

**Honeymoon Mountain**

By FRANCES SHELLEY WEES

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CHAPTER X—Continued

"If they are," he began, "there's something fishy somewhere. There's something . . . after all this talk about marrying her to me. To a Graham. Where's the catch?" He fingered his chin. "I get it," he said at last succinctly. "I get it now."

Bryn waited.

"So that's your game in meeting me here and trying to scare me off, is it? That's your game. You're and the girl's. After all her mollycoddle looks. Pretty cute."

"Just exactly what do you mean?"

The key note in Bryn's voice did not curb Graham's rising pride in his own cleverness. "You don't want me to see the old lady," he announced. "And why? Because it will spoil your game. There's some reason why it will spoil your game."

"Look here," Bryn said coldly, standing up. "I'm telling you the truth, Graham, and there's no game about it. Deborah is married to me. We were married three days after she met you there in San Francisco, as soon as we could get a license. It was her twenty-first birthday, the day she would have married you if you'd been decent to her. Why you come up here now, I don't know. By the terms of the will, it's too late for you to marry her and collect the estate, even if she weren't already married to me. I suggest that you forget it and go back to your ship. I will get you proofs of our marriage; possibly you are entitled to that much; and then you must see that there is nothing at all to be gained here, and that you may as well go."

Graham was smiling, an evil, knowing smile. "Nothing to be gained . . . by me," he said softly. "What do you mean?"

"You've filled in the picture pretty well, haven't you? But you know too much about that will, and the estate. It seems to me the trouble I could make, my cocky young friend, would be to tell the old lady who I am, and who you aren't."

Bryn waited.

"That's the lay," Graham said. "You've married my girl, and now you're passing yourself off as me. You must think I'm a damn fool. And at the end of the year, if nobody spikes your plans, you'll get the million dollars that ought to be mine. And you have the everlasting guts to tell me to get out of here in peace and let you get away with it!"

Bryn began to whistle tunelessly between his teeth.

Tubby stepped suddenly through the open door. "Look here, Bryn," he said, "what's the use of trying to talk sense to him?"

Tubby was followed closely by Simon. At their sudden appearance, Graham moved back a step, stealthily. Something in his pose caught Bryn's eye, and without stopping to think, he hurled himself forward on the burly figure and flung it backward. Graham, taken by surprise, fell heavily. In a second, Tubby and Simon were into the melee. Bryn, sitting on the recumbent man's chest, handed something to Simon. "He had a gun," he explained.

Bryn rose. "Get up," he said to Graham. "We'll put you in the milk house and let you think it over. Maybe you'll begin to come to your senses."

"You can be arrested for this," Graham threatened, struggling to his feet.

"I don't think so," Bryn said mildly. "This is my lawful residence. You came here uninvited, threatened me, and drew a gun."

When dinner was over, grandmother rose and patted Tubby's hand gently. "And now," grandmother said happily, "let us go out and sit on the veranda. It will be a beautiful evening."

"I'm afraid it will be chilly, grandmother," Bryn said quickly. "We can open the drawing-room windows wide, and see the moon from there, can't we?"

"You are much too careful of me, my boy," grandmother said with affection. "It is not in the least chilly."

The moon had risen already, and lay a great round silver lantern, on the tops of the rolling black hills to the west.

"Let's play games," Tubby said cheerfully. "It isn't late. It's only about half-past seven. Something loud and cheerful."

"It doesn't seem just the night for loud cheerful games," grandmother protested. "It's a dreamy sort of night, my boy. Couldn't we just sit and talk, quietly, and look at the moon?"

Deborah's eyes met Bryn's as he sat at her knee. She turned away from him quickly, conscious of Pilar

watching them, being miserable and unhappy and lonely and . . . beaten. Bryn didn't love Pilar, Bryn didn't love Pilar . . . the words sang in Deborah's heart so loudly that she was almost afraid Pilar would hear them. He had said . . . "I love you."

There was a sudden loud noise, to Deborah's ears a man's unmistakable cry. Grandmother started forward in her chair. "Bryn," she said quickly. "Surely that is a man's voice?"

Bryn stood up. "It's steam escaping, grandmother, that's all," he said reassuringly, and then, "Let's not stay here and have it worry you. It may go on for some time. How would you like to go for a little drive with me? You haven't been in the car for a long time."

"I think I should like it very much," she replied hesitantly. "But that noise . . . are you sure . . ."

"Positive," Bryn said definitely. He offered her his arm and led her down the steps.

They were gone.

Deborah, after a little, remembered Pilar, and turned to her. "I'm sorry, Pilar," she said politely. "I forgot that you don't know what this is all about."

"I do know," Pilar murmured. "Bryn told me the whole story, of course."

"I see," Deborah said slowly. Tubby straightened. "Why do you say of course, Pilar?"

She glanced at him. "It is a natural thing to say, surely?"

"No, it is not. Not under the circumstances. You would suggest to Deborah that Bryn goes to you as a matter of course with all his concerns and interests?"

Pilar rose. "I do not mean to suggest anything in particular to Deborah," she said coolly. "But if she chooses to be reminded that Bryn always has come to me with his interests and concerns, that is no fault of mine. It is true."

"It is not true," Tubby said. "I know exactly what you have been reminding her of. He has come to me, too; Sally and Simon and Madeline. Here and now, before them, I ask you to repeat to Deborah the statement you have just made, and if you will repeat it, we will take the matter up with Bryn when he returns, all of us, together, Pilar."

Pilar stared at him. She stamped her foot furiously. "You are impossible!" she stormed, and then turned and ran through the door and up the stairs like one followed by demons.

"I'm terribly proud of you, Tubby," Sally said with a catch in her breath. "But I don't know whether it was wise or not. You may discover some bright morning that Pilar has put ground glass in Madeline's coffee."

"In my coffee?" Madeline inquired. "Is it permissible to ask why mine, particularly?"

Sally looked at Tubby helplessly. Tubby fidgeted. He stood first on one foot and then on the other. "Well," he said.

"Well?" Madeline repeated. "Look here, Sally," Tubby expostulated. "That wasn't fair. That wasn't a bit fair. I didn't . . . I don't . . . that is, I can't . . ."

Sally took Madeline's hand. "Listen," she said. "I suppose I'll have to step in. He'll go on like that for hours, just mauding. Tubby is very good at taking care of other people's love affairs, but he's terrible at his own. Madeline, I may as well tell you . . . he came into our room last night—didn't he, Simon—and he sat on the edge of the bed . . . didn't he, Simon? . . . and talked about you for hours. And he ended up by practically asking Simon for your hand, although anybody but Tubby would know it isn't done any more. There. That's what's the matter with him. And that's why Pilar will want to put ground glass in your coffee. Pilar always wanted Tubby if she couldn't have Bryn."

Tubby stepped forward and lifted Madeline's hand. He tucked it under his arm. "Come on, Madeline," he said. "After all, this thing's got to a stage where an audience is practically unnecessary."

Sally dropped down in the step beside Deborah, exhausted. "There," she said faintly. "That's done. Aren't men idiots?"

It was a long time before grandmother and Bryn came back, nearly two hours. Graham pounded and tried to make himself heard a few times, but after a while he apparently decided it was useless, and all was quiet.

They came in at last, chatting comfortably. Grandmother kissed Deborah good-night and went directly upstairs on Bryn's arm. He came flying down in a minute or two. "Where's Tub? And Madeline, and Pilar?" he inquired.

"Pilar's in bed," Sally answered, "and Madeline and Tubby went off in the general direction of Heaven. Toward the orchard. I imagine that's where they still are."

"O-ho," Bryn said. "So at last it's come to this! Well, if you will excuse me, I must be about my own business."

Deborah rose swiftly and laid her hand on his arm. "You won't go alone?"

"Why not? It isn't going to be a war. We're just going to have a quiet little talk, Graham and I. I think he will see reason before we're through." He left.

A little later the door opened. It was Tubby and Madeline. He grinned sheepishly. His dimple

flickered in and out. The yellow lock on his crown stood straight up. Madeline put her fingers up and tweaked it.

"The first improvements we make," she decided, "will be to have the roots of that piece of hair dug completely out. Think of all the hours and hours it will save me and the children."

Bryn came in, quietly. He shut the door behind him. He stood for a moment, lost in thought.

"What'd he say?" Simon asked. "Nothing," Bryn replied. "He didn't say anything. He's gone, and his car's gone too."

"Gone!" Tubby echoed. "What I want to know," Sally said ominously, "is, how did he get out? Three bolts, and a six inch thick door, and a bar of iron on the bottom. You said he couldn't. How did he?"

Nobody answered her.

Deborah rose early, brushed her hair with swift nervous fingers, bathed in cool water, and went out into the thin fresh morning sunshine. She had not slept well. She walked quickly up the path between the garden and the orchard. She went on, but a few yards inside the stone wall that separated the orchard from the forest, she turned and raced back down the path as if she were pursued; for it had occurred to her suddenly that he . . .

Graham . . . might be hiding on the other side of the wall. Looking back over her shoulder, she was brought up short by colliding with a tall solid person who seized her hands and swung them in his own.

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

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

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

Deborah pressed her lips together. Her eyes searched his.

He drew her hands up, and took them both in one of his. "It doesn't matter about Graham," he said. "Don't worry about it, sweetheart."

She bent and plucked one of the clove pinks, put her hand up to the breast of his blue sweater and wove the flower stem through the stitches.



"Oh, I Was Just Worrying About Him. That's All."

Her eyes lifted to his. Bryn started to speak, but she turned and walked quickly down the path toward the house, with Bryn walking close beside her.

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

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

"I can't think of it," Grandmother protested. "You must have breakfast." She turned to the maid, "Joan, tell the cook that we want a tray of coffee and toast as quickly as it can be prepared."

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

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

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

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

The group had just moved out to the veranda when there came the roar of a laboring small engine from the road at the left.

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

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

Deborah lifted her eyes and met Bryn's in helpless anguish. Bryn was smiling at her, a steady, warm comforting smile that seemed to tell her that everything was all right, that she had nothing to fear. She

could not understand. He came up the steps and stood beside Grandmother's chair. Tubby and Simon were standing helpless on the grass, Sally and Madeline had retreated to the doorway, and stood there, hand in hand, watching Grandmother, too. And Pilar, still and unmoving, sat in her chair behind the vines.

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

He stopped on the lowest step. He faced Grandmother. He bowed to her.

"Good-morning," he said brightly. Grandmother inclined her head. "Good-morning," she replied.

"You are Mrs. Larned," he stated. "I think you will have heard of me, and from me. My name is Graham."

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

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

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

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

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

"You are Mrs. Larned?" he asked, incredulously. "You are Mrs. Larned, and you sit there as calm as ice when I tell you that I am Stuart Graham, and that this . . ." he indicated Bryn contemptuously, "that this fellow is nothing more than an impostor, a man who's been taking advantage of you, who's married your granddaughter without your consent?"

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

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

"I am sure that 'banking' is a very well chosen word," Grandmother commented.

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

"Mr. Graham, I cannot think that this is any of your affair," said Grandmother, quietly. "I am sorry, but I cannot possibly see why you concern yourself with this matter. It no longer is any concern of yours. Your interest, it seems to me, is a trifle belated."

Grandmother put Deborah's hand firmly away from her, and stood up. "And I will add now that I have seen you, that I shall thank God every moment of the remainder of my life that it is none of your concern, that when you had the opportunity to make it so, you thought us beneath your respect. I would rather have starved and Deborah with me, than to have her marry you. I would rather see Deborah where her mother is, in her grave, than in the hands of such a man as you are."

Graham drew back. "You believe anything you're told, don't you?" he sneered. "I suppose you think this is a very romantic marriage, this match between the girl and a young rolling-in-gold millionaire, this James Weldon Shipley Brynildson, Third, who pretends to fall in love with your precious granddaughter and marries her at sight. Well, let me tell you, it isn't half as romantic as it looks. Do you know what he is? He's nothing but a cheap adventurer, that's all, going around the world buying thrills with his money. This is a new one, this is. He hasn't done this before. But wait . . . when he's tired of his new toy, then you'll see what'll happen. He'll drop her like a wrung mop-rag."

"That's enough," Bryn said sharply, and stepped forward. He turned to Grandmother. "Is there anything further you wish to say to him?" he asked her quietly.

"Nothing, my boy," Grandmother answered steadily, still standing proudly.

"Then," Bryn said directly to Graham, "on your way. Go on," he said between his teeth, "if you know what's good for you."

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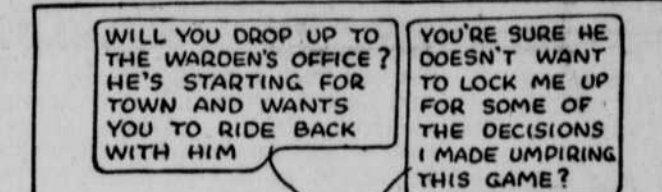


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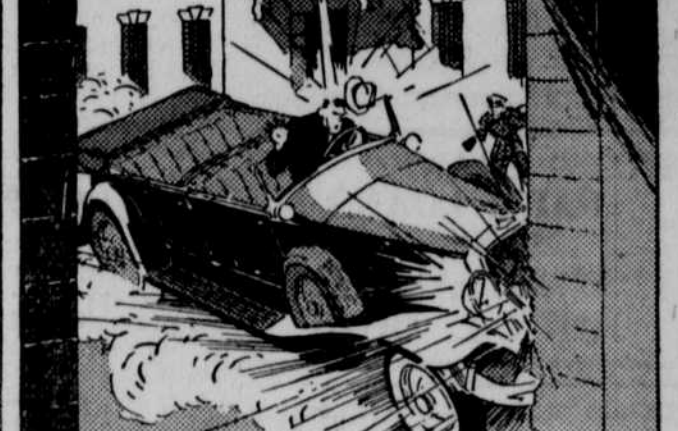
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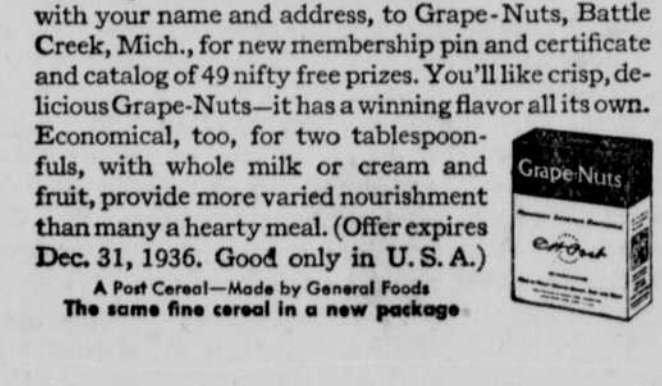
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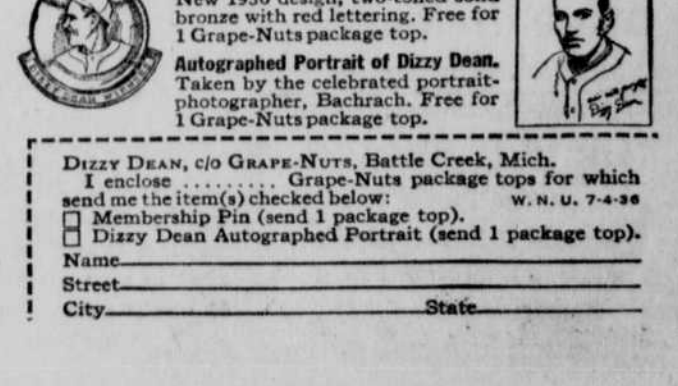
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