

AT CAPRI'S POINT.

It was a dull, dreary place, with nothing but the sound of the sea as it flashed monotonously upon the long stretch of gray sands. There were a few fishing boats drawn up upon the beach, and a few weather-beaten huts dotting the shore, where the owners of these boats tried to live. One could not imagine the sound of merry voices or of little children playing there; it was easier to picture the little boats gone down into the sea, and the voices hushed, and the children weeping.

Even when the boats came safe into port, the joyous words of welcome died away in the monotonous sound of the waves.

"They are safe this time, but they must go again and again, and the sea is always cruel. It may be soon or it may be late, but some time the boats will not come back."

Dull, dark and dreary, with dread overhanging the present and sorrow foreshadowing the future—this is Capri's Point.

Just now, out on the sands, a fisherman is making ready to set sail. He is a big, merry-hearted fellow of thirty or thereabouts. His golden curling hair and laughing blue eyes are in strong contrast to the scene around him. It would seem that his careless confidence and light-heartedness were almost a challenge to the sea to do its worst; so it appears to his wife as she stands on the beach watching him, with a half-scared, half-admiring gaze as he whistles at his work.

She is a tall, thin woman, with raven hair, dark, haggard eyes, and lines of anxiety written deep in her face; she looks five years older than her husband. It is easier to brave danger than to wait at home.

He is ready to put off at last, and steps ashore. The two comrades who are to accompany him busy themselves in the boat. He takes her up in his arms and presses her close against his heart. Ah, carelessness is often the highest kind of courage! It is only the brave man who faces death with a smile on his lips.

"Good-bye, Jeannie, good-bye," he whispers.

The woman on his breast shakes with suppressed sobbing.

"If anything should happen—" Her voice breaks.

"God be with you, then!" he says solemnly, and with a last kiss he puts her gently away and springs into the boat.

She watches him until the boat is a tiny speck in the distance. A group of fishermen pass her as she stands straining her eyes for a last look; they lower their voices—ah, anxiety and sorrow are on intimate terms with these folk at Capri's Point!

At length, with a sound in her throat half sob, half sigh, she turns her set white face toward home. Oh, how much poor, suffering humanity can hear! How much it bears without a murmur, while it lingers over its daily task!

As she turns, blind, dizzy, seeing only the empty future, she almost runs into a woman standing a few steps away from her. "Look out!" the other exclaims sharply. Jeanette stops short. A look of fury comes into her white face.

"You dared to come and see him off! You have been watching him as long as I have! I hate you, Lois Fairbanks!"

The woman to whom this passionate outbreak is addressed surveys her insolently, almost curiously.

"You do love him a little yourself? I never thought a pale, cold thing like you could! Well, there's 'no judging a seal by its skin,' after all. As to daring to see him off," she added contemptuously, "I didn't know there was any price set on watching the boats put off, or him either."

The woman was young and a beauty in her way. The red blood surged in her cheeks, her dark eyes flashed fire, and her softly rounded form quivered with passion, despite the calm insolence of her voice.

Jeanette looked at her steadily. She had grown ghastly as she talked, and there were hard lines about her close shut mouth. Several times of late she had heard her husband's name coupled with Lois Fairbanks'. Once she had gone so far as to speak to him of it, and he had laughed and kissed her, and asked if she was growing jealous.

"Did he—did he know—" she began. But she could not let this woman think that she doubted him, and broke off.

"Yes, he knew I was coming," she answered eagerly. "If I had got here a little sooner he might have kissed me instead of you."

Jeanette drew a quick breath, turned and ran swiftly home.

Lois Fairbanks stood and watched her with a look of unutterable hatred. Her bosom heaved with passion.

"What has love to do with a thing like that?" she muttered. "I love him a thousand times better than she does—than she is capable of loving!"

Jeanette flung open the door of her own little cottage, swung it after her, and fell on her knees by the lounge, burying her face in its cushions. For a little while she sobbed violently, then, as she grew calmer, she prayed to God to take away these unworthy suspicions, to give her back the old trusting faith in her husband that was hers when he held her in his arms such a little while ago. Only to see his face for one moment—to hear his merry, honest voice tell her it was not true. Not true! How

could it be true? How dared she doubt him, with his kiss hardly cold upon her lips? Suppose he should never come back, could she ever forgive herself? The woman was only trying to exasperate her. She was a fool even to notice it. She got upon her feet, bathed her face, and went resolutely about her work.

The days crept by—that was all they ever did at Capri's Point. To Jeanette it seemed as though she had suspended existence until her husband's return. Her life was centered in one frail fishing boat somewhere out on the countless miles of ocean. Nothing in the world could matter—nothing affect her—if that one boat came safe into port.

As the time drew near for his return, she would watch on the sands by the hour to catch the first glimpse of his sail. But he did not come. By and by it seemed to her that the fishermen cast pitying glances at her, and the fishermen's wives avoided her. Perhaps they had news which they dared not tell. The thought cast a chill on her heart. Months crept past—the suspense became unbearable.

It was a day in the autumn. She had been watching on the sands all the afternoon. She was faint and cold, but she was bracing herself to bear the worst. On her way home she stopped at one of the rude homes along the shore. The fisherman and his wife who lived there were elderly people. The old man had given over going to sea, and stopped at home mending nets, drying fish, and doing one thing and another on the shore. They had been always kind to Jeanette—had known her and loved her in girlhood days, had tended her in their kind, gruff fashion, once when she was ill and her husband was off on a fishing trip. They would tell her the truth, she thought.

The early twilight was fast deepening, and the old couple were aiding their failing sight by the light of two sputtering candles. The fisherman was bending his head closely over a torn net he was trying to mend, while the woman was stirring the fire and adding to it sticks of driftwood gathered from fragments of a wreck cast ashore at Capri's Point. They both looked up when Jeanette entered, and it seemed to her that their faces wore a questioning, pitying expression.

The old woman noted her pinched, worn look.

"Come to the fire, Jeanette," she said. "It's bitter cold, and you've been watching out on the sands again, I trow."

Jeanette only nodded her head. She drew nearer to the fire, and the old couple exchanged glances over her head. Suddenly she wheeled about.

"I cannot bear it any longer! she said in a labored way, as if it was difficult to speak. "This is killing me! It there is anything you have to tell me, I had better know it. I can bear it better than this. Don't be afraid to speak."

The old man bent his head lower over the net he was mending, and his fingers trembled at his work. His wife kept behind Jeanette, and busied herself with filling the kettle and setting it to boil.

Jeanette faced the old man.

"There is something—I see it in the way your hand shakes and you bend your head! What have you heard?"

"Nothing, Jeanette," he said huskily. "Nothing, and no news is good news."

"What do you guess, then? What do you suspect? Has there been a storm in the way he sailed? Tell me—I can bear it, I tell you!" she went up to him, and took the net out of his fingers.

He was pale through the dark brown of his weather-stained skin; the sweat stood on his brow, and his hands shook nervously. He looked at his wife.

"Tell her. She will have to know some time," he said.

"Yes, tell me," Jeanette repeated after him. The woman came and put her wrinkled hand on the younger one's shoulder.

"It is harder to bear, dear, than as it his boat had gone down to the bottom of the ocean; harder to bear! You must not grieve too much—he is not worth it."

"What is it?"

Jeanette could not say the words; she merely formed them with her lips.

"They say, dear—try and bear it, little one—that he has run away with Lois Fairbanks. He never meant to come back—"

Jeanette staggered, and the older woman put her strong arm around her.

"Then it was true—all true!" she murmured.

In a moment she freed herself from the sustaining arm, and stood erect before them.

"Go on. I interrupted you," she said. Tell me the rest."

"He never meant to come back," the old woman repeated. "It was all arranged before he started for her to meet him over at the Cove. She paid one of the boys to take her there; he was waiting. The boy saw him and saw her go up and speak to him. A man like that isn't worth breaking your heart over, is he, my dear?"

Jeanette smiled a strange, icy smile. If she had tried to explain it, she might have said that it is oftentimes the most unworthy over whom hearts are broken.

"I am going—I want to be alone," she said.

"You won't do yourself any harm?" the old woman asked anxiously, following her to the door.

"Any harm? No! What harm could happen to me now?" she replied.

When she had gone the old wife said to her husband:

"It was a hard thing to do."

"Better for you to tell her than anyone else," he answered, as he stooped and picked up his net.

Jeanette could not have told how she lived through the next few months, doing the same old things with their never varying monotony. She did them unheeding, her eyes always turned on the bitter soul within. It was as the fisherman's wife said; if he had been dead she could have borne it; but this! She had loved him with an intensity that admitted nothing else into her world. If he had died, all this love might have been turned into passionate grief; but now there was nothing left—nothing!

One day, as she wondered aimlessly along the sands, she caught a stray word or two from a group of sailors who had just landed in port. They talked of misery and sorrow in a city they had touched along the coast. As sorrow is ever akin to sorrow, she drew near and listened. It was an agonizing tale they had to tell of a vast city stricken with small-pox. She forgot herself in this awful story. When the sailors were ready to pull back to their vessels she begged them to take her with them, and put her ashore in the unfortunate city, which they finally consented to do.

For weeks she nursed the plague-stricken victims in this place. She had put aside her own sorrows in the suffering and death agonies of others. One day she had watched one man die—he was the last of a family she had been nursing—and she left him to go to a woman who had sent repeatedly for her. As she drew near the bed in the squalid little room, the sufferer lying there opened her dark, piercing eyes, bright with fever; then the eyes took on a frightened look. She writhed in the bed and sought to turn away her face, but it was too late for Jeanette had recognized her.

"Lois Fairbanks!" she exclaimed.

"Go away, and let me die!" the other muttered.

Jeanette drew close and leaned over the bed. Her white, set face was opposite Lois Fairbanks'. Her black eyes held the dead, fevered ones.

"Where is he? Is he dead?" she asked, with trembling eagerness.

"Whom do you mean?" the woman answered.

"Do not mock me, Lois Fairbanks! I mean my husband!"

"Your husband?" she asked comprehendingly. "I thought his boat never came back."

"It never did come back. But you—you were with him—"

"I never was!" Lois raised herself up on her elbow. "I am going to die," she said, "and I want to make it all right. I loved him, but he never cared for me. I followed him that day, but he would not listen to me. I waited by his boat until after the boy had put off to come home. I wanted him to tell you. I hated you so. I hate you yet—and I am going to die. I dared not die without telling you. If I should meet him he would curse me."

She sank back on the pillow exhausted. After a time she raved incoherently, and when morning dawned, she was dead.

It seemed to Jeanette she could not bear it any longer. Worn with watching, sorrow and this last revelation, she went out on the sands and paced up and down like a mad creature.

She had doubted him and he had been so true—and now he was dead! She could never fall at his feet and ask him to forgive her—only to tell him it was through her very love she had sinned—can there be love without jealousy?

At last she grew calmer. It had grown late. She had spent the day out on the sands. It seemed to her she could not go back to the loathsome, suffering people. She yearned for the dreary monotony of Capri's Point. To see again the familiar stretch of beach; the dingy cottage, the place where his fishing boat had anchored; the spot on the sands his feet had pressed that last time when he kissed her good-bye. Oh, to see them all again, and then—she need not think.

There was a vessel in the harbor preparing to set sail. She hurried down to it and asked one of the seamen if they would put her ashore at Capri's Point. The man told her they were sailing in another direction. She turned away despairing and disappointed. A fisherman who was lounging along the shore and had overheard her question followed her as she turned away, and told her that he was about to put off and was intending to land at the Point. If she didn't mind the fishing boat, she was welcome to go along.

She accepted his offer gratefully, and they put off together. It was early twilight. There was a strong breeze, and the tide was rising. She sank down in the end of the boat, and the fisherman, true to his craft, was silent. The wind was blowing freshly.

Presently the man broke the silence. It had grown quite dark.

"It'll be a rough night," he said.

"Any harm? No! What harm could happen to me now?" she replied.

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