

The Eyes of the Gull

Margaret Duley



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THE EYES OF THE GULL

By
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GWENDA MORGAN

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To Paolo

Chapter One

Isabel Pyke sat on a rock and looked towards the narrow bay. But for brief intervals and recurring days of incredible weather she had seen the same stretch of sea and sky for twenty years. At the age of ten she had begun to grope her way towards her individual dream, and to make the rock on the bare headland her lonely sanctuary: the one place where she could be alone in the stark outport of painted houses, straggling at haphazard spots and angles, on a zigzag road and many lanes.

A solitary house, on a foundation of granite stones, stood on the edge of the bleak promontory. It was a shunned object to the fisherfolk and a dread tale to decades of children. But Isabel Pyke had never heard the pick and hammer associated with it by ghoulish legend, and the only sounds that ever fell on her ears were the mutations of the wind and the guttural notes of the gulls. The only things she ever dreaded in her sanctuary were the ferocious eyes of the gulls! When they hovered low to the Head, she looked towards the horizon for fear of meeting their cold glittering gaze. Should she find herself staring into a pair of yellow eyes, her dream was dispelled for the day. They held the spirit of Helluland: savage, bitter, and chill.

Isabel Pyke had been in spiritual rebellion to Newfoundland all her life. She called it by the name she had learned at school: 'Helluland, or the Land of Naked Rocks.' Ever since she could look at picture books she had wanted to go to Spain: to Southern Spain: Cordova, Seville, and Granada. Andalusia! The word syllabicated on her lips with the smooth sensuousness of Uncle Seth's port wine on Christmas Day. (He had a row of dusty bottles on a shelf, along with red sealed crocks of Guava Jelly, and fresher looking bottles of Bay Rum.) When the old wine had slipped over her palate and eased into her blood, she could voicelessly whisper, 'Andalusia, Andalusia,' while her outward consciousness repelled the grating dominance of her mother's voice laying down the law to Aunt Dorcas and Uncle Seth. But she could mouth it sensuously to herself when sitting on her special rock, and inwardly change the granite garb of her own headlands to a soft bloom of olive, orange, palm, and pomegranate.

Isabel Pyke's hour of isolation was over. She knew by the position of the sun that it was time to put on the kettle for tea. Her Mother was daily sustained by three large meals and three large snacks; the one snack she prepared for herself being the four-thirty one, when Isabel took her walk on the promontory. She had seen her Mother's square body reel on its feet once or twice with 'a dizzy spell', and Isabel had murmured something about sending up the shore for the doctor. The strong figure had straightened and the dominant voice had grated, 'nonsense girl, make me a cup of tea,' thus adding another snack, between a snack and a meal.

Isabel Pyke rose to her feet and the wind lashed her blue cotton dress strongly behind her body, leaving it stark in outline. Her hair blew back tautly from the hair-line, and she stood like a figure-head over a ship's cutwater. Her hair was light brown and badly cut, her cheek bones Slavic in shape under wide eyes, the colour of clear water: the lashes were black against golden skin. She turned away from the sea, and the wind dishevelled her hair and dress to savage disarray. For a moment she faced the house with its dusty windows and stopped abruptly in shocked amazement. A sombrely dressed man was walking up the steps to the faded front door! Who could be entering the Head House? Her feet stayed rooted by the unexpected sight. Many times since her childhood she had run up the crumbling steps to look in the filmy windows, but old furniture stood changeless in increasing dust. Only the yellow-

eyed gulls and herself knew it, and no human footfall but her own had ever ventured so far. When the partridge-berry pickers swarmed over the Head they always stopped short of the house and the berries around it ripened and withered.

The sun told Isabel there was no time to linger in speculation, and movement returned to her feet. Her Mother was a martinet of routine. Time to her was stomach time, and more accurately registered than their Grandfather's clock.

Isabel trod the trackless scrub of the Head until she came to a rutted grass grown road, and walked a long mile to the small outport with its one road and many lanes. She made her way between a curving beach and a narrow railroad track, towards a crooked lane holding five houses at different oblique angles. The fifth was her Mother's lying behind thick lilac and syringa, which obscured the lower windows and tapped against the clap-board. The buzz of flies accompanied her up the pebbled walk, and myriad blue-bottles shone darkly azure on the white front of the wooden house. The July light was warm and golden. As she stepped from it to the dimness of the narrow hall she heard voices coming from the dining-room. Fresh from the wind on the Head, its snug stuffiness invaded her nostrils, and she longed to let the air blow round the plush covered table, the armchairs, and the Grandfather's clock that had ticked its way through many years. Her Mother's strong brown eyes looked from it to her.

'You're late Bella trapesing over that Head.'

Her Mother's voice was like the granite rocks of Helluland: hard, sharp, and jagged.

Her Aunt Dorcas's voice flowed benignly over her. It held the roundness of Andalusia.

'Let her be, Emily. There's no hurry my maid.'

'No hurry indeed! Just like you Dork not to eat regular! Bella, here's your Aunt Mary Ann from Lunenburg: your Aunt Dorcas's sister-in-law. She came in on the train a week back.'

As Isabel's dazzled eyes cleared to observation she saw the third black figure. She had often heard of Aunt Mary Ann in Nova Scotia. She was the wife of Aunt Dorcas's elder brother Joe, who had gone to sea in a Lunenburg schooner. As Isabel went forward to greet her she was drawn to a kiss from thin lips, lost to fullness from early false teeth. The nearness of the black figure came to her nostrils like the stuffiness of the room. She heard a flat voice raised on a query.

'Well now, Emily, is this your girl? She don't favour your family.'

'No, she's not a Wilkes,' grated Mrs. Pyke accusingly.

'She's like her own good Father,' smoothed her Aunt Dorcas, with a smile from deep brown eyes.

'Well, I've heard about you all from Joe. 'Tis real nice to see you.'

'He couldn't stay in his own country to know his own folks,' Mrs. Pyke informed her.

Aunt Dorcas's serene remark toned down the grating challenge. 'He did well for himself Emily, did Joe. He was always a good boy.'

'Maybe, Dorcas Penney, and maybe not. Bella girl, look spry now. Your Aunts are staying to tea. Open a crock of number one preserve, and cut the black fruit cake—the one with ten eggs.'

Isabel obeyed automatically. Her Mother's personality had never gone past her ear. She went into the kitchen and put the kettle on the stove standing on sail canvas painted Chinese red. A sleeping cat made a dusky lump on its crimson surface. Mrs. Pyke's dirty teacup lay on a white scrubbed table, beside a small plate, brown with rich crumbs.

Boiled ham, leaves of lettuce, red radishes, scalded cream, number one preserve, bread and butter, lay on the table together.

Mrs. Pyke ate rapidly, filling up her mouth until her lips were pursed out over her teeth. Then she bolted, washing down the remains of a mouthful with a draught of dark brown tea.

Aunt Dorcas's movements evinced a heavy fluidity. She was large, bovine, and benign, and her hands moved over her food with slow deliberation. She suggested a great cow, dragging home a bursting udder.

Aunt Mary Ann took brief sips of tea with her little finger stuck out from the cup. She wore a black dress of shiny satin with a string of glass beads. The dress had a deep V-shaped neck which showed an expanse of wrinkled skin. Beside the high concealing bodices of Mrs. Pyke and Mrs. Penney she seemed revealed in ugly nakedness. Isabel turned her eyes away, and tried to shut her ears to the bolting and sucking noises of her Mother's eating and drinking. She ate moderately with her wide eyes unseeing.

'You're not eating much my maid,' came the voice of her Aunt Dorcas. It had always been the same: unalterable and unchangeable: like infinity.

Isabel's Mother answered for her. 'She was always a pale pilgarlick like her Father. He had to leave the sea for his stomach, and lay down sudden to illness. The day he died I cooked my first onion in ten year.' (Isabel remembered the smell of the onion and white lilac mixed together.)

Aunt Dorcas never heeded personalities. They flowed from her mind like drops from a pane. Her cousin Emily had thrown herself against her profound serenity all her life. The slow bovine eyes turned towards her, 'Emily, I hear the Head House is let.'

The fact was so incredible that Mrs. Pyke stopped eating. She withdrew a piece of fruit cake from her mouth and the black wedge showed the print of strong teeth.

'Nonsense, Dork, 'tis not fit for a pigsty.'

''Twas strongly built, Emily, and has stood to the wind. 'Tis so that it's let. Simeon Pyke told me as I crossed the beach.'

'All the fools are not dead yet,' grated Mrs. Pyke returning the wedge of fruit cake to her mouth.

Isabel's mind had leaped to attention. They did not know her familiarity with the Head House! They thought she took a daily walk on the promontory and inevitably stopped short of it. The black figure she had seen on the decaying steps! Was her sanctuary to be invaded? For so many years only the wind had known it, and the yellow-eyed gulls. She strained to hasten the slow detail of her aunt's voice.

'There's a foreign fellow staying at Lydia Rumsden's. He got the key from Simeon and asked him to find women to clean the house.'

Mrs. Pyke's laugh was a bark. 'And did he get them?' she asked.

Mrs. Penney shook her head slowly. 'They wouldn't go Emily, they wouldn't go, though there's nothing to fear to them that love the Lord.'

'The love of the Lord hasn't taken away the fear of that house, Dork.'

'They don't love enough, Emily, they don't love enough.'

'Maybe not, Dorcas Penney, but there's those that say the sound of the pick and the hammer will rise above the love of the Lord.'

Mary Ann Wilkes, from Lunenburg, looked from one to the other. The serene comfort of her sister-in-law was moderated by the square presence of her cousin Emily, whose piercing eyes seemed to fasten on her neck and accuse it of immodesty; and now this strange conversation! Mary Ann fingered her glass beads with the desire to turn them into a scarf. In spite of the stuffiness of the room there were draughts on the back of her neck. Her own voice

came thinly to her ears. ‘And why wouldn’t they clean the house, Emily? Think a body would be glad to earn a few cents these days.’

Mrs. Pyke’s grating scorn reduced her, and now she felt silly as well as immodest.

‘Money for scraping dirt from Head House, Mary Ann! ’Tis money too dearly earned.’

‘Has it a bad name?’ she asked timidly.

Mrs. Pyke sucked up a last draught of tea, sweet from the moist remains of three teaspoons of sugar. She put her cup in its saucer with a final click, and wiped her mouth with the back of her hand.

‘ ’Tis well known you don’t live in these parts, Mary Ann. The house is known the length of the shore. Sixty year ago——’

Isabel pushed back her chair with a sudden scrape. She knew it all by heart! Her Mother glared, but her Aunt Dorcas asked kindly, ‘can I help you clear my maid?’

Her Mother answered for her. ‘That you won’t, Dorcas Penney! We had our day. Let the young wait on the old.’

Aunt Mary Ann left the table and sat nervously upright on a stiff sofa by the Nottingham lace curtains. Mrs. Pyke stayed in her place, distorting her mouth and letting her tongue cleanse the area between her lips and her teeth. Aunt Dorcas rose ponderously to her feet and her slow hands piled dishes for Isabel’s tray.

Mrs. Pyke left the table and placed herself in a faded armchair facing her cousin-in-law from Lunenburg. Her brown eyes with their hairy brows discovered every wrinkle on the naked neck. The draughts became increasingly evident.

‘Ain’t you cold, Mary Ann, with your low dress?’

‘No, no, Emily,’ she said hastily, grasping the glass beads. ‘ ’Tis warmish of a summer in Lunenburg. Tell me about the queer house.’

Mrs. Pyke’s eyes left the neck and she settled herself for a long recital.

Isabel left the room erect with the weight of the heavy tray.

‘Sixty year ago——’

‘Come Michaelmas, Emily,’ prompted her cousin fumbling with her large hands for the creases on the white cloth.

‘Sixty year ago come Michaelmas, Dorcas Penney, and the year after you were born, Captain Pyke, Josiah Pyke, came back from a long foreign voyage. I mind the time my Mother first told me the story. He was going to be married to a poor pilgarlick like my Isabel ——,’

‘My own Mother told me she was a pretty thing, Emily, and she wrote a bit of poetry.’ Mrs. Penney’s slow moving figure came to rest in another armchair with her large hands folded serenely in her lap.

Mrs. Pyke snorted. ‘Poetry indeed! Pure trash! If she’d been my daughter I’d have knocked the poetry out of her.’

Mrs. Penny continued with profound detachment. ‘They were going to be married on Twelfth Night.’ But her cousin’s grating voice demanded the narrative.

‘The girl was a Tucker: Elfrieda Tucker, and a poor sawney crowd the lot of them! This one was keeping company with Josiah a two year, but for ten month he’d been away in China and other heathen parts——’

‘The Chinese are coming to the way of the Lord, Emily. The foreign missions——’

‘Maybe so, Dorcas Penney, not that I hold with going out to the heathen when the heathen are at our own front door, but a lot could have been converted since then. This was sixty year

ago.' Her brown eyes pierced her cousin-in-law from Lunenburg, who sat up stiffer in her chair. 'Josiah came up the Bay, Mary Ann, one winter morning, and what did he find?' Mary Ann fingered her glass beads again, but no answer was required. 'And what did he find? He found, Mary Ann——' (the grating voice paused for a second). 'He found his worthless bride-to-be dead in a new grave, of a still-born child.'

'Ain't that sad, Emily,' said her cousin-in-law from Lunenburg in a flat voice. 'Josiah's child?'

'Have sense, woman! Didn't I just tell you Josiah had been away a ten month? No, Mary Ann, not a soul knows to this day who the fellow was. She was a poor thin thing, not built for child bearing, and no one knew she was that way until she was on her time.'

'The poor girl held on to the name of the father.'

'That she did, Dorcas Penney, and he never got his deserts. She died with the secret locked up inside her.'

'What did Josiah do, Emily?' questioned Mary Ann Wilkes still with her hands on her glass beads.

'Do, Mary Ann, and what did he do? He went rearin' about like a wild thing: running through the lanes and asking everyone for the name of the man.'

'And taking the name of the Lord in vain.' Mrs. Penney's head shook with slow regret.

'And what if he did, Dorcas Penney? He had good reason, but before the day was done, Mary Ann, the people were fair sick of his voice, and they went in and bolted their doors against him. But THEN what did he do? He waited until every lamp was blown out and crept into the graveyard with a pick and dug her up.'

Mrs. Wilkes, from Lunenburg, said with triumphant intelligence. ' 'Tis a crime, Emily, to desecrate a grave.'

'And don't you think we know that, Mary Ann? We may not live in a great country like Canada, but I hope we know the difference between right and wrong?'

Dorcas Penney said with slow forbearance, 'perhaps he didn't know what he was doing, the poor fellow.'

'Didn't he indeed? He dug her up to see if there was any token in her coffin: and when he didn't find one he shook the dead thing until her head cracked against the ice. 'Twas a white moonlight night, and a couple that was living close by, saw him clear as day. They were afraid to go out; he sounded that wild, but they waited until he was gone and then went across the graves and found the dead creature with her face turned up to the sky and her shoulders froze to the ground.'

'I hope he was arrested, Emily. 'Tis horrible.'

'Haven't I told you we know the law as well as you do? Yes, he was arrested BUT he got off. They thought he was cracked, and so he was with what he did after. He gave up his ship and took with him the ship's carpenter, a dreadful ugly fellow with one eye. He was a Covey duck from down the Shore. The pair of them went out to the Head and built a house: built it with their own hands, digging and hauling, cutting and sawing, beating and hammering, and the folks said they could hear it all across the Bay. Josiah was never seen in the village again until he went across the beach to be buried not far from Elfrieda. I can remember the day, and how we always hid whenever Coveyduck went to the Store. Every child ran as fast as its legs could carry it.'

'What happened to him when Josiah died?'

‘Now you’re asking. No one ever knew. He came to the store once after Josiah’s funeral, and then a long time went by. They thought he must be starved so Simeon Pyke’s father (who was the nearest kin to Josiah) walked out to see what ailed him. He found the house neat and tidy, but shockin’ bare, and never a sign of Coveyduck. From that day to this, his disappearance is just as great a mystery as the name of the fellow who got Elfrieda into trouble. Some say Josiah called Coveyduck away, others think he wandered down the Shore, and there’s them that say he fell over the Head and drowned natural like, but the tide never washed up his body.’

‘But that doesn’t explain the sound of the pick and hammer.’

‘’Tis said the haunt on the house comes from the rage that Josiah hammered into the walls, and when the wind is low, the echo of it still comes across the Bay, and the sound of the pick digging on hard ground begins in the graveyard.’

Mary Ann Wilkes gave a flat Nova Scotian laugh. ‘You’re too cut off from the world, Emily. That’s why you cling to stories like that.’

Mrs. Pyke’s eyes found the wrinkled neck again. ‘And I suppose Lunenburg is London, New York, and Paris?’

Dorcas Penney flowed on like smooth oil. ‘Emily, I think like Mary Ann. ’Tis an unnatural tale we’ve built up ourselves, and it’s wrong to pass it on to every lot of children. If we walked out to the house like we walk across the beach the story would soon die away. But,’ she sighed profoundly, ‘it’s a long walk and the wind is strong.’

Mrs. Pyke snorted. ‘Wind or no wind, Dorcas Penney, there’s no one stoppin’ you if you want to take that walk. ’Tis like you indeed to wait till you can only get the length of the beach.’

Mary Ann Wilkes from Lunenburg released her hold on her glass beads and said with nervous decision, ‘don’t you think we’d better be going, Dorcas?’

‘You’re right, Mary Ann. Seth will be wondering what’s keeping us, and you’ll be busy the week visitin’ the folks.’

‘Nonsense, Dork. Sit right down, Mary Ann, and stop a bit longer. I want to hear which of the folks is doing things for you. You must come to tea proper when I’m more prepared.’

‘Thank you,’ she murmured nasally, looking towards her sister-in-law. But her heavy figure still rested serenely, and her brown eyes gazed back kindly at the expanse of wrinkled neck. Mary Ann sat down again.

‘That’s right now. You couldn’t go anyway without a cup of tea. Bella!’ Mrs. Pyke’s voice was raised on a loud note, ‘Bella!’

‘Yes, Mother,’ came quietly through the thin partition.

‘Bella, make a pot of tea th’ once. Your Aunts are goin’ early. I must say you’re mighty slow with your dishes. Think you had to wash up for a regiment.’

Isabel had lingered in the crimson-floored kitchen. When her dishes were washed and the place tidied away she had gone to the back door and watched the sea dim to grey, and the old house on the Head become blurred in outline. She wondered what she would find to-morrow. Her Mother’s voice reached her easily in the back yard and she took quick long steps to the crimson-floored kitchen.

When Isabel had steeped the sixth and final brew of tea she was free to go to her room under the slanting roof. She closed the door and her body relaxed with a soft sigh. The wind blew in from the Bay and brought a smell of drying fish. The honeycomb spread and white lace curtains were blue-white like the ice which came down from the North.

With a jug of boiling water, diluted with icy well water, Isabel carefully washed her golden-coloured body in a white china basin. In the light of the crescent flame from the kerosene lamp her slim figure made elongated shadows on the papered walls. She put on a plain nainsook night-dress and extracted a bottle of olive oil from a drawer of scant contents. Slowly she rubbed the smooth fluid all over her face and neck, lingering with slow strokes around the eyes. (Some day she would go to Andalusia, and she couldn't take the leather skin of outport Helluland. The dark-eyed Andalusians were full of soft-skinned loveliness, and she always thought of them dancing in fiestas under hot yellow sun.)

Before slipping into bed Isabel counted a roll of notes concealed in the folds of a Chinese dressing-gown, brought her by Uncle Seth. Eighty-five dollars! It was growing! Andalusia! She closed her eyes and imagined the sun on her body, and the orange trees in bud. With a sigh she replaced the notes and extracted a book, and slipped under the blue-white spread. With the kerosene lamp beside her she began to read. 'Seville is the Paris of Andalusia, the gayest city of all Spain. Glittering like a jewel on the banks of the Guadalquivir, environed by orange-groves and palms, and glowing like a sun——'

Chapter Two

The next day the doors of the Head House were open and the wind blew through from front to back: the day after the windows were clean, and Isabel met the eyes of a gull and couldn't think of Spain.

Aunt Dorcas walked across the beach and brought the village news. 'The foreign fellow was cleaning the house himself, and he'd hired Joe Perry's square-bodied wagon to meet the train.' (It chugged inertly across the curving beach once a week from the capital city of St. John's.)

'Haven't we a taxi?' asked her cousin belligerently.

'And how could a taxi get out to Head House Emily? Whoever's chosen to live there must use the horse like our Father's before us.'

'And who's the fool that's going to live there? Bella girl make haste with the tea.'

But Isabel waited to hear her Aunt's voice come slowly over the click of her needles. Her knitting was the antithesis of her movements. With an economy of gesture she consumed large balls of wool: a skein by morning became a sock by night. Click, click, click until the calm voice was ready.

'I don't know Emily. Lydia says he don't answer to questions, but he's bought up most of the supplies in the store, and leased the house for four months.'

Mrs. Pyke's laugh was a bark. 'Leased indeed, and would the devil himself want to take it from him?'

'I tell you Emily, there's no fear to them that read the Word and trust in God. "There can no evil happen to the just."'

The voice was like a well of peace. It overflowed to Isabel's taut muscles and liberated her feet to the kitchen. Aunt Dorcas's mind might be chained to the limits of the small outport, but her spirit lay in profundity.

The night after the train had crawled across the curving beach Isabel had a strange dream. All space was full of snowy-breasted gulls, hovering, soaring, swooping to the level of her eyes: everywhere she looked she met a yellow implacable gaze. She searched wildly for the horizon but it was full of eyes: she tried to cover her face with her hands, but they lay powerless in her lap. Andalusia left her and she spun in the grip of Helluland: desolate, savage, and chill. As she sat in icy paralysis a gull swooped down and hovered in front of her face. Fascinated she saw that it had blue eyes like a human, warm, vital, and compelling. Freedom came back to her hands, but she no longer wanted to cover her face. Her body was released to life and she awoke to the warmth of a July day.

With a foreshadowed feeling she followed the curving beach and walked with long steps over the promontory. In sight of her rock she stopped abruptly in her cheap canvas shoes. In front of an easel sat a long figure, with the sun turning the back of an auburn head to the burnish of a copper kettle. Whatever atavistic blood had mixed in the making of Isabel Pyke it seethed with rebellion at the sight of the intruder. The easel was within a foot of her rock! She slanted into the wind and spoke to the gleam on a copper head.

'This is my rock. I've had it all my life. You've got to go.'

'Good God,' said a startled voice, and the figure and the chair turned round together.

Peter Keen saw the body of a strange looking girl starkly outlined by the wind from the sea. She narrowed to the waist, to the knees, to the ankles, and the cotton dress tautened over pointed untouched breasts. Spots of angry colour heightened Slavic cheek bones, and dilated pupils made grey eyes black. The elemental quality of the figure wakened all his artistic sense. 'Don't move,' he rapped. 'You look like Boreas, North Wind, any wind! My easel is dug into the ground. Don't move for God's sake.'

'I will,' she said, sitting down on the rock with her face turned towards the horizon. 'You can go away. This is my rock!'

Exasperated he regarded the disturber of his new found solitude.

'Indeed,' he drawled, 'I understood I had leased a house and paid the rent. Inconsiderable I will admit, but paid nevertheless.'

'You may have the house but you haven't got the Head,' she said, speaking to the horizon. 'This is my rock.'

'So you've said before. Is that all your vocabulary? Shall we sing "Rock of Ages?"'

Tears burnt in her eyes at the unknown quality of his ridicule, and at the violation of her sanctuary. She was defenceless against the smooth irony of such a voice. She looked like a figure of woe with her hair streaming back from her head. Where had she got that face? Looking at it he saw the tears. He said more gently, 'let's talk about it. What's your name?'

'Isabel Pyke.'

'And why is this your rock Isabel?'

'Because I've come here every day for twenty years and stayed until the light told me it was time to put on the kettle for tea.'

'Are you twenty Isabel? Your body looks so virginal.'

She wouldn't talk about her body. 'I'm thirty next January,' she said sulkily with her face still to the horizon.

'You don't look it and yet you do,' he said reflectively. 'Your face is angry and secret. What are you secret about Isabel?'

'This is my rock.'

'Yes, yes,' he agreed soothingly, 'we've conceded that. I'm sorry to gate crash, but I've taken the house to be completely alone. One day I didn't know where to go. I couldn't paint. I thought I'd never paint again: I was so full of soft living. Then I looked at a map of the world and shut my eyes and jabbed. When I opened them my finger was lying on Newfoundland.'

'Helluland,' she muttered.

'What did you say Isabel?'

She said out loud with granite in her voice, 'Helluland or the Land of Naked Rocks.'

'It has a Norwegian sound Isabel.'

'Eric the Red. He named it right.'

'By your voice you don't like your native land. It looks very fair to me.'

'You only came yesterday.'

'True I only came yesterday, but I'm very pleased with what I see. I wanted space above me, beneath me, and around me, and this seems to give me what I need.'

'You won't stay,' she said with conviction.

'Don't bank on that Isabel. I'm afraid I will.'

'You won't stay.'

'There's an element of repetition in your conversation Isabel. Do you think you could turn your face away from the sea and look at me? There's nothing out there but the gulls.'

Startled her eyes came straight to his. They were blue like the sky, and blue like the eyes in her dream! She stared and stared and her look so reluctantly given stayed on him in fascinated regard. He was momentarily speechless with the quality of her own eyes. Big pools of grey light with unexpected black lashes. They should have been brown like her blowing hair. He wished now she would turn them back to the sea. He said lightly with the even charm of a cultured voice, 'tell me Isabel why you're so sure I won't stay on the Head.'

'Hasn't your man told you: the man who was at the widow Rumsden's?'

'My man Isabel is the perfect servant. I can take him from Paris to the Pole and he's equally unaffected. We came to St. John's and I told him to find the loneliest place in Newfoundland where I could camp out. He hasn't confided in me the difficulties of his quest, but I'd thought he'd done very well until you came.'

'Hasn't he told you about Josiah, Coveyduck, and Elfrieda Tucker?'

'Good God no, he never gossips.'

'This,' she said flatly, 'is sixty year old gossip. Did you hear anything last night?' Her voice grew sibylline. 'The sound of a pick digging open a grave, and a hammer, beating, beating.'

He looked startled. Was she a natural? Not with those eyes. 'No, I heard nothing Isabel. What should I have heard?'

'What I told you.'

He laughed with a gleam of teeth, and said with illumination, 'the house is haunted is that it? That's why they practically gave it to me.'

'Yes it's haunted. You won't stay.'

He laughed again, and she watched the sun on the perfect teeth. 'Will I not Isabel? Wait and see. Tell me what haunts the house. I confess I'm very interested.'

With her eyes on the horizon she told him the tale, and he thought her stark sentences were like the brevity of line on a canvas. He sat forward with his arms resting on grey flannel trousers, and his red brows contracted over his blue eyes. 'Poor Elfrieda,' he murmured, and his voice was like a caress to the dead girl. 'She probably met a lovely moment in her life and couldn't resist it. If it had been a local man everybody would have known. Some bold sailor blew in from the sea and swept her off her feet. I wonder if she thought it was worth while. What do you think Isabel?'

His eyes saw her with comprehension. She answered him slowly. 'I don't know. She sinned and spoiled Josiah's life.'

'Josiah sinned, Isabel. He let bitterness eat him up. If he'd gone back to his ship he would have been very busy and in a very little while he would have met another girl. There are so many girls in the world Isabel.'

'Perhaps he could only love one. If you want one thing you want only one.'

'You seem to know Isabel. There's knowledge in your voice. What is it you want? And if you've come to your rock every day for many years why haven't you heard the sound of the pick and the hammer?'

'Perhaps there's no sound to hear. Nobody will come and find out. When I came first and didn't hear anything I thought it was because I was like Josiah.'

He laughed and looked at her with amused blue eyes. 'Like Josiah, Isabel, ISN'T that impossible? How could an undeveloped girl understand a story like that?'

'I didn't,' she muttered, 'I only meant I was like Josiah because I didn't have what I wanted.'

‘I see Isabel, and you think that makes the place safe for frustrated people?’

She made no answer and he turned and looked at the house. Faded and square it looked to his eyes, and harmless in the yellow sun. The front door stood open above the mouldering steps, and the windows were propped up with bits of stick. These were his orders. He had thought the house smelt damp and musty. He turned back towards the strange-looking girl and gazed straight into her eyes before she could turn, them away to the sea.

‘Do you think the house will be safe for me Isabel?’

‘Have you got what you want?’ she asked slowly, and his laugh was an ironical denial.

He MUST have what he wanted, she thought. He was so different to anyone she had seen or talked to before, and his voice was so beautiful. It fell on her ears like the roundness of finished things: like Andalusia! Startled, her eyes went to him as he sat forward on the wooden chair, with the sun burnishing his hair and the minute stubble of a copper beard. She hadn’t thought of Andalusia once! His eyes held her in silent appraisal, and he weighed her face against her body. It looked as if a hand had never touched it: it was so long and free and virginal: and her eyes—great luminous pools, like clear light that held no yellow. He had wanted to paint with enormous energy, undisturbed by outside sources: to sit free and untrammelled with the wind in his hair, and to portray space, infinite space: and above all to paint light: light receding towards the misty horizon. Now he itched to paint this strange girl, with the long flowing body and mutinous face. The wind had made her as naked to his eyes as she would be without her faded cotton dress. His eyes left her for the sea, and silently Isabel watched him. Suddenly she saw the sun and her leap to her feet brought him back to reality. ‘Where are you going?’ he demanded.

‘Home,’ she said briefly as she turned her back to the sea.

‘Are you coming back Isabel?’

‘To-morrow,’ she muttered irrevocably. ‘This is my rock.’

Peter Keen threw back his head and laughed on a deep joyous note. With a backward glance she saw the sun on his hair and the sky in his eyes. He sprang to his feet and put his palette on the seat of the wooden chair. With a long step he came close to her and put his hands on her shoulders, turning her round to his face. She quivered under his grip like a wild untamed thing and he could feel the fine bones of her body.

‘Let me go,’ she stormed, with the red spots standing out on her cheek bones and the black pupils swamping her eyes.

‘Hush, hush,’ he said soothingly, and the lovely voice made her want to crumple up in a heap. ‘I only wanted to suggest Isabel that this place is big enough for us both. Can’t you be generous and let me stay here? I’ll go on painting and you can sit on your rock. Will you Isabel? You can’t take away from me what I want as much as you do. A big wide open space where I can be alone.’

Like a terrified drowning person she looked into his blue eyes—the eyes of the gull in her dream. She had never been so close to a man before, and a man so unlike the men in the village. She wanted to get away, and yet she wanted to stay. Peter Keen sensed it all under his hands, and his fingers pressed her shoulders softly. His eyes like bits of the blue sky burnt down at her and his voice spoke to her upturned face. ‘Isabel, Isabel, poor little frightened Isabel. If I dared put my hand on your heart, I expect it would come out in my hand. May I stay on the Head, Isabel? May I? If you tell me to go, I’ll have to pack up and leave and I want to stay so badly.’

In the simplicity of her knowledge she believed him. It would mean the loss of her dream! She could never think of Andalusia, if he spoke in the beautiful voice and sat with the sun on his hair. She had a strange weakness in her knees, and her eyes closed. Her face looked wrung and he stood staring down at the silky black eyelashes resting on the flat cheeks. He said gently, 'Isabel, Isabel don't look like that. Why are you so unhappy and strange? Why have you got such a different face? It's like the East, except for the eyes, and your bones, the fine bones under my hands. Tell me Isabel—tell me?'

He shook her a little and she opened her eyes widely over flat cheek bones. The red spots were gone now. 'Let me go, let me go. You're worse than the eyes of the gull. I can't see Andalusia.'

She tore herself from under his hands, and her feet and the wind impelled her over the scrub.

Peter Keen stared after her. What a strange girl! Andalusia! What did she mean? What a face and what a body to paint if she could ever become unconscious of it without her clothes. For the moment he shrugged her away. He was damn glad about the haunted house. Josiah and Coveyduck would be too much competition for the village curiosity. He would be all alone except for Isabel Pyke! He stretched his long body in the sun, and the wind stirred his auburn hair. He turned and studied the battered old house. What a strange tale, and he hadn't felt a thing. It only smelt old and damp, and last night he had dragged his camp-bed to the open window and let the wind blow all around him. He had waked with its strong breath in his face, and seen a white gull pass his window. He looked towards the rear of the house, with all the windows propped up on bits of stick. His man worked away and didn't seem to be troubled by any ghosts or apparitions. Peter Keen's lips curled away from his teeth in a wide smile. A ghost to Stevens would be just something different in another foreign country!

Peter Keen didn't return to his canvas. He started to explore the Head. The plumbing was very primitive and he was determined to find a descent to the sea. There must be many little coves, somewhere in all this granite cliff. He would find one and bathe in it, and perhaps take Isabel Pyke to see it! They might swim together and maybe meet the ghost of Coveyduck on the jagged rocks. Isabel Pyke! Brief, economical, and descriptive! Primitive, Puritan and exotic. She seemed so. He would see. She would be back to-morrow. 'This is my rock.'

He smiled to himself and with the sun on his back he looked for indentations in the perpendicular cliffs.

Chapter Three

Isabel Pyke was pale under her golden tan as she poured boiling water into the earthenware teapot. She was afraid of her Mother's eyes after her great experience. Anything as big as that must surely show on the outside! She put the tea on the stove to steep, and tiptoed to a square of mirror on the kitchen wall. Fearfully she gazed at her own face, but to her eyes she looked just the same. In the crimson-floored kitchen she had become again the creature of food and drink. She put her long hand up to her face and stared again. 'Why have you got such a different face?' What did different mean? She dropped her hand and started to lay a tray. There was only work in the house on the lane.

Isabel Pyke had a hundred and twenty dollars a year of her own. It came in ten dollar cheques once a month from some Trust Company in the City, and she cashed them at the store. She gave the storekeeper a slip of blue paper and he gave her back a ten dollar bill. Isabel Pyke bought all her own clothes and saved money to go to Andalusia! In spite of her dream, once a week she paid out the sum of fifty cents to a woman in the village to do the washing and scrubbing. She did all the rest herself, but she was lost to everything on her knees wringing out a scrub-cloth. Her Mother made her pay for her laziness, telling her that in her young day she had worked from daylight to dark without any hired help.

Emily Pyke owned her house and bit of ground, and two more houses in the village, and her tall, frail husband had left her a sum of money. Isabel didn't know how much, but there was always enough for citron, raisins, cherries, and currants, and if Mrs. Pyke couldn't buy a supply at the store, she wrote to a shop in the City, and the parcel came in on the train.

Mrs. Pyke's baffled resentment was that her soft spoken husband had left his house and his bit of money in Trust for his daughter. It had to go to that pale pilgarlick after her death! But Isabel would die first! The Wilkes' didn't lie down to illness! Grandfather Wilkes had reached ninety-four without an ache or a pain, and the week he had died some seals had drifted in on a pan of ice, and he had enjoyed a large meal of flippers.

Isabel knew all that her Mother felt. There was no silence about it as she talked 'at' her through her Aunt Dorcas. When Mrs. Pyke scornfully dismissed the ways of her husband, Isabel became doubly grateful to his memory. He had always been so gentle with her and when he was home from the sea, it was his figure that came to her bed when she called in the night. Her Mother never heard. When she slept she died to sound, and when her Father went back to the sea Isabel learned not to call.

The next afternoon as she walked over the promontory her heart beat fast under her second cotton frock: but it was bluer than the other and she had washed her hair to high lights of gold. As she neared her rock she saw him painting in absorbed concentration with his back to the land. The wind was low on the Head, the sea rolled lazily in, and with the light on the copper hair Isabel couldn't say Helluland! She had been on the rock for sometime before he saw her. He rested his elbows on his knees and sat looking at her with his thumb stuck through his palette. Her hair was a soft mass and only lightly stirred by the breeze.

'Isabel, you're here! You should come with the wind! This is surely not your Helluland to-day? It's an Italian sky and a Mediterranean sea. Come and look at my picture.'

She came and stood shyly by his side while he studied her regretfully. 'Your dress falls straight to-day Isabel. I can't see you so well.'

‘What are you painting?’ she asked hurriedly.

‘Can’t you see Isabel—the beautiful golden day—and all that lovely light.’

He watched her expression and her contracted brows. She looked puzzled, and turned her eyes towards the surrounding view, and back to his picture.

‘Don’t you like it Isabel? I’m supposed to be a very good painter.’

‘It’s very yellow,’ she said doubtfully.

‘But it’s a yellow day, and your own golden skin has captured all the light, and your hair is full of it. I must paint you Isabel.’

‘Will you paint me yellow?’

‘Yes if I see you that way—full of sun. I suppose you’d like me to look across the Bay and paint six little houses and six little fish-flakes with a man in a blue shirt sitting in a boat.’

She felt he was laughing at her but she said steadily, ‘that’s what’s there.’

‘But if you were painting Newfoundland Isabel, wouldn’t you paint Helluland, and by the sound of your voice it would be a pretty grim picture.’

Isabel contracted her black brows in deep thought. ‘I see,’ she said slowly. ‘I look at it one way and you look at it another.’

His smile bathed her. ‘More or less Isabel, in relation to the light.’

‘Did Murillo paint like that?’

‘And what do you know of Murillo, Isabel?’

‘Nothing,’ she muttered, ‘except that his pictures are in Spain.’

‘Isabel,’ he commanded, ‘I’ve got to hear all about Spain. You’re going to tell me what you meant when you said you couldn’t see Andalusia.’

He laid his palette carefully on a chair, and with a friendly gesture took Isabel Pyke by the hand and drew her down beside him on the dry scrub. They sat with their faces looking towards the sea.

Isabel Pyke was silent. She didn’t know how to begin, but he smiled into her eyes. ‘Go on Isabel I’m waiting.’

‘I don’t know what to say.’

He leaned back on his elbow and looked up. From where he lay her lashes seemed to stretch to enormous length to end in light brown tips. He saw her clenched hands and said soothingly. ‘I’ll ask you questions Isabel, and *do* answer. I’m so interested.’

His voice claimed her confidence before her words gave it. ‘What will I tell you first?’ she asked shyly.

‘Tell me about the eyes of the gulls and Andalusia.’

His voice made it as smooth as Uncle Seth’s port wine, but he said it differently with a sound like a ‘th’.

She said wonderingly. ‘You don’t say it like I do.’

‘That’s the way they say it in Spain Isabel. Andalusia! Lovely word isn’t it? Lovely place too, and such exquisite architecture. It’s a challenge to an artist, but the Alhambra is too delicate and beautiful to have been made by human hands. Angels must have come down to fashion it.’

Isabel’s eyes of grey light were swamped in black, and she said breathlessly. ‘My book says the Virgin Mary often comes down to visit the cathedrals in Spain.’

Peter Keen said gravely, ‘I haven’t seen Her Isabel. Perhaps I didn’t go to the right places. What else does your book say?’

‘It says,’ she gushed out, ‘that when the devil took the Lord up to a high mountain, that it was well the Pyrenees were in the way or He would have fallen down and worshipped Spain.’

Peter Keen smiled into her excited eyes. ‘It’s a beautiful country Isabel. Perhaps beautiful enough even for Him.’

‘You’ve been there,’ she breathed.

‘Of course Isabel and I shall go again, and sit in the sun under snow-capped mountains. It restores my faith in the achievements of man, when I go to Spain.’

‘But where do you live every day?’

‘I don’t Isabel. I just momentarily reside, here, there, and everywhere.’

‘You must be very rich,’ she said in an awed voice.

Now he lay on his back with his eyes closed to the strong rays of the sun, and his lips curled in a smile. The sun made his teeth like shining pearls, and his lashes curled and golden like his gleaming hair. Isabel stared down at him as if he were magic from another world while she watched the words come out of his mouth. ‘Too rich for my own good, Isabel, but that’s the fault of my Father and Grandfather. I’m trying to live it down in a temporary period of asceticism.’

‘My Father left me money,’ she whispered, ‘and I’m saving to go to Spain. Sometimes I think it will take all my life.’

‘But why Spain Isabel? It might be any other place.’

‘I don’t know. I’ve always liked the sound of it. Orange, olive, palm, and pomegranate.’

His blue eyes opened quickly, momentarily dazzled by the strong rays of the sun, but Isabel was looking out to sea and her face was closed and secret. He sat up and turned slantways towards her.

‘Isabel I told you to tell me about Spain. Now begin.’

‘I can’t put it into words,’ she muttered.

He laughed and took her by the shoulders. ‘Oh yes you can Isabel Pyke from Helluland! Tell me why you’ve come to this haunted Head for twenty years and when you began to think of Spain.’

Isabel looked into his eyes and felt as if she were facing bits of the burning sky. He put his arm around her, and strangely her head went into the hollow of his shoulder. His nose received the fragrance of Uncle Seth’s Bay Rum, while she began to talk. She fumbled with her words at first but Isabel Pyke had found a companion, and she savoured the novelty of conversation. He liberated her tongue, he aired her mind, he listened to everything she had to say, and when her speech faltered, and her eyes questioned, he pressed her hand and bade her go on. For the first time in her life her dream found verbal expression. She told it to a blue shirt underneath a square chin with a minute stubble of auburn beard. She found words for Andalusia, the roll of bills, the red book, the olive oil, and how the eyes of the gull always destroyed her picture. In describing the yellow eyes her head pressed into his shoulder.

‘The eyes of the gull Isabel? How fanciful! I must look.’

‘No, no, they’re yellow and cold and take away from you what you want.’

‘But I don’t know what I want Isabel, so I think I’ll have a look. It sounds interesting.’

She was silent and content for a long time, until he put his hand under her chin and turned her face up to him and the sun. ‘You said I was worse than the eyes of the gull Isabel.’

‘Yes,’ she said gravely, ‘but Andalusia will come back when you go. Will I go?’ she asked fearfully.

‘I don’t know,’ he said looking at her strange face, but he held her sustainingly, and she felt reassured. She whispered shyly under his chin. ‘Tell ME about Spain. You know all about it.’

‘No Isabel, not to-day. I want to hear all about you, and I don’t see it as you do. I might spoil it for you. Tell me what it’s like down there? What the boats do when they go out in the morning, and what you do all day shut up in this little Bay?’

Isabel was very comfortable. She found herself telling him about Aunt Dorcas, her voice, and her peace. She told him about Uncle Seth, his foreign travel, his Port Wine, his Guava Jelly, and his Bay Rum, but she was chary of words about her Mother. He said directly, ‘Isabel you and your Mother are antagonistic?’

She jerked her head from his shoulder, ‘no, no,’ she said in denial. She could hear Aunt Dorcas’s profound voice. ‘My maid, honour thy Father and thy Mother.’ But he had no Aunt Dorcas, and he insisted, ‘yes, you are Isabel. Face facts my dear. You’ve stored up a lot of psychic poison behind those great eyes. Tell me how she feels about you.’

She didn’t understand all that he said but she whispered in reply, ‘her eyes despise me.’

‘Why,’ he asked gently with his blue eyes on her face. (Isabel had accepted the fact that he was very close to her.)

She threw it out wildly. ‘Because I’m a pale pilgarlick, and because I don’t like onions, and pea-soup, and fatback pork.’

If she hadn’t been trembling on the verge of liberated hysteria, he would have laughed out loud. Red spots burnt in her cheeks and her eyes looked black. ‘Hush, hush Isabel, I understand.’

It was too much. The kindness of the beautiful voice burst the founts of her repression. She had walked along so long! Great sobs shook her and tears flowed through her body like a river. He held her closely in the arms that had gone around so many women, and his nose received again the fragrance of Uncle Seth’s Bay Rum. She cried against a blue shirt and found a strange peace. She felt like Aunt Dorcas’s voice. His eyes went out over the distant horizon and because her hair was fresh and sweet he kissed it with the ease of long practice. But when her tears were wept out of her she drew primly away in sudden consciousness. She saw the slant of the sun, and in a second was on her feet like a hunted thing and streaking over the Head. His copper head gleamed as he looked after her. ‘Her exits are rather sudden,’ he reflected. ‘Damn it all, where’s my palette?’

When she appeared again she came with the wind. With a terse command he turned his easel towards the land and dug the legs into the ground. He drew her in long sweeping lines while she stood in the scrub, lashed by an inshore wind, and the pose was too familiar to her body to give her any consciousness of it. She had a way of lifting it out of her waist and pointing her breasts to the wind that maddened him with its beauty of line. He worked with contracted brows and did not throw her a word. But when her time came to go she left him in equal silence.

The next day she walked up behind him and demanded, ‘am I like that? Have I got such big cheek bones, and do I look as if I had on no clothes?’

He smiled at the outraged face. ‘The wind was your lover Isabel. He took them away. His name was Boreas.’

She turned away and hunched on the rock. She was worried about the look of her dress. It must be too small for her. She had a thin white one for Sundays. She would wear that to-

morrow. But her Mother would ask why. Isabel sighed and looked out to sea with her eyes brooding.

Peter Keen laid down his palette and followed her. He was very satisfied with his work. It grew free and clean and vital and seemed to be blown by the wind. It was better than space and light, and it appealed to him to put Isabel's strange face above her long virginal body. She was very paintable and lent herself to light and shadow. He lay down in the sun and stretched luxuriously. His white teeth gleamed as he murmured to the brooding face. 'Have you ever had a lover Isabel?'

'No.'

'What a very uncompromising no, Isabel. Why haven't you had a lover? You must be so different to the people down there. He pointed vaguely to the huddle of whitewashed houses far away at the head of the Bay.

'That's why. They think I'm queer, because I walk every day by myself and don't talk much.'

'Have you ever been kissed Isabel?'

His voice compelled her confidence but she said reluctantly. 'Once, when I was fourteen. A boy kissed me in the meadow behind our house, and we sat in the grass by the vegetable-cellar. I hated it. His lips were dry and cracked.'

'Is that the limit of your experience Isabel?'

His voice had the smooth quality that she feared. She said angrily, 'I've told you. That's all. I don't want those men to kiss me.'

'Why Isabel?'

'They don't wash enough,' she muttered with her face burning.

'It's an excellent reason my dear. Don't be cross Isabel. I only wanted to know all about you.'

He took her hand and studied its long lines. There was a Botticelli touch on her outward body as well as in the shadows breaking through her face.

'Tell me,' he murmured caressingly, 'haven't you any friends in the village?'

'No,' she said confused by the varying expressions in his voice. 'The girls I used to go to school with are all married.'

'I know, with lots and lots of babies. Wouldn't you like to have lots and lots of babies Isabel?'

'No I wouldn't, she said in the same uncompromising way. 'It means having false teeth, and being fat and ugly and working from daylight to dark.'

'A very unattractive picture Isabel, but isn't that rather a primitive marriage you describe?'

'That's the kind they have down there, except for one or two.'

'Maybe my dear, but it's not love. People nowadays love for the sake of LOVE, as something delightful, independent of families.'

She didn't know what he meant but she said obstinately, 'if you love outside of marriage you have to be married. Three girls got into trouble last year, and now when they go out everybody looks at them.'

He whispered softly, 'there are no babies in the love I mean my dear. Tell me how you think of it apart from the way of the village.'

She searched his face, then looked out to sea, but his blue eyes drew her gaze back to his own. He waited patiently until she said in a far away voice, 'I like to think it could be like the Song of Solomon.'

He lay back with a smile on his face. ‘Isabel you’re delightful! Like the Song of Solomon? Sensuous, exotic, and beautiful.’ He closed his eyes and murmured through half shut lips, ‘“Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled.” You look so undefiled Isabel.’

Her eyes flew spontaneously to his closed lids. ‘But you know it too!’

‘Of course I know it. I hope I know most good things. How do you know it so well?’

‘Because I wasn’t allowed to read it. Every Sunday in the winter I have to read a chapter to my Mother and my Aunt. I can pick where I like, anywhere except the Books of Genesis, Leviticus, and The Song of Solomon.’

His eyes opened and he laughed on a note of deep delight, while the flawless teeth gleamed in the sun. Isabel whispered to herself. ‘Thy teeth are like a flock of sheep that are even shorn.’ (Teeth were a thing of beauty to her. The people in the village kept theirs for such a short time.)

‘So of course the forbidden books became your favourites?’

‘Oh no, not Genesis or Leviticus. They have no music, and the story of Adam and Eve sounds like the people back there.’

‘BUT the Song of Solomon. “We have a little sister and she has no breasts.” You’re not like that Isabel.’

‘I must go,’ she said springing up, and again her exit was a sudden streak.

But he lay on in the warm sun, looking like a relaxed Pan, with lips smiling under closed eyes. He wondered if he wasn’t committing the greatest sin of his life. No, no he was sure he wasn’t! No one had a right to expect continued happiness. It only came in fugitive gleams. ‘Happiness was but a wayside camping.’ He smiled a little wider. HE was camping out.

Chapter Four

Isabel was snipping the roots from early turnip-tops when her Mother entered the crimson-floored kitchen.

‘Bella, I didn’t mind to tell you but your Aunt Dorcas was over a’yesterday when you were trapesing over the promontory. She wants us to come to tea to-day.’

‘Yes Mother?’

‘She’s having a few folks for your Aunt Mary Ann—her with her bare neck and her prate about Lunenburg. Pity she don’t see her age and cover up her body. It’s that withered with poor feeding.’

Isabel said nothing and her Mother leaned over the hot stove and took the lid off a saucepan. She eyed the bubbling contents with a sharp glance. ‘Now Bella, that’s a sight too small a piece of spare-rib for them greens! I could eat that much myself.’

‘It’s all we had in the house Mother, and I don’t want any.’

‘Indeed ’tis a pity about you. It’s a meal for your betters! Do you a sight of good if you’d eat a few slivers of pork every day: you might get some flesh on your bones.’

Isabel went on snipping and Mrs. Pyke went into the small pantry and raised the cover of the bread tin. Her voice grated through the open door. ‘Now Bella, here you’ve begun on the new batch before you’ve finished this stale loaf. I don’t know what would happen if I didn’t keep my eye on everything.’

Isabel snipped again and the voice grated from the recesses of the pantry. ‘Pity we’re going out. That’s a nice bit of fish in soak. I suppose we’ll get a good tea, but your Aunt Dorcas is not much of a cook. Her cakes are something awful—too heavy by a long sight.’

Mrs. Pyke returned and started to go out through the back door. As she opened it a shaft of strong light brought in a swarm of buzzing flies which circled round the kitchen and filled it with a noisy hum. Mrs. Pyke’s square figure parted the formation of their entrance. She turned back to her daughter. ‘Beat out the flies now Bella, and give me the key to the store-room. I want to see how those hams are looking in pickle.’

Isabel took a large key from a nail hammered into the wall and handed it to her Mother.

‘We’ll be leaving early Bella. ’Tis wonderful fine, and your Aunt Dorcas says to come right over after dinner and sit for a spell in the garden.’

Isabel’s pupils dilated as she picked up the rusty scissors. ‘But I’m going for a walk first Mother.’

Mrs. Pyke squared back. ‘Stuff and nonsense. You can go without a walk for one day. If you did the washing and the scrubbing you wouldn’t need so much exercise.’

‘But I’d like to go for a walk Mother.’

‘And what if you do? There’s a sight of things we can’t do in this world just because we want to! We’ll go at the time we’re asked, right after dinner.’

Mrs. Pyke turned to go. ‘I’ll go for a walk first Mother, and go to Aunt Dorcas’s after.’

‘You’ll do no such thing Miss. And what’s out on the promontory to make you that eager? That artist fellow?’

Isabel’s heart gave a fearful jolt and she held her breath. She made an uncalculated snip at a turnip-top and a bit of her finger nail flew into the bowl. With awful relief she heard her Mother’s voice grate on. ‘Think you’d be glad of a change instead of mopin’ around by

yourself. If you'd go to the tea-meetin's with your friends you wouldn't be so silent. No Miss you'll go to tea to your Aunt Dorcas, and you'll go when I go!

Isabel stared into the bowl and her Mother went on. 'And you needn't look sulky about it either. You can walk double to-morrow. I'm going to your Aunt Maria Benjamin's for tea and you're not asked. Don't wonder at all when you sit like a stick or a stone without opening your mouth. Your Aunt Maria has got a nice bit of veal from up the shore. 'Twill be a real treat, and you can have the afternoon off and take a sandwich to the Head and walk your legs off if you want to.'

Mrs. Pyke went out in the sun, and Isabel snipped on with nothing free but her thoughts. She had double preparations to make: vegetables to peel and scrape, and greens to clean for two dinners. Mrs. Pyke approved of extra food on Sundays, but of no extra preparations. Only the work entailed in cooking was holy on the Sabbath: special cooking that signified the occasion of the Lord's Day.

Mrs. Pyke got up in the mornings and made her bed, and sat and directed for the rest of the day, or walked across the beach and visited the folks. Her mouth talked and ate during her waking hours. On Saturday morning she was out in the store-room prodding the fat hams lying in pickle. Isabel had a chicken to draw, a jam tart to make, brewis to put in soak for the Sunday morning breakfast and the daily work beside.

The turnip-tops were finished and before she did anything else she had to beat out the flies with a heavy duster.

The kitchen was quiet again with only the bubble from the kettle and the saucepans. The sun streamed through the one window, burnished the top of the black stove and lit up the nickel plate on the oven door.

'Take a sandwich to the Head!' Pink spots ran up and stood out on Isabel's cheeks. She made an incision in the flesh of the chicken and plunged her hand through the opening. To-morrow her Mother would walk across the beach soon after dinner, to Aunt Maria Benjamin's, and would not return until ten o'clock! Isabel's eyes dilated as she drew out a handful of insides. She would take a jam sandwich and stay out on the Head for many hours! She separated the liver, and the heart, and the gizzard from the mass of entrails! (Giblet soup with onion, barley, and macaroni for dinner to-morrow.) Perhaps he would miss her to-day, perhaps he would be glad to see her to-morrow! He talked to her as if he liked to talk to her. She picked up the gizzard, cut it open and scraped out the gritty substance it contained. If he didn't want her to stay she would soon know! And she would wear her Sunday dress! While her Mother was at church in the morning she would run the iron over it, and it would be cool and in its place before she returned. She washed her hands, rinsed the greens in clear water and pressed them into the saucepan with the too small piece of spare-rib.

At half-past three Isabel and her Mother let themselves out on the pebbled walk. Isabel locked the front door and hid the key under the mat. She had on her Sunday dress and it fell white and soft, and smocked round the shoulders and round the waist. She had worn it for two years, but it washed fresh and white and didn't have to be starched. She had on a large white hat and white canvas shoes. Mrs. Pyke was buttoned up to the neck in stiff black with a jabot of Battenburg lace. Her hat was hard straw with a jet ornament and her shiny black gloves were tight on her fingers. They walked silently down the lane across the beach and turned their backs on the promontory. The sea was even and calm and crept up the beach in a languid wash. The boats rested in black bulk, and the houses turning every way on the crooked lanes,

shone white in the sun. Wood smoke came out of the chimneys in a thin blue, and curled up to the bluer sky.

Isabel and her Mother walked slowly in the unaccustomed heat, and Isabel noticed beads of sweat clinging to the down on her Mother's upper lip. She looked quickly away towards the sea. They crossed the railway track, and went up another lane, where Aunt Dorcas's house stood, with its front turned away from the beach. It was surrounded by a white washed fence which enclosed a garden to right and to left and ran round a thin strip which joined the back to the two sides. On the left ran straight drills of potatoes, and to the right grew a thick clump of lilac bushes which shaded a square of coarse grass, where Aunt Dorcas and Uncle Seth sat with some of the other relations. Isabel and her Mother entered the garden side.

'Well Emily 'tis wonderful fine. Come in and sit down. You must be warm with your walk. Bella my maid you look real pretty in your white dress.'

'Pretty indeed! She's a show with her long legs.'

Mary Ann Wilkes's hand flew to her neck where she sat on a rustic bench between Cousin Emma Wilkes and Aunt Susie Cruikshank. Uncle Seth sagged in moist bulk, with his vest open and his swollen hands hanging inertly between his knees. But his blue eyes twinkled from large pouches, at his wife's cousin.

'Emily your tongue would turn the milk sour. You sure need a drop of port to smooth it. You were always a sharp tongued one even as a gal.'

'One'd need to be in this world Seth Penney, and I can't see any beauty in a long gawky body.'

Mary Ann Wilkes spoke in her flat Nova Scotian voice. 'All the girls are slimming in Canada, Emily.'

Mrs. Pyke sat down on a hard chair and began peeling the gloves from her square hands. 'I hope it stops at the girls then Mary Ann. Some folks don't know when to give up. Better an old fat body than a thin scraggy one.'

Uncle Seth's fat stomach stirred to his silent laughter. 'Have some port, Emily?'

Mrs. Pyke's voice became gratingly affable. 'Well Seth I don't mind if I do.' But Aunt Susie Cruikshank's thin lips tightened, 'you ought to be ashamed of yourself Emily Pyke settin' such an example to the young.'

Mrs. Pyke squared in her black. 'Indeed Susie Cruikshank, 'tis nice to be told how to behave in company, and company from big places like Canada! But you may be a member of the W.C.T.U. but I'm not. And perhaps you'd be interested to know for all your temperance, that its many a piece of fruit cake you've ate in my house with a good glass of grog stirred up in the mixture.'

'Well I wouldn't have ate it if I'd known Emily.'

'Maybe not Susie Cruikshank but you took good care not to inquire! And I suppose we won't be able to play our games of five and fourties after tea because you don't play the spotted cards.'

Aunt Dorcas's voice flowed calmly. 'We can play Flinch Emily.'

'Flinch, indeed, I never heard the like. 'Tis cheating the devil in the dark. Do they play cards in Nova Scotia Mary Ann?'

Mary Ann Wilkes gave a flat superior laugh. 'We play Bridge Emily.'

Mrs. Pyke squared to take a deep breath but Aunt Dorcas said evenly 'Bella my maid, will you cut me a few flowers for the table, and set some in the parlour. My hands are too clumsy for the job.'

Isabel's body straightened eagerly, 'I'd like to Aunt Dorcas,' she said and escaped to the straggling patch of flowers in view of the Aunts and Uncles on the square of coarse grass.

The garden grew without plan or order, and straggled in the same haphazard placing as the houses on the crooked lanes. Isabel lingered long over her task, and from where she picked she could see the promontory running far out into the sea. Was he looking for her? She moved between tall plants of multi-coloured Columbine, Blue Lupin, Red Peonies, and Bleeding Heart, and breathed the warm air, fragrant with Sweet Rocket and Boy's Love. The scent of the Boy's Love took her instantly to the brown wooden church, at the foot of another crooked lane. As long as it was green Aunt Dorcas cut a sprig on Sundays, and breathed it profoundly during the entirety of the minister's sermon. Uncle Seth always wore a posy, and sat fidgeting by her side until he was released to the open air.

Isabel cut a great bunch of long-stemmed flowers and entered Aunt Dorcas's kitchen from the narrow strip, joining the potatoe patch and the straggling flower garden. Quietly she stepped from the glare of the sunlight to the stuffy dimness of another crimson-floored kitchen. With the flowers in her hand she gently turned a brass tap and watched the water flow evenly towards an iron sink, enamelled on the inside to a shiny white. Isabel gave a long sigh. Aunt Dorcas had taps! Since Uncle Seth had sold his vessels and left the sea, he had potted around doing odd jobs for her, and several years ago he had built a septic tank and brought the water into the house and right upstairs.

Isabel arranged the flowers in long glass vases, and placed one on the centre of the dining-room table. The yellow blind was drawn inside the Nottingham lace curtains, and a thin buzz came from some captive flies. The table was set with many places, and the knives and forks of each overflowed towards the next, while the backs of the waiting chairs were pushed closely together. A whole ham lay like a great lump thickly studded with cloves, and by its side were huddled three yellow-skinned chicken with their legs tied to their sides. Isabel smiled to herself. Aunt Dorcas had forgotten to remove the strings. 'I hope we get a good tea. Your Aunt Dorcas is not much of a cook anyway.' With infinite care Isabel moved a chair and unwound the string from the three chicken. Aunt Dorcas would never hear the last of it, if Mrs. Pyke saw the strings!

Isabel carried the second vase of flowers into the shaded parlour and placed it on a solid mahogany table, between the horse-hair settee and the harmonium. A hymn book lay open on the rack, at the page of Aunt Dorcas's favourite hymn, 'Eternal Father, strong to save.'

Isabel sat down in the yellow dimness of the stuffy parlour with the same buzz of flies in her ears from behind the drawn blinds. Two large conch shells gleamed white and pink from the iron fender—black from stove polish, and she had an instinct to get up and bend her ear to the convolutions of the shells. Above on the mantelpiece stood two delicate green vases with pendant lustres which changed and reflected the yellow light to gleams and points of brilliance. Isabel sighed and thought of the sun on an auburn head, but she went quietly upstairs and washed her hands luxuriously in the china basin with running water.

Isabel couldn't stay alone any longer, so she let herself out to the warm glare of the afternoon sun by way of the front door. As she turned towards the square of grass shaded by lilac bushes she heard her Mother's voice over a strong suck. (Uncle Seth must have brought her the port.)

'Nonsense Susie! What sort of a spy?'

'A spy like they used to have in the last war to build concrete platforms for the German guns.'

Isabel paused with her hand resting on a pointed top of the paling fence.

‘Don’t be a fool Susie Cruikshank. Even the Germans couldn’t find anything to shoot at out there.’

Aunt Mary Ann’s flat voice came through the leaves of the lilac bushes. ‘More likely he’s disappointed in love and doesn’t mind the Haunted House.’

‘Perhaps he wants to be alone with his God!’ The voice flowed like a Benediction.

‘Well ’tis lesser company he’s got Dorcas Penney, with Josiah and Coveyduck. With his God indeed!’

‘Perhaps Bella has seen a sign of him in her walks.’

Isabel gripped the fence and the whitewash came off in her hand.

‘Bella—not she! ’Twould take a sight more courage than she has to walk out to the Head!’

‘The station-master says——’

Isabel braced her body and moved forward prepared!

Chapter Five

Isabel ran out over the promontory in her Sunday dress, but as she came within sight of the house, she slowed down to an indifferent pace. Peter Keen was striding to and fro in front of the decaying steps flicking cigarette ash with impatient fingers. When he saw her coming he strode to meet her, and his lighted cigarette made a thin curl of smoke in the scrub.

‘Isabel, where have you been? I waited for you all day yesterday and you didn’t come.’

Her eyes were dazzled from walking towards the sun, but as his body blocked it out she saw it reflected in his hair, and the blue sky shine out of his eyes. He put his hands on her shoulders and compelled her to look up at him.

‘You should have come Isabel when I expected you. Why didn’t you come? I wanted you for my picture.’

A shy smile curled the corners of Isabel’s mouth. ‘I had to go to Aunt Dorcas’s to tea. She had a party for Aunt Mary Ann who’s visiting from Lunenburg, and Mother has gone out again to Aunt Maria Benjamin’s and I’m not asked.’

His lips parted widely from his gleaming teeth, and his laugh rolled over the Head. ‘Isabel, Isabel I do adore the names of your relations! You must tell me all about them—what you had for tea—how many of the Aunts and Uncles were there—and what they said.’

Isabel’s black lashes fell on her wide cheek bones. ‘They said you were a spy.’

‘Good God what kind of a spy?’ He gripped her shoulders a little tighter and Isabel relaxed to his hands.

‘Just a spy,’ she murmured.

‘What do I spy?’

‘Places to hold concrete platforms for guns for the next war.’

Peter Keen wrapped Isabel in his arms from sheer joy. He spoke over the brim of her white hat. ‘Isabel how beautiful! Come and sit down and tell me more.’

He took her by the hand and ran into the sun, and when he released her, she subsided on the rock while he dropped in contented relaxation at her feet.

‘Isabel I’ve wondered how the village would explain me but I never expected to be a spy.’

Isabel looked at the path of light on the water and the shy smile spread to her eyes and widened her lips. ‘You’re a hermit and a woman-hater, and you don’t mind the haunted house because you’ve been disappointed in love.’

He sighed with delight, ‘so often Isabel, but I got over it.’ He took her hand and looked up under the white hat. ‘Am I a woman-hater Isabel?’

She said hastily. ‘You’re also a secret drinker and you like your drop!’

Peter Keen threw back his head and roared and Isabel watched the bared teeth and the brown lashes with light tips. ‘Not very secret Isabel, and the last is not exactly a libel. I do like my drop.’

‘So they say! The train brought you in a case of whisky and a case of wine.’

He still held her hand, but he put it back on her lap and dropped his red head against her knees. ‘Isabel, you may as well know the worst before they tell you. It also brought me a barrel of beer. Stevens loves beer!’

She tried not to notice the weight of the red head. ‘Uncle Seth was delighted to hear you were a drinker.’

Peter Keen looked up. ‘He likes his drop too Isabel?’

‘Yes I think so. We had port that was twenty years old that came from Oporto. Uncle Seth said it was wasted on women as it came from a special year of something.’

‘A vintage year Isabel?’

‘Yes, that’s what he said.’

‘Did you drink the port Isabel?’

‘Yes I had two glasses.’

‘Little drunkard, and did all the Aunts drink it too.’

‘All except Aunt Susie Cruikshank, who’s a member of the W.C.T.U.’

‘The WHAT Isabel?’

‘I thought you knew everything.’

He smiled widely. ‘I thought I did too Isabel, but be kind to me and enlighten my ignorance.’

It was the tone that she dreaded. She said hastily. ‘It’s the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union. You sign the Pledge and you get a ribbon.’

‘How beautiful Isabel, and Aunt Susie wears a ribbon?’

‘Yes, but Uncle Seth told her he was following the words of St. Paul, to take a little wine for his stomach’s sake.’

‘Isabel, I think I like Uncle Seth.’

‘I expect for the same reason that made him want to visit you,’ she said practically. ‘When he heard that you had a store of liquor he wanted to walk out to the Head. But he won’t! For one thing nobody ever walks this way, and another it’s too far for his size. He’s very fat!’

‘A pity, Isabel! We might have had a Bacchanal and talked of foreign seas.’

‘He’d like that: he says he’s sailed on them all.’

‘Do they know you come out here, Isabel?’

‘Oh, no,’ she answered quickly, ‘they think I walk on the promontory and stop short of the house.’

‘Don’t they ever ask you questions?’

‘My Mother always answers her own questions, but Aunt Dorcas does sometimes. She asked me last night if I’d seen any sign of you.’

‘And what did you say, Isabel?’

She looked into his eyes for a fleeting second and then looked out to sea.

‘I told her,’ she said slowly, ‘that I’d passed your man once or twice.’

Peter Keen wrapped his arms around his legs and smiled at his knees.

‘Isabel, what delightful duplicity! But worthy of a diplomat.’ He was silent for a few minutes looking towards the sea and the sun came down and saturated them both in a golden circle. He sighed lazily, ‘Isabel, I meant to work this afternoon, but it’s so lovely. I’ve got the half-shut eyes of the Lotus-eaters, and feel terribly content to watch “the tender curving lines of creamy spray”.’

Her eyes flew wide open to his. ‘That’s Tennyson,’ she said eagerly, ‘I picked that line out for a fine day on the beach.’

‘So you read Tennyson, Isabel, as well as stories of Spain? Any other poet?’

‘Keats, it’s all I’ve got. I won them for prizes at school.’

‘It’s enough Isabel, if you can forget Tennyson in his bad moments.’

She told him shyly, ‘sometimes when I’m not thinking of Andalusia, and the sea is wild I say, “Break, Break, Break.”’

‘Do you, Isabel? I’m glad you like beautiful lines. Beauty is the only thing to strive after and it’s an endless quest, but it comes at such unexpected moments. If you wish it often enough, some day a stately ship will go by and take YOU to Andalusia.’

Her mind gave a foreshadowed leap. ‘But oh for a touch of a vanished hand,’ and she sat rigid and silent.

Peter Keen sighed again, watching the white foam of the waves lap lazily over the jagged rocks. The dove grey backs of the hovering gulls looked blue under the burning sky. ‘Isabel, I also intended to be very active and show you a beautiful cove. It’s steep and dark and damp in the back with a beach of grey stones that the tide doesn’t quite wash over, and it’s very, very private if you care to climb down and risk your neck.’

‘Deadman’s Cove,’ she said briefly.

He turned his eyes away from the gulls and looked at her reproachfully. ‘Isabel, what a horrid name, and I felt so alive in it. Why do they call it that?’

‘I don’t know. Perhaps for Coveyduck.’

‘Well, I didn’t see any sign of him, and I swam right out to open sea, past all those jagged rocks, slippery with seaweed and many gulls.’

‘Did you look at their eyes?’ she asked hastily.

‘Strangely enough I did. Not when I was swimming, but when I was painting, one swooped down and looked straight into my face.’

A breathless ‘yes’ was her only question, and he looked at her with contracted brows.

‘Yes, Isabel, and I knew just what you meant by Helluland! That gull simply looked at me with yellow hate. I was fascinated by such cold ferocity. I wanted to paint it with your grey eyes recoiling, and I did rough in a sketch, but I couldn’t manage a design to show your eyes and the gulls, and besides I can’t paint yellow cold. It’s all wrong.’ He sighed again. ‘I intended to work on that too, Isabel, and here I just sit and sit, and you’ll be gone soon.’

She touched the package of sandwiches with her white canvas shoe. ‘I don’t have to go so early this afternoon. Mother is staying out to tea.’

He turned his whole body towards her. ‘Of course, Isabel, I forgot. You don’t have to go home to put the kettle on! You can stay to tea with me. How beautiful!’

‘I’ve brought a sandwich so that I could stay out.’

‘Where? That little packet! Isabel you must eat like a bird. I’m afraid I like my food as well as my drop. Stevens!’ He turned towards the house and his round even voice went over the Head.

‘We must eat out of doors,’ said Isabel hastily.

‘Wouldn’t you like to put your legs under a table?’

‘No, no, out of doors. I couldn’t go into the house.’

Peter Keen turned back to her. ‘Isabel, you’re not afraid of the house?’

‘No, no, but it’s so lovely out here.’

Peter Keen shook his head. ‘Isabel, I’m afraid you are. Stevens!’

‘Yes, sir.’

Stevens’ tall thin figure had appeared at the top of the decaying steps. He was dressed in black trousers and a white linen coat, and his face above a stiff collar rose impassive and calm.

‘Stevens, I want a picnic.’

‘Yes, sir, very good, sir. Hot or cold?’

‘Hot or cold, Isabel?’

‘I think cold out of doors.’

‘Cold, Stevens. What can you give us?’

‘Well, sir, I could make sandwiches, or prepare something from a tin, sir—a lobster salad or a salmon mayonnaise. They’re very good in these parts, sir, and I could devil some eggs if you wish.’

‘Stevens, you’re so adequate, I leave it all to you. We’ll have it in the sun at—Isabel what time do you have to leave?’

‘At half-past eight.’

‘Eight-thirty! Stevens, we’ll picnic at six-thirty, and as it’s an occasion we’ll have a bottle of wine.’ He smiled at Isabel, his blue eyes full of laughing mockery. ‘What have you got in that case that came in on the train, Stevens?’

‘Well, sir, the choice was restricted. This is not a wine country, sir.’

‘What do they drink, Stevens?’

Stevens spoke expressionlessly to the horizon. ‘Whisky, gin, and rum, sir.’

‘But the ladies, Stevens?’

‘The same, sir, so I’m told and the wine lists would bear out that statement, sir.’

‘Truly an alcoholic Helluland, Isabel! Well, Stevens, do your best.’

‘Yes, sir. There’s a moderate sherry and a nice hock, sir. Some Liebfraumilch, sir.’

‘And very nice too, Stevens! Isabel, you’ll love the nuns on the bottle.’

The conversation was as alien and as delightful to her as the beauty of the Song of Solomon. She sat upright in tranced silence. Stevens started to retreat but Peter Keen recalled him. ‘Stevens.’

‘Yes, sir.’

‘Bring out those two canvas chairs and put them in the eye of the sun and bring me a long drink of beer to begin with. Would you like a bottle of beer, Isabel? It’s very cool.’

‘Oh, no, thank you. I’ve never tasted it.’

Very shortly Isabel Pyke and Peter Keen were sunk deep in the canvas chairs set close to the edge of the cliff. They sat looking at the sea glistening in flat quietude towards the misty horizon. Isabel lay softly relaxed under her white hat and bathed in a golden glamour. Peter Keen sipped clear amber beer topped with white foam like the edge of the waves on an angry day.

‘So cool and clear, Isabel! Wonderful fellow Stevens! He’s got a basket which he lowers down the well on a long rope, and it’s as cold as the eyes of the gull down there.’

‘Does he always cook for you?’

‘Amongst other things. I take him everywhere with me because nothing is impossible to him. When he found out that the pony and cart which does his transportation, stopped short of the house he got a hand cart and pushed the things out himself. By and by when my hair grows, he’ll cut it, and if I fall over the cliffs into Deadman’s Cove (as you call it) he’ll call out, “Just a minute, sir, I’ll be down with a splint.”’

It was too wonderful. Isabel sighed and stretched her long body. She took off her hat and laid it on the scraggy grass. She lay back and closed her eyes and still saw the sun behind her lids. ‘Mr. Keen,’ she breathed slowly.

‘What, Isabel? That’s the first time you’ve called me anything. Say Peter, Isabel.’

‘I can’t,’ she whispered.

‘Yes you can, Isabel, it’s a very easy name, and ought to be very familiar to you after all the chapters you’ve read on Sundays. What were you going to ask me, Isabel?’

‘I was going to ask you to tell me something about yourself. You must have a Mother and a Father and a home you lived in once. I don’t know anything about you. I just walked over the promontory and you were there.’

Peter Keen smiled. ‘Just like Elfrieda’s lover, Isabel, who came in from the sea, only I came in on the train.’

‘Tell me,’ she said hastily.

‘Tell me Peter,’ he insisted.

‘Tell me about your home and your Father and your Mother. Please Peter,’ she said shyly.

Peter Keen wanted to talk. He slumped down lower in his chair.

‘Well Isabel it’s a long story. My Mother who is a very beautiful woman is the daughter of an Ambassador, and married my Father who was very English. That’s usually the end of most stories Isabel, but it was the beginning of theirs. My Father is dead now, so all their opposition is over. He was a rigid member of what they call the ruling classes of England, and my sister and I were the results of his very incompatible union with my Mother. It was over us that they broke themselves on the rock of opinion. My Mother was very continental, believed in making us all round, and there was nothing my Father loathed like anything all round. He believed in a smooth neutral surface, with “made in England” hidden in the grain—not even British, if that’s not too fine a distinction for you Isabel.’

‘Does it mean England by itself without Great Britain?’

‘That’s it exactly, and even narrower than that Isabel: just a section of aristocratic England. My Mother had money of her own and sent us to France, Germany, Norway, Switzerland, Spain, and even across to Algiers, and my Father brought us home and sent us to the seaside. We were always travelling in our childhood. My Mother gave me pencils, crayons, paints, and brushes and my Father took them away and sent me out to play cricket. I was bundled off to school—prep. and public—to be made in the English mould, and my Mother took me to Paris in the holidays to teach me how to paint. My Father was determined that I shouldn’t paint and sent me to Oxford, where I became a complete and wicked hedonist, and a little more. My Father believed in behaviour, in well established grooves, and in turning one’s back quickly on what isn’t done. I believed in looking at everything, in picking it up, sampling it, tasting it, and throwing it away if it offended me. I had to find out for myself and because I was in rebellion to my Father’s ideas I behaved a little worse than I might have done in the ordinary way.’

She said quickly, ‘your Father and you are antagonistic.’

‘Isabel, hoist with my own petard! How quick you are. No, we were not exactly antagonistic. We wanted to like each other only we never started off on the same foot. I’ve seen him looking at me in my conventional moments when I was turned out by his tailor, and talking mildly in English unemphasis, and his eyes would hold a wistful expression. “Damn it all the fellow is a gentleman,” sort of thing, but when I talked innovations and art I was intolerable to him.’

‘I know,’ she said quickly, ‘when you wanted something different to your Fathers’ before you! Like Mother is over bathrooms, and Aunt Dorcas over the taxi.’

‘Isabel, do they do it here too?’

‘Yes I think so. Mother made me wear underclothes of white shirting with stiff embroidery until I bought them myself. She doesn’t hold with flimsy silk “you can shoot peas through”!’

Peter Keen gave a wide delighted smile. ‘Isabel how beautiful, the world is the same everywhere.’

‘Go on,’ she breathed.

‘When I talked innovations and modern art, Isabel, my Father cringed. He liked painting of course, like every English gentleman, the family portraits, and a nice farm horse bringing home a load of English hay, or an obvious picture with a story telling quality. He was steeped in tradition and wouldn’t recognize any modern ideas or forces that couldn’t be expressed in old forms. He was dead to the spirit of change, and the thought of Impressionism, Post Impressionism, Cubism, or the idea of expressing abstractions in line or colour was madness to him. One didn’t show one’s feeling much less paint them!’

Isabel Pyke looked doleful. ‘Perhaps he was like me: six little houses and six little fish-flakes.’

Peter Keen’s smile bathed her like the sun in the Heavens. ‘No Isabel your mind isn’t shut. He had the opportunities and you haven’t. If you were away from this little Bay and out in the world you’d soak up atmosphere like blotting paper. My Father’s mind was set in granite, and I never understood how he loved my Mother.’

‘Something different to himself which he couldn’t help wanting.’

‘Well his love didn’t make her very happy,’ he said grimly. ‘My Mother was beating her wings all her life and I think she got very tired.’

‘Where is she now?’ Isabel asked softly.

‘In the South of France. She couldn’t get out of England quickly enough when my Father died, but she’ll go back when she sees it more moderately.’

‘Do you see her often?’

‘Whenever I can. She always pulls me back if I lean too much one way. When I left Oxford, after I was twenty-one (without taking a degree Isabel) I wallowed a little, I’m afraid, in the stream of modern life. Liberty went to my head in a wild unbalance and I behaved very badly. I forgot to tell you Isabel that it was never any good my Father cutting me off with a shilling as my Grandfather had left a large sum of money in Trust for me until I was twenty-one.’

‘Where did you go?’

‘To Paris where I thought my Father wouldn’t hear about me, but my Mother arrived.’ Peter Keen closed his eyes. ‘I can see her now Isabel—very lovely, smooth, and groomed, and dressed like a dream. She told me mildly that I was a heresy to her theories, and that I’d had quite enough experience and liberty to keep me from such a violent reaction to my Father’s domination. She further reminded me that taste was extremely important and I was showing very little signs of it. I was thoroughly ashamed of myself and found Stevens and went round the world, and as I grew to a love of simplified design in my painting, so I modified my outward conduct, but it took time Isabel, as I do love the four corners of the earth, and places off the beaten track, and I’m so apt to follow the moment, to my own undoing on many occasions.’

‘And others too I expect,’ she said gravely.

‘I expect so Isabel, but when I want to really paint, I go off by myself and Stevens looks after me, just as he does now.’

Isabel turned it all over in her mind. ‘What did your sister do between your Mother and Father?’

‘Took what both had to offer and managed to keep a foot in both camps. My Father adored her in his distant way, but she disappointed him too. He wanted her to marry a Naval Officer

—a really marvellous looking fellow with a figure like a God. I wanted to paint him, but he wouldn't pose for me. Too damn modest.'

After seeing her picture Isabel understood how he felt. She asked quickly, 'didn't your Sister want to marry him?'

'I almost think she did, but she had a phobia against the traditional mind. She told me she'd love to walk under an arch of swords with him, but she'd always imagine them over her head if she did anything that couldn't be explained on page four, line five, etc., etc.'

Isabel looked out to sea and her eyes were puzzled, but she asked politely, 'is she married now?'

'Yes Isabel: very, very happily to a well-known London Specialist. They have two babies like Fra Angelico's angels, and sometimes when I go there I have a dim distant vision of what might have been.'

Isabel's mind answered, 'there are no babies in the love I mean Isabel!' She looked at him wide-eyed in searching wonder as if he could explain all that she didn't understand. He met her eyes like pools of clear water, fringed thickly round the edges with lush growth. Unexpectedly he dropped on his knees beside her and wrapped his arms round her and her canvas chair. 'Isabel, your eyes, your child's eyes, with all their questions! You've never done anything you shouldn't have done have you?'

She whispered back from the terrifying nearness of his face, 'I've never had the opportunity. I don't know anything. How could I learn anything in this place?'

'Do you want to stay as you are Isabel, walking to the Head every day and dreaming of Andalusia?'

Isabel pressed back against the canvas in the chair, but the face with the blue eyes like bits of sky followed her and whispered below her chin. 'Tell me Isabel, do you want to stay as you are?'

Isabel's voice flowed wildly over the auburn hair. 'No, no, no. I want to go away. I want to see places and people, and live where there's sun and warmth and beauty, and in houses with bathrooms and silver tops.'

Peter Keen laughed kindly and softly and for a moment leaned his red head on her Sunday dress. 'Poor little Isabel, beating her wings in Helluland! And my Mother beat her's in better places, but beat them just the same! It's a mad, sad world Isabel.' He heard the thud of her heart and brushed her cheek with the lightest kiss. 'Isabel I see the signs of the picnic and a lovely Gothic bottle of Liebfraumilch.' He sprang to his feet and drew her out of her chair. 'Let's go and see my dear.'

Isabel Pyke had a day like a dream. She ate things she'd never seen before and sipped a pale yellow wine, unlike the rich red of Uncle Seth's port. Pink spots stood out on her cheeks, and she soared to a delicate intoxication of sweet nebulous things. When she was in doubt, and uncertain of how to act she sat in tranced stillness and Peter Keen directed her with warm and easy gaiety. Stevens went up and down the decaying steps and brought strange and fascinating looking dishes—all out of tins—Peter Keen told her, and when she tasted them she recognized the contents, but she had never seen them prepared like this. When they had finished she left a table that she didn't have to clear, and sat once again in the canvas chair, and watched the sun slant in a long golden path over the sea. A lone gull hovered in its dying radiance and poised lazily, translucent like a single pearl. When the time came to go, Peter Keen walked with her over the promontory until they were within vision of the huddled village.

‘Good-bye,’ she said mutely, walking away in a dream.

‘*Au revoir* Isabel. Thank you for a very delightful day.’ With easy grace he caught her hand, and kissed it with warm lips and strode away.

Isabel went home looking at the hand that yesterday had pulled the insides out of a chicken. She walked in a golden dream to the house on the lane, and boiled water for her Mother’s final cup of tea. Her room under the slanting roof retained the heat of the day and she lingered sensuously over her nightly routine. She lay on the top of the honeycomb spread, with her eyes wide to the night, going over and over strange remembered conversation, while her hand retained the feel of his lips, and her knees and shoulder the weight of his head. She stayed awake nearly all night and when the time came for her to get up and light the kitchen stove, her body rose buoyantly to its feet and faced the day without fatigue.

Chapter Six

July drew to an end, and August came in with no change in the long sunny days. Peter Keen laughed at Isabel for her Helluland. He said Andalusia was all around them and even she marvelled at the many summer days. The sun shone on the Bay, the sea stretched away in sparkling ripples, the boats came in on a fair wind, the fish were split and dried, and flies buzzed over the bough covered flakes in black and azure swarms. Isabel's life was full of sun and warmth, and light and love. Her body accepted it like the touch of Peter Keen's hands, but she walked partially free of her golden enchantment, until he kissed her: until he had kissed her untouched mouth, silky with olive oil and virginity. From that moment she gave herself to a dual thrall of body and soul. He did not kiss her avidly, but like an artist, tentative with an untried canvas, and her passivity did not last beyond the first slow pressure of his lips.

As the days passed she spun in a glamorous world of expanding sense that nothing could pierce from the outside world of the house on the lane. She worked and cooked, and boiled and stirred skillets of red strawberries over the kitchen stove. Garden berries for number one preserve, and wild, for number two. These were followed by currants: red and black: and raspberries: garden and wild. She boiled and skimmed, and poured the steaming jam into glass and earthenware crocks, then cleared away her kitchen while her Mother had an extra snack from a slice of new bread and strawberry scum. Isabel fled down the lane towards the promontory, and her feet did not know the ground. By and by she began to pass the darkly dressed Stevens walking towards the village, as she walked towards the Head, but he accorded her no more recognition than he gave to the low clumps of partridge berries ripening on the ground. She wondered that the people didn't suspect her but they had the acceptance of familiar things, and she was known to be stand-offish so they let her be.

Mrs. Pyke was taken up with games of fives and forties and teas for Mary Ann Wilkes from Lunenburg. Mrs. Pyke put on weight and grew more short of breath as she trod across the beach, but she taunted her daughter for her added slimness. But Isabel's body felt fuller to her inner sense, and when she left the village behind her, she lifted it out of her waist and pointed her breasts, like a votive offering to the sun. She spun along a timeless path where the sharp outlines of right and wrong were dulled by the feelings in her own body.

All through August Isabel was subtly kissed, painted, and caressed out on the Head rising straight from the sea and in the little cove, reached by a hazardous path, and surrounded by granite and shaly cliff. The sun barely penetrated, and the sea washed at their feet as they lay in the shadow, while Isabel's blood flowed with a languid sweetness, and she was lost to the eyes of the gulls, Andalusia, and every other thing.

The day came when she returned to the crimson-floored kitchen and stood tranced with her hand on the earthenware teapot. 'Now I must look different,' she thought. But the square of mirror gave her back the same face, only her consciousness had to admit she looked rather pretty. She put the tea on the stove to steep and placed her hands on her slender body. For a moment she saw the girls who 'had' to be married and her mind held a vision of ungainly bodies straining the seams of their garments! But she threw up her head in reaction. Peter Keen had told her! He burned out her fear, he freed her mind from any consciousness of her actions, and woke every vibrating sense in her sleeping body.

Isabel began to look at other women. Was she wrong about love being like the animals, and were the dull faces masks of natural concealment? Was her experience every woman's experience? She walked in the village on her way to the store and searched the eyes of the woman that she met. She stared at inert slatterns in groups of children with smeared mouths. She looked at the misshapen bodies of pregnant women and back at their joyless faces. She stared more hopefully at decent bodies with neat clothes and neat hats. She studied the wife of the merchant, but all the faces held no flame and the bodies contained no spring. Isabel's body felt as if it could walk on the tops of flower starred meadows and not weigh them down. She sat in church and looked at the minister addressing his flock, and then at his wife. The minister's black arms sawed the air and his fist banged the shiny cover of the great Bible. Could those banging hands lie gently on his wife's delighted flesh? It seemed incredible! The mouth of the minister's wife was thin and severe and looked like Aunt Susie Cruikshank's when she said 'wine is a mocker'.

Isabel fled out over the promontory in her Sunday dress and the world of the little brown church seemed far away.

Then they quarrelled: bitterly and violently and didn't speak for three days. Isabel's feet dragged on the ground, the kettle and the earthenware teapot became dead weights in her hands, and every passing second seemed anchored with lead.

It was all about Head House! They had rested in the summer weather through their growing intimacy, and the days had only varied in a summer way, and it was always agreeable to stay on the Head, or hide themselves in the sheltered seclusion of Deadman's Cove.

One afternoon as Isabel left the house on the lane, the sky soared above in thin silver height, gradually darkening over the beach and receding to the horizon in massed grey angry clouds. The wind stirred the lilac bushes and the leaves hid their faces and turned their silver backs. As she walked over the promontory the sea rolled restlessly and struck angrily at the boats as if impatient of their presence. The black hulks blew about as if they were feather weights.

Isabel's eyes strained anxiously ahead and as she proceeded a long roll of distant thunder fell on her ear, coming nearer with every succeeding clap. Far ahead the lowering thunder clouds were broken with long streaks of jagged lightning, and when she came within sight of the house the thunder was louder, and the lightning more frequent.

Peter Keen was standing so near the edge of the cliff that it seemed as if a breath of wind would send him down to the granite rocks below.

'Peter,' she called fearfully, 'don't stand so near. The wind is rising.'

But he called back exultingly, 'Isabel isn't it magnificent. If I could only paint it! That great sweep of sky falling down on us and those colours! Silver grey, dark grey, blue grey, black, and the angry green of the sea, and way off that undertone of blue. It's too defeating!'

Isabel reached his side and even in his preoccupation with the colours, his arm went round her body, and she saw that his eyes that should have been blue were changed to grey by the dark clouds massed above them.

It grew darker, and blacker on the horizon, and the flashes of lightning streaked, with less time between, while the thunder rolled round them and clattered above their heads. The ground shook beneath their feet, the sea roared against the storm bitten cliff, and they stood together in a vast sense of lonely violence, shattered only by elemental noise.

'Isabel we might be the only two left on the Day of Judgement.'

She grew smaller in the circle of his arm and crowded against his body.

‘Peter I don’t like thunder. It’s worse than the wind and the sea.’

She shivered a little against him and he looked down at the wide grey eyes staring fearfully towards the horizon. His eyes drew hers to his own and he murmured, ‘grey and black Isabel, like the day.’

Fear faded from her eyes, like a stain from shining glass as he bent to the silky mouth only a few inches beneath his own, and because Isabel hated the outside world she tried to ease herself past his lips and crowd her way into his warm body. Her desire for him as a lover and a sanctuary went into her kiss and they stood silent like a single figure of life in an empty world. The rain separated their faces but not their lips, and they stayed locked together savouring the cold drops that tried to seep between their warm mouths. When he held her away from him her hair was plastered to her head and the red of his was changed to a wet brown. The thunder came back to their ears.

‘Isabel, we must run.’

Laughing, he took her hand and with heads bent they ran effortlessly towards the house, but as they reached the decaying steps the weight of her body fell back on his hand. He looked behind ‘come on Isabel, we’ll be drenched’.

Her weight stopped him again. ‘I’m not going into the house Peter.’

He dragged at her hand, ‘yes, you are, Isabel. It’s fantastic nonsense and I insist.’

‘I won’t go,’ she said flatly, and strained to release her hand but he gripped it tighter in annoyed insistence.

The rain that had tried to beat its way between their joined bodies now ran in a steady stream through the wide space between them.

Peter Keen snapped at her shortly. ‘Isabel this is no time to discuss your phobias. You’re coming inside if I have to carry you.’

Her eyes blackened, as he stepped down to her level and glared above her with great drops of rain running down his face. In her thin dress she looked as if she had come up from the sea. Her hair looked black like her eyelashes, and her eyes were wild, and black as both.

‘Let me go Peter,’ she gasped, and her strength almost freed her, but wax in his hands he couldn’t stand her sudden resistance.

‘Isabel you’re coming into the house.’ And now his eyes were black.

She dragged away, but with a quick gesture he jerked her towards him, and put one arm around her body and the other under her knees. She was lifted to his chest, and his legs were flexed towards the bottom step.

Like a maddened captive she swung her arm, and with her long hand taut and flat she struck him strongly in the face and the vibrant slap rang about the clatter of the thunder, while her hand tingled in a thousand pin points.

With a muttered curse he dropped her quickly, rage flooding him in an angry wave. Without a backward glance Isabel bent her head to the rain and streaked over the promontory like a sobbing, wounded thing cast up by the sea.

Isabel never dreamed of staying away from the Head. She was too inured to acceptance not to do the same thing every day. After an unhappy night she found the world was washed clean by the rain though it was an indefinite day, and only undertones of blue and gold came from the sea and the sky. The afternoon found her sitting immobile on her rock, and it found Peter Keen with his back to the land making a wide and free design of the scene in front of him. There was no evidence of the numerous canvases he had made of Isabel, and neither by word nor by sign did he acknowledge her presence. He painted as if he were alone in the

whole world. Isabel sat as she had sat many years before he came, and she did not shorten her visit by a minute. When her time came to go she left him without a word or a sign. It never crossed her mind to approach him, or to try and make amends for her savage slap. The beginning of things had always been his!

The next day held a touch of Helluland! A bleak cold day out of place and time, and she walked over the promontory in her winter coat. The wind blew her hair wildly about, and it seemed as if summer had been a dream. When she came to her rock there was no sign of Peter Keen. Pride kept her there for her allotted time but she looked at the cold sea as if it had washed over her heart, while her eyes were hot with unshed tears.

Suddenly she heard a door open and close, and the blood surged over her body in a warm wave. He was coming! But she bade her body sit still and not turn its head. But tranced with waiting, the feet came too slowly, and a dry cough announced the sombre Stevens. Isabel turned round and looked up into the impassive face. For the first time Peter Keen's servant really saw the clear wide eyes. He coughed again.

'Mr. Keen's compliments Miss, but he's painting indoors to-day and will you join him in a cup of tea.'

Isabel's hands tensed in her lap. Her heart leaped across the Head and went straight into his arms, but her body drooped on the rock. Stevens waited until she said slowly, 'tell Mr. Keen that I CANNOT go into the house.'

'Is that all Miss?'

Isabel looked straight into the dry face, 'yes Stevens, that's all.'

But the man lingered. 'It's very comfortable inside Miss. I've managed to light a fire in the room where Mr. Keen is painting.'

'I'm sure it is,' she whispered, 'but I cannot go.'

'Very good Miss. Can I bring you a cup of tea or a glass of sherry?'

The tone was dry but tears welled up in Isabel's eyes. She forced them back and something jerked her spirit upright. 'Thank you, no Stevens. I don't need anything.'

She gave him a very faint smile and said simply, 'I sat here many years before you came, Stevens, and I'll sit here many years again. I'm used to the cold.'

'Yes, Miss. Very good Miss. I'll tell Mr. Keen.'

The unexpected dry kindness of the man's voice threatened Isabel's control. She rose as if she were under Peter Keen's eyes, threw back her head to the wind and walked away with a dauntless step. But she cried all night while the Grandfather's clock tolled away the hours.

The next morning the sky was dazzlingly blue and when she went out in the backyard the light hurt her sleepless eyes. Big white clouds went floating by, puffy like the tops on the Queen of puddings. She did her work with her head lowered to conceal the traces of her tears, but Mrs. Pyke was absorbed in large meals past, and large meals to come as a farewell to Mary Ann Wilkes who was on the last lap of her visit. She was taking the train to the city in the middle of September, to catch a boat to Nova Scotia.

Mrs. Pyke dressed herself without speaking to Isabel, and went down the lane and over the beach to drink her eleven o'clock with Dorcas Penney.

Isabel left everything and washed her hair. The hot water and cold dash of Uncle Seth's Bay Rum cooled her head and loosened the skin on her scalp. She wandered out of doors into the meadow behind the house, and sat on the mound of grass that made the vegetable cellar which was topped by a pointed windowless roof. The sun streamed down and warmed her, as

she closed her eyes to the vivid burn of the sky. Suddenly her taut body eased into long relaxed lines and she slept timelessly until her Mother's voice shattered her repose.

'Bella, Bella! Where are you now? What's come to you to go out in the morning.'

Isabel ran towards the back door. Her Mother filled it in solid indignation.

'Where were you Miss? Have you taken leave of your senses?'

'I was washing my hair Mother.'

'What's got into you with your head washin'? You'll be as bald as a coot if you keep the grease out perpetual. Make haste now and help me.'

Isabel followed her into the kitchen. 'What do you want me to do?'

Mrs. Pyke was excited. 'We're going on a real jaunt. Your Uncle Seth got word from your Aunt Jose's up the shore to bring up your Aunt Mary Ann. He's taken the taxi—mind you! And we're starting as soon as we take dinner at your Aunt Dorcas's; and what's more we're going to stop the night and won't be back till dinner time to-morrow.'

Isabel's heart leaped, then beat drearily on. What was the good of her freedom now?

'Who's going Mother?' she asked quietly.

'Well you're not, that's one thing. Just your Aunt Dorcas and Uncle Seth and your Aunt Mary Ann. That's all the taxi will hold. Come on now, come upstairs.'

In a little while Isabel got her off and she went down the lane with her large hand gripping a Boston bag which held a new flannelette night-dress, trimmed with flannelette embroidery thick with eyelet holes. As the square figure disappeared the voice grated back.

'Mind the house now and make good use of your time. You might clean out the parlour extra like.'

Isabel didn't hear. She went upstairs and threw herself on her bed. It was strange to lie there with the daylight pouring in the window, but the cessation of work and absence of noise soothed her and she knew the luxury of a long sleep in the middle of the day. When she woke it was three o'clock and she didn't start for her walk until after four.

Chapter Seven

All the canvases of Isabel Pyke were propped against the backs of kitchen-chairs, placed in a neat row between the cliff and the front of the house.

Peter Keen stood studying them, motionless in the brilliant sunshine. Yesterday he had realized the meaning of the word Helluland, and if a train had been going towards the City he would have boarded it on a sudden impulse, and let Stevens pack up and follow after. The chill of the outside world and his coldness towards Isabel Pyke had destroyed his capacity for work. After a fruitless attempt to paint indoors, he had come out and tramped restlessly up and down the Head for several hours. But Isabel Pyke had gone then! He had seen her rise from her rock, and lift her body out of her waist and point her breasts to the wind. The sight of the dauntless gesture had made him feel captive and restless in the stuffy room. So much sea air in his lungs made them feel cramped in the glow of a fire, and he had thrown down his brushes in frustrated effort. Something had changed in him, when Stevens came in with his expressionless message.

‘Miss Pyke says, sir, she CANNOT come into the house.’

The inscrutable emphasis on the word ‘cannot’ swept the cold anger and indifference out of his heart, and he felt as he sometimes did, after he had seen his Mother—wrong and unbalanced.

Where he had seen Isabel crude and wild with her savage slap, he now saw her coerced to his unreasonable domination, in the way he had tried to force her into the house against her will. He should have sensed that her reasons, whatever they were, came from some deep spiritual repudiation of the house. The fact that she wouldn’t enter it with HIM, made him realize the finality of her decision.

He was waiting for her now, and a careful examination of his canvases made him impatient to see her slender body outlined against the sky. The promontory ended with a slight dip towards the sea, and he couldn’t anticipate her approach from a long distance.

His capacity to paint would be returned when she appeared, and impatiently he waited. She had become an integral part of his life on the lonely Head, and as long as he stayed, she would be as indispensable as the air he breathed. When his work had failed, his mind had reached out to her eager unformed companionship, and his eyes had desired the sight of her upturned face drinking in his every word. And her tall slender body with its tapering lines and springing breasts. In freeing it from its lonely thrall to the wind and its strange exotic dreams of Andalusia, he had awakened a clean fresh flame for himself, like a burning-glass on his own flesh. Sometimes when she left him he wondered if her strange eyes wouldn’t follow him all his life. Isabel Pyke! Wouldn’t the brief little name leap out of the varied confusion of other names, and her eyes dominant in still beauty, the other flickering glances that he held in his memory. She had stamped herself upon his canvases and sometimes he stood fearful before the strength of his work. Her eyes seemed to follow him around and the eyes of the gull.

The Eyes of the Gull! That picture had a fearful fascination for him! He had developed his fanciful sketch to a canvas of her head and shoulders, with a snowy-breasted gull hovering above her eyes, and claiming them in paralysed fear. He hadn’t been able to show the eyes of the gull, but their yellow ferocity had gone into the slightly curved beak. Peter Keen was afraid of that picture and didn’t look at it often. It had seemed to run away with him and paint

itself. The outline of Isabel's face was clear and firm, and her eyes arresting in their wide dread, but the flesh beneath her cheek bones was grey with a strange taint, and seemed to hold a touch of dissolution. Looking at it in the sunlight, he gave a slight shiver, and turned it towards the back of the chair and let it face the sea.

The others were human and vital and told the story of Isabel Pyke. She was there as an elemental creature of the sea and the sky, her body the mistress of the wind, but on her face above he had drawn out her lonely thoughts and disharmony with her native land. She was there tall and young, and blown about in her Sunday dress, but already the face was different, the lips a little parted and tentative, and the eyes less distant and dreaming. Then there was the unfinished picture in Deadman's Cove! They called that Andalusia and Helluland! Peter Keen had clambered down, several times and painted the cove when she wasn't there, and when the light was chill and cool. The surrounding cliff of granite and shale veered from grey to black, and showed a moist patch of inky shadow. The tiny stretch of beach held the honey-coloured body of Isabel Pyke, relaxed in a slender attitude of golden glamour. In spite of the grim cove her skin looked warmed by the suns of Andalusia, but in reality was warmed by the light from Peter Keen's eyes. She seemed saturated in light amongst grey and silver tones, and her body emanated a delicate animalism from its tapering lines.

Peter Keen studied his work and then looked back towards the land. It was incredible that she wasn't there! And because he wanted her immediately he tramped up and down the Head and smoked innumerable cigarettes. He saw the dark figure of his servant moving towards the village, and still there was no sign of her, and the light was so perfect for the picture in Headman's Cove! Where was she? Perhaps she had gone out to tea again on command of the grim Mother.

He had tramped past the row of chairs many times before he saw her tall figure outlined against the sky. He watched her tread the slight descent, noting the slowness of the steps that usually skimmed so effortlessly over the scraggy grass. But her shoulders were back and her face was tilted to the warmth of the sun. He strode past the house and his voice met her first.

'Isabel I thought you were never coming, and it's so perfect for the picture in the Cove. My dear I'm so sorry that I was such a brute about the house—'

'Peter!' Her voice was a dazed relieved cry, as she almost fell towards him. He reached her and she vibrated between his hands, while life bounded in her body and her blood flowed in a thick sweet stream. Big tears ran over the grey eyes but did not fall and the black pupils shone behind like luminous dots. She swayed back gazing at him until the black lashes drooped and the tears seeped out between.

'Isabel,' he whispered, 'don't waste those big tears. It isn't worth it! It was all my fault. I should have known that your refusal to come into the house was something deeper than your fear of that old wives tale.'

Her voice gushed to him like a river that had been stemmed. 'Yes, yes Peter it is, but I don't know it myself. I only know that I can't go inside. I can sit on the steps as I have many times in the winter, but I can't go past the door. Yesterday I ached to go in and see you, but I couldn't, and I felt so rude and unhappy and savage like all the jagged things I hate in Helluland but I couldn't help it! I had to stay out of the house.'

'I know my dear. I shouldn't have tried to force you.' Her eyes were still closed and the two lone tears turned the curled lashes to wet points. He drew her boneless and melted towards him, while her tilted chin touched his as he whispered almost on her lips. 'I'm sorry Isabel.'

Isabel thought that the scraggy grass on the granite Head had become a carpet of down. Her feet began to sink into endless softness. Almost in pity at her still face his lips lingered for a moment in the hollow of each eye. In aching relief she placed one hand on the face she had slapped and he felt her lips touch his cheek in lingering warmth. 'Peter, your face?'

His laugh rang roundly out. 'That's rather humorous my dear. Even your fist couldn't hurt after a summer in Newfoundland. I'm so hard from swimming in your cold sea that I shall have to ease my muscles back into civilization.'

Isabel's heart died for a moment, but the thought of their separation only skimmed her consciousness without scarring it, in her acute return to the present.

'Peter I'm so happy. I thought you'd never speak to me again. I was so miserable and the days have been like winters.'

'But Isabel,' he asked curiously, 'if it was as bad as that, why didn't you come to me and say you were sorry? Explain. I've always understood haven't I?'

Her face left the warm contact of his and drew back to look into his eyes. Her own were wide with amazement. 'Peter I never thought of it. I thought there was nothing to do but wait.'

He laughed for a moment then sobered quickly. 'Isabel you mustn't have such acceptance. It's all wrong! You must help yourself—reach out! Would you have gone on for ever if I hadn't made the first advances?'

'I expect so Peter,' she said unhappily. 'It must be the place, the wind, and the sea. They do what they like and we accept it. And Mother! Somehow she rolls over me like the sea rolls over the beach.'

For a moment her eyes were brooding, and he had the quick reflection that she was beginning to grope her way towards analysis. But he brought her back to the sunny day. 'Never mind it now my dear. It's such a day, after yesterday. I want you to look at my pictures. I'm having an exclusive exhibition, artist and model and a few sea-gulls. No we won't have the gulls! We don't like their eyes! They can come on another day when the public is admitted. Come and see how beautiful you are.'

She raised her head like a flower to the sun. 'Beautiful Peter? You only ever said I had a different face, and sometimes strange.'

He held her hand and went with long steps towards the row of chairs. With easy length she followed beside him. He gave a blue slantways look to the wide grey eyes. 'Different and strange Isabel. Sometimes sombre and sometimes very beautiful. When you smile it's a revelation, but you don't smile very often do you? And you've lived an imaginative life so long that you look aloof and brooding, but I haven't noticed it lately,' he finished with a wide grin, and Isabel Pyke nearly grinned back.

They reached the pictures and she stood looking at them silently. Her cheek bones were touched with pink as she saw the long lines of her golden coloured body on the grey rocks of Deadman's Cove. He watched her closely rather than the pictures. 'What do you think of them Isabel?'

'I don't know Peter. How could I judge? I expect I'll be worse than your Father would have been.'

He laughed. 'THAT would be impossible Isabel. He might like the bit of blue sky in them, but he wouldn't look at Deadman's Cove.'

'Peter,' she whispered, 'if that wasn't me I'd say it was beautiful.'

'It is beautiful my dear and I'm very proud of it. I'm proud of them all. The drawing is good, but they're individual and personal, and full of life. The wind and the sea seem to be in

them, and your wide eyes above those high cheek bones give you a Botticelli look. If they were more decorative, and you had on another dress they'd look quite dateless. I think you're going to make me famous Isabel.'

She asked sombrely. 'Will they make you famous because you painted them or because they are me?'

'Both Isabel. You've been a magnificent model and so much more than flesh and blood. You've no reserves in those pictures.'

'Why is that one turned away Peter? Is it the queer one with the gull?'

Without comment he reversed the picture and her wide eyes stared past in agonized dread at the snowy-breasted gull.

Isabel's hands locked together. Peter,' she said clearly, 'I've felt sometimes like I look in that picture.'

'No,' he said sharply, 'you couldn't. Not so strongly. It's just fanciful and imaginative.'

But she insisted, 'yes I have.' She paused in silent thought. Then asked hesitatingly, 'Peter?'

He looked at her with interest. 'What Isabel? Tell me! I like to hear your reactions.'

She felt for her words. 'There's a picture in our family Bible of Lazarus coming out of the tomb. I always hated it. He looks black and hollow and decayed round the eyes. Don't I look a little bit like that?'

'No,' he said in the same sharp tone, but Isabel Pyke said in her uncompromising voice, 'yes I do Peter, and also like the people I've seen in their coffins only my eyes are open.'

He turned the picture back to the chair appalled at the integrity of her opinion, but he answered her crisply, 'don't be morbid my dear. It's a mistake in painting. The flesh tints are all wrong. My mistake on an off day.' He pulled her round to face him. 'Is there time to paint in the Cove Isabel? Stevens will put these away when he returns. I'll just turn them away from the sun. Have you got to go rushing away? Somehow I wish you could stay for a long long time.'

Isabel Pyke's black lashes dropped to her cheeks, and rose again over wide smiling eyes. Her infrequent smile touched the whole of her face.

'Peter I don't have to go!'

He put his arms around her and laughed down into her smiling face. 'How beautiful my dear. Has your Mother gone out to tea again? Aunt Mary Ann must be having a whale of a time.'

'She's gone out to tea yes, but way up the Shore! Uncle Seth has hired the taxi! They're going to spend the night and won't be home until to-morrow at dinner time.'

He stared at her reflectively. 'What incredible luck! It's a compensation for our quarrel. What fun we can have. You'll stay all night Isabel?' His blue eyes blazed down on her. 'We'll paint in the Cove. It's a lovely day. Stevens will make us a picnic. We'll have a bottle of wine, several bottles of wine, and we'll watch the sun set and then—'

Isabel Pyke's eyes were black. 'I can't go into the house Peter. I must go home then.'

'No you mustn't Isabel,' he whispered. 'Ever read a lovely poem, "Sleeping Out: Full Moon." No, of course not, only Keats and Tennyson. I must send you some books when I go! There's no moon to-night but does it matter? We'll spread some rugs on the Head and watch the light fade and the stars come out, and we'll be all alone Isabel in the whole world, with nothing above but "the radiance of wings". No we mustn't have wings! They might be the gulls! Think of it Isabel? The stars overhead and the sound of the sea breaking at our feet.'

Isabel thought wildly and recklessly, but she also thought of walking home through the village.

‘Peter, they’d see me go home.’

He frowned. ‘That’s a point. We must think! I have it Isabel. You’ll go home before dawn. It’s always the darkest hour so they say, and I’ll walk to the village with you.’

‘No, no, no,’ she protested. ‘You mustn’t come into the village. Somebody might be looking through the window.’

‘Isabel,’ he said reproachfully, ‘do the Aunts and Uncles get up in the night?’

Isabel Pyke giggled. ‘I expect they would, Peter, that night. They hate to miss anything! And if they saw you they’d talk about it for ten years.’

‘I suppose so Isabel. We can’t have that. Could I walk to the end of the promontory and watch you until you’re out of sight? Would you be afraid?’

Now Isabel Pyke really laughed. ‘How funny that sounds Peter! I’ve walked across the beach in all weathers and all seasons and on the blackest nights. And over the promontory in rain and sleet and snow, and I’ve never thought of being afraid. Nobody is afraid of that sort of thing here! They only fear things like the Haunted House.’

‘The fear of the Unknown? It’s in us all Isabel! Then you’ll stay. It’ll be such a lovely adventure. I’d like it so much. Please Isabel.’ He laid his lips softly on her mouth in long sensuous pressure and Isabel Pyke made a great decision. Under his lips, her tumbling mind told her, her Mother was up the shore, the house was empty, the key was under the mat and perhaps nobody would look out the window as she crept up the lane, and there were no dogs to bark to herald her late approach. Only the vagrant waddle of fat geese in flocks and stray pairs. She knew her Mother would give her the length of her tongue for not turning out the parlour, but she didn’t care. She was dead to the morrow. The hands of the clock had stopped. ‘Will you stay Isabel,’ he whispered on her lips, and her eyes flew open. ‘Yes I’ll stay Peter, just as long as I can.’ His arms pressed her in return and he laughed happily over her newly washed hair.

The long hours sped away from Isabel Pyke in the swiftest, sweetest flight. The light left the Cove and they climbed back to the Head. Stevens made them a picnic, and they drank sherry out of a tumbler. It was Isabel Pyke’s first taste and she followed it with many glasses from the tall thin bottle of hock. The yellow wine in her body raced the love in her veins and Peter Keen sat looking at her pink cheeks and shining eyes. He laughed at her and told her she was going to be like Uncle Seth, but the tranced stillness of her face drove the laughter from his lips and his hand shook a little as he drew her towards the canvas chairs in front of the house. They watched the sun set and the sky gleam like a ragged opal pressing back on a sapphire dome. They saw the path of gold on the water dull to a leaden green. When the wind blew in a cool breath and the old house had dimmed to a dark square Peter Keen spread thick rugs on the ground and brought another to cover them. Their heads lay on a rise of ground and Isabel lay on her back with his arms around her and her eyes saw nothing but the height of the darkening sky and the white gleam of his teeth. Only a few stars came out and they rested in complete silence except for the wash of the waves breaking over the rocks. She lay lapped in her own wonder, but the wine in her veins and the love in her body melted out her last reserve and when he turned towards her, her silky mouth parted sensuously to his lips. Several times he saw her eyes shining against the dusky night and several times he pressed her head into his shoulder. Once she slept lightly against him in boneless relaxation, and he let his mouth lie on her hair while he held her yielded body and listened to her easy breath. He thought of her

tenseness the first time he had touched her, and that night he wondered if he had kindled a flame that might consume her, but when she waked and turned her drowsy mouth towards him he only remembered the freshness of her hair and the smooth touch of her skin. Then he slept and Isabel lay scarcely breathing, her heart drowned in tenderness for the strong relaxed body in her arms. Her eyes never left him, and the even breath from his parted lips fell on her breast. She had a strange thought that frightened her in its intensity. She wanted to clasp him closer until he died while her arms were around him, and she was sure he belonged to her. She had a wild desire to do it now and her shiver brought him back, 'Isabel my dear are you cold? You don't seem so.'

'No, no Peter hold me. I'm afraid of myself.'

Peter Keen stirred to wakefulness and wrapped her against his body. Every nuance found a pulse beat from himself, and she lost her strange thoughts against the vitality of his breast.

She saw the change in the sky. 'Peter,' she sighed, 'I must go. Some of the men might be going out in their boats.'

'But I'm so comfortable Isabel. Put your arms around me and we'll both go to sleep.'

'But I mustn't Peter. Look at the sky. Don't come. I know the way so well.'

He laughed lightly, 'don't be silly my dear. I'm coming with you. It's been so beautiful having you for such a long time. Your lovely, lovely body my dear! Kiss me before you go Isabel. You've become such a delightful lover.'

She kissed him with every drop of her blood and they both prepared to go.

They walked over the promontory hand in hand, and as they neared the houses they began to tiptoe. Suddenly Peter Keen's round laugh almost woke the village. 'Isabel we're walking as if we were overlooked by a thousand eyes, and even the gulls have gone to bed.'

'Sh-shush,' she laughed. 'I'm sure you've wakened Aunt Susie Cruikshank!'

'No Isabel,' he said solemnly, 'she smelt the Hock on your breath. "Wine is a mocker."''

Isabel giggled. 'The only one who wouldn't notice would be Uncle Seth. Don't come any further Peter. I'll be all right.' Her hands pressed against his chest as if she would force him back.

'I wish you could ring me up when you get in. I shall be so worried Isabel.'

'Don't be silly Peter. I must hurry. Look at the sky.' She was almost gone, anxious to feel secure in her own house.

'Isabel I'll watch until you're out of sight. Bless you my dear and good luck with the Aunts and Uncles.' Her hand felt the light contact of his lips, and she was off like an arrow.

When she got within the vision of the houses she crept silently in the shadows. She met the curve of the beach and saw the ghostly edge of the waves, but there was no gleam of lamps from any of the houses. Her heart thumped as she turned into her own lane, until she walked safe in the shelter of the fences. Not a sound but the stir of the trees and the soft wash of the waves, but the sky was growing light. She held her breath as she met the pebbled walk, and afraid of the scrunch from her shoes, she leaped to the edge of grass and tiptoed to the door. She fumbled for the key and turned it with infinite care. In a second she was inside, wrapped in inky silence. For a moment she sank against the papered walls and found her breath, but she knew no one had seen her return! Her body felt free of peeping eyes, and safe with its secret love. She crept up the stairs without striking a light and found her room. The slanting roof retained the warmth of the sun, in spite of the cool breeze from the window. Without sound she dropped her clothes in the warm darkness and crept under the honeycomb

spread. Her body relaxed to a long sleep unhampered by the claims of a black stove, or a large breakfast at the stroke of nine.

Out on the Head, Peter Keen clambered down into Headman's Cove. He dropped his body into the black water and it felt icy cold to his warm flesh. For a moment he shivered with the sudden chill, then swam strongly past the jagged rocks, towards the pale light glimmering on the distant horizon.

Chapter Eight

Summer died in a day. The gales tortured the boats and drew angry crests on the waves. The trees shivered in the wind, and when an early frost curled up their leaves they rustled with a dry sound. The late flowers in Aunt Dorcas's garden drooped limply with the weight of blackened petals, while enduring nasturtiums were torn to tatters and splashed to the ground in vivid rags. The scrub and scraggy grass was changed to red and yellow, but the blue was dimmed in the sea and the sky. Increased smoke issued from the chimneys, and the doors and windows were sealed to the wind.

Aunt Mary Ann went back to Lunenburg, and the Aunts and the Uncles gathered in a solid bunch to wave her away. They stood on the wooden platform of the station-shed while the train crawled round the curve of the beach. Until it was out of sight Aunt Mary Ann leaned out of the window waving vigorously in return and Isabel noticed that her gloved little finger was stuck out from a large white handkerchief in the same way that it stuck out from her teacup. Before she boarded the train she invited Isabel to visit her in Nova Scotia, but Mrs. Pyke answered in sharp decision. 'Bella visit you? Have sense Mary Ann! And who's goin' to do for me I'd like to know? She goes trapesing around enough as it is, there's no mistake. Lunenburg indeed! I never heard the like.'

Isabel didn't answer. What was Lunenburg to her with Andalusia in her heart? Then she realized with shocked amazement that she hadn't lived in her dream for many weeks. Peter Keen was the one image in her mind, while her body treasured the touch of his hands.

Mrs. Pyke bought berries for the last boiling of jam: bakeapples that came down on a schooner from Labrador. Isabel cleaned and weighed, and boiled and skimmed, and then blew out to the Head in her heavy coat.

Peter Keen painted indoors, and worked hard to finish his summer's work. He only stopped when Isabel came, and they walked up and down in front of the house, or back a little way to the land, on the side of the promontory away from the Bay. She learned what it was to love outside the body and to sustain herself by the sound of his voice and the touch of his hands. But her visits were shorter now. Her mother was in more, and sat by the fire with her eyes on the Grandfather's clock. Summer was over and the village was settling down for the winter. It was concerned with its wood and its fish and its winter supplies, and in getting the vegetables out of the ground. Mrs. Pyke wrote to the City for cherries and almond nuts for a recipe left by Aunt Mary Ann.

Isabel became afraid of the train and her fears materialized one night when Aunt Dorcas reported that the servant fellow was going the rounds of the village, collecting the bills for bread and milk, and butter and eggs. Next day she walked fearfully to the Head where she found Peter Keen standing silently by the rock, looking across the Bay. His chin was sunk in a high-necked sweater worn under a rough coat that smelt strangely to her nostrils, and the eyes that should have been blue were grey with the colour of the day. She came and stood quietly by his side with her hands thrust into the pockets of her coat.

'Isabel,' he said moodily. 'I see what you mean by Helluland! It looks pretty grim.'

'It gets worse now every day,' she answered quietly. 'We've gone from summer to winter. It's like that some years.'

‘It’s not credible that you walk out here in the winter Isabel. It must be the last word in desolation.’

‘I do Peter. Somehow it’s the only place where I can be alone. I’ve come when I’ve had to crawl towards the rock on my hands and knees, and sometimes when the wind is in I’ve tied myself to the steps of the house. It’s only on very stormy days that I ever stay away.’

‘And yet with your love of the sun and the warmth you choose the bleakest spot to dream of it.’

‘But it’s the only spot where I can own myself Peter.’

He asked her slowly, looking across the Bay. ‘Will it remain to you Isabel as the place where you can own yourself?’

‘No,’ she whispered simply. ‘Now it will be all of you.’

‘Will you come here when I go?’

Her voice was the ghost of a whisper. ‘You’re going Peter?’

He nodded still looking away from her. ‘Yes in ten days time—the train after this.’

For the first time since he came she saw him in stark reality as a being alien to her life, and her eyes became a wasteland. Her body felt cold and empty and she dropped silently to the support of the granite rock. In the continued bleak silence he looked down at her tense figure, and saw her boneless hands reveal white knuckles. He remembered how once he had criticized her, for her acceptance, now he saw what it meant. He watched the agonized reticence of her hands and couldn’t bear it.

‘Isabel don’t wring your hands like that. Say something. Look at me.’

She raised her face obediently and he saw the whole of Helluland in her eyes: cold pools of bleak emptiness staring from a consciousness drained of joy. He dropped down beside her and put his arms around her, but her body was as tense and unyielding as the first time he had held it.

‘Isabel my dear don’t look like that. You knew I’d have to go sometime didn’t you? Everything must come to an end no matter how beautiful! We have to go on! There’s always change: new scenes, new people, new contacts, and the best is only a fugitive thing. There’s always something to fill in the gaps, something a little better or something a little worse, but a gleam to follow: here, there, and everywhere! Isabel you must try and learn that! It’s the only attitude to make life endurable. You can’t spend your time looking back. Don’t torture your hands like that. Say something!’

‘What is there to say?’ she whispered. ‘You can’t think like that here. Everything is always the same for ever and ever. Look at it yourself.’

She sprang to her feet unmindful for the first time of his encircling arms, and gestured towards the huddle of houses at the head of the Bay. While his eyes followed her directing arm she suddenly wheeled and left him with the swift abruptness of their early meetings. The contrast of her dauntless back and desolate eyes made him search savagely for a cigarette. ‘Damn it all,’ he said out loud, ‘I was talking of my life not hers.’

That night he found his camp bed too narrow. He turned and twisted and strangely dreamt of Elfrieda! He saw her on the edge of her violated grave with her empty coffin standing beside her at an oblique angle. He leaned down to raise her and found her shoulders frozen to the ground, but as he straightened from his useless effort he found himself gazing into the wide open eyes of Isabel Pyke. He stayed rooted in horror staring at the familiar eyes frozen in their circle of black lashes, and as he strained to liberate his feet, a gull flew past his face and left a chill breath all around him like an encircling current. He woke to find himself struggling

on his camp bed: cold in body and spirit. He threw on some clothes and let himself out to the bitter chill of an autumn dawn. A light frost whitened the ground, but he tramped strongly up and down until the sun melted it away. That morning he wrote to his Bank in the City and sent Stevens to the village to post his letter. In the afternoon he waited for Isabel Pyke, but she didn't come, and that night he dreamt of Elfrieda again but her eyes were the eyes of Isabel Pyke.

Isabel had tried to anticipate the days when he would be gone. She walked half way over the promontory, and then turned desolately back again. There was nowhere to go but across the beach and through the lanes, and nowhere to be alone but out on the Head. In the night the Grandfather's clock measured out the loneliness of her present and future hours, while she twisted uneasily, knowing she would have to see him as long as he remained on the Head. Already she regretted the wasted day without sight of his face and sound of his voice.

In the morning the sun warmed to a pale luminous brilliance and lay beneficently on the havoc of the recent gales. The sea was blue again and the sky domed overhead in a thin azure, bathing the red and yellow of the scrub in a warm glow. As Isabel hurried over the promontory she saw that the blue had come back to the sea and the sky, and as she ran to meet her lover she was bathed in the blue that ran out of his eyes. Afraid of his dream he clasped the warm actuality of her body, and desolate with the thought of impending separation she pressed herself strongly against him. To forget the memory of her frozen gaze in Elfrieda's face he kissed her until the black lashes drooped sensuously over the wide open grey eyes. The warmth of the day relaxed their bodies and flowed graciously over their lowered spirits.

'Isabel why did you stay away yesterday?' he asked softly against her lips.

'I don't know Peter,' she whispered back. 'I only know that I punished myself, but I thought I should get ready for your going, but I couldn't to-day. I had to come.'

'Of course my dear. Don't try. We must have every available moment and don't spoil what's left Isabel my darling. It's been so beautiful. Let's keep what we've had without any shadow between. Will you if I ask you my dear?'

The loneliness of yesterday fell away like a loosened garment. To-day was enough. 'Yes, yes Peter. I'll be what you want. As long as you're here I'll be happy.'

He touched the closed eyes with his lips. 'I hope so my dear. We'll have a last lovely week. Yesterday I lived in your Helluland and felt very cold.'

'I'm sorry Peter, but I won't think of afterwards any more, until you're gone.'

'The weather got into our hearts Isabel. We need the sun. But it's going to be different now. Stevens met some old salt in the village and he said we're due "a fair spell now".'

She smiled happily from the circle of his arms and opened her eyes to see his face. 'Captain Joey Tucker I expect Peter. He smells the weather before it's on the glass.'

He laughed. 'Another Uncle my dear?'

'I don't know Peter. Perhaps a hundred years back. We're too mixed up to keep count.'

'Isabel,' he said slowly, 'since you left me yesterday I've thought a great deal of you and your life in this place, and of what you said about everything being the same forever and ever. With shame my dear I began to realize how selfish and stupid I'd been in talking of your life as if it were the same as my own. Now I want you to do something for me.'

She leaned back and searched his face. 'Do something for you Peter. What can I do?'

'Come and sit down my dear, and let's talk.'

With his arm around her he drew her towards the granite rock and sat at her feet. In the enveloping glow of the pale sun they recaptured some of the blessed warmth of early summer

days. He wrapped his arms round his knees and picked his words carefully with his blue eyes claiming her own. He noticed how graciously the sun touched her fine skin and effaced the bleak look from her grey eyes.

‘Yesterday my dear I very stupidly tried to transfer some of my own ideas to you without realizing that your life was fixed in very limited surroundings with only the grim variations of nature to give you any sense of change. For myself I believe most strongly that nothing lasts, everything changes, and no one note is struck for ever, but that is perhaps because I’m continually on the move and always most intensely interested in what’s happening at the moment, knowing it’s only temporary and that I’ll be somewhere else very soon.’

As he paused she asked in a soft whisper. ‘Where are you going Peter when you take the train?’

‘To California, Isabel, by way of New York. I haven’t been there and I want to paint in that miraculous light I’ve heard so much about. Then I may go to Australia or maybe Japan. I don’t know. I never plan very far ahead.’

‘It must take an awful lot of money,’ she said with her eyes wide at his magical wealth.

He smiled at her childish awe. ‘A certain amount Isabel but not an undue strain on what I have, and there’s always a little left over for anything special I want to do, and that my dear is what I want to talk about.’

He studied her for a moment with contracted brows, but her eyes still waited on his face. With a quick gesture he took one of her long hands lying idle in her lap.

‘Isabel, he said irrelevantly, ‘when men leave women it’s such a time worn banality to tell them that *this* has been different. I think it must have been said so often that women must smile endlessly to themselves. I’ve never said it my dear, because I’ve never felt it, but this time I *want* to say it, I must say it, because I feel it so strongly within myself. When I look at you now as you are, I have the feeling that I’ve fashioned you myself: as if I’d begun a canvas that I dearly loved and wanted to perfect to the utmost of my power. Yet I’ve got to go on my dear, and I can’t take you with me.’

‘No Peter, I know that.’

‘Isabel I am as I am, and it means that I must be foot loose, but I’ve begun to realize that I’ve made a gigantic upheaval in your life: muddled your values and destroyed your conception of right and wrong.’

‘No Peter,’ she said steadily. ‘That part is all right. Nothing so beautiful to me could be bad. I’ve decided that.’

He pulled gently at her hand as if to drag her towards him. ‘You’re sure Isabel? You feel like that, right within yourself?’

She answered steadily. ‘Always Peter. Within myself, I feel as if I could take my feelings for you to the feet of God.’

He dropped his forehead against their clasped hands and her eyes never left the copper gleam of his hair.

‘Don’t Isabel my darling. You’re so sheer. I’m not worth all that.’

‘But that is how I feel inside Peter—out here and when I’m by myself. Only sometimes it’s just a little different when I’m at home, or in the village, or listening to the minister in church. It’s like another world in which I have no part. But right or wrong Peter I know I’ve only come to life since you came.’

He raised his head and looked into her face. ‘Perhaps to die again my dear with a heart-ache that may consume you.’

‘No, no I’ll be all right Peter. I’ve got lots of work to do, and I’ll do more for a while until time doesn’t seem so long.’

‘Do you know that already Isabel?’

‘Only when we quarrelled Peter and yesterday when I didn’t come. Don’t worry about me. It’s been beautiful and wonderful and I’ll try and remember that you said nothing lasts, everything changes, and no one note is struck for ever.’

She said it like a parrot as if her mind had absorbed the words and not the meaning.

‘No my dear,’ he said gravely, ‘you won’t be able to accept that now with nothing to distract you in this limited little village. It’s something especially interesting to follow after that counts. What filled your life before I came Isabel?’

‘It wasn’t filled Peter. I was like a child asleep with a fairy tale of Andalusia.’

‘Yes, asleep, but painlessly asleep. And Andalusia was enough wasn’t it?’

‘Andalusia,’ she said wonderingly as if the word was new to her tongue. ‘It’s gone now. I can’t see orange, olive, palm, and pomegranate any more.’

‘But you must see it again,’ he insisted. ‘It’s something to look forward to—something that will keep your eyes front instead of weeping back to those lovely summer days.’

‘Peter,’ she whispered with desperate courage. ‘Have they been truly lovely to you too?’

He took her other hand and held them both in a warm compelling clasp. ‘Haven’t I told you my dear? Very lovely and very fresh and unspoiled, but I shall go on and you must too! This lovely experience will be a springing-board for other things and you’ll hold the beauty that came to you and to me, while giving your interest to all that comes and goes.’ He gripped her hands closely and insistently. ‘Isabel I’ve decided that you must go to Spain. Think, my darling, of taking the train, and going to the City and then over to England and across to Andalusia. You can if you will, and you must! You’re young and reliant and very perceptive and a few contacts in bigger places will make you very poised and beautiful. You’ll get more independent away from your Mother’s domination, and in time you may get something to do. Isabel think of it! It’s the right thing for you. Promise me, *promise me* that you will go to Spain.’

She glowed under his words and the compelling decision in his voice, and for a moment her cheeks ran pink with the picture that he painted. But the light died out of her eyes and she drooped on her rock. ‘Peter it sounds too beautiful, but how can I go? I’ve only got eighty-five dollars and I haven’t saved any this summer. I’ll be old and afraid before I can go, so what’s the use of talking.’

‘But that’s what we’re going to talk about Isabel my dear. That’s what I want you to do for me. I want you to let me send you to Andalusia!’

The red blood poured into her face and she snatched her hands away. ‘No, no, Peter don’t ask me. I couldn’t do such a thing. Take money from a man. It’s awful. It’s like payment. Let me go, let me go—’

‘Isabel,’ he said in sharp command. ‘Stop that at once.’ He drew himself quickly up on the rock beside her and took her by the shoulders. ‘Isabel that’s the first time I’ve ever heard you say anything really crude.’

Her eyes filled with tears and she struggled to go but his arms detained her. She sank back and drooped desolately. ‘How can I be anything else Peter living down there?’

He wrapped her in his arms and held her gently, talking to her bowed head. ‘No, no my dear. I’m all wrong. You’ve never been crude since I’ve known you, but always delicate and beautiful to me. It’s only a natural reaction to a gift involving the expenditure of money. Don’t

be distressed my dear. You're gentle all through Isabel. I understand, even though I must have my way in this.'

The tenseness went out of her body at the relief of soothing kindness in his voice, and as she relaxed against him he heard her whisper on a half laugh. 'Aunt Dorcas says, Peter, that we come from generations of God fearing people.'

His arms tightened around her. 'Isabel how I love your developing humour. You laughed so little when I came first.'

'There wasn't much to laugh at Peter.'

'It's going to be different now Isabel. My dear you're going to Spain to live your own life. Think of it this way Isabel. If I were leaving any woman anywhere I'd send flowers, books, or some other thing—whatever her particular taste indicated, and it happens to be my great good luck that I'm able to do a little more. But relatively Isabel a trip to Andalusia from me isn't any more than a box of flowers from some other man not quite so well off.'

'It's money,' she said in her uncompromising voice. 'Your money.'

'Yes it's money,' he said patiently, 'and my money, but the spending of it this way will give me as much pleasure as it will give you to go to Spain. It's not as if I were denying myself to do it. I wish I were! It would be a more gracious gift if I had to make some sacrifice for you. Unfortunately I haven't! And I'll make it very easy for you my dear. There'll be no cheques, no names, no bother of any kind. When the train comes in, there will be a plain envelope with enough notes to give you a moderate trip to Spain. Stevens will go to the post and when we say good-bye I'll just slip it in your pocket, and you'll forget it's anything more important than just the means to Andalusia.'

'Peter, you've arranged it all!'

'I'm afraid I have my dear, and you're going to do as I say. You must Isabel, as a last great favour to me.'

'Peter, I must go,' she said quickly. 'It's very late.'

'I'm sorry Isabel,' he said with grave decision, 'but your Mother will have to wait for her tea. You can't go until you've promised to go to Spain. And remember when the time comes to leave her, don't be held by meaningless sacrifice. Let somebody else boil the kettle for her and wash her dishes.'

'Peter I must go.'

'Certainly my dear whenever you say, but if you waste the time in a delayed refusal to accept a simple gift it's not exactly my fault is it? Perhaps you're prepared to spend the night, and by and by we'll see a posse of relations arrive. They'll all come together because they'll be afraid of the house, and I'll have to offer Uncle Seth a drink, and give your Mother a ten course dinner, and read a chapter with Aunt Dorcas, but I'm afraid, Isabel, I'm very much afraid, that I haven't anything that would appeal to Aunt Susie Cruikshank. We might show her the nuns on the bottles of Liebfraumilch. Then she'd realize how truly blessed they are.'

Isabel Pyke smiled under his chin, but she wanted to go. Their time was so short, and her Mother might think of things to claim her afternoons, if she attracted attention by being late. She raised her head and smiled into his eyes. 'Peter you always make big things seem like nothing at all. It's beautiful of you to want me to go to Andalusia and the way you talk about it makes it sound so little. But I don't see it that way! It seems so much. Won't you let me go home now and think about it?'

But he held her firmly. 'No, my dear, I'd rather not. Otherwise we'll waste a whole week talking and arguing, and there are so many other pleasant things to do aren't there? It's going

to be a beautiful week, Isabel.'

At the tone of his voice her blood ran a little faster. Always their relations had shone and blossomed most happily on soft sunny days. The aftermath of summer, and the belated richness of red and yellow autumn lay graciously on her flesh. His convincing voice ran on. 'It's such a little thing to over emphasize Isabel—a mere trip from here to there! And you've been everything to me this summer. Think of all the time you've given me for my pictures and the marvellous results I've achieved—all through you. Let's decide it now and brush it aside. I can't let you go until you do Isabel, and your Mother is going to be so annoyed if you keep her waiting.' He gave her shoulders a gentle shake. 'You must know I want it for you very much don't you my dear? Look into my face and tell me what you think.'

Her eyes drank his like fresh water coming to clear pools, while Andalusia became lost again in the vivid reality of his face.

'Peter,' she breathed from a limitless simplicity of emotion. 'I love you very much.'

For an incredible moment of true vision he saw the living beauty of her eyes change to a frozen gaze in another body, and mutely she questioned the quick pressure of her face into his shoulder.

'Isabel,' he whispered over her head, 'will you close your eyes and kiss me, and promise me to accept my small gift. I don't want to talk about it any more. Kiss me by yourself as you do sometimes. Make me realize the warmth and life of your lips. I've got a touch of Helluland.'

She gathered an appeal from his voice and her body ached to respond. When she laid her mouth delicately to his she saw that his own eyes were sealed against her. In the slow gathering contact of her lips her lids drooped and he let her kiss him until his own body responded, and she was clasped with the hardest pressure she had experienced from his sensuous arms.

'It's yes, Isabel?' He questioned without resigning her lips. 'Do it for me my darling.'

'Yes if you want it Peter.'

'And you won't regret it once this week?'

'Not if you say it's all right Peter.'

He sighed with relief. 'Then it's *au revoir* my dear until to-morrow.' He kissed her slowly, and her arms dropped away. 'Good-bye Peter, I wish I could stay, but I can't! Good-bye my dear.'

Without watching her hurried retreat he walked straight towards the house feeling unaccountably tired and the sun shining warmly on his back failed to restore his body to its usual easy energy.

Isabel Pyke's Helluland crouched with dormant breath during Peter Keen's last week. Daily she kept her promise to him and walked joyously over the promontory, but she walked in the sun and it drew her love to a ripe maturity. The strength of the dying red and gold went into it, and something of the richness of its colour flowed through her body to be transferred to his. When they talked he reminded her of Andalusia and made it an easy realization for her immediate future. She listened to his voice rather than his words, but once she said to him. 'Peter I thought it would remain as an impossible dream, but when you speak of it, I'm on my way.' She kept her promise to him in everything, neither referring to his departure nor to her dislike of accepting the means of Andalusia. The prospect lay vaguely on her mind without shape or form. She was concerned with the present—timeless and changeless in her love for him, and blessed by the sun. Once in the resurgence of summer Mrs. Pyke went out to tea, and

Isabel stayed long on the Head, and once she was very late with the kettle, and didn't hear her Mother's chiding voice. It went round and about and over her fortified body.

Sometimes when she left him, Peter Keen stared moodily at the sea. Some of his serene sureness in the mutability of things dropped away, and his zest for change lost its edge. A germ of humility crept into his heart and he didn't know what to do with it. When she wasn't there he was restless and anxious to be gone, and chafed at the rarity of transportation. When she came he was bathed in the stayed radiance that she shed all around him and he was captive to the moment. She was never sentimental or cloying and she smiled all the week. Only once she told him with a mature note in her voice, 'Peter you said everything changes, nothing lasts, and no one note is struck for ever. You were speaking of yourself I think. I know now that I shall love you all my life.' In the calm conviction of her voice he felt inadequate but she went on talking of something else, as if her love had given her the better poise. But to the best of his ability he was careful of her and all Stevens's preparations for departure came and went in the mornings. There was nothing to suggest the finality of their summer and even the sky seemed perpetually blue and the soft breath of the wind was gentle with the remnants of withering leaves clinging lightly to the drying stalks and stems. The sun was pale and the horizon misty, but warmth lay on the land in lingering farewell.

Isabel Pyke was exalted and when the train came, it carried her through.

Their parting was brief. He was ready to leave and was going to walk into the village when she left. She stood silently in front of him and they searched each other's faces.

'Isabel what can I say?'

'Nothing Peter,' she whispered. 'It all lies inside.'

He put his hand into his pocket and drew out a long envelope and slipped it into hers. She scarcely noticed.

'Isabel it's Andalusia with my love.'

'Thank you,' she said simply.

He took her in his arms and wonderingly she noticed that his blue eyes were misted like the horizon. She thought vaguely that tears were for lesser things. Her own wide grey eyes clung to his face.

'Isabel,' he whispered, 'I shall remember your eyes like silver water.'

'They'll follow you,' she whispered, but he gripped her with reality.

'Isabel before I go, promise me, *promise me* again, that you will go to Spain.'

'Yes Peter, I'll go.'

'I'll know if you don't,' he muttered.

'What Peter,' she asked wonderingly.

'Nothing my dear.' He kissed her deeply and softly. 'Good-bye Isabel my darling. Bless you a thousand times.'

During his long kiss her eyes stayed open and it was only when she took his hand for a brief minute and dropped her face against it that he saw the black lashes rest for a short space. It was her voiceless farewell and she left his hand with the soft feel of her face, and walked erectly away.

Chapter Nine

He was gone and he had taken the mellow autumn with him. The penetrating chill of wind and weather crept through the zigzag road and many lanes.

The realized medium of Andalusia lay unopened between the folds of the Chinese dressing gown. The money came to Isabel like, 'oats to a dead horse.' For a day her body rested in a sad glamour of remembered sense, until it awoke to piercing hunger. She craved the solace of arms and the warmth of lips. The founts of her liberated conversation dried up and her thoughts coiled back on themselves. Her body knew no rest! She turned and twisted under the honeycomb spread with her eyes wide to the darkness. The wind and the waves in her ears could not deafen her to the sound of a remembered voice. She paced a strip of thin carpet while her Mother's snores violated the silence. She threw her racked body in front of the window and did not notice the chill from the sea. The Head became a bed of drying scrub for her body, and the rock a pillow for her head. She endured the eyes of the gulls and let them stare at her with a merciless yellow gaze. She tramped the promontory in reacting violence and thought of Josiah of bygone days. For the first time in her life her spirit encompassed his agony for Elfrieda. She thought sometimes he was treading the Head beside her.

Mrs. Pyke talked of Christmas: of puddings and fruit cakes, and Isabel went to the store for citron, raisins, and spice. She tried to stir out of the black, black mixtures an anodyne for her pain. She denied herself the services of the poor woman in the village and did the scrubbing herself. It had destroyed Andalusia before and now it would destroy Peter Keen! With her face to the crimson floor she wrung, and soaped, and scrubbed, but the galvanized bucket became another container for her misery and her tears dropped into the water. The sobs tore up through her body, but she held them until she reached the Head. With her face on the granite rock she gave herself up to grief, while the sea beat savagely against the cliffs, and the wind blew its chill breath across her tormented body. She cried herself out, until she reached a boundless emptiness where nothing acute could live. Quiet at last she lay with her face to the sea, watching it roll in from the horizon. Peter Keen had taught her colour. There was no yellow in the day, and she couldn't find a gleam of light. The sky was thin and grey and the sea rolled thick and leaden. Suddenly his voice rang in the core of her memory, 'Isabel, Isabel, promise me, PROMISE ME you will go to Spain. The warmth of his hands was on her shoulders and she could feel herself in his grip. A thin trickle of life ran through her insensate body. Andalusia? Where was Andalusia? Hastily she turned her eyes away from the swooping gulls. She heard his voice again, 'Josiah sinned, Isabel: if he'd gone back to his ship he would have been very busy, and then he would have met another girl. There are so many girls, Isabel.'

Isabel Pyke sat up and the wind blew her hair away from her tear-stained face. She stood up, and her teeth chattered with the cold on her depleted body. She wrapped her coat tightly around her and faced the square house on the Head. Already the windows were returning to the dust of the past. They looked like empty eyes, and her own desolation acknowledged their state, but to-day her grief was appeased and she lived in the centre of nothing. As she shivered over the promontory, the germ of Andalusia grew in her heart and lifted her out of her well of emptiness. Her blood stirred to the word, and her feet quickened towards the unopened envelope between the folds of the Chinese dressing gown. As she reached the pebbled walk by her own front door she paused in fear of her Mother's eyes. She knew her face would betray

her tears even in the light of the kerosene lamp. She lingered outside and turned her face to the sea. The wind blew damply in and tortured the crumpled leaves clinging to the lilac and syringa, and rapped the skeleton branches sharply against the clap-board. She waited as long as she dared, and fearfully entered the stuffy hall, but it received her body in black silence. She fumbled her way to the kitchen and applied a match to a kerosene lamp. A pencilled scrawl lay on the white scrubbed table, written on an uneven scrap of wrapping paper.

‘Gone to Aunt Dorcas’s to tea. Don’t go to bed until I’ve had my supper. Be sure and change the water on the salt fish.’

A stub of pencil lay beside the untidy note.

In the absence of her Mother’s eyes Isabel relaxed to the silent house. The fire glowed through chinks in the black stove, the kettle was almost on the boil, and the floor shone warmly red in the light from the kerosene lamp. Where it did not penetrate the colour receded to dusky red, and the scrubbed table stood out against the darkness in white solidity. The unwonted silence was only disturbed by the hiss of the kettle and the rap of the branches against the clap-board.

Isabel dragged an old rocking chair in front of the stove and sat relaxed with her frozen feet on the oven shelf. The monotony of her rocking added a rythmical creak to the hiss of the kettle and the rap of the branches. Warmth flowed up through her chilled body, and she rocked content, until she remembered through a daze of dulled routine that she had to make some bread. It must be put to rise to-night: she had cut into the last bun that morning for breakfast.

Wearily she rose to look for the bowl of yeast. Had she remembered to moisten it in her race with her welling tears? It was there in its accustomed spot with a cracked plate over the top. But before she could summon strength for her task she must put some food in her body. As she stood watching boiling water bubble over the curve of an egg, she wished the needs of her empty heart could be fed so easily.

Andalusia! It was there at her hand if only she had the courage to take it. She could fill her empty heart that way. Had she not promised Peter Keen? And again she felt his hands on her shoulders. ‘Isabel, Isabel promise me, PROMISE ME you will go to Spain.’ She would! She could by the power of the unopened envelope. Andalusia! The word came back to her lips in smooth syllabication. It was what her soul had craved before Peter Keen had dimmed the picture, of olive, orange, palm, and pomegranate. It would grow over the ache in her heart, and the longing of her body, and soothe her eyes for their craving of a gleam on a copper head. She quivered in a wave of remembered sense, and struck the rounded top from her boiled egg.

Feverishly Isabel Pyke dipped into the flour barrel and spun the handle of the sifter—once, twice, three times. Cordova, Seville, Granada! Her eyes grew black with dilated pupils and she turned them toward the wooden clock. Three hours away from the sealed envelope of Andalusia! Blood ran in and out of her face and rose to the height of the Slavic cheek bones. Another sifter of flour into the moistened yeast, a pinch of salt, a sprinkle of sugar and she stirred it all with a wooden spoon. When the mixture became too heavy, she washed her hands and bared her arms to the shoulder. The golden fists were lost in the dough. Knead, twist, turn: Cordova, Seville, Granada. Knead, twist, turn: Cordova, Seville, Granada. It became a voiceless rhythm! Twenty minutes by the clock, her fists assaulted the dough, until with a final gesture she turned the mound over with a heavy plop. It lay under her eyes, domed and white and perfect. Andalusia! she had made it with her hands.

A white cloth, a frayed blanket, a woollen sweater, and an old winter coat were folded over and around the bowl and it was left in its many wrappings on the white scrubbed table.

Isabel Pyke stayed busy in the crimson-floored kitchen until she heard the scrunch of her Mother's feet on the pebbled walk. She lifted the kerosene lamp to the level of the small mirror and examined her face. Her eyes had come back to their wide gaze and the dilated pupils made them black. The swelling and redness had gone from her lids and the cheek bones were heightened by bright pink spots. With careful haste she replaced the lamp and braced her body by the black stove, her eyes on the singing kettle. Mrs. Pyke's flat heels grounded on the hall canvas and she brought in a breath of cold air. It seemed to linger in the heavy black garments.

'My, 'tis a blustery night. The wind is in! Make haste with the tea now, Bella.'

Isabel poured the boiling water into the earthenware teapot. Three teaspoons of sugar, a little milk, and the strong fresh brew ran into the cup.

Mrs. Pyke rocked by the stove, the heavy folds of her black garments spilling to the crimson floor. Her coat was open, showing the tight bodice, running high to the square double chin, under which fell a white lace jabot pinned with a gold brooch. Her black fabric gloves lay on her lap under her square hands, and the flesh of the wedding ring finger puffed over a broad gold band. Her hat was solid with bits of jet and a small tip, and stayed securely pinned to strong black hair without a touch of grey. Her eyes were hairy with black lashes, and brows that swept from temple to temple. Her skin was moist and sallow and the under lip protruded beneath the upper. She accepted the cup of tea and sucked up a taste from the teaspoon.

'Cut me a hunk of cake now, Bella. Your Aunt Dorcas is a poor hand with her mixtures. She can make but she can't bake. I never saw the like; all soggy in the middle and the pure dough.'

Isabel went into the dark pantry with the kerosene lamp, and came back with a large wedge of foxy cake, heavy with currants. Her Mother's teeth closed on a large semi-circle and her lips pursed out over the mouthful.

'What did you have for your own tea, Bella,' she mumbled.

'I had an egg, Mother.'

Mrs. Pyke bolted. 'Them fresh eggs, Bella! 'Tis a pity about you. We've got to break twelve the week, into the Princess Maud. Wasn't there anything else in the house?'

Isabel said nothing. Her Mother never begrudged her food, but she had eaten it without being told! Mrs. Pyke's brown eyes searched the dim corners of the shadowy kitchen and her gaze fastened on the muffled bowl of dough.

'I hope you worked that dough right, Bella. Poor stuff, your bread. You're too gentle handed by a long sight.'

'Not to-night,' thought Isabel. Hadn't she kneaded a perfect mixture, domed like a mosque in Cordova? Very soon someone else would make her mother's bread. A woman in the village must knead the dough, peel and scrape and wash, and stir the black and white mixtures of the endless fruit cakes. She would be in Andalusia!

When Mrs. Pyke had bolted her cake and sucked up three cups of tea Isabel straightened the kitchen and went up the shallow stairs with her kerosene lamp in her hand. As she passed the hall window, stiff with starched lace, the pane rattled violently, and the flame flickered inside the lamp-chimney. Isabel steadied her pace and trod the narrow strip of Brussels carpet towards her room under the slanting roof. She was alone with the unopened envelope of Andalusia!

Her routine was feverish and hurried and her wide eyes searched the corners of the room as if she were overlooked. With the kerosene lamp on the table beside her she crept under the

honeycomb spread with the long envelope close to her body. The corners felt sharp to her flesh. She lay listening, her cheek bones red with colour, and her ears strained for sound. Her Mother's wooden bed still creaked to her weight but in a little while the sounds were muted to her heavy breathing which began to be inhaled noisily, and drawn to a sharp, short snore. Isabel waited until they came regularly in strangled sustained sounds. Then she sat up in bed, her body and the envelope making a grotesque shadow on the papered wall. Fearfully one long finger broke the seal and the crack of the paper sounded like a shot in the night. She waited for a change in her Mother's snores but as they continued in strangled rhythm, she peered inside the envelope. Green notes ran long and flat in a compact pile! Her eyes pierced the dark corners of the room, and glanced over her shoulders at the slanting roof, but there was nothing but her own shadow and the distorted outline of solid wooden furniture. She drew out the notes with a quick pull and they lay on the honeycomb spread with a bold fifty dollar mark facing her on the top of the green pile. She took it in her hand and it felt thick between her fingers. The red blood deepened on her cheek bones and the pupils swamped her eyes. She began to count with fingers burning acquisitively at their tips. She licked one hot first finger and counted again. Twenty of them: and all with a fifty dollar mark on their flat sides! One thousand dollars! Isabel thought of her carefully hoarded eighty-five and wanted to laugh out loud. She was rich: she would escape: she had the power to escape. She closed her eyes and saw behind her lids olive, orange, palm, and pomegranate. She would leave Helluland to the eyes of the gulls, and the lonely Head to the sound of the wind. She would go to Andalusia! Andalusia! For the first time since she had seen the gleam of the sun on a copper head, her dream came back to her with compelling reality. The blood that had flamed under Peter Keen's hands and cooled to joy at his going, tingled with a wave of new life. Her veins filtered with youth and expectation, and her mind remembered. 'There are so many girls in the world, Isabel.' Then there must be so many men! Somebody else would love her: somebody without the slack shoulders and leather face of Helluland. Someone in Andalusia like Peter Keen. She was awake to love now and she craved it like her Mother craved six daily brews of tea and four heavy slabs of fruit cake.

Isabel Pyke looked sly with the red spots burning on her cheeks. She crept out of bed and wrapped the long envelope carefully in the Chinese dressing gown. Back in bed she looked at the outside of the drawer. She sat up restlessly with her blackened eyes searching the narrow limits of the room. She slipped out again and extracted the envelope, holding it consideringly in her hand. Under the carpet? She dropped to her knees and turned up a thin corner to the right of the door. She pushed the envelope under and smoothed the surface, sitting back on her heels to see if it made a hump. It looked unchanged and flat and with a sigh she returned to her bed and blew out the lamp. For once the picture of a red head, shining teeth, and a being of strange fascinating conversation, had dimmed to the promise of Andalusia.

Isabel tossed and twisted restlessly. There was no sleep or rest for her mind. The mosques and minarets of Andalusia seemed to be made of dough. She would never get there! Somebody would find her money! Her Mother might come in and see if she'd 'dug out' the corners of her room. She might decide to take up the carpet.

Isabel sat up in bed and her eyes strained towards the corner of the carpet, through the wall of blackness. It was a dark night and she thought the sky must be curving overhead in an inky dome. Carefully she struck a match and lighted the lamp once more, listening for any change in her Mother's snores. This time she crept out of bed and tiptoed to the door. Not a change in the succession of grating sounds. Isabel stood in her cotton night-dress and looked around.

What was it she heard about hiding things? That they were always discovered except in the most apparent places. Her eyes found her small shelf of books. Three tall black volumes — ‘The works of Washington Irving.’ They were all about Spain. She opened one at random and prophetically her eyes saw ‘Legends of the conquests of Spain’. It was ordained. With a sigh of content she placed the envelope between the pages, and went to the first untroubled sleep she had known since Peter Keen had left her.

Chapter Ten

The next morning Mrs. Pyke sent Isabel to the store for some fatback pork. As she turned from the lane to the curve of the beach the wind cut her face with a cold blast. The boats in the bay rose and dipped to the heaving sea, and the crested waves made long indentations on the curving beach. As they retreated with a strong suck to the loose stones, she thought they sounded like her Mother's breath before it exhaled a strangled snore.

With the oozing parcel of pork in her hand Isabel crossed the street to the one-roomed post-office and asked for a City paper. The postmistress greeted her, and looked a query over steel-rimmed glasses, but Isabel stood silent in front of the wooden counter, so she stooped to a pile of week-old papers. 'Emily Pyke's girl was a silent piece.'

Isabel put two coppers on the counter and folded the paper to the size of her pocket. She had bread in the oven, dinner to get, and the crimson-floored kitchen to clear away before she could escape to her rock on the Head.

The day was grey and the light promised to be short. As they ate silently in the stuffy dining-room Mrs. Pyke seemed to be slow with her food. She pursed out her mouth and bolted as usual, but the square hands looked uncertain in piling up her food and several times a heaped mass dropped back to the mounds of turnip, potatoe, and oily cabbage, cooked with fatback pork. The food which encroached to the gold line round the edge of the plate, was slow in disappearing, and Isabel looked anxiously through the bare branches of lilac towards the leaden sky.

Isabel walked the arc of the curving beach, and once out of sight of the huddled houses ran over the bare promontory. Breathlessly she subsided on the rock and took the paper from her pocket. At the first sign of liberation from its folds the wind crackled and blew it backwards and forwards, and billowed it out of her hands. Bold type fluttered in front of her eyes—Italy—Abyssinia—but they were nebulous names to her. The only places her mind could encompass were, Helluland, and Andalusia! She had lived with them so long! Impatiently she held and searched the fluttering pages, until she saw a list of advertisements for Steamship Companies. With a sigh of relief she grasped it, and freed the remaining leaves of the paper to the caprice of the wind. She watched them scrape across the scrub and flatten themselves against the wall of the house before she studied the page in her hand.

Two boats to Liverpool in December during the first and last week. The first was too soon. Isabel looked towards the sea and began to plan. The train arrived from the City the day after to-morrow and returned the following day. She would write to-night and in a week the train would bring her back a reply. She would go the last week in December, but she would have to leave for the City before Christmas. Her Mother would spend it with Aunt Dorcas, and drink the annual glass of port with Uncle Seth, and eat turkey with its craw stuffed with force-meat. She would not tell her Mother until her plans were made, but whatever followed, she would be as cold to the grating voice as the yellow eyes of the gulls. If her Mother gave her 'the length of her tongue', and tried 'to knock the nonsense out of her', she would leave the eighty-five dollars for a woman 'to do' for her.

Isabel thought and planned. How would she go? First class? Second class? How much was a thousand dollars? She didn't know how to do things but she would learn. Hadn't she learned to love from Peter Keen? Hitherto she had imagined that people married, slept in the same

bed, did things like the animals, and had babies like the cows and calves. The world of love and delight and golden sense, and the feeling of wanting to submerge herself in another being was utterly unknown to her until she had been held in Peter Keen's arms. There had been times when she had ached to ease behind his blue eyes and gleaming teeth, and to get past his strong outside body and live and dwell within him. She dropped her face in her long hands; then threw up her head and looked towards the sea. That way of thought drowned Andalusia!

Isabel thought of clothes. Would she ever have the dress that Peter Keen had imagined for her, on a day she had appeared in her Sunday dress? She shut her eyes and heard as clearly as if he were by her side. 'Isabel you must have a dress, long and svelte, and soft and gold: lamé that doesn't crush or scrape. You must wear it Isabel over your golden skin with perhaps a very little garment—skin tight. Then a streak of lip-stick, more orange than red, and antique gold ear-rings that skim the curve of your shoulders. And your hair must be washed soft to high lights of gold and waved back to the nape of your neck. Then you must sit very still in long golden lines and I shall paint you.' He had looked at her under contracted brows, as if it were her fault she didn't have a gold lamé dress.

Isabel dropped her face in her hands and let it stay. The paper in her lap crackled under her elbows, but she took no heed. Andalusia! Andalusia! It was Dead Sea fruit to her now! Her mind admitted it. She rocked to and fro and clenched her hands until the knuckles were white. Her aching longing was like a physical pain, and she allowed it to flow over her, unconscious of the fading light and the gathering chill. She would forsake everything, give up every hope of orange, olive, palm, and pomegranate, and stay in Helluland for the rest of her life, if only she could see his copper-kettle hair, the gleam of his teeth, and the eyes that held the blue of the sky on summer days, and changed to grey when the sun went in. And his lips and hands on her own body—. She sprang wildly to her feet, and the paper dropped from her lap and scraped across the scrub. She picked it up and put it in her pocket, and found herself facing the house. Sad and old and desolate it faced the sea. In spite of the fact that she had always refused to enter it with Peter Keen, it held no terror for her. She felt at one with it now. She wanted to put her arms around it and cry against its faded sides. Josiah would understand how she felt. She braced her shoulders and walked to the edge of the perpendicular cliff. Below, the sea dashed against it with savage strength, and where the black rocks rose out of the green water, the gulls hovered over them. She looked towards the horizon and tried to visualize what lay beyond. Andalusia! A world of other things. She must have the courage to break away! She couldn't face the snows of winter Helluland with her heart dead within her. She braced her body and started to go, but as she turned away from the sea a snowy-breasted gull poised in front of her face, and she found herself staring into a pair of yellow eyes. Tranced to utter stillness she stared and stared. Colder than the ice from the North, colder than the bergs gleaming white in the sun, colder than the bite of the Arctic wind she felt the glitter of the merciless yellow eyes. The spirit of Helluland! Cold on her body and cold on her heart! She threw one arm across her eyes and dashed blindly forward.

Isabel's memory held the gleam of the pitiless eyes all the way home, but after she and her Mother had eaten a silent tea, she went to her room under the slanting roof, and wrote her letter to the Steamship Company. She asked for rates, first and second class, and reserved a passage for the last week in December. As she walked across the beach to post it, Aunt Dorcas passed, going the other way to visit her Mother.

As Isabel walked home she was cold with more than the wind from the sea. The yellow implacable eyes were looking at her through the darkness of the night. She walked faster, and

tried to think of the time when she would be gone, but she shivered as she turned from the beach to the lane. Vainly she tried to reassure herself with the thought that she had gazed into the yellow eyes many times before. As a child she had shrunk from a close look at the birds which looked so beautiful and graceful at a distance. She remembered the first time she had seen a sea-gull's eyes, and how she had been chilled with their cold cruelty. She shook herself for her fancy but she returned to the house with her heart full of dread. She got back in time to make the sixth and final brew of tea and to watch her Mother consume a 'taster' of the first black Christmas fruit cake. The taster was large and very rich, and but for a small piece for Aunt Dorcas, Mrs. Pyke ate it all. Was it Isabel's fancy again that her Mother's movements were slow? She gulped just as quickly, but her face had a purple tinge, and her eyes held more than their usual dark glitter.

Isabel was sleeping unhappily that night when she was awakened by queer stertorous sounds, like yet unlike her Mother's snores. Her hands fumbled and found a match, and shakingly she lit the kerosene lamp. In her agitation the flame ran in a long smoky streak up the slender glass chimney. Instantly her eyes went towards the books of Washington Irving that held Andalusia, but they stood undisturbed in black formation. The sounds continued. In her white nainsook night-dress and bare feet she picked up the lamp and walked the thin strip of carpet towards her Mother's room. The draughts from the hall window turned her feet to ice.

Mrs. Pyke lay flat on her back—a dreadful sight, and the lamp wavered in Isabel's hand. She placed it on a table before her knees gave way beneath her. Her Mother's face was drawn to one side, and a bit of tongue protruded. A line of saliva dribbled over her chin, and one eye was completely closed while the other continued winking. But the expression of the live eye told Isabel that she was conscious of her condition. Her whole body seemed to strain in protest towards the loss of her grating voice. The strength of her domination over her daughter struggled to assert itself, and suddenly she began to gabble in a confusion of words. Frustration and contempt seemed to gather in the winking eye for Isabel's tranced panic, and as she received the dreadful look she turned and went out. Now her feet carried her fast. She tore her winter coat out of the cupboard, thrust her bare feet into her thick shoes and raced over the narrow stairs. She fell against the front door and fumbled for the large iron key. Desperately she turned it and felt the cold air rush over her thinly clad body. She shivered as her feet crashed over the pebbled walk, and turned down the lane towards the nearest house. Another Penney! They were all, Pykes, Penneys, and Tuckers, and all related in some remote distant way.

Isabel wrenched at the fastening of the nearest storm-door, and it flew back and cracked against the side of the house. She pounded with her fists, on the panels of a stout inner door until she heard the scrape of a window and a rough voice demanding, 'what's wrong now? Quit that banging.'

Isabel retreated to the dim focus of the window. 'Oh, Mr. Penney, it's Isabel Pyke. My Mother—'

'Who?' bawled a voice above the moan of the wind and the sound of the sea.

'Isabel Pyke, Mr. Penney, my Mother—'

'Wait now, I'll come down and unhasp the door.'

Isabel heard the window close and writhed in impatience. In her haste she had forgotten that Mr. Penney was deaf. It seemed a long time before she heard a step and saw a thin gleam of light. The door opened about a foot and Mr. Penney stood peering at her, in a striped

flannelette night-shirt falling below his short day coat. The night-shirt was short in the front, and long in the back and even in her hurry Isabel had time to notice the grotesque lines of the figure. For a fleeting second she compared it with the memory of a warm summer day, when she had found Peter Keen painting on the Head, in pyjamas and a silk dressing gown the colour of deep blue delphiniums. The light from the kerosene lamp shone full on her face.

‘Well now ’tis Isabel Pyke. What’s wrong to your place?’

Isabel stepped close to his ear and felt the heat of the lamp on her face.

‘Mr. Penney, my Mother is very ill—’

‘Speak up girl, you know I’m hard of hearing.’

Isabel had the instinct to leave and run across the beach herself, but she said with loud desperation, ‘my Mother has been taken very ill. Will you go across the beach and get Aunt Dorcas, Penney.’

‘What’s that Jabez?’ shouted a voice from a height in the dim interior. The queer figure turned with the lamp in his hand, and shouted in return, ‘it’s Isabel Pyke, Annie Maud. Her Ma is took sick.’

Isabel could have screamed at the slowness of his comprehension and the thought of what might be happening in her Mother’s bedroom. She said again in a loud voice, ‘my Mother is dying, Mr. Penney. Will you go quickly.’

The urgency of the word penetrated. Death was always an event. He turned slowly. ‘Dying is she? ’Tis wonderful sudden. Yes I’ll go girl, the minute I step into a bit of clothes. Will Annie Maud come into you?’

‘No, no, thank you, Mr. Penney. I’ll manage until Aunt Dorcas comes. Only hurry, will you, PLEASE Mr. Penney?’

‘That I will girl. Be easy. I’ll be ready th’ once.’

Isabel sped away, the wind snatching at her own nainsook night-dress, and the cold air blowing on her bare legs and ankles. The chill of a late dawn was in the air and she could hear the waves breaking on the beach. As she entered the house her body shook with icy cold. She went into the kitchen and lit a lamp and put a match to the fire. The crackle of splits rang through the silent house like a sharp bombardment and Isabel crouched over the black stove. When the fire was under way she filled up the kettle with water from the galvanized bucket and put it on to boil. In life or death tea might be necessary.

Reluctantly she returned to her Mother’s room. Mrs. Pyke lay in the same position and the eye was still winking. Isabel turned her face away from the bed and looked out of the window. The pale dawn lay like a ghost of light on the sea but objects stood out in square relief, and by turning down the lamp to a thin crescent of flame, she could see the curve of the beach and the rolling waves. After hours of vigil (it seemed to her strained nerves), she saw the ponderous figure of her Aunt plodding in a line to the growing light. There was no hurry in her movements, and she, entered the house as calmly as if she had dropped over to spend the evening with her knitting. Isabel rushed down, ‘what is it, my maid?’

The unchanged quality of her Aunt’s voice released some of Isabel’s panic. She spoke through deep gasps. ‘I don’t know Aunt Dorcas. ’Tis Mother. She looks dreadful.’

‘There now, my maid. There’s nothing to be frightened about. Sickness and death! ’Tis the way of life. I’ll just lay off my things and go up. Your Uncle Seth is going to get a message up the shore to the doctor.’

Her slow hands removed her black coat which seemed to drip with the wind from the sea. She hung it on a peg, and laid her hat and fabric gloves on the flat post at the bottom of the

painted stairs. Then she mounted, holding on to the varnished rail. The stairs creaked to her weight, as Isabel crept up after her, close in the shadow of her solid bulk.

Chapter Eleven

The doctor was slow in coming. He was very far up the shore when the message was sent, and Isabel and Aunt Dorcas looked continually across the beach for the sight of his battered car.

Aunt Dorcas settled down in the house on the lane, waiting to see which way the tide was going to turn. She sent Uncle Seth to a relation on her own side—(a Wilkes)—with more confidence regarding his welfare, than if she had sent him to a Penney. She plodded up and down the stairs in the service of her cousin Emily, and the thin boards creaked to her ponderous weight. In the shadow of her comforting presence Isabel dropped from a world of tortured thought, to a realm of numbness and ceaseless work. She dared not think, and for the present she followed resistless, the sustaining guidance of her Aunt, who directed her into a decent care of her Mother's inert body, while her slim figure curved and strained over the large feather bed.

Mrs. Pyke's right side was as lifeless as a dead tree, and the dreadful contrast of the two sides tortured Isabel's eyes until she had to look away. She tried to stand so that she could only see one side at a time, and for choice she liked the paralysed one best. It was so smooth and free of wrinkles and the closed eye seemed to be resting in peace. She poured tea into the half-open mouth, with the protruding tongue, and it trickled in brown stains out of the corner. Until the doctor came she spun in an unfeeling muddle of lifting, fetching, washing, cooking, baking, peeling, and scraping for the endless meals that had to go on. An unheard of pile of sheets and pillow-slips accumulated, and the washing was returned to the poor woman in the village who thankfully reclaimed her fifty cents a day. Isabel and her Aunt Dorcas had to take turns sitting up at night, and they watched through the silent hours in an old rocking chair, which was pushed close to a small black stove with sliding doors. Mrs. Pyke lay like a log, and except for the winking eye, and an occasional babble of incoherent words, she was dead to life. Aunt Dorcas did for her, and talked to her as if her cousin could understand: the only difference being that her deep voice flowed on in ineffable calm, without a continued grating interruption.

To Isabel the hope of Andalusia, and the memory of Peter Keen had receded to a world of distant dreams, and a realm of strange impossible things. But many times she looked through the Nottingham lace of the upper windows, for the sight of the doctor's car. She was strung to endurance for his verdict. Her Mother's death would solve her problem, but while there was calm and repose on one side of her face, there was no dissolution in the winking eye. With the memory of her Father's tranquil face in his coffin, she couldn't visualize her Mother in the same waxen peace. The other alternative she dared not name, but in the night by the black stove, with her eyes turned away from the feather bed, she thought in tortured channels. As her mind ran up this one, and that one, she seemed to meet a continual closing door. She might have known! It was the meaning of her last look into the pitiless eyes of the gull.

She would have liked to tramp the thin carpet in her Mother's room, but she forced herself to sit still in her chair, listening to the long moan of the wind, the raps on the clap-board and the sound of the waves breaking on the beach. She yearned to clarify her thoughts by a visit to her rock, and she chafed for her daily walk over the promontory. But at present there was no thought of leaving the house on the lane.

The doctor arrived, grey and grizzled from many drives by the sea. Aunt Dorcas preceded him up the stairs, and Isabel crept after them, and crouched in the small passage, every nerve strained for the doctor's words. He said nothing until he came downstairs again and Isabel crept after them, and followed them into the dining-room. Aunt Dorcas sat in her Mother's worn velvet chair, and Isabel stole speechlessly to the stiff sofa by the window. Aunt Dorcas sat with her hands folded passively in her lap and questioned in her untroubled voice, 'well doctor, what do you think?'

He faced them square and tired with his hair falling over his forehead, and his clothes full of wrinkles. They looked as if he slept in them very often on people's stiff sofas, on kitchen settles, or in faded old arm-chairs. Isabel, waiting for his words, thought he looked worn and beaten like the old house on the Head.

He was a Scotsman and his voice was deep and pleasant. In spite of many years of wind-swept Newfoundland he had never lost his accent.

'Don't know, Mrs. Penney, can't say, it's hard to tell with Hemeplegia. Sometimes death occurs within a few hours, sometimes there's a slow improvement after a few weeks. Look for signs in the face and lower limbs. In this case the pressure is very high. Too full habit, too much pork and cabbage—might get better—might have another one—might be bed-ridden for years! Strong stock—great longevity! Quiet, care, light nourishment—that's all that can be done. I'll be back in a week.'

Aunt Dorcas followed him to the door and his old car shook him down the lane.

Isabel's stricken ears had retained one sentence. 'Might be bed-ridden for years.' The hope of Andalusia was dealt a mortal blow, and she drooped towards the kitchen. During the midday dinner she sat with her wide eyes unseeing. Without interest she scooped the centre out of a baked potato. Her Aunt's deliberate hands did the same thing.

Isabel looked through the bare branches of lilac towards the sombre sky, and then let her eyes rest on the placid figure of her Aunt.

'Aunt Dorcas,' she whispered in a dead voice, 'do you think Mother will be bed-ridden for years?'

Her Aunt slowly squashed a lump of butter into the steaming potato. 'I don't know, my maid. You heard what the doctor said. I've seen them get over a seizure, but the body is never the same. 'Twill be hard for you, my maid, but you must get constant help. Your Mother can afford it, with what will be saved off the food and now she'll have to eat light.'

Andalusia died within her! She knew that her Aunt already saw her Mother as a permanent invalid. Isabel's head drooped over her baked potato, and she looked ahead to a joyless routine of heavy service under the ceaseless scrutiny of the winking eye. She had a rebellious instinct to sweep the plates, and knives and forks aside with a wild gesture, but she asked quietly, 'Aunt Dorcas, do you think I could go out for a walk this afternoon?'

Her Aunt's voice agreed benignly, 'yes, indeed my maid. A breath of air will do you a sight of good. You can go th' once if you like. I'll clear away.'

'No, no, Aunt Dorcas, I'll do that, if you'll sit in Mother's room and tend the stove.'

'All right, my maid, and don't hurry back. I'll mind the kitchen fire and put the kettle to boil. We'll have a boiled egg and a bit of bread and butter. There was always a sight too much cooking in this house.'

Mrs. Penney moved away and creaked up the stairs. Isabel gathered up the dishes in mute surprise. It was the first time she had ever heard her Aunt make a remark that might be called criticism.

During Isabel's walk down the lane and over the arc of the beach, several people stopped her to ask about her Mother. She made the same automatic answer to each enquiry, 'just the same, thank you.' As she trod the last lap between the road and the railway track she looked along the receding steel rails. What was the good of looking for the train to come in with her letter? She couldn't go: she was a prisoner in Helluland for the rest of her life. She rushed out over the promontory and flung herself down on the rock. The house seemed to welcome her, and release her to a survey of her desolate thoughts. She looked towards the horizon and tried to see a way out, but the doors of her escape seemed closed by the weight of her Mother's body. What good was Andalusia between the covers of a book? Her Mother might get well! A woman could 'do' for her, but she rocked to the implacable picture of the winking eye. Her Mother might die! Wasn't death, complete death, better than a body cut in half? 'The Wilkes didn't lie down to illness!' Her Mother's voice grated across her memory, and joined the recent pronouncement of the doctor. 'Bed-ridden for years, great longevity.'

Restlessly Isabel came to her feet with a thought in her mind. She would go and see the records of the dead Wilkes! Aunt Dorcas had told her not to hurry home. Before she went she took a long look at the house, with its closed doors, and windows like empty eyes. She thought of the summer afternoons when the sun had shone kindly on its dilapidation and turned the leaden windows to shining gold. The sky had burned above it in deep azure, and the sea had lapped against the granite cliffs in lazy quietude. Now the sky was damp and grey, the sea rolled with crested waves and dashed against the Head in booming sound. Isabel turned and left it, and her despondent body seemed to accept the weight of its gloom. Hurry left her feet and she walked slowly over the promontory, over the arc of the beach, past her own lane, past several other lanes until she came to a sloping graveyard on the side of a hill. Lonely and still the cheap stones rose straight, and slanting, and bent almost to the earth, from decaying mounds of damp grass. The light was dull but she wandered in and out looking for inscriptions to the dead Wilkes! Her Mother's family had come to Newfoundland in 1763, and many of the memorials were worn and obliterated from continued wind and weather. She peered and deciphered—ninety-four, ninety-two, eighty-nine, seventy-nine, seventy-six—(red spots leaped to Isabel's cheekbones)—ninety-four, ninety-two! Her arms dropped to her sides in the chill twilight and she sat desolately down on a strip of damp grass surrounding a clay mound. She dropped her chin in one hand and looked down the hill to the village. Blue wood smoke curled from nearly every chimney: coal smoke from a few. An occasional figure walked across the beach, with shoulders and head drooped to the wind from the sea. The chill November day had driven most of the villagers into their houses and Isabel imagined them all gathered in the warm kitchens, sitting round white scrubbed tables at an early tea. Her own people lived better than most and ate in the dining-room, like the wife of the storekeeper.

Isabel looked ahead and her eyes held the dreariness of Helluland without the gathering strength of its winter force. She was staring unseeingly, at an old mound several feet away, with a brown stone falling back at a crooked angle. Everything had the familiarity of accustomed things and it was some time before her eyes told her that she was staring at the sixty year old grave of Elfrieda Tucker. With a sudden abandonment of movement Isabel ran towards it, and threw herself face down on the neglected mound. The slant of the stone made a rest for her face, and her voice that had died to conversation when Peter Keen left, loosened its speech to the worn surface of the brown stone.

'Elfrieda, Elfrieda, you did what I did. Tell me what to do now? Tell me—tell me?' Her arms went round the flat slab and she tried to shake it for a reply. 'Your lover came in from the

sea, and mine came from, “here, there and everywhere.” Yours gave you a child and mine gave me a way to Andalusia! But he went away and it didn’t seem to matter any more, but it does, it does! If I wasn’t closed in by rocks and cliffs, I could try and forget, but there’s nothing here but coldness, and emptiness, and the same things every day for ever and ever. I can’t stay, Elfrieda, I can’t stay and I can’t go, I can’t go.’ She lay motionless for a while, with her long body pressed against the ground and the bit of decaying grass drying itself against the walls of her chest. But Isabel didn’t notice. The light diminished, and the sea air thickened to a fine drizzle, but she lay on with her face pressed against Elfrieda’s scarred tombstone. As the darkness deepened her voice became a confidential whisper. ‘Elfrieda, you were a pale pilgarlick too. Perhaps you called it Helluland and hated the eyes of the gulls. Were you happy with your lover? Did he have a beautiful voice like mine and did the sun shine for you and turn everything yellow and make you forget you lived in Helluland? Did you meet him every day, and then go back to the kitchen and make tea and bake bread? Did you die inside when he left you? But you did die Elfrieda, really die! Were you sorry? Am I sorry? Do I want to be what I was before he came?’

The drizzle turned to cold rain and Isabel became conscious of her soaked condition. Great drops fell on her face and she sat up on the edge of the mound. The lateness of the hour appalled her. Her absence would be a betrayal of her feelings, but she remembered that she was freed from the sound of her Mother’s voice, and she was schooling herself to look away from the winking eye. Her Aunt Dorcas would welcome her kindly, offer to help, and warm her with the sound of her unchangeable voice. The thought of the heavy figure getting tea in the crimson-floored kitchen jerked Isabel to her feet. She picked her way out of the graveyard and ran all the way across the beach and up the lane.

Chapter Twelve

The next morning Isabel Pyke didn't care about anything. She had a headache: her mouth was dry and felt like the surface of her Mother's flannelette night-dresses: her skin enclosed her like a hot sheath and she went to and fro to the galvanized bucket for dippers of cool water. All day she fetched and carried and worked, while her Aunt Dorcas rested from her vigil in the rocking-chair by her cousin's bed. Mrs. Penney didn't snore. Her breathing came in long profound sounds—unvaried and even, like her unchangeable voice. Mrs. Pyke's lost speech asserted itself above it in a more frequent gabble, which was silenced only when Isabel poured tea into the twisted mouth. She watched it dribble out of the corner towards the white pillow-slip, and stood staring at the long, brown stains, wishing she could do something about them. But the task seemed too gigantic for her inertia, and the sense of her Mother's weight lay mountainously on her mind, so she picked up the tray and went out, carefully avoiding a look from the winking eye. All morning she had the instinct to sit down, but she was kept continuously on her feet in dulled activity. Neighbours dropped in and relations walked up the lane to make inquiries, so that her work in her Mother's bedroom, and the crimson-floored kitchen, was interrupted by many trips to answer the door. Some one brought half a dozen eggs, another a pat of fresh butter, another a crock of black currant jam and the storekeeper's wife sent a red jelly in a china mould.

In the afternoon the house creaked again to the weight of Mrs. Penney's slow tread, and Uncle Seth puffed up the lane to see his wife. He stood looking at them from pouches round his eyes and seemed angry. 'Dorcas, I'm going back to the folks and arrange for them to sit up by night. They'll all take a turn and be glad to. Your eyes and this poor maid's, look like burnt holes in a blanket.'

'Come in and sit down Seth, and tell me the news. That'll rest me.'

But for once he was impervious to the calm voice. Without answering he buttoned up his coat over his portly stomach and let himself out to the pebbled walk. With a ponderous sigh Aunt Dorcas pulled herself up the stairs, and Isabel in a brief space of non-activity rocked dully by the kitchen stove. Later the minister called and his voice filled the dark hall with smooth piety. Aunt Dorcas took him upstairs to her cousin's room and Isabel went back to her rocking-chair, the lassitude of her body holding her from any extra effort. She rocked monotonously on the painted crimson canvas, listening to the drone of voices from the top flat. For a moment she had a vision of her Mother straining to interrupt them, but it slid off her mind as too sharp a thing to encompass. Once or twice she gave a fleeting thought to trains and travel, but that too slipped away. It seemed a prospect of impossible effort! Peter Keen? If he walked into the crimson-floored kitchen now? What would she do, with her body too weary to greet him? Perhaps she could rest herself against him, and sink deep, deep to some kind of peace. He had seemed to understand everything, would he understand how she felt now? She didn't know, and she stirred restlessly. The heat of her body or the heat of the black stove was stifling her. Wearily she raised a damper and looked at the size of the fire. It was red and glowing, but low enough to need replenishing. She took the black shovel in her hand and bent over the coal bucket. It seemed a long way from it to the open round hole in the stove, and she suddenly saw herself weary and bereft like something cast up by the tide which would never be reclaimed.

The banister rail creaked heavily and her Aunt's deep voice flowed down.

'Come up, my maid. We're going to have a word of prayer.'

As Isabel crawled up the stairs, hot waves engulfed her. When she entered her Mother's room, she saw the two black figures in position on either side of the feather bed. Mrs. Pyke lay like a log between them except for the restless life of the winking eye. Aunt Dorcas knelt with her large hands folded against her massive chest, and as soon as she saw her niece her lids fell heavily on her cheeks. The minister looked at home on his knees, and as if he were always a master in that position his eyes commanded Isabel to kneel down. She dropped hastily beside her Mother's wash-stand. It had a marble strip standing upright against the wall, and Isabel wished she could put her face against it. It looked so cool. But the minister's eyes were closed and he had thrown back his head. A crest of black hair reared up from his forehead, curved like an incoming wave on the beach. His voice came rapidly and fluently.

'Oh Gracious Lord and Father, Thou who hast seen it incumbent on Thyself to burden thine handmaiden with this heavy blow, grant that she may be given grace to bear her affliction with meekness, humility, and sweet submission to Thy will—'

The words whirled to the hot centre of Isabel's brain. 'Meekness, humility, and sweet submission?' In the thought that the minister hadn't looked into the winking eye, she lost several fluid sentences of the supplication. But her mind was caught again. 'Give her grace from out of her affliction to count her blessings, and though she is cut off from all activity, teach her to give thanks for the ministrations of a kind and loving daughter—'

Isabel's wide gaze was gathered to the one winking eye, and held in frustrated contempt. When it dismissed her to fasten on the minister, she felt limp. Fascinated she waited for its effect on the praying voice, and the black figure. No sealed eye could be sufficient protection from the dreadful scorn of the one-eyed glance! One-eyed, one-eyed? Who was one-eyed? Her brain was hot behind her burning forehead. Coveyduck of course, the one-eyed ship's carpenter. She had the impulse to rise from her knees and walk out over the Head. The wind would cool her, sweep the hair back from her hot face, and she would put her cheek against the rock, and let it whistle over her. One kneeling leg started to rise, but the praying voice held her again.

'And oh Lord, as each day passes from time into eternity, may she grow more ready to approach Thy mercy seat: to put behind her all earthly things and come before Thy presence with a song, where suffering is no more, where "they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint". Through the mercy of Jesus Christ Our Lord, Amen.'

Aunt Dorcas breathed a deep 'Amen', but Isabel rose quietly, and went down to the rocking-chair without a word.

When the lamps were lit Uncle Seth puffed up the lane again, with Aunt Maria Benjamin triumphantly by his side, and a list of volunteers for the next six nights. Isabel heard the names from a vast distance. Aunt Julia Wilkes, Cousin Emma, Annie Maude Penney, Lydia Rumsden, Susie Cruikshank, and Jessie Tibbo. Aunt Dorcas smiled at her kindly. ' 'Tis good news my maid: now we'll be able to take our rest regular.'

Isabel went to bed without making tea. She didn't wash, she didn't rub in any olive oil, she didn't even light the kerosene lamp. She dropped her clothes in a heap and crept under the honeycomb spread. The wind was rising and beat the lilac and syringa hard against the clap-board. The windows rattled and draughts blew over her head but they did nothing to cool it. All night she tossed in a restless fever, and woke ceaselessly to hear the wind and the sea, the

growing rap of the branches against the house and the creak of Aunt Maria's chair and Aunt Dorcas's profound breath.

The morning came grey and chill with increasing wind. The wooden house quivered in its blast, and lying in a sheath of burning skin Isabel longed to give her body to its breath. 'You look like Boreas, North wind, any wind.' The voice strayed through her memory. It was impossible to get up, but she heard her Mother's gabble, her Aunt Maria creak up from her chair and Aunt Dorcas turn over ponderously in the spare room. They would all want their breakfast and the kitchen stove wasn't lit yet! The habit of years made her put her feet out on the thin carpet, and she sat upright on the edge of the bed. All at once her teeth clattered together and a sharp pain stabbed her side. Her breath caught on a gasp and she put her hand over her heart. She knew she was ill, but with what? Her Mother's eye winked in her mind. 'The Wilkes' didn't lie down to illness.' She wasn't a Wilkes: she didn't want to be a Wilkes, but it was impossible for two people to be sick in one house at the same time. She stood up and the pain caught her again. She breathed lightly and it didn't hurt: she breathed deeply and the blood ran over her face. She would breathe lightly! She crossed the thin carpet and looked out through the blue white of the stiff curtains. The wind beat at the bare trees as if it would gouge them up by the roots. In the distance the sea rolled with savage abandon, and licked greedily up the deep indentations of the beach, like a row of foam-flecked tongues. Isabel shivered again but she washed her face and hands in icy water and put on a knitted dress. She was hot again, and recklessly wet her hair-brush and plastered her hair back from her burning face. She went downstairs and by breathing lightly and walking slowly she did her work, and lingered in the kitchen while the others ate their breakfast. Aunt Dorcas's deep voice came in low conversation while Aunt Maria Benjamin told the news of the night. Isabel didn't eat any breakfast herself, but as she was washing the remains of porridge and molasses from a soup plate a long shiver ran over her body and clattered her teeth together. It passed and left her limp. She finished her dishes. She would go upstairs and tell Aunt Dorcas she was ill and go to bed, but as she entered her Mother's room her Aunt was busy changing the bed, and she said without looking, 'that's right, my maid, I was just about to call you. You lift that side. There now, easy!' Isabel bent to her Mother's weight and the pain in her side cut her like a knife. She gave a deep gasp and the quick unguarded movement to get her breath brought her Mother's winking eye within a few inches of her face. It seemed to taunt her for the weakness of her body and when she could, she left the room without giving voice to her illness. She went into her own bedroom and closed the door. Listlessly she made the bed and tidied the room. With the wind howling in her ears and the misery of her body, desolation swept over her. A sob tore up through her body but it met the pain in her chest and the tears streamed over her face. The relief of crying was diminished by the extra strain on her breathing, and she strained to control her gasping sobs. Her throat worked until it held a hard pain, and when she was quiet again she went over and rested her forehead against the black backs of Washington Irving. Motionless she stood with her eyes closed and breathing so lightly that the pain was not reached. Confused and fevered, memory washed over her. Andalusia was under her forehead! She would be patient and wait. Peter Keen had told her that nothing lasted, everything changed, and no one note was struck for ever. She would remember! Soon she would pass out of this. The fever and misery of her body would leave her, something would be done about her Mother, and she could go to Andalusia where the wind was kind to growing things and the sea didn't strain to lick everything off the shore. There would be sun, gaiety, lightness, and love and the caress of soft voices. Drearily she ached for Peter Keen until her

longing swelled to a hunger of the spirit that distilled to a great physical pain. It met the hard ache in her throat, and the stabbing pain in her chest until her body felt like an overflowing container of pain. For a wild moment she thought she would burst wide open. Now restlessness besieged her and she jerked her head away from the black books. She couldn't rest in bed where thought leaped up and tortured her. She must work, wait, forget, and begin again. For a second she flicked her burning face with the icy face cloth and ran the comb through her hair. What did they have for dinner yesterday? Turnips and potatoes and fatback pork! There was still some in the house.

At midday dinner she found she had cooked turnips again. That was strange! She had meant to have carrots. She sat over a plate of mashed vegetables and turned them all over and over with her fork. Four strokes to flatten them down and three to mound them up again. Her Aunt's kind eyes regarded her thoughtfully. 'You're sick, my maid.'

'No, Aunt Dorcas, just tired.' Her voice was only a whisper. The strain of the few words made her heart beat fast, and she seemed to meet the pain with the lightest breath. Her chest felt as if it held no depth. Inconsequentially she thought, 'we have a little sister and she has no breasts.'

Her Aunt's bovine gaze was still on her hot face and she stirred restlessly.

The slow voice came, 'you've got fever, my maid. Your face looks very red. Lie down on your bed and I'll watch out for your Mother.'

'No, no, Aunt Dorcas,' she whispered. 'I'm going out. It's so close—I want some air.'

Her Aunt's eyes regarded her like the waters of a well a long way down.

'Close, my maid? The wind is blowing like a hurricane, and 'tis wonderful cold. 'Tis going to be a dreadful night. God pity the poor sailor.'

'I'll only go for a little while,' she muttered over shallow breath.

Her Aunt's eyes still studied her kindly. 'You're troubled, my maid. I can see it. Is it your Mother?'

'No, no it's nothing Aunt Dorcas. I'm just tired and I've got a cold.'

But the slow voice protested. ' 'Tis more than that, my maid. If you've got trouble, take it to the Lord. His love is all around us. 'Tis His love that we need, my maid—'

'No, no let me alone,' she said wildly with her heart running and leaping at every word. She jerked back a chair and picked up her untouched plate but her Aunt's voice held her. 'Yes, 'tis love we need my maid, the love of God. "Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it."'

Isabel dropped the plate. Who knew better than she?

'Let me go, let me go,' she sobbed wildly. She rushed up the stairs, with the pain catching her breath, her body a flame, and her heart beating its way out of her chest. She grabbed the envelope of Andalusia out of her black book and left it heedlessly on the floor: she tore her winter coat off its hook and for the first time in her life left a table of dirty dishes, and rushed out of the house. Her Aunt's slow movements only brought her to the front door as it slammed, and she stood heavily and uncertainly on her feet. For some time the massive figure paused irresolute, until a gabble came from overhead. Her cousin hadn't had her dinner. But what had come to the maid? She plodded back to the dining-room and her slow hands gathered up the plates. She would let her be. The young took their troubles to heart, but she listened to the wind, and the rap of the lilac and syringa, and she remembered Isabel's flushed face and her own heart was troubled. Heavily she prepared food for the twisted mouth of her Cousin Emily.

Chapter Thirteen

Out over the Head, Isabel rushed as fast as the stabbing pain would let her, but she breathed better out of doors. There wasn't a soul in sight and she had the whole of Helluland to herself. Andalusia was clutched in her hand, and when sometimes the wind and the pain threatened to take her breath, she placed the thick envelope across her mouth. The sea was like thunder in her ears, and pounded against the granite cliffs, and where she could see it breaking across the Bay, it leaped in white foam towards the black heads, to drop back to the churning waves beneath.

The wind was North East and blew from across the Bay. Isabel walked with a list to the right, and the full blast hit her on the side with the stabbing pain. Sometimes she thought it would bend her to the ground, then she leaned the other way, knowing its force would bear her up. Once or twice the shivering she had felt in the morning tore up through her body, and the burning heat left her, leaving her conscious of the bitter chill. She crouched down on a granite rock until the flames lapped her again, and brought her an exhilaration to go on.

The old square house came in sight, and as she went down the small slope, the horizon receded on an infinity of crested waves. To the right, to the left, and ahead they rose and fell, making and remaking deep green gulches in endless formation.

Isabel listed and panted towards her rock. Now she was unconscious of the pain in her side. A bird had entered her chest and was straining to get out! It beat its wings inside her and pecked with its beak at her chest. It was the gull! She ran on to shake it out, but the bird flew on inside her. She ran faster. It must leave her and fly out to sea. So much sea! 'Many waters cannot quench love, many waters cannot quench, neither can the floods drown it.' But the sea looked cool to the feel of her skin. If she dipped into it would the waves lap over her, and drown her love for Peter Keen? No, no, no! Aunt Dorcas had said 'many waters cannot quench love!' And there were many waters in Helluland: in the sea and out of the sea: ponds, arms, guts, rivers, stagnant pools, wells, springs. 'Many waters, many waters in Helluland!' Her voice kept whispering it, and the wind blew the words away from her lips. Here was the rock and in her last run towards it, the bird nearly left her chest. It made such a struggle to get out, but she sat down, and the bird sat down with her. She tore at her neck and opened her coat to let it out, while she turned to let the North East wind cool the fever of her face. With Andalusia clutched in her hand she threw back her head, and let the full force of the gale assault her body. The suns of Andalusia were on her flesh, until the shivering shook her again and she felt the breath of Helluland. Grabbing and clutching at the collar of her coat, she turned her back to the wind. Her teeth chattered in icy chill, and she sagged inside her cloth coat. The sounds from her mouth were like the castanets of Andalusia and she rocked to and fro until the heat of it came back again.

Then she saw Josiah! He was walking on the Head in a blue coat with brass buttons, and a peaked Captain's cap. She started towards him, but her strength failed and she fell back on the rock. Where was Josiah? He would help her towards the steps of Head House, but Josiah was gone, and she started up again. The wind beat her down, so she crawled slowly on her hands and knees, with the long white envelope scraping along the ground. At last she reached the decaying steps, and with labouring breath reached the top and huddled in the well of the door. But she had brought the bird with her and it pecked at her side with its cruel beak. When it got

out she knew it would turn and look at her, and for a moment she covered her eyes with her sleeve. Now she was cold: cold like the ice from the North: cold like the rolling sea, cold as the eyes of the gulls. The wind pierced her thin coat, turned her feet to lumps of ice, and whipped her hair into thin strips like flicking wires. They blew away from her face, and blew back again to hit her in thin streaks of pain. Her hands were white and dead, and she thrust them in her pockets. Andalusia dropped down a step! She didn't heed until a gust of wind moved it with a dry husky sound. The fever came back to her body and she swooped towards it. Andalusia! Cordova, Seville and Granada! The old house shook and shivered behind, but she sat warmly now in its shelter. She was in Spain! Orange, olive, palm, and pomegranate! How much money had she left? The white envelope was heavy in her hand. She hadn't spent much. Eighty-five dollars, wrapped up in her Chinese dressing gown! With a quick gesture she thrust her fingers inside and drew out the notes. She held them high in the air and they dripped from her fingers and fell in her lap, green and fresh and flat. She picked them up again. Granada! Glowing and ardent like the sun. Long convulsive shudders tore up through her body, and she doubled up to a wild peck from the bird in her chest. A hacking cough fluttered the notes of Andalusia, and they flopped down a step. The white envelope left them with a dry scrape and whirled independently out to sea. For a while the notes moved heavily in a lump, until they reached the bit of gravel below the bottom step, and then they all went their different ways. They scraped and scratched and stuck to the scrub: were liberated by the wind, whirled along for a space, to catch and stick again.

Isabel sat with her hands lying like cold stones in her lap, and watched the flapping movements of the notes of Andalusia. But the wind urged them towards the edge of the cliff, and one by one they reached the end of the promontory! The light dimmed and only the white crested tops of the waves were visible.

Then Josiah came back! She called to him and her voice came over a curious rattle, but he turned his head and started to walk towards her. The light went, the notes of Andalusia took their last flutter in the dark, the sea was a sound instead of a sight, the wind rushed across the Head, pushed past the house, which rocked and shook at her back, but she still crouched at its door talking and croaking to Josiah! The wind carried away whispers of orange, olive, palm, and pomegranate, calumys and saffron, of Helluland and Andalusia, of a gold tissue dress, of yellow-eyed gulls, and a winking eye, of Headman's Cove, and a head like a copper kettle. In a voice with a curious rattle, and a breath that could be heard above the screech of the wind, she talked to Josiah in his Captain's cap. The voice that had died to conversation when Peter Keen left her, gave its secrets to the savage night. The wind tore them away from her lips, swept them across the Head, and out to sea after the notes of Andalusia! Cordova, Seville, and Granada.

Back in the house on the lane Dorcas Penney sat by her cousin's bed and clicked her knitting-needles. Emily Pyke dozed on her back, and her breathing held long strangled sounds. Dorcas Penney creaked down the stairs and clicked her needles again in the sight of the Grandfather's clock. She left the dark dining-room, and plodded to a pantry window, commanding a view of the sea, and her brown eyes grew troubled. She stirred the fire and put on the kettle, and when the light faded she lit the kerosene lamp, and its glow turned the crimson floor to dusky red. With the lamp in her hand she went into the dining-room and held it high to the face of the Grandfather's clock. Fifteen minutes after six! The heavy head rolled sorrowfully, and the massive bulk went back to the kitchen. As fast as her slow-moving body

could go she prepared tea, cut the bread and butter for her cousin Emily, and creaked up the stairs with the tray. It took a long time before she was down again, when the hands of the clock pointed to after seven. She opened the front door and the wind assaulted her face. She shut it again and moved with the decision of a slow mind made up. Emma Wilkes was coming to sit up that night! Dorcas Penney found a scrap of paper and a stub of pencil and wrote a note. She might pass Emma on the beach! Well and good! Again, she might not. She placed the note on the flat post at the foot of the stairs, and left a lamp in the hall. For a while her calm eyes watched the flame bend and flicker with the vibrations of the house and the encircling draughts, and her eyes turned doubtfully towards the stairs. Her lids dropped while her lips moved, silently in prayer, towards an audible Amen. God was good! He would watch the lamp, as she had to go out and look for her niece. Calmly she placed a neat black hat over her bun of hair, put on a loose coat and gave her body to the wind.

An hour later the springs of Joe Perry's square bodied wagon sagged beneath her weight. She took up the whole of the slippery back seat, with a pair of blankets across her knees, and a dusty bottle of port held upright between her large hands. When she was settled in black imponderable bulk she gave the command to go. Joe Perry whipped up his horse, and the sound of the iron rimmed wheels scrunched above the sound of the wind. Uncle Seth sat in front holding a lantern in his hands. Another stood on the floor of the wagon, and threw their faces in white relief against the black of the night.

They crossed the beach in the teeth of the gale, curved and turned towards the promontory, and the full blast of the North East wind rushed past their faces in hostile haste. Aunt Dorcas directed, and the calm roundness of her voice was unchanged by the urgency of her search, or the wild touch of the wind. 'Seth keep your lantern to the side of the road. Look sharp for the poor maid.'

Her husband bawled back. 'How did you think to come here, woman?'

'She walks this way by day, and where else would her feet take her but the way she's gone all her life? I should have come after her before. God help the poor maid if she's been lying out in this weather. I ought to have known. Her face was full of trouble.'

Every word came roundly to her husband's ear. 'Tush, woman, tush, don't be blamin' yourself. You've been wearin' yourself out for that Mother of hers ever since she was taken sick, and she wouldn't be where she is now if she hadn't been that good to herself, feeding her face from morning till night.'

'Hush, Seth. 'Tis the will of God.'

'Nonsense woman, unless 'tis the will of God to shut that carping tongue. Poor Bella. It must be sweet to her, her Mother's silence.'

'Hush, Seth, we mustn't question. The ways of the good God are inscrutable and strange.'

'Too strange, on a night like this, woman. I've never seen it worse at sea. There'll be trees and fences down to-night. Wonder what could have come to the maid?'

'She must have been taken bad and fallen down by the way. She had fever in her eyes before she left.'

Joe Perry answered instead of her husband. 'Well I hope she was taken before she reached the house Ma'am. I've no likin' for this drive.'

Dorcas Penney's voice spoke to the back of his neck with implacable calm. 'Let fear lend wings to your horse, Joe Perry, and I'll not mind your feelings.'

The oracular voice induced silence and instinctively he flicked the back of his labouring beast. Uncle Seth peered to right and to left with the lantern held high in his hand. Aunt

Dorcas raised the other from the floor and did the same thing. The wind blew between her lids and she felt the cold on her eyes, but she narrowed her gaze and peered into the night.

The lanterns revealed patches of gaunt scrub, loose boulders, and granite rocks emerging from scraggy grass, but no sign of Isabel. In the distance the dark sea threw up crested lines of white-capped waves, which became clearer as they drove nearer and nearer to the edge of the promontory. The wagon wheels jolted in and out of the deep ruts and threw their bodies backwards and forwards, until at last they reached the end of the track, when the wagon stopped with a sudden jolt.

‘This is where I stop ma’am. I’ve got to mind my horse.’

Joe Perry looped the reins around the carriage lamp and leaped out to the uneven track.

‘Help me down, Joe Perry.’ And he gave his hand obediently to the heavy descent. As Dorcas Penney dropped from one side, her husband dropped from the other and the wagon rose perceptibly in height.

The wind made free with their garments and struck on their flesh with an icy breath.

‘What do we do now Dorcas? She’s not here.’ The lantern gleamed on the pouches of his face, as he lifted it to speak to his wife. Implacably she gazed back, with the black folds of her loose coat billowing around her. ‘Seek until we find Seth. Give me a lantern and we’ll go ahead. I’ll carry the port and Joe’ll carry the blankets.’

‘Sorry ma’am, I’ve got to stay with m’ horse.’

‘Your horse will stand, Joe Perry. Carry the blankets. ’Tis a bad night to stay alone with all your fears.’

‘Yes,’ bawled her husband, ‘you might meet Josiah when you’re all alone Joe, and then where would you be?’

The man seized the blankets and followed close to their solid bodies. They plodded, listed to the wind, with their lanterns gleaming to right and to left, over the trackless Head until they came to the desolate house. Black and square it rose to their eyes, with the wind rushing by.

‘The Head House!’ gasped Joe Perry.

‘Tis not goin’ to bite you man,’ bawled Seth Penney gasping with the strain of his portly weight.

They skirted the rear of the house, past the well and a small outhouse, round to the front where the full blast of the wind blew them to the bottom of the decaying steps. A flat note of Andalusia hit Joe Perry in the face and his thin scream could be heard above the roar of the wind.

‘Hold your tongue man,’ commanded Dorcas Penney. ‘Hark, what’s that?’

She paused to listen with her black coat streaming forward.

A hacking cough came to her ears over a dreadful bubbling breath, and a voice croaked incessantly in a husky whisper. Aunt Dorcas lifted her lantern and the high beam found the figure of her niece huddled in the faded front door of the tormented house. As Isabel’s wide eyes flinched from the light she threw her arm across her face.

‘The eyes of the gull, the eyes of the gull,’ she croaked. ‘Take it away, take it away.’

Aunt Dorcas’s ponderous figure swayed up the stairs. She laid her lantern on the steps and painfully knelt to the level of her niece. Her husband and Joe Perry crowded behind her kneeling figure, and silently they listened to the dreadful breath and glimpsed the wide eyes staring unseeingly past them.

‘What’s come to you, my maid? ’Tis your old Aunt, come to take you home.’

‘Time to go home, time to go home. Got to put on the kettle for tea. Good-bye Peter, good-bye. Now it’s for ever but I’m going to Andalusia, Cordova, Seville—’ The husky voice was lost in a dreadful cough and Aunt Dorcas put her arms around the racked body, but it threw her aside and strained for its breath.

Dorcas Penney rose heavily to her feet and spread out her coat to take the wind. When the coughing was spent Isabel crumpled up in the doorway.

‘What’ll we do, Dorcas? She sounds wonderful bad.’

‘You’re right, Seth. We can’t take her home. We must break in the house.’

‘Break in Head House, ma’am. ’Tis better to chance the ride in the wagon.’

‘That’s quite enough, Joe Perry. We need help now, not hindrance. You and Seth go round to the back and break in the back door. There’s sure to be a stove and perhaps a bit of wood. ’Tis not so long since the house was lived in and it’s better than risking the poor maid’s life any further. Make haste now and when you break in, come round to the front. Pull from the back and I’ll push from the front, but easy now! The poor maid is right in the way.’

They left her in black silence with her body filling the well of the door. Above the howl of the wind she heard the back door give way, and when they were on the other side, with the front door between, she leaned her body towards the inward pull. The door burst open and a cold wave of damp air rushed out in her face. Isabel’s body fell at their feet and her voice croaked on to the dirty floor.

Aunt Dorcas bent and raised her to the massive bulk of her bosom.

‘Seth, lift her poor feet. There now my maid. ’Tis just your old Aunt.’

With her Aunt at her head and her Uncle at her feet Isabel Pyke entered Head House.

Chapter Fourteen

Dorcas Penney sat in the kitchen of Head House between the guttering flame of the two murky lanterns.

The wooden chairs that had stood in the sun to hold the pictures of Isabel Pyke now joined their seats to make her a bed. Aunt Dorcas had commanded the shiny leather seats from Joe Perry’s square-bodied wagon, and Isabel tossed restlessly on them, wrapped in the pair of blankets with Aunt Dorcas’s black coat folded to a pillow.

The rusty stove held a gleam of fire. They had found some wood, a bit of coal, and a blunt and rusty tomahawk. With difficulty Joe Perry had cleaved some splits, and because they had no paper Uncle Seth had whittled some shavings with his knife. The splits had smouldered and caught, but the chimney was damp, and Isabel nearly hacked her life away with the extra strain of the smoke. They had carried her into the hall, and Aunt Dorcas had kept her there, until Joe Perry had gone back to his wagon. Her niece’s strange delirium was not for his ears! But the chimney warmed, and her Aunt and Uncle carried her back to the kitchen and placed her on the bed of wooden chairs. Now Uncle Seth had followed Joe Perry, and they were jolting back to the village to collect food and fuel, linseed meal and muslin, clothes and bedding, saucepans and kettles, and to send Isabel’s wash and scrub woman to stay, up in the house on the lane.

Dorcas Penney dug at the damper of the stove with a bit of stick, and tended the fire with what fuel she had. The bottle of port stood warming on the fender in front of the rusty bars, and every now and then she poured a few drops between Isabel’s talking lips.

The wind pushed at the house and rushed past, until another gust crouched for a minute’s lull, and then pounced with a new violence to sweep it out of its path. Because it couldn’t roar

through the house it clamoured with a thousand voices at its walls, screaming to get in. When it dropped for a second's lull it whistled and wailed in tormented frustration.

The house strained on its foundation of granite stones, and threatened to leave it with every blast of wind. But Josiah and Coveyduck had built to last, and Aunt Dorcas blessed the tale of the hammer. She sat close to the side of the wooden chairs, and watched the wide-open eyes, and feverish cheeks of her niece. Her incessant husky voice had revealed and repeated most of her golden happiness and autumn desolation, mixed up with the Song of Solomon, and strange countries called Helluland and Andalusia. Aunt Dorcas's sorrowful ears received the story in profound calm, but she talked tranquilly to her niece in her deep voice which seemed to soothe and quiet her. Isabel kept trying to get off her chairs and her hot hands beat themselves against the wooden rungs. She was restrained only when her Aunt spoke to her, so the two talked to the wild accompaniment of the wind.

'Look, look, there's a gull—a gull with yellow eyes. It's looking at me.' Her arm was thrown across her face. 'Take it away, take it away.' The husky voice tried to scream and died to a strangled croak.

Aunt Dorcas lumbered off her chair, and beat the air between the two murky lanterns. 'Yes, yes, my maid, I'll drive it out. There now! 'Tis gone. Lie down and let me cover you up. 'Tis your old Aunt that's watching. Nothing can hurt you, not even the gull. The love of God —'

'Many waters cannot quench love, many waters cannot quench love—' The voice went on in maddening husky monotony, and Aunt Dorcas sighed heavily. 'Neither can the floods drown it my maid.' But the voice took that up and her Aunt began to pray until Isabel's voice died to a husky whisper.

'O God, heal the poor maid. Lay not this sin at her door. 'Twas the fault of her elders letting her work away with nothing to enrich her life. Man cannot live by bread alone. Thou knowest that O heavenly Father, and she was raised without love. Save her O Lord that I may not reproach myself for the rest of my life. I let her go rushing out, with the fever in her face and her lungs bursting with sickness—' A gust of wind nearly shattered the house and Isabel strained to leave her chairs with her eyes wild and black. 'There, there, lie down my maid. 'Tis only the wind.' Isabel quieted and the black figure sagged back on its chair, while the deep voice whispered on. 'O Lord, be merciful to-night to those that go down to the sea in ships and do business in great waters. Remember the sailor's prayer, O Lord be good to my boat, the sea is so wide and my boat is so small—'

Isabel was coughing her life out, and her face was turning blue.

With the bottle of warm port in her hand her Aunt leaned over and raised her to her massive bosom. But the face with the Slavic cheek bones had turned deathly pale, and the port ran down in a long red stain. She propped the bottle against the back of a chair and put a large thumb and finger on Isabel's wrist. 'Poor maid your heart is running out.'

Isabel's wide grey eyes focused on her for a second. 'Aunt Dorcas's voice Peter. 'Twas always kind, so deep, Mother's voice—'

The faint husky whisper trailed away and her head slumped against her Aunt's black bodice. She tried the port again but it ran out in the same red streak. There was no sound of the laboured breath. Isabel's heart had run out! The gull had left her breast!

Dorcas Penney held the limp body for some minutes, gazing into the sightless eyes. Wide open they looked back at her with an emptiness of life. With two large fingers she pressed and held the lids down, until the black lashes rested in a dark segment on the Slavic cheek bones.

She composed the long body and laid it straight on the chairs. Then she sat between the murky lanterns waiting for the return of the wagon. Two tears ran heavily down either cheek but they flowed unregarded towards the high black bodice. Her eyes were closed, and her lips moved in constant prayer, until her ears became impervious to the roar of the sea and the screech of the wind. Solid and withdrawn she prayed silently with moving lips, until she heard the creak of the wagon and the scunch of the wheels. Before she left the Head she let herself out for a breath of air. As she lumbered down the mouldering steps, her eyes contracted in their heavy shadows, but her massive chest expanded to receive long draughts of windswept air. The sea pounded against the cliffs and rolled mountainously towards the horizon. When the stuffiness of the kitchen was out of her nose she turned to go, and saw something green fluttering at her feet. Without amazement she bent wearily and picked it up, gazing at it with brooding eyes. With a slow glance at the windows of the house she pushed it inside her bodice and once more mounted the decaying steps.

Her Aunt brought Isabel across the beach, past her own lane, over the rail way-track, and into her own small parlour. It was evening before she lay long and still, clothed in her Sunday dress, with her smooth hands folded across the smocking round her waist. The Aunts and Uncles had made a posy from their potted plants and the pale hands loosely clasped a single rose, folded in a clump of drooping fuschia. In the light of the kerosene lamp the red of the fuschia looked like a spot of blood. Aunt Dorcas held the lamp high. She was alone with her niece while the sound of many muted voices came from the dining-room. Her profound whisper filled the silent parlour.

‘’Tis just you and me, my maid. They’ll never know. You won’t go down like Elfrieda. You both met love and took it, and perhaps where you’re going she’ll bear you up. The Lord bless you and keep you and cause His Face to shine upon you. Rest quiet my maid.’

Isabel Pyke rested on. The pendant lustres winked above her head, and sent out gay gleams from the flame of the kerosene lamp, but her black lashes with brown tips were sealed to life and colour. Her Aunt walked heavily around the coffin and laid down the lamp. With a sigh she sat down and sagged inside her wrinkled clothes. For a moment her hands fumbled in a small drawer until they found an envelope, a piece of paper, a pen, and a bottle of ink. Only then she searched inside her bodice and extracted a bit of crumpled green. She flattened it out with her heavy hand, folded it inside the sheet of paper, slipped it inside the envelope, licked, and sealed it with a ponderous fist. Slowly and laboriously she addressed it and the fine pen scratched out, ‘To the Chinese Millions, Foreign Missionary Society, London, England.’ With the envelope in her hand she left Isabel alone in the parlour. In the dark hall she put on her hat and coat and let herself out into the night. The wind had gone down and a few stars gleamed overhead, behind dark scudding clouds. She stopped and looked up with tired eyes. The thick lips murmured audibly, ‘When I consider Thy Heavens, the work of Thy fingers, the moon and the stars which Thou hast ordained: what is man that Thou art mindful of him?’

She plodded on to the post-office to post her letter, and as she returned to her home her husband was waiting at the storm-door.

‘Dorcas woman come in and rest. You’ve done it all and it’s time you had a spell.’

‘Yes Seth I’ll be glad of a rest. Send someone to Emily and I’ll go to bed.’

Her husband drew her across the threshold and her own stairs creaked to her tired weight.

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been fixed.
[The end of *The Eyes of the Gull* by Margaret Duley]