

A "NATIVE"

By M. LOUISE CUMMINS

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"Oh, Gertrude, won't you help me peel these peaches? It's most train time, and supper isn't anywhere near ready."

The voice came with a pleasantly suggestive clink of dishes through the screen door to where Gertrude Woodford stood under a large elm.

"I think the train is in," she answered, entering the cool, pleasant house in answer to her mother's call.

"For the land's sake!" Mrs. Woodford turned to her handmaid and gave an order with some asperity. Keeping summer boarders was really the one excitement of her dull life, eagerly looked forward to during the long winter months when her daughter pursued her musical career in the city and she lived alone on the rugged Cape.

"Small this year, aren't they?" she said, watching her daughter's pretty bent head and referring to the fruit.

"Not more so than usual," the girl laughed.

"Well, I don't care," Mrs. Woodford declared. "Mr. Garst says he never tasted sweeter peaches, and as to Mr. Clifford—"

"Who's trifling with my august appellation?" called a gay voice as a young fellow swung himself on to the piazza. "Miss Woodford, I don't know which I shall devour first, you or the peaches, I'm so ravenous!"

"I was just going to say that your appetite was all right anyhow," Mrs. Woodford laughed. "Did your cousin come down with you?" she added.

"Yes, Garst got as far as the ham-

mock and collapsed."

"Go and call him, Gertrude. Supper is ready," her mother said.

The girl rose and went through the hall. Inside the door she paused, looking with darkening eyes at the man who lay full length in the hammock.

The slight clash of the screen as she stepped outside caused him to turn. He sprang up at once and came toward her, showing a strong, clean shaven face and a figure singularly muscular in spite of the fact that he walked with a slight limp.

"It is heavenly here after even a day in town," he said. "I have just been thinking that the most marvelous changes in our lives come when we least expect them. I wonder if you know what this summer has been to me?"

He was looking gravely into her eyes, and the color mounted to her temples.

"Stephen, the fish is getting cold," his cousin called impatiently, and Gertrude went quickly into the house.

In compliance with a previous promise to Jack Clifford she went with him after supper to see the sunset from a hill near by. When they were seated on a boulder watching the vast sweep of ocean and crimsoning sky she turned suddenly to her companion.

"Why is Mr. Garst lame?" she asked gently.

"Well, I suppose it won't do any harm to tell you," Jack hesitated, "though we never speak of it when he is present. His leg was crushed in a railway accident trying to save the girl to whom he was engaged."

"Did he save her?"

"Yes."

"Then why were they not married?"

"Oh, she threw him over for a man twice his age and the trifling adjunct of \$3,000,000!"

Gertrude Woodford drew her breath sharply.

"She tried to stuff it down Stephen's throat that she was sacrificing herself to save her father from financial ruin, and I think he believed her," Jack went on. "Then she attempted a platonic correspondence with him after her marriage, but he would have none of it. All the same I don't believe he has ever quite forgotten her. Anyway, he could not do so now, even if he would."

"What do you mean?"

"For she is come, for she is here," as Jean Ingelow says in 'The Letter L.'"

"Here?"

"Yes, at the Ocean View. I saw her on the piazza tonight as I came up from the train. Handsomer than ever, by Jove! Tall woman, with bronze hair."

"Bronzed, you mean. I saw her arrive this morning," Gertrude said coldly.

"The old man very considerably 'shuffled off this mortal coil' two years ago, leaving her complete mistress of his millions," Jack rambled on. "My own opinion is that this alighting next door to where she knew Stephen was staying in the subdued attractiveness of second mourning is the beginning of the end. You should have seen him start when he saw her on the hotel piazza tonight."

Gertrude rose quickly.

"How cold it is up here," she said, with a shiver. "Let us get back to the house."

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A group from the summer hotels and cottages was standing near Mrs. Woodford's house watching the sunset when they descended. Gertrude would have passed on, but Jack Clifford detained her. Unwilling as she was, she had to submit to an introduction to Mrs. Armitage, Stephen Garst's former fiancée. The latter turned to her at once, with a scrutinizing look. The girl was too pretty not to be dangerous.

"It is beautiful here in these late summer weeks," she drawled.

"I think it beautiful at all times. The Cape is my home," Gertrude answered quietly.

"Indeed! Then you are a native. I should hardly have thought it."

A faint color rose under the girl's skin at the supercilious tone.

"Miss Woodford's forefathers settled here over 200 years ago," Garst broke in quietly. "I believe her ancestors for six generations back are buried in the little cemetery at Plum Cove. Not many of us can go as far back as that."

Mrs. Armitage looked quickly from Garst to the girl beyond him. But Gertrude had left the group with her head held high. She wanted none of Garst's vindication of her family. She had almost reached the house when he overtook her.

"One moment," he pleaded. "I want so much to speak to you tonight."

"I am afraid I must ask you to excuse me," she said icily.

Had Garst known that the cold, direct look which she sent into his eyes was really the outcome of burning jealousy he would not have turned away with so heavy a heart.

Jack Clifford had hard work to persuade her to accompany them on the yachting party arranged for the next morning.

"You forget that I am a 'native.' The summer people might object," she said, with a bitter little smile, and Garst set his heel into the ground as he listened.

When they reached the wharf Gertrude turned to Jack Clifford.

"Old Captain Lufkin is sick and can't go, the boy tells me," she said quickly. "I think we had better give up the trip."

"Miss Woodford"—Jack looked at her with mock reproach—"I am pained that you should thus undervalue my yachting. Nothing but patriotic feeling prevented my offering my expert services to Sir Thomas. Step on board the Widgeon, ladies, and fear nothing."

But fear entered Gertrude's heart

more than once when they had left the little harbor and she noted the darkening horizon.

Mrs. Armitage was sitting near Garst, beautiful in her soft white flannel yachting suit. After half an hour's sailing Gertrude crossed to where Jack Clifford sat at the helm, thus bringing herself on Garst's other side.

"Do put back," she whispered to Clifford. "We are going to have a squall, and a bad one."

After a critical glance at the sky Jack put the boat's head around. But even as he did so a cold blast, which was the foreboding of coming ill, shivered over them. Gertrude drew her breath hard. She alone knew what the wind would be when it struck them.

Suddenly as if she had received a mortal blow the Widgeon went over—over until her mainsail lay almost level on the water. With a horrible, hungry, suggestive hiss the sea rose over the combings of the hatchway.

Too terrified to scream, the women held their breath, clinging for dear life to whatever they could hold on by. Mrs. Armitage flung herself on Garst's shoulder.

"Stephen! Save me!"

But in that moment when death seemed upon them he was not even aware of her presence. His arm went around the girl at his side and drew her close, his lips brushing her cheek, while her damp hair blew against his face. Gertrude scarcely cared whether it was life or death.

Then she suddenly wrenched herself free and flung her weight upon the tiller, putting it hard to port, for Jack's amateur skill seemed to have deserted him. The Widgeon came round, shuddering, into the wind and lay like a frightened thing with flapping sails while the squall raced by.

"I think we owe our lives to you, Miss Woodford." One of the women from the Ocean View approached Gertrude when they were safely landed on the wharf, but Garst drew her aside.

"Sweetheart!" His voice vibrated as he bent over her.

Mrs. Armitage turned to look after them, lifting an end of her bedraggled flannel skirt.

"Well," she said slowly, "for nerve give me a native!"

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