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## SHORT STORY

# ON THE CLIFF

Written for "The Listener"  
by K. M. KNIGHT

I KNEW when I had been a day or two with the others I shouldn't have come. It is quite true that when you are married life is different. For years I had come to this lovely bay camping. I had grown to know and love every curve of the coastline, every rock and tree, every small track from the hill-top to the sea. But this year I had seen none of them. Only Dick.

I was lonelier than I had ever been before. Years ago I had been alone, but not lonely. When the others had gone off in twos I had always been by myself, and known a companionship with the earth and sea such as few people ever achieve. This year there was Dick. He never left me alone. If I went out at night to sit for awhile on the cliff just to hear the sea winds through the cutty - grass, Dick had to come and I heard no sea-winds but only his voice. It rose above the noise of the surf; it came to me on the wind; it blotted out the song of every little creature who had been my friend. It filled my ears and my head and my heart and no matter where I went I couldn't get away from it. Dick—my husband; handsome, young, arrogant.

There wasn't a girl in the party who didn't envy me. Any one of them would have changed places with me, just as I would have changed with them. It was that made me first realise that if ever I had loved Dick I didn't love him any more. I used to wish he'd take Mollie or Betty out on to the cliff at night, and let me get away by myself. A came as an awful shock when I first knew. I saw Betty's eyes on him—lingering, coy. She had held her wrist out to him and said,

"Take my pulse, Doctor. I think I'm sickening for something."

I saw his cold blue eyes summing her up. I wouldn't have liked the scrutiny myself. And I had thought quickly,

"Don't look at her like that, Dick. She is an attractive girl. Much better looking than I am."

"It's probably mumps," he said. "Kids get them at Christmas."

Just like that. He wasn't interested in her, or in any of them. Only in me, and I didn't love him. I didn't love him any more. Where love had been in my heart there was just emptiness.

\* \* \*

TO-DAY I got away from them all for awhile. They had gone swimming. Dick made a big fuss—wanted to find me sick somewhere. I wished to God he'd grow up and leave off showing up his petty little bit of knowledge. I suppose they're all like it when they

have just qualified. I said I wasn't sick, but I was. Not in the body. I was sick in the mind, and sick in the heart—my poor, empty heart.

They went down the steep hill to the sea, and I went along the cliff top, across the dangerous bit of track on to the most beautiful part of the cliff. It went sheer down to the sea. Six hundred feet below the surf was white along the rocks and great rolling, curling waves coming in over the sand. I lay on a flat piece of ground and rested my face on the grass.

The eternal sea wind blew all around me. I closed my eyes and heard it coming in across a thousand miles of ocean. It came from the shallow parts that broke in white surf, and from the deep rolling parts that never broke at all. It came from the loneliest places on earth, but it blew around me and took my loneliness away. It went on up the hill and I knew where it was going. It moved the cabbage trees and the flax, the small ferns and the thin grasses. It took the warm scent of dried grass and sand and driftwood far up into the hills. It found the creek with the little waterfalls where I had paddled as a child.

I suppose it was not Dick's fault. It was the way he was made. He just couldn't understand that if the earth turned her back upon me I was undone. Some people get something from the earth, and if the contact is broken then they starve as surely as if food were withheld from them. I was one of these. I knew it more surely still when I stroked the hot, dry grass with my open palms. It was shining and silky like stubble. I poked in the grass-roots with a piece of stick. There were funny little spiders running about in the peppery soil. Some were no bigger than a grain of sand.

\* \* \*

THE sun was very hot. I covered my head and neck with my hat, and looked from under the brim down on to the surf. I saw the waves break long before I heard them they were so far below. The sea looked dazzling blue against the long line of surf, and the huge rocks very black and impressive. Out a little from the shore were three islands—Father Pudding, Mother Pudding and Baby Pudding. They were black as good Christmas puddings, and every now and again the sea poured white sauce over them. I made a game about them as I watched them. I gave

(continued on next page)