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myself so many points for guessing correctly how many of them would be covered because the waves were not all the same size and sometimes only Baby was covered. Big ones covered all three and then the line of foam came further up the beach and took longer to go back again. It was a fine game and I was pretty clever at it.

Then I got tired of lying that way and turned over on my back and looked at the sky. There wasn't much variety about it. Sky is better with clouds and there had been no clouds for months. After a while I turned back to the sea again.

The tide had come further in and now nearly every wave covered all the puddings with sauce. It rather spoilt the game. I got rich too quickly, so I made another game. How far down the cliff would the trickle of soil go when I started it at the top?

I leaned further over.

I pulled some roots out and the loose clay rolled and tumbled out of sight. I threw a stick and it caught in the branches of a tree. I threw a stone and it went right down to the rocks below, but I couldn't hear it land because of the noise of the surf. I was disappointed about that. I pulled out a clump of grass and it made a perfect landslide. I didn't see where it stopped, so it may have gone right to the bottom.

I got to wondering how big a one I would make if I went over, but the thought frightened me a little. I could be for ever free from pettiness and triviality if I just let myself slide over as the other things were doing. Dick would soon forget. He didn't really love me. He was too immature to love anyone.

I put my cheek on the warm grass, and stretched out my hand. Would it get broken if I went after the things I was throwing over the cliff? Somehow I didn't want my hands to get broken.

I could hear voices coming nearer. Every now and then they came to me above the water noise. When the path wound round the hill and they were on my side of the valley I'd hear them. Then they'd be lost again. But every time I heard them they were nearer. I had not many more minutes to make up my mind. I wasn't afraid it would hurt. Nothing could hurt more than the inside of me did now that I knew what kind of person Dick was. But I didn't want to leave the warm golden grass, the little sea wind, the sound of the flax and the cabbage trees, the scent of the tangled undergrowth and the sea-weed. And maybe it would be dark and cold where I was going.

\* \* \*

I THINK I knew from the beginning I couldn't do it, but Dick and the others came upon me so suddenly that I felt myself go limp and lifeless. Maybe I looked strange, for Dick didn't say anything. He took my hand and he looked frightened. He flung himself on the grass beside me.

"You should have come with us, Chris. The water was so warm it was like olive oil."

I couldn't speak.

"Have you been asleep? Or what have you been doing?"

I made a big effort. The words had to come through fences and over stiles and under hedges to get themselves assembled.

"Lying here," I said. "Lying here and thinking. Watching the sea. Playing a game. Sometimes those Christmas puddings get covered with sauce and sometimes they don't."

He twisted a curl of mine round his fingers.

"Chris—what's the matter?"

"Nothing. I'm a bit tired. I'm tired of everything but the sea and the pudding game and making rivers go down the cliff. If you throw a stone you can't hear it splash. That, I think, is a great shame."

He put his hand under my chin and turned my face towards him. He made me look at him and I didn't want to because I always saw how hard his face was.

"Are you getting mumps too?"

"Betty isn't getting mumps. Can't you see she's lonely? Maybe I'm lonely too."

"You are crazy, girl. I'll have to get you out of this God-forsaken place."

I turned round just in time to see Father get a real beauty. He swirled in a sea of foam.

"Whooshter," I said. "That covered him right over. But it's very pale sauce. Probably no brandy in it, and made with skim milk."

He pulled me to my feet. He called to the others.

"Let's get going. What say we call it a day and get back to town?"

"But I'm not a bit sore under the ears, and I can open my mouth as wide as anything," I said, seeing he knew how I loved the place and hated it accordingly. "Why should we go back to town? I want to stay here."

"Let's go and have lunch, anyway. Mollie and Betty and the boys led the way, and Dick followed them. I came slowly behind. My legs felt wobbly. When we came to the dangerous part the others all crossed it and Dick stood halfway over and turned and called to me. I saw him with the sky all around him like a bird. His shoulders were very broad and his back straight.

"Are you coming?" he asked, knowing I was frightened. "Or are you going to stay there and think, and look at the sea?"

I put a foot on the rolling gravel, and some slipped beneath me. I felt sick in the tummy and I stepped back. My legs were trembling so I could hardly stand. Dick waited for me, poised on the narrow ledge—a challenge to the earth and the sky, and meant to be an object lesson to me. But he was something else, and I went cold and then hot all over. Blackness filled my ears and my eyes. I knew I would only have to take one step, give him the smallest push, and I would have peace from him always. That would be a better way out—a much better way—than going myself into the darkness. I could say he had fallen over. They all knew how reckless he was. No one would know. If he screamed no one would hear above the noise of the surf breaking. There would be just a trickle of

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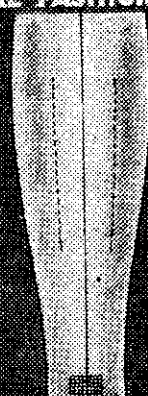
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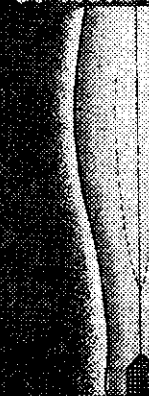
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