

BEHIND CLOSED DOORS

BY ANNA KATHARINE GREEN.

don't weigh much; the mare'll never feel me. Jump in, gentlemen, and clear the ground between us and that scoundrel.

CHAPTER XXIX.

An hour's riding soon convinced them that they had a task of more difficulty before them than they had anticipated. Dr. Cameron had sufficient start of them to be out of view.

"The doctor renewed his prayers and protestations, which being seconded by the peddler, whose blood seemed really to have been stirred by this chase, Mr. Lewis finally consented to drive them as far as a certain house, where if they could get a man to take them further, well and good, if not he would carry them back to his own home.

"They could not blame him. The wind was blowing furiously and the horse showed signs of discomfort, so they accepted the alternative given them and drove as rapidly as possible to the house he had pointed out.

"Has a fellow been by here in Hyde's new buggy?" was the shout they sent forth as they neared the spot and saw a man.

"This much to tell me what he said," he cried.

"The man looked at it and shook his head. Dr. Cameron, who had caught the sparkle of curiosity in the man's eye at the sight of the coin, immediately cried:

"Five times this, then, for a team to purchase. This man's horse is worth—"

"And so would mine be in ten minutes. Phew, but this is a gale!"

"The house ahead will give out sooner than yours. Come, carry a cent while you can. It may not be over a ten minutes' job."

"That's so," the man answered. "Step in a minute, out of the wind. I'll harness up in ten, but it's a \$5 whether we overtake the car or not."

"Yes, if you go as far as you can and don't leave me in the road when you're tired."

"Never fear, I'll take you into town any-how." And then Dr. Cameron learned they were on a fine but unfrequented road, which curving about on itself led back to H-town, which he had supposed to be at his back.

"And how far is it from here to the tavern?" he asked.

"Five miles if you go through S——. Three if you turn off into H—— direct."

"Very good, but you go as the man ahead goes, and that won't be through S——. I am sure." And with a somewhat apprehensive look at the sky, he left the barn to tell of his success to the couple awaiting him.

"Where is the peddler?" he inquired.

"Gone into warm himself. Says he has had enough of this kind of thing. I reckon he will stay where he is to-night. Is Joyce going to hunt for a horse to sell?"

"Yes, he is harnessing now."

"I shouldn't have reckoned on his being such a fool. But it is no business of mine. Good-bye; you won't catch that fellow ahead now as quick as you will a horse."

"And with this parting shot, he turned his team about and disappeared in the darkness before the doctor could utter his thanks.

"When the new horse and team did at length make their appearance, there was a peddler coming too, eager and anxious as ever to see the affair out."

"Now don't say you don't want me," he cried, as the doctor opened his lips in protest. "If you won't take me inside I must run along at the back, for I'm going into H—— to-night."

"Was this the stumbling, shuffling ne'er-do-well of the morning?" Dr. Cameron began to doubt him, and questioned in his own mind as to whether this seeming peddler could be a friend of the enemy, bound to betray him.

"But upon a second look he found the man so courteous, so good-humored and so free from all suspicious appearance, that he had not the heart to deny him a seat in the buggy. Meanwhile the wind was increasing every minute, and the rain falling like a thick veil over the landscape.

"Their new driver mounted his horse, straight ahead he went without talk or delay."

"You want to catch that fellow," he cried; "what will you get him?"

"But they rode on and on without coming up with buggy or vehicle of any kind, when they reached the place where the roads divided they passed for consultation."

"I'm sure he won't go on to S—— if his horse is in H——," ventured Noyes. "A dog wouldn't go round a barn without cause to-night."

set if he were doing the wisest thing he could in staying there. He began to think he remembered Dr. Moleworth's former tricks and felt that he was simply capable of another.

What if the horse and buggy had been left there as a lure while he himself sped away. As the doctor contemplated this possibility he grew too uneasy to sit still, and rising, went out again to take a look at the weather. He found it was very unpropitious. In the driving wet, the horse he had hired in H—— stood shivering, and as he contemplated it he thought of the scotch he had left at the tavern and at once took a resolution to drive back to H—— and procure it.

The distance was not long in a direct line, and he would not only have the satisfaction of returning the horse, but of quieting any suspicions on the part of Moleworth if, as he feared, he were in league with the hotel clerk and knew or would soon know that his partner was at his heels.

He informed the clerk that the team in front of the house was in reality his and explained as much of the circumstances as he thought necessary. Then perceiving that his story was credited, expressed his intention of driving the horse back to H——.

"The peddler slouched to the door as he drove off."

"Coming back, mister?" he shouted.

Dr. Cameron may have heard him but if so, he neglected to answer.

His plan was to ride to H—— and board the same train at H—— which he expected Moleworth to take at S——. He would thus be on hand to greet the fugitive when he entered the cars.

But when he arrived at H—— he found to his surprise that this evening train did not stop there, and that if he proposed to be on hand to hinder Moleworth taking it at S——, he must hire another horse and immediately return to the town which he had so inconsiderately left.

When he proposed this measure to the lively stable man, he found him totally unwilling to let another horse go out of his stable that night. He was obliged to follow his discomfited master as best he might, and put up again at the tavern where he had spent the preceding night. The sole comfort he found in the situation was the fact, that the midnight train had been so delayed by some accident which had occurred on the road, that it would not be likely to pass through H—— much ahead of the regular morning express which left H—— at 7 a.m.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE GREAT STORM.

It was a night to be long remembered by a devoted man, such as it is such driving of snow and sleet; such swaying and cracking of trees; if he rose and looked out, nothing but a hurly burly of snow met his eye; if he calmed himself and lay down, all the while an about him, a pandemonium seemed to hurtle in his ears.

When daylight finally came there was not only no snow, but such piles of it that all landmarks had disappeared, and he seemed to be in a different place from the one he looked out upon the day before. Snow still fell with that unremitting persistency which gives promise of a whole day of storm.

A midwinter storm in March, and he on the track, a man who had never before had one train the start of him. He found that, taking advantage of the telegraph operator being on hand, he sent a message to the station master at S—— inquiring if a person of such and such a description had taken that train for New York. The answer came back yes, and Dr. Cameron bought his ticket and set down to wait for the early express.

But this train was also late, and he lost three hours at the start. The difficulties of the road increased so rapidly that the engine experienced the greatest difficulty in cutting its way through the snow. Hours were consumed in a passage usually occupying but a few minutes.

"Fate is against me," thought Dr. Cameron, as the morning waned into afternoon, and these hours were yet miles from New York. "I have not only lost my man, but myself. I feel like a wayfarer in a solitary wilderness."

As time still passed and nightfall began to descend, and with it the increasing certainty that they would not be able to struggle much longer against the drifts which filled the cuts through which they were obliged to pass, he began to remember there were others about him who had their own anxieties and fears.

He found the car to be about half full of passengers, mainly men, but there were two or three women amongst them, and strange to say, these bore the appearance of a great discomfort with more apparent cheer than the men.

Though the engine was making heroic efforts to advance, but slowly through the huge drifts. At last there came a shiver and a slow settling into quietude. Its efforts had ceased.

"Stalled!" cried one voice.

"In the roughest part of the road!" exclaimed another.

"And night coming on," added a third, "we're stuck for our lives."

"Let us see if a gang of men cannot do something with that drift," suggested a sturdy individual.

"Where are your shovels?" put in another.

"Then it isn't a matter of one drift but fifty," said another voice.

Dr. Cameron went out on the platform. But he did not stay long, the rushing wind almost took him off his feet, and he found himself forced to step back in order to recover himself. If horses were near he could not see them, nor were there any signs of fences or roads. "Have we been transported into Siberia," he thought.

Sending one or two men on to the ground below, he asked them if they knew just where they were.

"They were on the dreariest part of the river, between ——— and ———. No houses here, no water, than miles and miles of ice, you except the Harvey cottage, where you would be more likely to meet rebuff than welcome."

Rebuff on such a night the doctor did not believe it. "And how far is the Harvey cottage?" he enquired.

"Only a mile! A mile seemed some distance through the wilderness of snow-hills he saw before him."

"But there's no use going there. Old Harvey wouldn't open his door to a dog and he likes them. Better stay on the train, sir."

Dr. Cameron thought this last bit of advice good and for some time was disposed to follow it, but he began to ask himself if these women must suffer hunger as well as cold, and whether it would not be less painful to endure the hardships of a vigorous battle with the snow, than to sit in that comfortable car all night eating out his heart, as he would be sure to do if he remained inactive. He hesitated, and asked him in what direction the Harvey cottage lay, and whether its owner was really so hard hearted as to refuse bread to a band of suffering women and children. The answer was an expressive shrug and a shiver.

"Better join the party from the forward car; they are going to try and reach the village, three miles away."

the first to falter and require the assistance of his comrades.

The darkness of twilight soon added itself to the general dimness made by the rushing, blinding snow. Had there been one there who knew the route back, they could have simultaneously returned; but the only one who could give any guidance, was stiff and speechless and had to be drawn along by two of his hardest companions. So they advanced, confident they were headed right, though they could see nothing save here and there the trunk of a tree, against which they more than once precipitated themselves in their haste and indifference to all obstacles.

Dr. Cameron's will was formidable and his purpose one to uphold the faintest heart. He had started in the company of two men whose faces he had liked, but he found himself ahead of these and joined to another stranger, who, seeing his stop moment for breath, thrust out an arm and linked him to himself. The touch and the evidence of fellow feeling which it gave, seemed to work a miracle in him. Though he could not speak his gratitude to the man beside him, he pressed his arm and showed by his lifted head that he had received encouragement to advance.

The remaining men were lost to view behind the great drifts which Dr. Cameron and his energetic companion still toiled. And the snow did not let up for an instant, and the wind was like all the demons of power and fury let loose.

"Can we do it?" he asked the doctor. But his words were lost in the heavy coating of ice that enveloped his mouth, and he gained no response but the vigorous clasp of his companion's arm, which in itself was at once a help and a promise.

"O God," was the next cry that arose in his heart, "if she were to see me in her dreams!" and a gust of softened feeling swept through his heart, and made him tremble and he would have fallen, had it not been for that ever ready arm within his.

The night had now settled down completely, but instead of this being an aid to his companion's arm, which in itself was at once a help and a promise.

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think I will ever let you go out of my sight till I tear the secret from you which is threatening my home and imperiling the safety and honor of my wife."

"What—what do you mean?" queried the other, with the first sign of faltering. Walter Cameron had ever discerned in him "I know of no secret."

The gesture of his opponent stopped him; Dr. Cameron had become terrible in his wrath and denunciation.

"Don't lie," he protested slowly. "I have not left my house here my wife and brood the terror of such a storm as this, to listen to any weak denial of the truth. If you hate me."

Dr. Moleworth smiled.

"If you love my wife."

Dr. Moleworth gave a violent start.

"You will not crush me or gain her by leaving back the secret which you have sworn to conceal. The police have made some strange discoveries which will not be longer in your hands than they suspect of Mildred Farley's death, but my wife, the woman whom you—"

He could not speak his gratitude to the man beside him, he pressed his arm and showed by his lifted head that he had received encouragement to advance.

The remaining men were lost to view behind the great drifts which Dr. Cameron and his energetic companion still toiled. And the snow did not let up for an instant, and the wind was like all the demons of power and fury let loose.

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but the shadow of crime, is brought home to her."

"I understand, though I have never loved Mildred worth passing and his lip. "Pardon me," he entreated, in a certain manly confusion, "I have so forgotten any feeling that I once imagined myself have cherished for Genevieve Gretorex. I mean well by you, Dr. Cameron, as God, who has saved us from this biting storm, is our judge."

"I believe it; though an hour ago my heart was full of hatred, you have conquered it, and I am willing to trust life and honor with you. You will go back with me, Julius; you will stand up with me before the police and help me to prove to them what you must surely believe, that the woman to whom you lent such wonderful and unprecedented aid in her terrible difficulty, was no vile murderer."

"I long to serve you," the other declared, "but I cannot do it in this way. If by staying in town and facing the police and their questions, he could have benefited you or saved her, do you think I would have aided away from my patients?"

"But—but you feared for yourself? You have committed perjury—and—"

"I fear nothing for myself. Since I have known you I have had but the one wish, to save your distress and humiliation. Read the letter I have written to you."

The doctor read the following lines:

Dear Dr. Cameron,—You will pardon the presumption of these words when I tell you they are from a very unhappy man to a much honored one. You know what you have done for me, but you cannot know the feelings to which your kindness has given rise. They are strong; they are vital; they are absorbing. Never have I known before what it was to regard a human being above my work and my ambition. What once called love was but a shadow, a vanity. This only is the one great feeling of my life, and if it seems unmanly and presumptuous in me to avow it, you will pardon me for the sake of my wife. I am willing to do to preserve your honor and your happiness. Love makes light of sacrifice, and it is love I have felt for you, ever since you so generously came to my assistance at the moment of my greatest necessity. If then I disappear do not let the fact make you indignant or unhappy. It will be for your sake, and therefore for my own, who am your truest well-wisher.

JULIUS MOLEWORTH.

Destroy this and do not retain so much as a memory of its contents.

The letter fell from Dr. Cameron's hands. Julius Moleworth at once thrust his foot forward and pushed it into the flames. In the light of its burning the two men again confronted each other.

"And this means," gasped Walter.

"That you do not want me to go back with you to New York. That intercourse between us is dangerous; that when this wind ceases and a path can be found through the wilderness of snow without, I shall vanish from your presence; to what hiding place you must never know, nor must you, if you value honor or happiness, attempt to follow me."

"The can be but one interpretation to put upon this language," he declared. "You have evidence or you have belief?"

The grip of Moleworth's hand on his was like a vise.

"Do not continue," he charged him. "Do not ask me to explain myself. Silence between us is our only safety now that you know I am a runaway simply in your interests, and that the bond between us is one of repulsion rather than of shame."

"But Genevieve—"

The name fell like an icy bolt between them. Then Moleworth finished the sentence by declaring:

"Will never be presented on any bare suspicion. While I remain absent, doubt will always hover about the case, and trammel the efforts of those engaged in its investigation."

"But if they find you?"

"They shall not find me. I have an extra incentive now to keep out of their reach; you have heard my avowal of regard and have not repulsed me."

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My Stock of Harness, Collars, Whips, Trunks and Valises is large, well selected, guaranteed, and cheaper than any place in town. Hand made collars a specialty. Remember that all my work is finished by experienced workmen, none other employed. This is money well invested. All I ask is an inspection of my stock and you will be convinced that it is the largest to choose from, best workmanship, and prices really cheaper than any place in town. My expense being lower, therefore I give my customers the benefit. Gentlemen, place in your orders at once and don't miss this opportunity. Repairing promptly done. Don't forget to call. Give me a call.

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