

she yielded to Michael's wish to meet him on the cliff the night following his return.

It turned out to be a wild night; but Mary Ellen was not afraid. She was accustomed to storm and darkness, and nimbly sprang up the rocky, wooded path, leading to the Cape's bald crown. As she emerged from the forest a tall, dark figure was before her, standing out against the sky. Her steps grew slower and less eager, when with shambling wolf-like gait Michael began to move towards her. As he drew near she stood quite still. In another moment his strong arms were around her.

To him it was a moment of supreme joy. Without speaking he drew her to the cliff's highest point. The moon, breaking through the clouds, shed around them a sudden light; and Michael could plainly see the placid face upturned to his. The wild wind blew a loose tress across her cheek. Smoothing it aside, he bent and kissed her.

"Don't, Michel, don't!" she said quickly.

"My dear, dear sweetheart," he murmured, not perceiving that she was struggling to be free.

"Let go Michael—please, Michael."

"I will never let you go any more—never any more."

Failing to slip from his powerful grasp, she remained motionless, her head thrown back, and her eyes gazing into his.

"Michael," she began, "I must tell you something. It is a long time that you have been away. It is more than two years—"

"But I shall not go away any more, dear. I could never leave you again. I have worked hard, Mary Ellen. I am a rich man now. I have a hundred dollars; it's a great sum."

"It is not the money, Michael. That cannot bring you and me together now. You must let me go. I can't tell you while your arm is around me. You hurt me."

"I'll try not to hurt you, dear; but I cannot let you go. Two years is a long time."

"It is a very long time, Michael. I am not the same as when you left me. I have changed a great deal."

"You are taller, Mary Ellen; but you can never change to me. To me my dear sweetheart will always be beautiful and young."

"It is a greater change than that. It is something different. Can't you see what it is?"

"I can only see that you are my own Mary Ellen. Nothing else matters. You are different because you are older, and because you have missed me. Is it not so?"

"I used to miss you, Michael when you first went away, the days were very dreary. But you must try to understand me. The time came when I didn't miss you any more."

"Ah, you got used to it. I never got used to being away from you."

"Yes I did get used to it. Oh, Michael you must not be hard on me! You were away so long! I could not help it. I began to wish that you might not come back. I wished that you might be dead. I am sorry that you are not dead. That is the truth. Now, please let me go."

He withdrew his arm slowly from her waist. The iron had begun to enter into his soul.

"I don't understand you, Mary Ellen," he said, with quiet, half-frightened wonder. "I have a hundred dollars. We can be married when we like."

"No, no. We cannot be married now."

"Never?"

"No, never, never, never!"

"Why?"

"Because—Oh, because, I am going to marry someone else."

"Who?"

"The Schoolmaster."

"You can't love him?"

"I do—I do love him."

"But you love me."

"No—not now. I think I never loved you Michael. It was not like this."

"Then you have deceived me?"

"Yes, Michael. I have deceived you. You will not be hard on me."

"No, I will not be hard on you."

"You will forgive me?"

"Yes I will forgive you."

"And give me up?"

"And give you up. Yes, I will give you up."

He spoke quietly, and turning from her, moved rapidly away. He had reached the edge of the dark pine forest, when she ran after him.

"And, Michael," she said pleadingly, laying her hand on his arm, "you will not tell him. He might cast me off if you did. He doesn't know you—he doesn't even know your name."

"I will not tell him," he answered in the same passionless voice. "He shall not know my name. But don't touch my arm. Your touch hurts me."

"And will you go away from the Bay?"

"If you wish it."

"So that I shall never see you again?"

"I will do whatever you desire."

"I want you to be as if you were dead."

"Very well. You will not hear of me again."

"Thank you, Michael. That is what I want."

"Good-bye. Don't follow me. You must try to get home alone."

Then, like some huge wounded animal, plunging into the forest he crept out of sight; and lay down, dumb with his misery, in the thick, dark woods.

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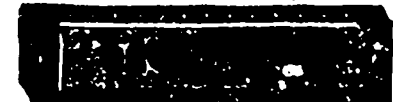
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