

# 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 III  
INCUMBENT.

That night the tempter had his own way with me. Without much difficulty he persuaded me that my neglect of Althea Burroughs' children was without any excuse; that what had been my duty toward them when I knew them to be left motherless and alone had become an imperative demand upon me now that the town in which they lived had become overshadowed by a mystery which could not but affect the comfort and happiness of all its inhabitants. I could not wait a day. I recalled all that I had heard of poor Althea's short and none too happy marriage and immediately felt such a burning desire to see if her delicate and espiegle beauty—how well I remembered it—had been repeated in her daughters that I found myself packing my trunk before I knew it.

I had not been home for a long time—all the better reason why I should have a change now—and when I called together Mrs. Randolph and the servants and told them of my intention of leaving on the early morning train it created quite a sensation in the house and a little surmise.

But I had the best of explanations to give. I had been thinking of my dead friend, and conscience would not let me neglect her dear and possibly unhappy progeny any longer. I had purposed many times to visit them, and now I was going to do it. When I came to a decision, it was usually suddenly, and I never rested after having once made up my mind.

My sentiment went so far that I got down an old album and began hunting up the pictures I had brought away with me from boarding school. Here were among them, and I really did experience more or less compunction when I saw again the delicate yet daring features which had once had a very great influence over my mind. What a teasing sprite she was, yet what a will she had, and how strange it was that, having been so intimate as girls, we never knew anything of each other as women! Had it been her fault or my fault? Was her marriage to blame for it or my sisterhood? Difficult to tell then, impossible to tell now. I would not even think of it again, save as a warning. Nothing must stand between me and her children now that my attention has been called to them again.

I did not mean to take them by surprise—that is, not entirely. The invitation which they had sent me years ago was still in force, making it simply necessary for me to telegraph them that I had decided to make them a visit and that they might expect me by the noon train. If in times gone by they had been properly instructed by their mother as to the character of her old friend, this need not put them out. I am not a woman of unbounded expectations. I do not look for the comforts abroad I am accustomed to at home, and if, as I have reason to believe, their means are not of the greatest I should only be provoked at any extra effort to make me feel at home in the humble cottage suited to their fortunes.

So the telegram was sent and my preparations completed for an early departure.

But, resolved as I was to make this visit, my determination came near receiving a check. Just as I was leaving the house, at the very moment, in fact, when the hackman was carrying out my trunk, I saw a man approaching me with every evidence of haste. He had a letter in his hand, which he held out to me as soon as he came within reach.

"For Miss Butterworth," he said. "Private and immediate."

"Ah," thought I, "a communication from Mr. Gryce," and hesitated for a moment whether to open it then and there or thrust it in my pocket and read it at my leisure on the cars. The latter course would be far the easiest, for my hands were cumbered with the various small articles I consider indispensable to the comfortable enjoyment of the shortest journey, and the glasses without which I cannot read a word were in the very bottom of my pocket under some other equally necessary articles of smaller size.

But something in the man's expectant look warned me that he would never leave me till I had read the note, so with a sigh I called Lela to my aid, and after several vain attempts to reach my glasses succeeded in pulling them out at last and by their help reading the following hurried lines:

DEAR MADAM—I send you this by a swifter messenger than myself. Do not let anything that I may have said last night influence you to leave your comfortable home. The adventure offers too many dangers for a woman. Read the enclosed.

The inclosed was a telegram from Obadiah Trohm, sent during the night, and evidently just received at headquarters. Its contents were certainly not reassuring:

Another person missing. Seen to have entered Lost Man's lane. Never seen to have come out of it. A harmless lad known as Silly Rufes. What's to be done? Wire orders. P.

"Mr. Gryce bade me say that he would be up here some time before noon," said the man, seeing me look with some blankness at these words.

Nothing more was needed to pull me together. Folding up the letter, I put it in my bag.

"Say to Mr. Gryce from me that my intended visit cannot be postponed," I remarked. "I have telegraphed to my friends to expect me, and only a great

emergency would lead me to disappoint them. I will be glad to receive Mr. Gryce on my return." And without further parley I took my bundles back from Lela and proceeded at once to the carriage. Why should I show any failure of courage at an event that was but a repetition of the very ones which made my visit necessary? Was I a likely one to fall victim to a mystery to which my eyes have been opened? Had I not been sufficiently warned of the dangers of Lost Man's lane to keep myself at a respectable distance from the place of peril? I was going to visit the children of my once devoted friend. If there were perils of an ordinary nature to be encountered there, was I not all the more called upon to go if only as a moral support to these young people, who perhaps themselves were paralyzed by fear?

Yes, Mr. Gryce, and nothing now should hold me back. I even felt an increased desire to reach the scene of these mysteries and chafed some at the length of the journey, which was of a more tedious character than I expected. A poor beginning for events requiring patience as well as great moral courage, but I little knew what was before me and only considered that every moment spent on this hot and dusty train kept me thus much longer from the embraces of Althea's children.

I recovered my equanimity, however, as we approached. The scenery was really beautiful, and the consciousness that I should soon alight at the mountain station which had played a more or less serious part in Mr. Gryce's narrative awakened in me a pleasurable excitement which should have been a sufficient warning to me that the spirit which had led me through that affair next door had seized me again in a way that meant equal absorption if not equal success.

The number of small packages I carried gave me enough to think of at the moment of alighting, but as soon as I was safely again on terra firma I threw a hasty glance around to see if any of Althea's children were there to meet me.

I felt that I would know them at once. She had been so characteristically pretty they could not fail to show some likeness which would lead to an instant recognition while they could not fail to know me. But while there were two or three country maidens to be seen standing in and around the little pavilion known here as the mountain station I saw no one who by any stretch of imagination could be regarded as Althea Burroughs' blood or breeding.

Somewhat disappointed, for I had expected different results from my telegram, I stepped up to the station master and asked him whether I would have any difficulty in procuring a carriage to take me to Miss Knollys' house. He stared, it seemed to me unnecessarily long, before replying.

"Waal," said he, "Simmons is usually here, but—I don't see him round today. Perhaps one of these farmer lads will take it."

But they all drew back with a sort of scared look, and I was beginning to tuck up my skirts preparatory to walking when a little old man of very meek appearance drove up in a very old fashioned coach, and with a hesitating air, springing entirely from bashfulness, managed to ask if I was Miss Butterworth. I hastened to assure him that I was, whereupon he stammered out some words about Miss Knollys and how sorry she was that she could not come for me herself. Then he pointed to his coach and made me understand that I was to step into it and go with him.

It was not an altogether encouraging outlook, especially as I saw the heads of the various onlookers draw together and many curious looks directed at us both and the conveyance that was to carry us. But I was in no mood to be daunted now, and accepting the old coddler's apologies with what grace I could I stepped into the wagon and prepared myself for a ride into town.

But it seems I was not to be allowed to enter upon this adventure without another warning. While the old man was engaged in bringing my trunk, the station master approached me with great civility, and with a touch of his hat asked if it was my intention to spend a few days with the Misses Knollys. I told him that it was, and, thinking it best to establish my position at once in the eyes of the whole town, added with a politeness equal to his own that I was an old friend of the family and had been coming to visit them for years, but had never found it convenient till now and that I hoped they were all well and would be glad to see me.

He made some sort of reply, showing considerable embarrassment, then plucking up his courage said with marked constraint:

"Perhaps you have not heard that this village just now is under a cloud."

"I have heard," I said innocently. "That one or two men have disappeared from here somewhat mysteriously. Is that what you mean?"

"Yes," he answered. "One person, a boy, disappeared only two days ago."

"That's bad," I said, "but what has that to do with me?" I asked smilingly, for I saw he was not at the end of his talk.

"Oh, nothing," he cried eagerly, "only I didn't know but you might be timid—"

"Oh, I'm not at all timid!" I has-

toned to say. "If I were, I should not have come here at all. Such matters don't affect me." And I spread out my skirts and arranged myself for my ride as if the horrors he had mentioned had made no more impression upon me than if his chat had been of the weather.

Perhaps I overdid it, for he looked at me for another moment in a curious, lingering way; then he walked off, and I saw him enter the circle of gossips on the platform, where he stood shaking his head as long as we were within sight.

Before taking his seat my driver escorted gave me a furtive glance as he stooped to tear from one of the spokes a bit of rag that seemed to have been caught there. He was evidently preparing to make a good impression and to do me suitable honor.

My companion, who was the steepest man I ever saw, did not speak a word while descending the hill. I talked and endeavored to make him, too, but his replies were more grunts or half syllables which conveyed no information whatever. As we cleared the thicket, however, he allowed himself an ejaculation or two as he pointed out the beauties of the landscape. And indeed it was well worth his admiration and mine had my mind been free to enjoy it. But the houses which now began to appear on either side of the way drew my attention from the mountains. We were still somewhat remote from the town, were rapidly approaching the head of that lane of evil fame with whose terrible history my thoughts were at this time full. I was so anxious not to pass it without one look into its greivous recesses that I kept my head persistently turned that way till I felt I was attracting the attention of my companion. As this was not desirable I put on a nonchalant look and began chatting about what I saw. But he had lapsed into his early silence, and only answered by a snap of his whip at the horse whose jog trot needed a little urging.

Suddenly I myself grew still. The houses were growing fewer on the left hand side of the way, and I saw beyond the dark boughs of a pine thicket. We

faces of these young people I recognized the fact that they were the victims of a web of circumstances so tragic and incomprehensible that only a woman like myself would be able to clear them away and restore these girls to the confidence of the people around them.

I forgot that these girls had a brother and that— But not a word to forestall the truth. I wish this story to grow upon you just as it did upon me, and with just as little preparation.

The farmer who drove me, and whom I afterward learned was called Simsbury, showed a certain dogged interest in my behavior that would have amused me or at least have awakened my disdain under circumstances of a less thrilling nature. I saw his eye roll in a sort of wonder over my person which may have been held a little more stiffly than was necessary and settle finally on my face with a look I might have thought complimentary had I had any thought to bestow on such matters. Not till we had passed the path branching up through the woods toward the mountain did he see fit to withdraw it, nor did I fail to find it fixed again upon me as we rode by the little hut occupied by the old woman considered so harmless by Mr. Gryce.

Perhaps he had a reason for this, as I was very much interested in this hut and its occupant, about which I felt free to cherish my own secret doubts—so interested that I cast it a very sharp glance and was glad when I caught a glimpse through the doorway of the old crone's bent form and toothless jaws muzzling over a piece of bread she was engaged in eating as we passed her.

"Mother Jane," explained my companion, breaking the silence of many minutes. "And yonder is Miss Knollys," he added, lifting his whip and pointing toward the half-concealed facade of a large and pretentious dwelling a few rods farther on down the road. "She will be powerful glad to see you, miss. Company is scarce in these parts."

Astonished at this sudden launch into conversation by one whose reserve even I had found it impossible to penetrate, I gave him the affable answer he evidently

numbered such portions of the path as the weeds had left visible. As I went on something in the silence of the spot struck me. Was I becoming over-sensitive to impressions or was there something really uncanny in the absolute lack of sound or movement in a dwelling of such dimensions? But I should not have said movement, for at that instant I saw a flash in one of the upper windows as of a curtain being stealthily drawn and as stealthily let fall again, and though it gave me the promise of some sort of greeting there was a furtiveness in the action that was so in keeping with the suspicions of Mr. Gryce that I felt my nerves braced at once to meet the half dozen uninviting looking steps that led to the front door.

But no sooner had I done this with what I am fain to think was my best air than I suddenly collapsed with what must have been a movement of sudden and to me quite comprehensible fear, for while I do not quail before men and have a reasonable fortitude in the presence of most dangers corporal and moral, I am not quite myself in face of a rampant and barking dog. It is my one weakness. I can divulge that much now, and while I usually can, and under most circumstances do, succeed in hiding any outward manifestation of my inner trepidation I always feel that it would be a happy day for me when dogs would be banished from the affections and homes of men. Then I think I would begin to live in good content and perhaps enjoy trips into the country which now, for all my apparent bravery, I regard more in the light of a penance than a pleasure.

Imagine, then, how hard I found it to retain my self-possession or even my appearance of dignity when at the moment I was stretching forth my hand toward the knocker of this inhospitable mansion I heard rising from somewhere I never rightly knew where the howl of a dog so keen, piercing and prolonged that it frightened the very birds over my head and sent them flying from the vines in clouds.

It was the unhappiest kind of welcome for me. I did not know whether it came from within or without, and when after a moment of indecision I saw the door open I am not sure whether the smile I called up to grace the occasion had any of the real Amelia Butterworth in it, so much was my mind divided between a desire to produce a favorable impression and a very decided and not to be hidden fear of the dog who had greeted my arrival with such an ominous howl.

"Call off the dog!" I cried almost before I saw what sort of person I was addressing.

Mr. Gryce, when I told him of this later, said I could not have made a more significant introduction of myself to the Knollys mansion.

(To be Continued Next Week.)



I SAW A FLASH IN ONE OF THE UPPER WINDOWS.

were nearing Lost Man's lane, we were abreast of it, we were—turning into it.

I could not repress the exclamation that escaped me.

"Where are we going?" I asked.

"To Miss Knollys' house," he found words to say, smiting his horse again, but with a sidelong glance at me this time full of uneasy inquiry.

"Do they live on this road?" said I, remembering with a certain shock Mr. Gryce's suspicious description of the two young ladies who with their brother inhabited the dilapidated mansion marked in the map he had shown me.

"Certain," was the laconic answer, and, obliged to be satisfied with this, I drew myself up with just one longing look behind me at the cheerful highway we were so rapidly leaving. A cottage, with an open window, in which a child's head could be seen nodding eagerly toward me, met my eyes and filled me with quite an odd sense of discomfort as I realized that I had caught the attention of one of the little cripples who, according to Mr. Gryce, always kept watch over this entrance into Lost Man's lane. Another moment and the pine branches had shut the vision out, but I did not soon forget that eager, childish face and pointing hand marking me out as an intruder if not a possible victim to the horrors of this ill-reputed lane. But I was aware of no secret flinching from the adventure into which I was plunging. On the contrary, I felt a strange and fierce delight in thus being thrust into the very heart of this mystery which I had only expected to approach by degrees. The warning message sent me by Mr. Gryce had acquired under it a deeper and more significant meaning, as did the looks which had been cast me by the station master and his gossips on the hillside, but in my present mood these very tokens of the serious nature of my undertaking only gave an added spur to my courage. I felt my brain clear and my heart expand, as if even now before I had so much as set eyes on the

ly expected and then looked eagerly toward the house. It was as Mr. Gryce had intimated, eminently forbidding even at that distance, and as we approached nearer and I was given a full view of its worn and discolored front I felt myself forced to acknowledge that never in my life had my eyes fallen upon a habitation more given over to neglect or less promising in its hospital-ity.

Had it not been for the thin circle of smoke eddying up from one of its broken chimneys I should have looked upon the place as one which had not known the care or presence of man for years. There was a riot of shrubbery in the yard, a lack of the commonest attention to order in the way the vines drooped in tangled masses over the very face of the desolate porch, that gave to the broken pilasters and decayed window frames of this dreariest of facades that look of abandonment which only becomes picturesque when nature has usurped the prerogative of man and taken entirely to herself the empty walls and falling casements of what was once a human dwelling. That any one should be living in it now and that I, who have never been able to see a chair standing crooked or a curtain awry without a sensation of the keenest discomfort, should be on the point of deliberately entering its doors as an inmate filled me at the moment with such a sense of unreality that I descended from the carriage in a sort of a dream and was making my way through one of the gaps in the high antique fence that separated the yard from the gateway when Mr. Simsbury stopped me and pointed out the gate.

I did not think it worth while to apologize for the broken palings certainly offered as good an entrance as the gate, which had slipped from its hinges and hung but a few inches open. But I took the course he indicated, holding up my skirts as well as my packages would allow and treading gingerly for fear of the snails and toads that in-

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