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BY GEORGE BARR McCUTCHEN
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"Why couldn't I have put it off until morning?" she was saying to herself as she passed down the gravelled drive and advanced to meet the wall of trees that frowned blackly in her face. "What will he think? What will he say? Oh, he'll think I'm such a silly, romantic fool! No, he won't. He'll understand. He'll help me on to Plattsburg tomorrow. But will he think I've done this for effect? Won't he think I'm actually throwing myself at his head? No, I can't turn back. I'd rather die than go back to that house. It won't matter what he thinks. I'll be away from all of it tomorrow. I'll be out of his life, and I won't care what he thinks. England! Goodness! What's that?" She had turned a bend in the drive, and just ahead there was a light. A sigh of relief followed the question. It came from the lantern which hung to a stake in the road where the new stone gate posts were being built by workmen from town. Bazelhurst Villa was a quarter of a mile, through the park, behind her; the forest was ahead.

At the gate she stopped between the half finished stone posts and looked ahead with the first shiver of dismay. Her limbs seemed ready to collapse. The flush of anger and excitement left her face. A white, desolate look came in its stead. Her eyes grew wide, and she blinked her lashes with an awed uncertainty that boded ill for the stability of her adventure. An owl hooted in mournful cadence close by, and she felt her hair was going straight on end. The tense fingers of one hand gripped the handle of the travelling bag, while the other went spasmodically to her heart.

"Oh!" she gasped, moving over quickly to the stake on which the lantern hung. The wind was rushing through the treetops with increased fervor, the air was cool and wet with the signs of rain, a swirl of dust flew up into her face, the swish of leaves sounded like the splashing of water in the air. Holding her heart for minutes, she at last regained some of the lost composure. A hysterical laugh fell from her lips. "What a goose! It was an owl, and I've heard hundreds of them up here. Still, they do sound different outside of one's own room. It's going to rain. What wretched luck! Dear me, I can't stand here all night! How black it is ahead there! O-o-o-h! Really, now, it does seem a bit terrifying. If I only had a lantern it wouldn't be so!" Her gaze fell upon the laborers' lantern that clattered aimlessly, uselessly, against the stake. An instant later she had jerked it from its fastenings with a cry of joy. "I'll send it back when they go for my trunks. What luck!"

Without a second's hesitation she started off briskly into the woodland road, striding along with the splendid swing of the healthy Englishwoman who has not been trained to dawdle. Her walking skirt gave free play to her limbs. She was far past the well known "line in the road" before she paused to take a full breath and to recapitulate. Her heart beat faster, and the sudden glow in her cheek was not from the exercise. Somehow, out there alone in the world, the most amazing feeling of tenderness sped on ahead to Randolph Shaw. She tried to put it from her, but it grew and grew. Then she blushed deep within herself, and her eyes grew sweet with the memory of those stolen, reprehensible hours along the frontier. Something within her breast cried out for those shining, gone by moments, something seemed to close down on her throat, something



She Started Off Briskly into the Woodland Road.

flooded her eyes with a softness that rolled up from her entire being. Their line! Their insurmountable barrier! An absurd yet ineffable longing to fall down and kiss that line came over her with compelling force.

Her head grew light with the thought

of those moments when their horses stood with muzzles together as if kissing by proxy—the flush grew deeper, though her blood went cold and she trembled.

A pitiful confusion seized her, an inexplicable timidity crept into her heart, replacing the bold assurance that had been recklessly carrying her on to him. It was as though some one had whispered the truth into her ear and she was beginning to believe. From that moment her courage began to fall. The glow from her lantern was a menace instead of a help. A sweet timorousness enveloped her and something tingled—she knew not what.

Spattering raindrops whizzed in her face, ominous forerunners from the inky sky. The wind was whistling with shrill glee in the treetops and the treetops tried to flee before it. A rattle and a half lay between her and the big cottage on the hillside—the most arduous part of the journey by far. She walked and ran as though pursued, scudding over the road with a swiftness that would have amazed another, but which seemed the essence of slowness to her. Thoughts of robbers, tramps and wild beasts assailed her with intermittent terrors, but all served to diminish the feeling of shyness that had been interfering with her determination.

Past Renwood's cottage she sped, shuddering as she recognized the stone steps and path that ran up the hillside to the haunted house. Ghosts, witches and hobgoblins fell into the procession of pursuers, cheered on by the shrieking wind that grew more noisome as her feet carried her higher up the mountain. Now she was on new ground. She had never before explored so far as this. The hill was steep and the road had black abysses out beyond its edges.

She was breathless, half dead from fatigue and terror, when at last her feet stumbled up the broad steps leading to his porch. Trembling, she sank into the rustic bench that stood against the wall. The lantern clattered to her feet, and the bag with her jewels, her letter of credit and her curling irons slid to the floor behind the bench. Here was his home! What cared she for the storm?

Even as she lay there gasping for breath, her eyes on the shadowy moon that was breaking its way through the clouds, three men raced from the stables at Bazelhurst Villa, bent on finding the mad young person who had fled the place. Scarcely knowing what direction he took, Lord Bazelhurst led the way, followed by the duke and the count, all of them supplied with carriage lamps, which at any other time would have been slectening in their obtusiveness. Except for Lady Evelyn the rest of the house slept the sleep of ease.

Gradually Penelope recovered from the effects of the mad race up the hill. The sputtering flame in the lantern called her into action. Clutching it from the floor of the porch, she softly began a tour of inspection, first looking at her watch to find that it was the unholy hour of 2. Had some one yelled "Boo!" she would have swooned, so tense was every nerve. Now that she was here, what was she to do? Her heart came to her mouth, her hand shook, but not with fear; a nervous smile tried to wreak disaster to the concern in her eyes.

The house was dark and still. No one was stirring. The porch was littered with rugs and cushions, while on a small table near the end stood a decanter, a siphon and two glasses. Two? He had said he was alone except for the housekeeper and the servants. A visitor, then. This was not what she had expected. Her heart sank. It would be hard to face the master of the house, but—a stranger? Cigarette stubs met her bewildered, troubled gaze—many of them. Deduction was easy out there in the lonely night. It was easy to see that Shaw and his companion sat up so late that the servants had gone to bed.

Distractedly she looked about for means of shelter on the porch until daylight could abet her in the flight to the village beyond. The storm was sure to come at no far distant time. She knew and feared the violence of the mountain rains.

"By all that's holy," came in a man's voice, low toned and uncertain, "it isn't a dream, after all!"

She turned like a flash, with a startled exclamation and an instinctive movement as if to shield herself from unbidden gaze. Her lips parted, and her heart pounded like a hammer. Standing in the doorway was Randolph Shaw, his figure looming up like a monstrous, wavering geyser in the uncertain light from the shaking lantern. His right hand was to his brow, and his eyes were wide with incredulous joy. She noticed that the left sleeve of his dinner jacket hung limp and that the arm was in a white sling beneath.

"Is it really you?" he cried, his hand going instinctively to his watch pocket as if doubting that it was night instead of morning.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

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