

Honeymoon Mountain

(By Frances Shelley Wees)

Deborah rose early, brushed her hair with swift nervous fingers, bathed in cool water and went into the thin fresh morning sunshine. She had not slept well. She walked quickly up the path between the garden and the orchard. She went on, but a few yards inside the stone wall that separated the orchard from the forest, she turned and raced back down the path as if she were pursued; for it had occurred to her suddenly that he—Graham—might be hiding on the other side of the wall. Looking back over her shoulder, she was brought up short by colliding with a tall solid person who seized her hands and swung them in his own.

"What are you running away from, this bright and shining morning?" Bryn inquired.

"Nothing," she said with a little nervous laugh. "That is, nothing real. I just got to thinking that perhaps—Oh, I was just worrying about him. That's all."

"Do you know how lovely you are?" he asked gently.

Deborah pressed her lips together. Her eyes searched his.

He drew her hands up, and took them both in one of his. "It doesn't matter about Graham," he said. "Don't worry about it, sweetheart." She bent and plucked one of the clove pinks, put her hand up to the breast of his blue sweater and wove the flower stem through the stitches. Her eyes lifted to his Bryn started to speak, but she stopped and walked quickly down the path toward the house, with Bryn walking close beside her.

Grandmother, to Deborah's intense surprise, was already up.

Almost before Deborah had told a maid that they were ready for their breakfast, Pilar came downstairs with her red beret on her smooth dark head and her bag in her gloved hand. "I find that must go back at once to San Francisco, Mrs. Larned. I'm terribly sorry to go. Good-by," she said firmly.

"I can't think of it," Grandmother protested. "You must have breakfast." She turned to the maid.

"Joan, tell the cook that we want a tray of coffee and toast as quickly as it can be prepared."

Pilar glanced at her watch. "Oh, very well," she said, a little ungraciously. "I'm anxious to get home by night," she explained.

Tubby was the last one down. "Well," he said jovially, "here we all are, eh? What've you got your hat on for, Pilar? You're not leaving us, surely?"

Pilar gave him a disdainful glance. "I suppose you'll be heart-broken."

"Well, you know how it is," Tubby said cheerfully.

The group had just moved out to the veranda when there came

the roar of a laboring small engine from the road at the left.

A small battered roadster turned in at the gate. With a splash and clatter of gravel it came to a stop. Deborah's head dropped like lead at the sight of the driver.

As the car stopped, Bryn rose, walked down the steps and stopped. His eyes met the triumphant eyes of the man driving the other car. For a moment, Bryn and Graham stood facing each other, Graham half out of his car. Then, without a word, perfectly calm, Bryn turned toward the veranda.

Deborah lifted her eyes and met Bryn's in helpless anguish. Bryn was smiling at her, a steady warm comforting smile that seemed to tell her that everything was all right, that she had nothing to fear. She could not understand. He came up the steps and stood beside Grandmother's chair. Tubby and Simon were standing helpless on the grass. Sally and Madeline had retreated to the doorway, and stood there, hand in hand, watching Grandmother, too. And Pilar, still and unmoving, sat in her chair behind the vines.

Stuart Graham, with that black smile of his, came across the grass from the driveway. He swung his wide shoulders confidently, and Deborah wished wildly that Bryn would go out and do something to him, anything, to stop that confident, steady advance, to wipe off that triumphant smile, to save Grandmother. But it was too late. He stopped on the lowest step. He faced Grandmother. He bowed to her.

"Good-morning," he said brightly.

Grandmother inclined her head. "Good-morning," she replied. "You are Mrs. Larned," he stated. "I think you will have heard of me, and from me. My name is Graham."

"Indeed?" Grandmother murmured, entirely calm. Her pulse beat was swift, but steady.

He stiffened at Grandmother's "Indeed?" "Stuart Graham," he repeated distinctly. "From Boston."

Grandmother inclined her head. "How do you do," she said coolly, with perfect self-possession, perfectly unmoved. "I knew your grandparents, I believe. And your father, too. I hope they are quite well?"

"Say," Graham demanded roughly of Bryn. "This isn't Mrs. Larned herself. It's somebody dressed up to look like her. What're you trying to do, put something else over on me?"

"I am Mrs. Larned," Grandmother said quietly. "You are Stuart Graham. I quite understand. Is there something I can do for you? Your father, as I remember him, was a gentleman, and he was our friend. Can I help you in any way for his sake?"

"You are Mrs. Larned?" he asked, incredulously. "You are Mrs. Larned, and you sit there as calm as ice when I tell you that I am Stuart Graham, and that this—"

He indicated Bryn contemptuously.

"That this fellow is nothing more than an impostor, a man who's been taking advantage of you, who's married your granddaughter without your consent!"

"This is all you have to say to me?" Grandmother asked. "Nothing that you have said seems to me particularly interesting, or of any importance, I understand. And what, then?"

Graham stood foolishly for a moment, regarding her with disbelieving eyes. Then "This is a fine kettle of fish," he said. "Your husband took every precaution to see that Deborah and I should marry each other and without any compunction whatever you let her marry another man. What about me? I've been banking on marrying her, all my life!"

"I am sure that 'banking' is a very well chosen word," Grandmother commented. "He flushed darkly. 'That's all very well, I suppose you realize that she doesn't get the money, now that she's married this smart guy who's got you wound around his finger?' Suppose you can afford to snap your fingers at that, at deliberately throwing away everything your family ever had?"

"Mr. Graham, I cannot think that this is any of your affair," said Grandmother, quietly. "I am sorry, but I cannot possibly see why you concern yourself with this matter. It no longer is any concern of yours. Your interest, I would rather me, is a trifle belated." Grandmother put Deborah's hand firmly away from her, and stood up. "And I will add now that I have seen you that I shall thank God every moment of the remainder of my life that it is none of your concern, that when you had the opportunity to make it so, you thought us beneath your respect. I would rather have starved and Deborah with me, than to have her marry you. I would rather see Deborah where her mother is, in her grave, than in the hands of such a man as you are."

(Continued Next Week)

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