

The House of the Whispering Pines

By ANNA KATHARINE GREEN

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CHAPTER IX.

THE MOTIONLESS FIGURE.

"The coat is here, too," whispered Sweetwater after a moment of considerate silence. "We had better look it over. I'll make up your mind what to do with this conclusive bit of evidence."

"Yes, look it. I'm not quite myself. Sweetwater, I shall never survive the strain if—"

"He turned away. Sweetwater carefully returned the hat to its peg, turned the key in the door and softly followed his superior back into the dining room and thence to their former retreat."

"I can see that it's likely to be a dreadful business," he ventured to remark as the two stood face to face again. "But we're no choice. Facts are facts, and we've got to make the best of them. You mean me to go on?"

"Go on?"

"Following up the clues which you have yourself given me? I've only finished with one; there's another."

"The bottles?"

"Yes, the bottles. I believe that I shall not fall there if you'll give me a little time. I'm a stranger in town, you remember, and cannot be expected to move as fast as a local detective."

"Sweetwater, we have but one duty to follow both clues as far as they will take us. Only be careful. Remember the evidence against Ranelagh. You will have to forge an exceedingly strong chain to hold your own against the facts which have brought this recreant lover to book. You see—oh, I wish that poor girl could get ease!"

"Lila, Lila!" rang again through the house.

"She is the only one who is wholly innocent in this whole business. Consider her at every point. Her life is invaluable to every one concerned. But she must not be roused to the fact—not yet. Nor must be startled either; you know whom I mean. Quiet does it, Sweetwater. Quiet and a seeming deference to his wishes as the present head of the house."

"Is the place his? Has Miss Cumberland made a will?"

"Her will, yes, he read tomorrow. For tonight Arthur Cumberland's position here is the position of a master." "I will respect it, sir, up to all reasonable bounds. I don't think he meddles giving any trouble. He's not at all impressed by our presence. All seems to care about is what his sister may be led to say in her deposition."

"That's how you look at it? The coroner's tone was one of gloom. Then came a moment of silence. "You may take a moment of silence. 'You may take a moment of silence. I can do nothing further here today.' Sweetwater threw open the door, but his wistful look did not escape the other man's eye."

"You're not ready to go? Wish to search the house perhaps. It has already been done in a general way."

"I wish to do it thoroughly."

"The coroner sighed."

"I should be wrong to stand in your way. Get your warrant and the house yours. But remember the sick girl."

"That's why I wish to do the job myself."

"You're a good fellow, Sweetwater. The keys tell the tale—the keys and the bat. If the former had been left to the clubhouse and the latter found without the mark set on it by the coroner's wife Ranelagh's chances would look as slim today as they did immediately after the event. But with things as they are he may well rest easily tonight. The clouds are lifting for him."

"The coroner gone, Sweetwater made his way to the room where he had last seen Mr. Clifton. He found it empty and was soon told by Hexford that the lawyer had left. He followed Hexford upstairs."

"I'd like to see the girl and I'd like to see the brother when he thought no one was watching him," he said.

"I wonder what she meant by that wild cry of 'Fear it open! See it her heart is there!'"

"The coroner said Hexford."

"Of course. What else could she have meant?"

"Well, delirium is a queer thing; makes a fellow feel creepy all over. I don't reckon on my nights here."

"Hexford, help me to a peep. I've got a difficult job before me, and I need all the aid I can get."

"Oh, there's no trouble about that! Talk boldly along; he won't notice."

"He won't notice?"

"No; he notices nothing but what comes from the sickroom." He lit his all the time."

"Does the nurse know this?"

"The nurse is a puzzle."

"How so?"

"Half nurse and half—But go see your journey. Here's a package to take—medicine from the drug store. Tell her there was no one else to bring it. She'll show no surprise."

Muttering his thanks, Sweetwater slipped the package and dashed down with it down the hall. He had as far as the turn before, but now he passed the turn to find, just

as he expected, a closed door on the left and an open alcove on the right. The door led into Miss Cumberland's room. The alcove, circular in shape and lighted by several windows, projected from the rear of the extension and had for its outlook the stable and the huge sycamore tree growing beside it.

Sweetwater could not see Arthur's face. But his drooping head, rigid with desperate thinking; his relaxed hand closed around the neck of a decanter, which nevertheless he did not lift, made upon Sweetwater an impression which nothing he saw afterward ever quite effaced.

"When I come back that whisky will be half gone," thought he and lingered to see the tumbler tilted and the first draft taken.

But no. The hand slowly uncupped and fell away from the decanter, his head sank forward until his chin rested on his breast, and a sigh, starting to Sweetwater, fell from his lips. Hexford was right—only one thing could arouse him.

Sweetwater now tried that thing. He knocked softly on the sickroom door.

This reached the ear oblivious to all else. Young Cumberland started to his feet, and for a moment Sweetwater saw again the heavy features which an hour before had produced such a repulsive effect upon him in the figure sank again into place with the same constraint in its lines and the same dejection.

Sweetwater's hand, lifted in repetition of his knock, hung suspended. He had not expected quite such indifference as this. It upset his calculations just a trifle.

The door was opened to him this time. As it swung back he saw first a burst of grey color as a room paneled in exquisite pink burst upon his sight, then the great picture of his life—the bloodless features of Carmel calmed for the moment into sleep.

Sweetwater gazed at the winsome brown head over the nurse's shoulder and felt that for him a new and important factor had entered into this case with his recognition of this woman's great beauty. How deep a factor he was far from suspecting, or he would not have met the nurse's eyes with quite so cheery and self-confident a smile.

"Excuse the intrusion," he said. "We thought you might need these things. Hexford signed for them."

"I'm obliged to you. Are you—one of them?" she sharply asked.

"Would it disturb you if I were? I hope not. I've no wish to seem intrusive."

"What do you want? Something, I know. Give it a name before there's a change there."

She nodded toward the bed, and Sweetwater took advantage of the moment to scrutinize more closely the nurse herself. She was a robust, fine looking woman, producing an impression of capability united to kindness. Strength of mind and rigid attendance to duty dominated the kindness, however.

"I want another good look at your patient, and I want your confidence since you and I may have to see much of each other before this matter is ended."

"You asked me to speak plainly, and I have done so."

"You are from headquarters?"

"Coroner Perry sent me." Throwing back his coat, he showed his badge. "The coroner has returned to his office. He was quite upset by the outcry which came from this room at an unhappy moment during the funeral."

"I know. It was my fault. I opened the door just for an instant, and in that instant my patient broke through her torpor and spoke."

She had drawn him in by this time and, after another glance at her patient, softly closed the door behind him.

"I have nothing to report," said she, "but the one sentence everybody heard."

Sweetwater took in the little memorandum book and pencil which hung at her side and understood her position and extraordinary amenability to his wishes. Unconsciously a low exclamation escaped him. He was young and had not yet sunk the man entirely in the detective.

His eye went wandering all over the room as he spoke until it fell upon a peculiar looking cabinet or closet set into the wall directly opposite the bed.

"What's that?" he asked.

"I don't know. I can't make it out, and I don't like to ask."

Sweetwater examined it for a moment from where he stood, then crossed over and scrutinized it more particularly. It was a unique specimen. What it lacked in height—it could not have measured more than a foot from the bottom to the top—it made up in length, which must have exceeded five feet. The doors, of which it had two, were both tightly locked, but as they were made of transparent glass the objects behind them were quite visible. It was the nature of these objects which made the mystery. The longer Sweetwater examined them the less he understood the reason for their collection, much less for their preservation in a room which in all other respects expressed the quintessence of taste.

At one end he saw a stuffed chair, not perched on a twig but lying prone on its side. Near it was a doll, with scorched face and limbs half consumed.



"HER HEART SHOULD BE THERE. HER HEART, HER HEART!"

Next this the broken pieces of a china bowl and what looked like the torn remnants of some very fine lace. Further along his eye lighted on a young girl's bonnet, exquisite in color and nicely of material, but crushed out of all shape and only betraying its identity by its dangling strings.

"Some childish nonsense," he remarked and moved toward the door. "The servants will be coming back, and I had rather not be found here. You'll see me again. I cannot tell just when. Perhaps you may want to send for me. If so, my name is Sweetwater."

His hand was on the knob, and he was almost out of the room when he started and looked back. A violent change in the patient had occurred.

Disturbed by his voice or by some inner pulsation of the fever which devoured her, Carmel had risen from the pillow and now sat, staring straight before her, with every feature working and lips opened as if to speak. Sweetwater held his breath, and the nurse leaped toward her and gently encircled her with protecting arms.

Flinging out her hand, she cried out loudly, just as she had cried an hour before:

"Break it open! Break the glass and look in. Her heart should be there. Her heart, her heart!"

"Go or I cannot quiet her!" ordered the nurse, and Sweetwater turned to obey.

But a new obstacle tumbled. The brother had heard this cry and now stood in the doorway.

"Who are you?" he impatiently demanded, surveying Sweetwater in sudden anger.

"I brought up the drugs," was the quiet explanation of the ever ready detective. "I didn't mean to alarm the young lady, and I don't think I did. It's the fever, sir, which makes her talk so wildly."

"We want no strangers here," was young Cumberland's response. "Remember, nurse, no strangers." His tone was actually peremptory.

Sweetwater observed him in real astonishment as he said by and made his quiet escape. He was still more astonished when, on glancing toward the alcove, he perceived that, contrary to his own prognostication, the whisky stood as high in the decanter as before.

CHAPTER X.

HELEN SURPRISES SWEETWATER.

THE servants returning from the funeral drove up just as Sweetwater reached the lower floor. He was at the side door when they came in, and a single glance convinced him that all had gone off decorously at the grave and that nothing further had occurred during their absence to disturb them.

He followed them as they filed away into the kitchen and, waiting till the men had gone about their work, turned his attention to the girls, who stood about very much as if they did not know just what to do with themselves.

"Sit, ladies," said he, drawing up chairs quite as if he were doing the honors of the house. "You're all upset, you are, by what Mr. Cumberland said in such an unbecoming way at the funeral. He'd like to strangle Mr. Ranelagh! Why couldn't he wait for the sheriff? It looks as if that gentleman would have the job, all right."

"Oh, don't!" wailed out one of the girls, the impressionable, warm hearted Maggie. "The horrors of this house will kill me. I can't stand it a minute longer. I'll go to-morrow."

"You won't; you're too kind hearted to leave Mr. Cumberland and his sister in their desperate trouble," Sweetwater put in, with a decision as sug-

gestive of admiration as he dared to assume.

Her eyes filled, and she said no more. Sweetwater shifted his attention to Helen. Working around by her side, he managed to drop these words into her ear:

"She talks most, but she doesn't feel her responsibilities any more than you do. I've had my experience with women, and you're of the sort that stays."

She rolled her eyes toward him in a slow, surprised way that would have abashed most men.

"I don't know your name or your business here," said she, "but I do know that you take a good deal upon yourself when you say what I shall do or shall not do. I don't even know myself."

With the most innocent air in the world he launched forth in a trade against the man then in custody, as though his guilt were an accepted fact and nothing but the formalities of the law stood between him and his final doom. "It must make you all feel queer," he wound up, "to think you have waited on him and seen him tramping about these rooms for months just as if he had no wicked feelings in his heart and meant to marry Miss Cumberland—not to kill her."

"Oh, oh!" Maggie sobbed out. "And a perfect gentleman he was too. I can't believe no bad of him. He was not like—"

Her breath caught and so suddenly that Sweetwater was always convinced that the more cautious Helen had twined her by her arm. "Like—like other gentlemen who come here. It was a kind word he had or a smile."

"I—"

She made an attempt to finish, but bounded to her feet, pulling up the more sedate Helen with her. "Let's go," she whispered. "I'm afraid of the man."

The other yielded and began to cross the door behind the impetuous Maggie.

Sweetwater summoned up his courage.

"One moment," he prayed. "Will you tell me before you go whether the candlestick I have noticed on the dining room mantel is not one of a pair?"

"Yes; there were two—once," said Helen, resisting Maggie's effort to drag her out through the open door.

"Once," smiled Sweetwater, "by which you mean three days ago."

A lowering of her head and a sudden make for the door.

Sweetwater changed his tone to one of simple inquiry.

"And was that where they always stood, the pair of them, one on each end of the dining room mantel?"

She nodded, involuntarily perhaps, but decisively.

Sweetwater hid his disappointment. The room mentioned was a thoroughfare for the whole family. Any member of it could have taken the candlestick.

"I'm obliged to you," said he and might have ventured further had she given him the opportunity. But she was too near the door to resist the temptation of flight. In another moment she was gone, and Sweetwater found himself alone with his reflections.

The moon shone that night, much to Sweetwater's discomfort.

The house presented an equally gloomy and forbidding appearance, and in the stable it was no better. Zaddock had bought an evening paper and was seeking solace from its columns. Sweetwater had attempted the so-called, but had been met by a decided rebuff.

Soon Sweetwater realized that his work was over for the night and planned to leave. But there was one point to be settled first. Was there any other means of exit from these grounds save that offered by the ordinary driveway?

He had an impression that in one of his strolls about he had detected the outline of a door in what looked like a high brick wall in the extreme rear. If so it were well worth his while to know where that door led. It might be as well to try the lock, but he would have to cross a very wide strip of moonlight in order to do so, and he

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Heard to attract attention to his extreme inquisitiveness.

Advancing in a quiet, sidelong way he had, he laid his hand on the small knob above the lock and quickly turned it. The door was unlocked and swung under his gentle push. An alleyway opened before him leading to what appeared to be another residence street. He was about to test the truth of this surprise when he heard a step behind him and, turning, encountered the heavy figure of the coachman advancing toward him with a key in his hand.

Zaddock was of an easy turn but he had been sorely tried that day, and his limit had been reached.

"You snooper!" he bawled. "What do you want here? Won't the run of the house content you? Come! I want to look that door."

"It's my last duty before going to bed."

Sweetwater assumed the innocent. "And I was just going this way. It looks like a short road into town. It is, isn't it?"

"No! Yes!" growled the other. "Whichever it is, it's your road tonight."

"That's private property, sir. The alley you see belongs to our neighbors. No one passes through there but myself and—"

He caught himself in time with a sudden grunt which may have been the result of fatigue or of that latent instinct of loyalty which is often the most difficult obstacle a detective has to encounter.

"And Mr. Ranelagh, I suppose you would say?" was Sweetwater's easy reply.

No answer. The coachman simply locked the door and put the key in his pocket.

Sweetwater made no effort to detain him. More than that, he decided from further questions, though he was dying to ask where this key was kept at night and whether it had been in its usual place on the evening of the murder. He had gone far enough, he thought. Another step and he might arouse this man's suspicion, if not his enmity. But he did not leave the shadows into which he again retreated until he had satisfied himself that the key went into the stable with the coachman, where it probably remained for this night at least.

It was after 10 when Sweetwater re-entered the house to say good night to Hexford. He found him on watch in the upper hall, and the man, Clarke, below. He had a word with the former.

"What is the purpose of the little door in the wall back of the stable?"

"I don't know. These grounds with those of the Fultons. The Fultons live on Husted street."

"Are the two families intimate?"

"Very. Mr. Cumberland is sweet on

the young lady there."

"He uses that door, then?" Sweetwater purred.

"Probably."

"Did he use it that night?"

"He didn't visit her."

"Where did he go?"

"We can't find out. He was seen on Garden street, coming home after a night of debauch. He had drunk hard. Asked where he got the liquor, he rambled out something about a saloon, but none of the places which he usually frequents had seen him that night. I have tried them all and none that weren't in his books. It was no good."

"That door is supposed to be locked at night," Zaddock says that's his duty. Was it locked that night?"

"Can't say. Perhaps the coroner can. You see, the inquiry run in such a different direction at first that a small matter like that may have been overlooked."

Sweetwater rubbed the natural report and, reverting to the subject of the saloon, got some specific information in regard to them. Then he passed thoughtfully downstairs, only to come upon Helen, who was just entering the front hall light.

"Good night," he said in passing.

"Good night, Mr. Sweetwater."

There was something in her tone which made him stop and look back. She had stepped into the library and was blowing out the lamp there. He paused a moment and sighed softly.

Then he started toward the door, only to stop again and cast another look back. She was standing in one of the doorways, anxiously watching him and twisting her fingers in and out in an impatient way truly significant in case of her disposition.

He felt his heart leap.

Returning softly, he took up his stand before her, looking her straight in the eye.

"Good night!" he repeated, with an odd emphasis.

"Good night!" she answered, with equal force and meaning.

But the next moment she was speaking rapidly, earnestly.

"I can't sleep," she said. "I never can when I'm not certain of my duty. Mr. Ranelagh is an injured man. Ask what was said and done at their last dinner here. I can't tell you. I didn't listen, and I didn't see what happened, but it was something out of the ordinary. Three broken wineglasses lay on the tablecloth when I went in to clean away. I heard the chair when they fell and smashed, but I said nothing. I have said nothing since, but I know there was a quarrel, and that Mr. Ranelagh was not in it, for his glass was the only one which remained unbroken. Am I wrong in telling you? I wouldn't say it if it were not for Mr. Ranelagh. He didn't do right by Miss Cumberland, but he doesn't deserve to be in prison, and so would Miss Carmel tell you if she knew what was going on and could speak. She loved him and I've said enough—I've said enough," the agitated girl protested as he handed eagerly toward her. "I couldn't"

(Continued on page 8)

ly, November 2nd, 1916

YOUR CHILDREN
DELICATE OR FRAIL
er-size or under-weight
nber—Scott's Emulsion
ture's grandest growing-
it strengthens their bones,
s healthy blood and pro-
sturdy growth.
L. & Bowne, Toronto, Ont. 12-27

ICE TO CREDITORS
Rosa Cudney, Deceased

ANT to Section 56 of Chapter S. O. 1914, notice is hereby hat all creditors and others claims against the estate of Cudney, late of the township nouth, in the county of Elgin, who died or about the 18th August, A.D. 1916, are, on or the 12th day of December, 1916, to send by post pre-paid, to Allen Miller, of the Town of Ontario, the Administrator estate of the said deceased, christian names and surnames, es and descriptions, the full ars of their claims, a state- f their accounts and the n- f the securities (if any) held m, and that after the day last id the said Administrator will d distribute the assets of the ead among the parties en- hereto having regard only to claims of which notice shall een given as above required, e said Administrator will not le for the said assets or any ereof, to any person or persons e claim or claims notice shall een received by him at the f such distribution.

d at Aylmer this 23rd day of E. D. 1916.
WARD ALLEN MILLER,
Administrator,
Aylmer, Ont.

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