

# The House of the Whispering Pines

By ANNA KATHARINE GREEN

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[CONTINUED.]

She was missed the next morning, and an account of her erratic flight reached the papers and was published far and wide. But the name of Miss Caroline Campbell conveyed nothing to the public.

At the house of Dr. Carpenter she met Mr. Moffat. What she told him heartened him greatly for the struggle he saw before him. Indeed, it altered the whole tone of the defense. Perceiving from her story and from what the doctor could tell him of their meeting at the station that her return to town was as yet a secret to every one but themselves, he begged that the secret should continue to be kept.

Carmel wished her brother informed of her return, but the wily lawyer persuaded her to excuse him from taking Arthur into his confidence until the last moment. He knew that he would receive only opposition from his young and stubborn client. One of the stipulations which he had made in securing Mr. Moffat for his counsel was that Carmel's name was to be kept as much as possible out of the proceedings, and to this Mr. Moffat had subscribed, notwithstanding his conviction that the crime laid to the defendant's charge was a result of Ranelagh's passion for Carmel and consequently distinctly the work of Ranelagh's own hand.

He had thought that he could win his case by the powers of oratory and a somewhat free use of innuendo, but his view changed under the fresh enlightenment which he received in his conversation with Carmel. He saw unfolding before him a defense of unparalleled interest. True, it involved this interesting witness in a way that would be unpleasant to the brother, but he was not the man to sacrifice a client to any sentimental scruple—certainly not this client, whose worth he was just beginning to realize.

Carmel was not strong enough for much talk. Dr. Carpenter would not allow it, and the continued clearness of her mind was too invaluable to his case for this farseeing advocate to take any risk. She had told him enough to assure him that circumstances and not guilt had put Arthur where he was and had added to the assurance details of an unexpected nature—so unexpected, indeed, that the lawyer was led away by the prospect they offered of confounding the prosecution by a line of defense to which no clew had been given by anything that had appeared.

He planned then and there a dramatic climax which should take the breath away from his opponent and change the whole feeling of the court toward the prisoner. Strangely enough, the subject of Adelaide's death was discussed in her hearing without any mention being made of strangulation as its immediate cause. Would her action have been different had she known that this was a conceded fact?

## CHAPTER XXIII

"I REMEMBERED THE ROOM."

AS Carmel's gaze passed from her brother's face it traveled slowly and with glowing hesitation over the countenances of those near her, on and on past the judge, past the jury until they reached the spot where I sat. There they seemed to falter, and the beating of my heart became so loud that I instinctively shrank away from my neighbor. By so doing I drew her eye, which fell full upon mine for one overwhelming minute; then she shrank and looked away, but not before the color had risen in a flood to her cheek.

The hope which had sprung to life under her first beautiful aspect vanished at sight of this flush, for it was not one of joy or surprise or even of unconscious sympathy. It was the banner of a deep, unendurable shame. But in a few minutes her features settled into a strange placidity, undisturbed by the leveled gaze of a hundred eyes. Her whole attention was concentrated on her brother and wavered only when the duties of the occasion demanded a recognition of the various gentlemen concerned in the trial.

Mr. Moffat prefaced his examination by the following words:

"May I please your honor, I wish to ask the indulgence of the court in my examination of this witness. She is just recovering from a long and dangerous illness, and while I shall endeavor to keep within the rules of examination, I shall be grateful for any consideration which may be shown her by your honor and by the counsel on the other side."

Mr. Fox at once rose. He had by this time recovered from his astonishment at seeing before him and in a fair state of health the young girl whom he had every reason to believe to be still in a condition of partial forgetfulness at Lakewood and under the care of a woman entirely in his confidence and under his express orders. He had also mastered his chagrin at the triumph which her presence here and under these dramatic circumstances had given

on his adversary. He expressed in warm tones his deep desire to extend every possible indulgence.

Mr. Moffat bowed his acknowledgments and waited for his witness to take the oath, which she did with a simple grace which touched all hearts, even that of her constrained and unconvinced brother. Compelled by the silence and my own bounding pulses to look at her in my own despite, I caught the sweet and elevated look with which she laid her hand on the book and asked myself if her presence here was not a self accusation which would bring satisfaction to nobody, which would sink her and hers



I DREW HER EYE.

into an ignominy worse than the conviction of the brother whom she was supposedly there to save.

Tortured by this fear, I awaited events in indescribable agitation.

The cool voice of Mr. Moffat broke in upon my gloom. Carmel had resumed herself after taking the oath, and the customary question could be heard:

"Your name, if you please."

"Carmel Cumberland."

"Do you recognize the prisoner, Miss Cumberland?"

"Yes; he is my brother."

A thrill ran through the room. The lingering tone, the tender accent, told some of the feeling she thus expressed seemed to pass into every heart which contemplated the two. From this moment on he was looked upon with less harshness. People showed a disposition to discern innocence where perhaps they had secretly desired until now to discover guilt.

"Miss Cumberland, will you be good enough to tell us where you were at or near the hour of 10 on the evening of your sister's death?"

"I was in the clubhouse—in the house you call the Whispering Pines."

At this astounding reply, unexpected by every one present save myself and the unhappy prisoner, incredulity, seasoned with amazement, marked every countenance. Carmel Cumberland in the clubhouse that night—she who had been found at a late hour in her own home, injured and unconscious! It was not to be believed, or it would not have been if Arthur, with less self control than he had hitherto maintained, had not shown by his morose air and the silent drooping of his head that he accepted this statement, wild and improbable as it seemed. Mr. Fox started to rise at her words; but, noting the prisoner's attitude, he hastily re-seated himself, realizing, perhaps, that evidence of which he had never dreamed lay at the bottom of the client's manner and the counsel's complacency.

Mr. Moffat, who saw everything, smiled slightly as he spoke encouragingly to his witness and propounded his next question:

"Miss Cumberland, was your sister with you when you went to the clubhouse?"

"No; we went separately."

"How? Will you explain?"

"I drove there. I don't know how Adelaide went."

"You drove there?"

"Yes. I had Arthur harness up his horse for me, and I drove there."

A moment of silence, then a slow awakening on the part of judge, jury and prosecution to the fact that the case was taking a turn for which they were ill prepared. To Mr. Moffat it was a moment of intense self congratulation, and something of the gratification he felt crept into his voice as he said:

"Miss Cumberland, will you describe this horse?"

"It was a gray horse. It has a large black spot on its left shoulder."

"To what vehicle was it attached?"

"To a cutter—my brother's cutter."

"Was that brother with you? Did he accompany you in your ride to the Whispering Pines?"

"No. I went quite alone."

Entrancement had now seized upon every mind. Even if her testimony were not true, but merely the wanderings of a mind not fully restored, the interest of it was intense.

"And how did you return? With whom and by what means did you regain your own house?"

The answer came with simple directness:

"In the same way I went. I drove back in my brother's cutter, and, being all alone, just as before, I put the horse away myself and went into my empty home and up to Adelaide's room, where I lost consciousness."

"Miss Cumberland, do you often ride out alone on nights like that?"

"I never did before. I would not have dared to do it then if I had not taken a certain precaution."

"And what was this precaution?"

"I wore an old coat of my brother's over my dress and one of his hats on my head."

It was out—the fact for the suppression of which I had suffered arrest without a word, because of which Arthur had gone even further and submitted to trial with the same constancy. Instinctively his eyes and mine met, and at that moment there was established between us an understanding that was in strong contrast to the surrounding turmoil, which now exceeded all limits, as the highly wrought up spectators realized that these statements, if corroborated, destroyed one of the strongest points which had been made by the prosecution. This caused a stay in the proceedings until order was partially restored, and the judge's voice could be heard in a warning that the courtroom would be cleared of all spectators if this break of decorum was repeated.

"Miss Cumberland, will you now give the jury the full particulars of that evening's occurrences as witnessed by yourself? Begin your relation, if you please, with an account of the last meal you had together," said Mr. Moffat when the trial was resumed.

Carmel hesitated. Her youth—her conscience, perhaps—shrank in manifest distress from this inquisition.

"Ask me a question," she prayed.

"I do not know how to begin."

"Very well. Who were seated at the dinner table that night?"

"My sister, my brother, Mr. Ranelagh and myself."

"Did anything uncommon happen during the meal?"

"Yes; my sister ordered wine and had our glasses all filled. She never drank wine herself, but she had her glass filled also. Then she dismissed Helen, the waitress, and when the girl was gone she rose and held up her glass and invited us to do the same."

"We will drink to my coming marriage," said she, but when we had done this she turned upon Arthur, with bitter words about his habits, and, declaring that another bottle of wine should never be opened again in the house, unclosed her fingers and let her glass drop on the table, where it broke. Arthur then let his fall and I mine. We all three let our glasses fall and break."

"And Mr. Ranelagh?"

"He did not let his fall. He set it down on the cloth. He had not drunk from it."

Clear, perfectly clear, tallying with what we had heard from other sources.

"Miss Cumberland, where were you looking when you let your glass fall?"

My heart gave a bound. I remembered that moment well. So did she, as could be seen from the tremulous flush and the determination with which she forced herself to speak.

"At Mr. Ranelagh," she answered finally.

"Not at your brother?"

"No."

"And at whom was Mr. Ranelagh looking?"

"At—at me."

"Not at your sister?"

"No."

"Was anything said?"

"Not then. With the dropping of the glasses we all drew back from the table and walked toward a little room where we sometimes sat before going into the library. Arthur went first, and Mr. Ranelagh and I followed, Adelaide coming last. We went this way into the little room and—what other question do you wish to ask?" she finished, with a burning blush.

Mr. Moffat was equal to the appeal.

"Did anything happen? Did Mr. Ranelagh speak to you or you to him, or did your sister Adelaide speak?"

"No one spoke, but Mr. Ranelagh put a little slip of paper into my hand—a note. As he did this my brother looked round. I don't know whether he saw the note or not, but his eye caught mine, and I may have blushed. Next moment he was looking past me, and presently he flung himself out of the room and I heard him going upstairs. Adelaide had joined me by this time, and Mr. Ranelagh turned to speak to her, and—and I went over to the bookshelves to read my note."

"And did you read it then?"

"No; I was afraid. I waited till Mr. Ranelagh was gone, then I went up to my room and read it."

It was not a—a note to be glad of—I mean, proud of. I'm afraid I was a little glad of it at first. I was a wicked girl."

"Miss Cumberland, before you tell us about this note will you be good enough to inform us whether any words passed between you and your sister before you went upstairs?"

"Oh, yes; we talked. We all three talked, but it was about indifferent matters. The servants were going to a ball, and we spoke of that. Mr. Ranelagh did not stay long. Very soon he remarked that he had a busy evening before him and took his leave. I was not in the room with them when he did this. I was in the adjoining one, but I heard his remark and saw him go. I did not wait to talk to Adelaide."

"Now, about the note?"

"I read it as soon as I reached my room. Then I sat still for a long time."

"Miss Cumberland, pardon my request, but will you tell us what was in that note?"

She lifted her patient eyes and looked straight at her brother. He did not meet her gaze, but the dull flush which lit up the dead white of his cheek

showed how he suffered under this ordeal. At me she never glanced.

"I do not remember the words," she said finally as her eyes fell again to her lap. "But I remember its meaning. It was an invitation for me to leave town with him that very evening and be married at some place he mentioned. He said it would be the best way to—to end—matters."

## CHAPTER XXIV

"I LOVED ADELAIDE BETTER THAN MYSELF."

THIS brought Mr. Fox to his feet. Turning to the judge, he cried:

"This testimony is irrelevant and incompetent, and I ask to have it stricken out."

Mr. Moffat's voice as he arose to answer this was like honey poured upon gall.

"It is neither irrelevant nor incompetent, and if it were the objection comes too late. My friend should have objected to the question."

"The whole course of counsel has been very unusual," began Mr. Fox.

"Yes, but so is the case. I beg your honor to believe that in some of its features this case is not only unusual, but almost without a precedent. I beg that my witness may be allowed to proceed and tell her story in all its details."

"The motion is denied," declared the judge.

Mr. Fox sat down, to the universal relief of all but the two persons most interested—Arthur and myself.

Mr. Moffat, generous enough or discreet enough to take no note of his opponent's discomfiture, lifted a paper from the table and held it toward the witness.

"Do you recognize these lines?" he asked, placing the remnants of my half burned communication in her hands.

She started at sight of them. Evidently she had never expected to see them again.

"Yes," she answered after a moment. "This is a portion of the note I have mentioned."

"You recognize it as such?"

"I do."

Her eyes lingered on the scrap and followed it as it was passed back and marked as an exhibit.

Mr. Moffat recalled her to the matter in hand.

"What did you do next, Miss Cumberland?"

"I answered the note."

"May I ask to what effect?"

"I refused Mr. Ranelagh's request. I said that I could not do what he asked and told him to wait till the next day and he would see how I felt toward him and toward Adelaide. That was all. I could not write much. I was suffering greatly."

"Suffering in mind or suffering in body?"

"Suffering in my mind. I was terrified, but that feeling did not last very long. Soon I grew happy, happier than I had been in weeks, happier than I had ever been in all my life before. I found that I loved Adelaide better than I did myself. This made everything easy, even the sending of the answer I have told you about to Mr. Ranelagh."

"Miss Cumberland, how did you get this answer to Mr. Ranelagh?"

"By means of a gentleman who was going away on the very train I had been asked to leave on. He was a guest next door, and I carried the note in to him."

"Did you do this openly?"

"No; I'm afraid not. I slipped out by the side door in as careful a way as I could."

"Did this attempt at secrecy succeed? Were you able to go and come without meeting any one?"

"No. Adelaide was at the head of the stairs when I came back, standing there, very stiff and quiet."

"Did she speak to you?"

"No. She just looked at me. But it wasn't a common look. I shall never forget it."

"And what did you do then?"

"I went to my room."

"Miss Cumberland, did you see anybody else when you came in at this time?"

"Yes, our maid, Helen. She was just laying down a bunch of keys on the table in the lower hall. I stopped and looked at the keys. I had recognized them as the ones I had seen in Mr. Ranelagh's hands many times. He had gone, yet there were his keys. One of them unlocked the clubhouse. I noticed it among the others, but I didn't touch it then. Helen was still in the hall, and I ran straight upstairs, where I met my sister, as I have just told you."

"Miss Cumberland, continue the story. What did you do after re-entering your room?"

"I don't know what I did first. I was very excited—elated one minute, deeply wretched and very frightened the next. I must have sat down, for I was shaking very much and felt a little sick. The sight of that key had brought up pictures of the clubhouse, and I thought and thought how quiet it was and how far away and how cold it was, too, and how secret. I would go there for what I had to do—there! And then I saw in my fancy one of its rooms, with the moon in it, and—but I soon shut my eyes to that. I heard Arthur moving about his room, and this made me start up and go out into the hall again."

"Arthur's room is near and Adelaide's far off, but I went to Adelaide's first. Her door was shut, and when I went to open it I found it locked. Calling her name, I said that I was tired and would be glad to say good night. She did not answer at once. When she did her voice was strange, though what she said was very simple—I was to please myself; she was going to retire too. And then she tried to say good night, but she only half said it, like one who is

choked with tears or some other dreadful emotion. I cannot tell you how this made me feel, but you don't care for that. You want to know what I did—what Adelaide did. I will tell you, but I cannot hurry."

"Take your time, Miss Cumberland; we have no wish to hurry you."

"I can go on now. The next thing I did was to knock at Arthur's door. I heard him getting ready to go out, and I wanted to speak to him before he went. When he heard me he opened the door and let me in. He began at once on his grievances, but I could not listen to them. I wanted him to harness the gray mare for me and leave it standing in the stable. I explained the request by saying that it was necessary for me to see a certain friend of mine immediately and that no one would notice me in the cutter under the bearskins. He didn't approve, but I persuaded him. I even persuaded him to wait till Zadok was gone, so that Adelaide would know nothing about it. He looked glum, but he promised."

"He was going away when I heard Adelaide's steps in the adjoining room. This frightened me. The partition is very thin between these two rooms, and I was afraid she had heard me ask Arthur for the gray mare and cutter. I could hear her rattling the bottles in the medicine cabinet hanging on this very wall. I hurried back to my own room, where I collected such little articles as I needed for the expedition before me."

"I had hardly done this when I heard the servants on the walk outside, then Arthur going down. The impulse to see and speak to him again was irresistible. I flew after him and caught him in the lower hall. 'Arthur,' I cried, 'look at me—look at me well—and then—kiss me!' And he did kiss me. I'm glad when I think of it, though he did say next minute: 'What is the matter with you? What are you going to do—to meet that villain?'"

"I looked straight into his face. I waited till I saw I had his whole attention. Then I said as slowly and emphatically as I could: 'If you mean Elwood—no! I shall never meet him again, except in Adelaide's presence. He will not want to meet me. You may be at ease about that. Tomorrow all will be well and Adelaide very happy.'"

"He shrugged his shoulders and reached for his coat and hat. As he was putting them on I said, 'Don't forget to harness up Jenny. Jenny is the gray mare. And leave off the bells.' I urged. 'I don't want Adelaide to hear me go out.'"

"He swung about at this. 'You and Adelaide are not very good friends, it seems.' 'As good as you and she are,' I answered. Then I flung my arms about him. 'Don't go down street tonight,' I prayed. 'Stay home for this one night. Stay in the house with Adelaide. Stay till I come home.' He stared, and I saw his color change. Then he flung me off, but not rudely. 'Why don't you stay?' he asked. Then he laughed and added, 'I'll go harness the mare.'"

"The key's in the kitchen," I said. 'I'll go get it for you. I heard Zadok bring it in.' He did not answer, and I went for the key. I found two on the nail, and I brought them both, but I only handed him one, the key to the stable door. 'Which way are you going?' I asked as he looked at the key, then back toward the kitchen. 'The short way, of course.' 'Then here's the key to the Fulton grounds.'"

"As he took the key I prayed again: 'Don't do what's in your mind, Arthur. Don't drink tonight.' He only laughed, and I said my last word: 'If you do it will be for the last time. You'll never drink again after tomorrow.'"

"He made no answer to this, and I went slowly upstairs. Everything was quiet—quiet as death—in the whole house. If Adelaide had heard us she made no sign. Going to my own room, I waited until I heard Arthur come out of the stable and go away by the door in the rear wall. Then I stole out again. I carried a small bag with me, but no coat or hat."

"Pausing and listening again and again, I crept downstairs and halted at the table under the rack. The keys were still there. Putting them in my bag, I searched the rack for one of my brother's warm coats. But I took none I saw. I remembered an old one which Adelaide had put away in the closet under the stairs. Getting this, I put it on, and, finding a hat there, too, I took that also, and when I had pulled it over my forehead and drawn up the collar of the coat I was quite unrecognizable. I was going out when I remembered there would be no light in the clubhouse. I had put a box of matches in my bag while I was upstairs, but I needed a candle. Slipping back, I took a candlestick and candle from the dining room mantel and drove swiftly away."

"How did you leave the stable door?"

"Open."

"Can you tell us what time it was when you started?"

"No. I did not look. Time meant nothing to me. I drove as fast as I could straight down the hill and out toward the Whispering Pines. I had seen Adelaide in her window as I went flying by the house, but not a soul on the road nor a sign of life near or far. The whistle of a train blew as I stopped in the thicket near the clubhouse door. If it was the express train you can tell."

"Never mind the if," said Mr. Moffat. "It is enough that you heard the whistle. Go on with what you did."

"I tied up my horse, then I went into the house. I had used Mr. Ranelagh's key to open the door, and for some reason I took it out of the lock when I got in and put the whole bunch back into my satchel. But I did not lock the door. Then I lit my candle and then—

"There is a room upstairs in the clubhouse where I have often been with Adelaide. It has a fireplace in it, and I had seen a box there half filled with wood the day before. This is the room I went to, and here I built a fire. When it was quite bright I took out something I had brought in my satchel and thrust it into the flame. Then I got up and walked away. I did not feel very strong and sank on my knees when I got to the couch and buried my face in my arms. But I felt better when I came back to the fire again and very brave till I caught a glimpse of my face in the mirror over the mantelpiece. That—that unnerved me, and I think I screamed. Some one screamed, and I think it was I. I know my hands went out—I saw them in the glass; then they fell straight down at my side, and I looked and looked at myself till I saw all the terror go out of my face, and when it was quite calm again I stooped down and pulled out the little tongs I had been heating in the fire and laid them quick—quick, before I could be sorry again, right across my cheek, and then—"



"I LAID THEM RIGHT ACROSS MY CHEEK."

in the fire and laid them quick—quick, before I could be sorry again, right across my cheek, and then—"

Uproar in the court. If she had screamed when she said she did, so some one cried out loudly now. I think that pitiful person was myself. They say I had been standing straight up in my place for the last two minutes.

## CHAPTER XXV

"CHOOSE."

"I HAVE not finished," were the first words we heard from Carmel when order was restored and we were all in a condition to listen again.

"I had to relate what you have just heard that you might understand what happened next. I was not used to pain, and I could never have kept on pressing those irons to my cheek if I had not had the strength given me by my own reflection in the glass. When I thought the burn was quite deep enough I tore the tongs away and was lifting them to the other cheek when I saw the door behind me open inch by inch, as though pushed by hesitating touches."

"Instantly I forgot my pain, almost my purpose, watching that door. I saw it slowly swing to its full width and disclose my sister standing in the gap with a look and in an attitude which terrified me more than the fire had done. Dropping the tongs, I turned and faced her, covering my cheek instinctively with my hand."

"I saw her eyes run over my elaborate dinner dress—my little hand bag and the candle burning in a room made warm with a fire on the hearth—this before she spoke a single word. Then, with a deep laboring breath, she looked me in the eye again with the simple question:

"'And where is he?'"

Carmel's head had drooped at this, but she raised it almost instantly. Mine did not rise so readily.

"Do you mean Elwood?" I asked.

"You know," said she. "The veil is down between us, Carmel. We will speak plainly now. I saw him give you the letter. I heard you ask Arthur to harness up the horse. I have demeaned myself to follow you, and we will have no subterfuges now. You expect him here?"

"No," I cried. "I am not so bad as that, Adelaide—nor is he. Here is the note. You will see by it what he expects and at what place I should have joined him if I had been the selfish creature you think." I had the note hidden in my breast. I took it out and held it toward her. I did not feel the burn at all, but I kept it covered. She glanced down at the words, and I felt like falling at her feet, she looked so miserable.

"[TO BE CONTINUED.]"

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