting his finger on his lips. "If you are looking for Miss Knollys," he added, seeing us both pause aghast, "she is on the lawn beyond, talking to Mr. Trohm. If you come here, you can see her. She is in no kind of danger, but if she were Mr. Gryce is in the first row of trees to the back there, and a call from me"—

That made me remember my whistle. It was still round my neck, but my hand, which had instinctively gone to it, fell again in extraordinary emotion as I took in the situation he had hinted at and realized that it was on Mr. Trohm's grounds we stood and that it was toward Mr Trohm himself Loreen's looks of unmistakable fear and dread were turned.

"Loreen," I whispered, "it is not here you look for a solution of that awful mystery?"

"Miss Butterworth," she answered, "it is here you should look for it."

"Here? I?" Never have I felt such emotion and never have I so nearly succumbed to it. "What do you mean?" I prayed. "Tell me, tell me quickly what you mean!"

"I mean," she gasped, "that that is the man who has pursued us with his hatred, driving my father and my mother into their graves. Obadiah Trohm is the rich man of whom we spoke to you; not Deacon Spear or any one else in this unhappy lane." And breaking from me she slid away nearer the ill assorted couple, in one of whom from that moment I saw no longer the courteous, kindly country gentleman, but a monster of vengeful propensities, if not something worse and still more diabolical.

"Come!" she beckoned, happily too absorbed in her own emotions to notice mine. "Let us get nearer. If Mr. Trohm is the wicked man we fear, there is no telling what the means are which he uses to get rid of his victims. There was nothing to be found in his house, but who knows but that the danger may be around her now. It was evidently to dare it she came, to offer herself as a martyr that we might know"—

"Hush!" I whispered, controlling my own fears roused against my will by this display of terror in this usually calmest of natures. "No danger can menace her there, not where they two stand, unless he is a common assassin and carries a pistol"—

"No pistol," murmured the man who had crept again near us. "Pistols make a noise. He will not use a pistol."

"Good God!" I whispered. "You are not anticipating also that it is in the heart of this man to kill Lucetta?"

"Six strong men have disappeared hereabout," said the fellow, never moving his eye from the couple before us. "Why not one weak girl?"

With a cry Loreen started forward. "Run!" she whispered. "Run!"

But as this word left her lips a slight movement took place in the belt of trees where we had been told Mr. Gryce lay in hiding, and we could see him issue for a moment into sight with his finger like that of his man laid warningly on his lips. Loreen trembled and drew back, seeing which the man beside us pointed to the hedge and whispered softly:

"There is just room between that and the fence for a person to pass sideways. If you and this lady want to get nearer to Miss Knollys, you might take that road. But Mr. Gryce will expect you to be very quiet. The young lady expressly said before she came into this place that she could do nothing if for any reason Mr. Trohm should suspect that they were not alone."

"We will be quiet," I assured him, anxious to hide my face, which I felt twitch at every mention of Mr. Trohm's name behind the screen he thus offered for our use. Loreen was already behind the hedge.

(To be Continued Next Week.)

The Variety store is selling out with all goods marked with plain figures at cut prices to close out quick.

A New York Attraction.

Edwin F. Mayo, who with his company, recently played an engagement at Fremont, in a letter to Manager Irvin of the Love, has this to say about an attraction that will be presented in the Auditorium on the 12th of February:

"You have with you, I have learned, on February 10th Mr. Otis Skinner. The Fremont people should feel flattered, as this gentleman is one of the best actors on the American stage; none better. His company is composed of ladies and gentlemen whose standing as Thespians in New York and all the large cities can not be questioned. Miss Comstock, who accompanies Mr. Otis, is direct from Mr. Frohman's theatre. Let me say once again that with such companies as Otis Skinner's there need be no fear on the part of the public. They will get as good a company and play as is seen in New York."

History of Paris Exposition.

Among the international events that will mark the close of the nineteenth century the Paris exposition will be the greatest.

Here will be displayed the greatest works of art, science and skill produced since time began. Campbell's Illustrated Journal in its consecutive issues is making an authentic illustrated history of this great event, similar to that it made of the great World's Fair, showing the buildings, grounds, exhibits, art and architecture that will astonish and command the admiration of the world. As an historical work of art it will be invaluable. Those intending to visit Paris and the exposition can become familiar with it before that time, while those who cannot attend, by perusing its pages can visit the exposition at their own fireside.

J. M. COVERT, Agent,
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Is intended to nourish and sustain us but it must be digested and assimilated before it can do this. In other words, the nourishment contained in food must be separated by the digestive organs from the waste material and must be carried by the blood to all parts of the body. We believe the reason for the great benefit which so many people derive from the Hood's Sarsaparilla lies in the fact that this medicine gives good digestion and makes pure, rich blood. It restores the functions of those organs which convert food into nourishment, that gives strength to nerves and muscles. It also cures dyspepsia, scrofula, salt rheum, boils, sores, pimples and eruptions, catarrh, rheumatism and all diseases that have their origin in impure blood.

Housekeepers can buy the most goods for the least money now at The Variety store closing out sale. See the cut prices displayed in the show windows and on the counters.

Letter List.

List of letters remaining uncalled for at the postoffice January 20, 1900:

Maurice Brown, S. J. Creeg, Mrs. C. A. Evans, Rosa Harden, Mr. and Mrs. G. Huntington, Mont Van Shaick, Mary Wright.

If not called for in 30 days will be sent to the dead letter office.

Parties calling for any of the above please say advertised.

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MRS. S. M. IDOL.

"Cancer is hereditary in our family, my father, a sister and an aunt having died from this dreadful disease. My feelings may be imagined when the horrible disease made its appearance on my side. It was a malignant Cancer, eating inwardly in such a way as to cause great alarm. The disease seemed beyond the skill of the doctors, for their treatment did no good whatever, the Cancer growing worse all the while. Numerous remedies were used for it, but the Cancer grew steadily worse, until it seemed that I was doomed to follow the others of the family, for I know how deadly Cancer is, especially when inherited. I was advised to try Swift's Specific (S. S. S.), which, from the first day, forced out the poison. I continued its use until I had taken eighteen bottles, when I was cured sound and well, and have had no symptoms of the dreadful affliction, though many years have elapsed. S. S. S. is the only cure for Cancer.—MRS. S. M. IDOL, Winston, N. C.

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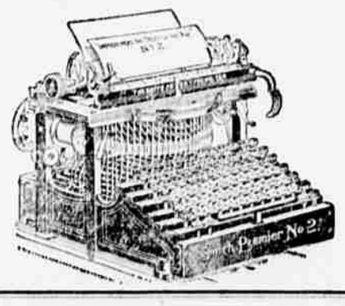

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