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LOST MAN'S LANE A SECOND EPISODE

AMELIA BUTTERWORTH

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Angerous character hardly materialized in my eyes. While I light of it rested upon this family eye would be lowered

CHAPTER IX. A VISITOR

When my mind is set free from doubt and fully settled upon any course, I am capable of much good as well as much evil

"I will leave you to my brother for a few minutes," said she, lightly tripping from the room. "I do not think of going to your room till we have had an opportunity of arranging it."

"I instantly made up my mind I would go there, and that, too, before the arranging process was over. But I must see what could make of it."

"Oh, the girls are well enough," she grumbled, "but they will stick to their place. Lucetta might have married half dozen times, and one time I thought she was going to, but she turned straight around and sent him off, and that made me mad beyond every thing."

All it had given me a sort of turn. I began to have something more than an aversion for the man. He inspired me with something like terror.

"Your wishes," said I with as little expression as possible, "seem to leave your sister entirely out of your calculations. How would your mother regard that she could see you from the place where she is now?"

"He turned upon me with a look of anger that made his features positively ugly. 'What do you mean by speaking of her to me? Have I spoken of her to you? Is there any reason why you should beg my mother into this conversation? If so, say so and be done with it.'"

"He did not swear at me; he did not dare to, but he came precious near to it and that was enough to make me recoil."

"She was my friend," said I. "I knew and loved her before you were born. That was why I spoke of her, and I think it very natural myself."

"It seemed to feel ashamed. He grumbled out some sort of apology and looked about quite helplessly, possibly for the dog he manifestly was in the habit of having for a pet."

"She was a beautiful girl," I remarked on the principle that the once broken, it is not best to hesitate about jumping in. "Was your father equally handsome for a man?"

"My father—yes, let's talk of father. He was a judge of horses, he was. When he died, there were three mares in that stable not to be beat on this side of Albany, but those devils of excrement sold them, and I—well, you had a chance to test the speed of old Bess yesterday. You weren't afraid of being thrown out, I was."

"Oh, about the way my father looked! What does that matter? He was handsome enough. Folks say that I get whatever good looks I have from him. He was big—bigger than I am, and while he lived, 'What did you make a fellow talk for?'"

"I suppose he was afraid to come up the lane. Do you know, I think you'd better to attempt it, Trohm. 'We have a very good name up here.' And with a sudden, perfectly unaccountable burst he broke out into one of his huge guttural thumps that shook the old gate on which he was leaning."

"I saw Mr. Trohm start and cast a look in which I saw both surprise and horror before he turned to me and with an air of polite desperation anxiously said: 'I am afraid Miss Butterworth will understand your allusion to her visit in town.'"

"As his manner showed, even more feeling about the subject than I had, I wanted I made haste to assure that I was well acquainted with the tradition of the lane; that its name alone showed that it was a very quiet road."

"His bearing showed an instant relief. 'I am glad,' said he, 'to find you so well informed. I was afraid—' there he cast another very strange glance at William, as if he thought young friends here might have shrunk from some sense of delicacy from telling you what might frighten most guests from a lonely road like this. I compliment you upon their thoughtfulness."

"William bowed as if the words of the other contained no other suggestion than that which was openly apparent. He was so dull, or he was— I had not time to finish my conjectures even in my own mind, for at this moment a quick cry rose behind us, and Lucetta's light figure appeared running toward us with every indication of excitement."

"Ah," murmured Mr. Trohm, with an appearance of great respect, "your sister, Mr. Knolly. I had better be making on good morning, Miss Butterworth. I am sorry that circumstances seem to make it impossible for me to offer you those civilities which you might reasonably expect from so near a neighbor. Miss Lucetta and I are at Lucetta's house, and I am afraid I still insist she is to blame. See how shocked she is to see me even standing at her gate."

"Shocked! I should rather have said terrified. Nothing but fear—her old self aggravated to a point that made all attempt at concealment impossible—could account for her white, drawn features and trembling form. She looked as if her whole thought was, 'Have I come in time?'"

"What—what has occurred on the honor of this visit?" she asked, moving up behind William as if she would add her own contribution to the scene.

"I had forgotten my early determination to go to my room before any change there could be made. Recalling it now, I started for the staircase and did not stop, though I heard Hannah behind me, saying that she was that I came full tilt upon Miss Knolly's coming down the hall with a tray in her hand."

"I have advised you to trust nobody. I should have said that I do not think you will give an opportunity to speak to me, or to the man secretly, who is not awakening suspicion. If, however, you wish advice or desire to make any confession, you may do so in the presence of the hotel where you will stay for room 8. It has been retained by me, and I am sure you will find me a safe place where you will be the man you seek."

"There was no signature to this— it needed none—and in the pocket which contained it I found a card which was tied to it and glad to hear that I was not left entirely without protection in my somewhat hazardous enterprise."

"The events of the evening had been unexpected that till this moment I had forgotten my early determination to go to my room before any change there could be made. Recalling it now, I started for the staircase and did not stop, though I heard Hannah behind me, saying that she was that I came full tilt upon Miss Knolly's coming down the hall with a tray in her hand."

"I accepted the explanation and made no further remarks, but as I had caught sight of the tray of the half eaten porridge I reserved to myself the privilege of doubting its exact truthfulness. To me the sight of this partially consumed porridge was a living proof of the presence of the person whose presence I was supposed to be ignorant—not a pleasant thought under any circumstances."

"I felt that in this discovery I had clutched the thread that would lead me out of the labyrinth of this mystery. Miss Knolly, who was on her way down stairs, called Hannah to take the tray and, coming back, beckoned me forward and opening into one of the rooms."

"This is to be your room," said she. "But I do not know that I can move your trunk. She was so calm, so perfectly mistress of herself, that I could not but admire her. Lucetta would have flushed and digested, but Lucetta stood as erect and as high as if no trouble weighed upon her heart and the words were as unimportant in her character as they seemed."

"I told Lucetta last night that I was perfectly comfortable and had no wish to change my quarters. I am sorry you should have thought of coming to see me. Her eyes were fixed on me as if she were waiting for me to say something. 'Don't do it again, I pray you. A woman like myself had rather put herself to some slight inconvenience than more. I am sure you are obliged to me, said she and came at once from the door. I don't know but after all I like Lucetta's sly ways as well as this unscrupulous sort of openness."

"I thought that perhaps you might like to ride into town. Mr. Simsbury at leisure this morning. I regret that neither Lucetta nor myself will be able to accompany you."

"I thought what this same Mr. Simsbury had said about Lucetta's plan and had had myself morning elsewhere than that town. Should I honor them or find excuses for remaining here? I went, but what might not take place in my absence. If I remained, what suspicious matters and affairs for town even if I did not quite go there."

"I am hesitating," said I, "because I noticed when I was standing at the gate and looking at her two or three rather threatening looking clouds toward the east. But if you are sure Mr. Simsbury can be spared I think I will risk it."

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