

Honeymoon Mountain

(By Frances Shelley Wees)
(Continued from last week)

And now for Deborah's story. What she has told you, I do not know, as I mentioned before, but looking at the matter from her point of view, and trying to be just and generous, I am forced to the conclusion that whatever she told you must have been both exaggerated and biased. I was very much disturbed over the whole business, and spent all my spare leave when in San Francisco trying to find her and explain, but of course it was an impossibility to do so.

I don't know whether it has occurred to you, Mrs. Larned, to think how completely ignorant of the world and its ways Deborah is. I was prepared, of course, for a certain amount of unsophistication, knowing to some extent how she had been brought up, but I did not realize that any girl could possibly, in this day and age, have remained so entirely unaware of all trends of modern times. I grant you that it must have been difficult for her to come down alone to meet me, and perhaps if I had known just how difficult, if I had realized Deborah's state of mind and lack of understanding of modern life as it is lived, I should have been able to overcome her objections and explain away her difficulties. As it was, I could do nothing. Deborah was in a state of frantic terror before I had a chance to see her at all, and by the time I reached her, she was beyond ordinary reasoning.

Even as it was, I might have been able to overcome Deborah's childish terrors had it not been for the absolutely unwarranted interference of some unknown person in the lawyer's office. Deborah will probably have mentioned him to you, and made some satisfactory explanation as to her conduct. I was certainly pained and astonished to discover that she had so little good taste as to be willing to take up at once with a stranger. The fact of Mr. Holworthy's presence was all that reconciled me to leaving her, angry as I was.

The really serious question between us is that of your husband's will and Deborah's estate. With my copy of the will I have consulted a lawyer, and it is his opinion that under certain circumstances we might make a fight for the estate that would ultimately prove successful. The circumstances are, of course, a marriage between Deborah and myself which would take place with your approval. This, unless there are aspects of the case with which I am not familiar, seems to me to be, from your point of view, an absolute necessity. I have examined the list of securities named in the will as the source of your present income, and, as you doubtless know only too well, most of them are completely worthless. How you have managed for the past few years is a mystery, and may possibly explain Deborah's appearance and obvious lack of advantages. In any case, no mitigation of your circumstances may arrive except through me, and although I am deeply hurt and mortified, not to mention my disappointment and the general disruption of my plans, I am willing for the sake of the friendship which has existed between our families for so long, to do what I can to make things easier for you.

I have obtained from my commander an extended leave of absence, and I am leaving San Diego tomorrow morning to drive up the coast to your home. You may expect me at the latest by Wednesday noon, unless I meet with unexpected difficulties along the road. Yours sincerely,
STUART O. GRAHAM.

day noon, unless I meet with unexpected difficulties along the road. Yours sincerely,
STUART O. GRAHAM.

Bryn folded the letter. Tubby thrust his hands into his pockets and began to saunter up and down the room, whistling beneath his breath. Simon put his hands behind his head and stared at the ceiling. Sally was trembling with excitement and clutching Simon's knee, and Madeline walked slowly across and dropped down beside Deborah.

"Well," Tubby said, buttoning his coat and squaring his shoulders, "if he's got to be kept away, he's got to be kept away, and that's all there is to it. After all, there are four men of us here, and Burch. Five against one. That ought to be easy."

"You talk as if we were going to fight about it," Sally said tearfully. "With guns. It isn't half as blundering or easy as that."

"Not half," Madeline echoed. "This is going to be strategy, and strategy, Tubby, never was your strong point, if you will remember." She smiled up at him, a warm tender smile that made him blink and look as if he saw her for the first time. "But you're a darling, Tubby, and you're loyal and strong, and worth a lot more than one of those slippery strategists."

"Well, gee," Tubby said, bewildered, and sat down.

"We might bar the road," Tubby said hopefully. "Put a gate across it, you know."

"Somebody would have to guard it, of course," Bryn said thoughtfully. "And he'd want to know why he couldn't pass. If I stayed there myself and had a talk with him, explaining the situation, it might help; but I wouldn't trust him not to pretend to go away and then to sneak back when we were not watching just to see what harm he could do."

"What you're hinting at," Tubby said boldly, "is that we've got to capture him, then, and dispose of him finally, once and for all. Murder, I suppose. Of course, it doesn't matter. Any of us would gladly oblige, but it would be nice to know your plans first. We might draw lots to see who would stab him. That's the fairest way, really."

"What we've got to do," Bryn said, disregarding Tubby, "is to let him come here, all unsuspecting; but we've got to know ahead of time. We've got to let him come here to make sure of getting our hands on him. Inside our own gates we can be sure of being undisturbed."

"I know," Deborah said suddenly. "Joe?"

"Joe?"

She turned to Bryn. "Yes, Joe is our nearest neighbor's boy. Before you came," she explained, "when Joe's father brought us any mail from town, or anything we didn't expect, he used to sound a call on a horn he has there. A kind of hunting bugle he made himself out of a deer-horn. He's terribly proud of it, and he loves to do it. He's taught Joe, too, and you can hear it for miles. Why not . . . why not have Joe watch the road? Nothing could get past him, especially if you told him enough to make him see how serious it was. And the minute he sees the car he can sound the horn, and we'll have

almost fifteen minutes to prepare."

"Well, there you are," Bryn said, smiling down at Deborah. "We're all right, aren't we?"

"We're . . . all right," Deborah said, and her lashes dropped to her cheek at the look in his eyes.

Bryn, very bodily, had proposed a starlit walk to Deborah, and to his surprise she had made no excuse. She had been pale and weary after the excitement of the letter, and now that some solution had been reached, she put it behind with relief. She walked along beside him in silence, holding to her face, from time to time, the sheaf of clove-pinks he had gathered for her beside the walk. Their perfume, heady and sweet, drifted up to him.

"It's a beautiful night," he said steadily.

"Yes."

"What's it like up here in the winter time, Deborah?"

"Oh," she replied, "it's beautiful. I love it. We get ever so much snow just here in the valley, but it doesn't last long. When it comes it makes me think of Lorna Doone. Do you remember? When the snow was so heavy and thick, and they were all winter-bound?"

"What do you do with yourself when you are snow-bound?"

"There was always plenty to do. Mending, you know, and sewing, and keeping the house in order."

"But in the evenings?"

She glanced up at him. "Sometimes it is a little dull," she said. "But Joe's father brought us a load of logs each fall, and we would put one on the fire, Gary and I, and sit beside it reading. Or playing chess."

"It sounds very pleasant," Bryn said. "We'll get a radio this winter, shall we? And how about a kitten or two? A hearth isn't really complete without a kitten."

She murmured something under her breath. Bryn bent toward her. "I beg your pardon?"

"I said," she replied, lifting her voice, "I said, you would probably

be bored. The road will be impassable as soon as the rains set in. You will find it very dull, shut away from the world for so long."

"No," he said. "I'd be looking at you."

She caught her breath. "You'd . . . you'd get tired of that."

"I'd never get tired of looking at you. Don't you know how beautiful you are, Deborah? You're the prettiest thing in the world."

"Oh, no. No, I'm not."

She bent her head and lifted the pinks to her lips. She held them there, silent.

"Deborah."

"Yes?"

"Do you . . . like me at all?"

She did not answer. Bryn could hear his own heart pounding. He waited.

She stirred. "You have been more than kind to me," she said, "and to Grandmother, too. I am very grateful." She put her hands beside her on the wall and jumped

lightly down. "I think we ought to go in," she said quickly.

She did not speak on the way back to the house, except to murmur "Thank you" as he held the door. Once inside she went directly up the stairs, quickly, as if she wanted to get away from him.

(To be continued)

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