

# The House of the Whispering Pines

By ANNA KATHARINE GREEN

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girls, who had been waiting patiently for this moment, now came forward, and he stepped aside to watch them as they filed by, dropping as they did so a tribute of fragrant flowers upon the quiet breast. They were followed by the servants, among whom Zadok had divided his roses. As the last cluster fell from the coachman's trembling hand the undertaker advanced with the lid and, pausing a moment to be sure that all were satisfied, began to screw it on.

Suddenly there was a cry, and the crowd about the door leading into the main hall started back as wild steps were heard on the stairs and a young man rushed into the room.

"Take it off!" he cried, pointing at the lid which had just been fastened down. "I have not seen her! I must see her! Take it off!"

It was the brother, awake at last to the significance of the hour! The clergyman, aghast at the sacrilegious look and tone of the intruder, stepped back, raising one arm in remonstrance and instinctively shielding the casket with the other. But the undertaker saw in the frenzied eye fixed upon his own that which warned

in an instant all were struck again into stone. The young man had turned and was facing them all, with his hands held out in a clutch which in itself was horrible.

"If they let the man go," he called out in loud and threatening tones, "I will strangle him with these two hands!"

The word and not the shriek which burst irrepressibly from more than one woman before him brought him to himself. With a ghastly look on his bloated features he scanned for one moment the row of deeply shocked faces before him, then tottered back out of sight and fled toward the staircase. All thought that an end had come to the harrowing scene, and minister and people faced each other once more, when, loud and sharp from above, there rang down the shrill cry of delirium, this time in articulate words which even the children could understand.

"Break it open, I say! Break it open and see if her heart is there!"

It was too awful. Men and women and children leaped to their feet and dashed away into the streets, uttering smothered cries and wild ejaculations. In vain the clergyman raised his voice and bade them respect the dead, for the rooms were well nigh empty before he had finished his appeal. Only the least of the children remained.

Soon these, too, were gone, and the casket was refastened and carried out by the shrinking bearers, leaving in those darkened rooms a trail of desolation which was only broken from time to time by the now faint and barely heard reiteration of the name of her who had just been borne away.

"Lila, Lila!"

Sweetwater, however affected by this scene in the funeral chamber, had not lost control of himself nor forgotten the claims of duty. He noted at a glance that while the candid looking stranger whose lead he had been following was as much surprised as the rest at the nature of the interruption—which he had possibly anticipated and for which he was in some measure prepared—he was of all present the most deeply and peculiarly impressed by it.

Sweetwater took occasion likewise while the excitement was at its height to mark what effect had been made on the servants by the action and conduct of young Cumberland.

It was not so easy to determine as the anxious detective might wish. Only one of them showed a simple emotion, and that one was, without any possibility of doubt, the cook. She was a Roman Catholic and was simply horrified by the spectacle of which she had been witness. There was no mistaking her feelings. But those of the other two women were more complex.

So were those of the men. Zadok specially watched each movement of his young master with open distrust and very nearly started upright in his repugnance and dismay when that intruding hand fell on the peaceful brow of her over whose fate to his own surprise he had been able to shed tears.

And the women! Might not the same explanation account for that cu-

rious droop of the eye with which the two younger clutched at each other's hands to keep from screaming and interchanged whispered words which Sweetwater would have given considerable out of his carefully cherished board to have heard.

It was impossible to tell at present, but he was confident that it would not be long before he understood these latter at least. He had great confidence in his success with women, homely as he was. He was not so sure of himself with men, and he felt that some difficulties and not a few pitfalls lay between him and, for instance, the uncommunicative Zadok. "But I've the whole long evening before me," he added in quiet consolation to himself. "It will be a pity if I can't work some of them in that time."

Plans had been made for carrying the servants to the cemetery, and, despite the universal disturbance consequent upon these events, these plans were adhered to. Sweetwater watched them all slide away in the last two carriages.

This gave him the opportunity he wanted. Leaving his corner, he looked up Hexford and asked who was left in the house.

"Dr. Perry, Mr. Clifton, the lawyer; Mr. Cumberland, his sick sister and the nurse."

"Mr. Cumberland! Didn't he go to the grave?"

"Did you expect him to after that?" Sweetwater's shoulders rose, and his voice took on a tone of indifference.

"There's no telling. Where is he now, do you think—upstairs?"

"Yes. It seems he spends all his time in a little alcove opposite his sister's door. They won't let him inside for fear of disturbing the patient, so he just sits where I've told you, doing nothing but listening to every sound that comes through the door."

"Where's his room? In sight of the alcove you mention?"

"No; there's a partition or two between. If you go up by the side staircase you can slip into it without any one seeing you. Coroner Perry and Mr. Clifton are in front."

"Is the side door locked?"

"No."

"Lock it. The back door, of course, is."

"Yes; the cook attended to that."

"I want a few minutes all by myself. Help me, Hexford. If Dr. Perry has given you no orders take your stand upstairs where you can give me warning if Mr. Cumberland makes a move to leave his post or the nurse her patient."

Five minutes later Sweetwater had slipped from sight, and for some time not even Hexford knew where he was.

"Dr. Perry, may I have a few words with you?"

The coroner turned quickly. Sweetwater was before him. "It'll not take long," added the detective, with a short significant glance in the direction of Mr. Clifton.

Dr. Perry nodded, excused himself to the lawyer and followed the detective into the small writing room which he

had occupied during the funeral. In the decision with which Sweetwater closed the door behind them there was something which caused the blood to mount to the coroner's brow.

"You have made some discovery?" said he.

"A very important one," was the quick, emphatic reply. And in a few brief words the detective related his interview with the master mechanic's wife on the highroad. Then with an eager "Now let me show you something" he led the coroner through the dining room into the side hall, where he paused before the staircase.

"Up?" queried the coroner, with an obvious shrinking from what he might encounter above.

"No," was the whispered reply. "What we want is here." And, pushing open a small door let into the under part of the stairway, he disclosed a closet and in that closet a coat or two and one derby hat. He took down the latter and, holding it out to the light, pointed to a spot on the under side of its brim.

The coroner staggered as he saw it and glanced helplessly about him. He had known this family all their lives, and the father had been his dearest friend. But he could say nothing in face of this evidence. The spot was a flour mark, in which could almost be discerned the outline of a woman's thumb.

(Continued next week.)

## SUNDAY SCHOOL.

Lesson V.—Fourth Quarter, For Oct. 29, 1916.

### THE INTERNATIONAL SERIES.

Text of the Lesson, Acts xxvii, 13-26. Memory Verses, 22-24—Golden Text, Ps. xxxvii, 5—Commentary Prepared by Rev. D. M. Stearns.

Now Paul is off to Rome and has been delivered from his enemies in Jerusalem who so persistently sought his life. But the devil is sometimes permitted to rage on the sea as well as on the land, and Paul has more troubles ahead, but we shall see God glorying in all. Then there are so many "handfuls of purpose" to cheer us along the way (Ruth ii, 16) and lighten our journey. I hope he enjoyed the sea voyages, for to me they are so restful, and even storms are magnificently grand if one can keep a quiet mind and body. He had at least one good companion with whom he could have good fellowship on the voyage, Aristarchus of Thessalonica, who was afterward a fellow prisoner with him at Rome (verse 2 and Col. iv, 10).

At Sidon, where the ship called, Paul was given liberty to go to his friends and refresh himself (verse 3), and this must have been a good handful and much appreciated. They changed ships at Myra, in Lycia, some distance southeast of Ephesus, where they found a ship from Alexandria bound for Italy. They reached Crete safely, but, not giving heed to Paul's advice to winter there and thinking that they had a favorable wind, they set sail. I shall never forget one of the most enjoyable sea trips of my life from Fort Said, in Egypt, to Brindisi, in Italy, in 1897. After some months of tropical heat in China and India and the sail up the Red sea, which the captain thought must have been called Red because it was red hot, I thought I never had anything quite so enjoyable as that sail. My diary for Sept. 15, 1897, says, "Sighted Crete about noon and kept along the southwest coast till night." I was then writing notes on the Sunday school lessons just as I am today and have been doing in the summer months ever since 1887. How great have been my privileges! To Him be all the glory. Pardon this digression and give Paul and Crete the credit of it. The tempestuous wind and the being exceedingly tossed (verses 14, 18, 20) did not come my way on the Mediterranean, but I have known something of it on other seas and been kept in peace.

This was certainly a great storm that this ship fell into, for neither sun nor stars were seen for many days, and all hope of surviving the storm was given up (verse 26). We think of the works of the Lord and His wonders in the deep and of people at their wits' end and how He can make the storm a calm or in some other way deliver (Ps. cvii, 23-30). After many days and nights of this great storm Paul had a visitor from heaven, an angel of God, either the Lord Himself, as in xxiii, 11, or one of His faithful messengers, as in xii, 7-10, with a word of good cheer for him and for all on board. Oh, these wonderful angels who excel in strength, who delight to do His bidding, who can run and return like lightning! (Ps. ciii, 20, 21; Ezek. i, 14.) They have no fear and seek to have all power. Just think of this one finding this ship in the midst of this great storm and the one man on board of all the 276 whom he specially wanted (verse 37).

It should comfort us to know that such friends as these are ever ministering unto us (Heb. i, 14). The next day after this visit of the angel Paul was able to comfort all on board. How much even one person may do to help others if he is in touch with God! Paul was able to assure them that there would be no loss of life, not a hair of their heads harmed, and to encourage them to eat something, for they had eaten little or nothing for fourteen days (verses 22, 33-36). He

took bread and gave thanks to God in the presence of them all and began to eat. Then they all did eat and were of good cheer. Note Paul's message concerning the angel visitor, "The angel of God, whose I am and whom I serve" (verse 23), and may the last seven words be ours always from the heart. He certainly believed for himself what he wrote to the Corinthians, "Ye are not your own, for ye are bought with a price" (I Cor. vi, 19, 20). If ever a man lived it out he did, and, knowing what it meant to serve the Lord with all humility of mind, he could urge others to serve the Living and True God (Acts xx, 19; I Thess. i, 9). Then his words of strength and cheer to all these people were so grand with every prospect, humanly speaking, of going down with the ship, and no reason for thinking otherwise but the message of the angel, he said so boldly, "Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer, for I believe God that it shall be even as it was told me" (verse 24). And so it came to pass, and they escaped all safe to land (verse 44). We think of Abraham, who considered not himself nor Sarah, but was fully persuaded that what God had promised He was able to perform (Rom. iv, 19, 21). For twenty-one years the motto of my little monthly, Kingdom Tidings, has been "Abraham believed God . . . I believe God," and, though the contrast between these two men of God and the work represented by this little monthly is very great, yet the principle is the same, and the words have been a great help to me.

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