

A photograph of a misty forest. In the foreground, a rustic wooden fence made of logs and branches is visible. The background is filled with tall, slender trees whose trunks are shrouded in a thick, white mist. Sunlight filters through the dense canopy of green leaves, creating a soft, ethereal glow. The overall atmosphere is quiet and mysterious.

***ETHEL  
M. DELL***

***THE OBSTACLE  
RACE***



A photograph of a misty forest. In the foreground, a rustic wooden fence made of vertical posts and horizontal rails is visible. The fence is slightly out of focus. Behind the fence, several tall, slender trees with green foliage stand in a misty or foggy environment. The light is soft and diffused, creating a serene and somewhat mysterious atmosphere. The overall color palette is dominated by greens and greys.

***ETHEL  
M. DELL***

***THE OBSTACLE  
RACE***

**Ethel M. Dell**

# **The Obstacle Race**

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**THE OBSTACLE RACE**



# **PART I**

# CHAPTER I

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## BETTER THAN LONDON

A long, green wave ran up, gleaming like curved glass in the sunlight, and broke in a million sparkles against a shelf of shingle. Above the shingle rose the soft cliffs, clothed with scrubby grass and crowned with gorse.

"Columbus," said the stranger, "this is just the place for us."

Columbus wagged a cheery tail and expressed complete agreement. He was watching a small crab hurrying among the stones with a funny frown between his brows. He was not quite sure of the nature or capabilities of these creatures, and till he knew more he deemed it advisable to let them pass without interference. A canny Scot was Columbus, and it was very seldom indeed that anyone ever got the better of him. He was also a gentleman to the backbone, and no word his mistress uttered, however casual, ever passed unacknowledged by him. He always laughed when she laughed, however obscure the joke.

He smiled now, since she was obviously pleased, but without taking his sharp little eyes off the object of his interest. Suddenly the scuttling crab disappeared and he started up with a whine. In a moment he was scratching in

the shingle in eager search, flinging showers of stones over his companion in the process.

She protested, seizing him by his wiry tail to make him desist. "Columbus! Don't! You're burying me alive! Do sit down and be sensible, or I'll never be wrecked on a desert island with you again!"

Columbus subsided, not very willingly, dropping with a grunt into the hole he had made. His mistress released him, and took out a gold cigarette case.

"I wonder what I shall do when I've finished these," she mused. "The simple life doesn't include luxuries of this sort. Only three left, Columbus! After that, your missis'll starve."

She lighted a cigarette with a faint pucker on her wide brow. Her eyes looked out over the empty, tumbling sea—grey eyes very level in their regard under black brows that were absolutely straight and inclined to be rather heavily accentuated.

"Yes, I wish I'd asked Muff for a few before I came away," was the outcome of her reflections. "By this time tomorrow I shan't have one left. Just think of that, my Christopher, and be thankful that you're just a dog to whom one rat tastes very like another!"

Columbus sneezed protestingly. Whatever his taste in rats, cigarette smoke did not appeal to him. His mistress's fondness for it was her only failing in his eyes.

She went on reflectively, her eyes upon the sky-line. "I shall have to take in washing to eke out a modest living in cigarettes and chocolates. I can't subsist on Mr. Rickett's Woodbines, that's quite certain. I wonder if there's a pawnshop anywhere near."

Her voice was low and peculiarly soft; she uttered her words with something of a drawl. Her hands were clasped about her knees, delicate hands that yet looked capable. The lips that held the cigarette were delicately moulded also, but they had considerable character.

"If I were Lady Joanna Farringmore, I suppose I should say something rather naughty in French, Columbus, to relieve my feelings. But you and I don't talk French, do we? And we have struck the worthy Lady Jo and all her crowd off our visiting-list for some time to come. I don't suppose any of them will miss us much, do you, old chap? They'll just go on round and round in the old eternal waltz and never realize that it leads to nowhere." She stretched out her arms suddenly towards the horizon; then turned and lay down by Columbus on the shingle. "Oh, I'm glad we've cut adrift, aren't you? Even without cigarettes, it's better than London."

Again Columbus signified his agreement by kissing her hair, in a rather gingerly fashion on account of the smoke; after which, as she seemed to have nothing further to say, he got up, shook himself, and trotted off to explore the crannies in the cliffs.

His mistress pillowed her dark head on her arm, and lay still, with the sea singing along the ridge of shingle below her. She finished her cigarette and seemed to doze. A brisk wind was blowing from the shore, but the beach itself was sheltered. The sunlight poured over her in a warm flood. It was a perfect day in May.

Suddenly a curious thing happened. A small stone from nowhere fell with a smart tap upon her uncovered head! She

started, surprised into full consciousness, and looked around. The shore stretched empty behind her. There was no sign of life among the grass-grown cliffs, save where Columbus some little distance away was digging industriously at the root of a small bush. She searched the fringe of flaming gorse that overhung the top of the cliff immediately behind her, but quite in vain. Some sea gulls soared wailing overhead, but no other intruder appeared to disturb the solitude. She gave up the search and lay down again. Perhaps the wind had done it, though it did not seem very likely.

The tide was rising, and she would have to move soon in any case. She would enjoy another ten minutes of her delicious sun-bath ere she returned for the midday meal that Mrs. Rickett was preparing in the little thatched cottage next to the forge.

Again she stretched herself luxuriously. Yes, it was better than London; the soft splashing of waves was better than the laughter of a hundred voices, better than the roar of a thousand wheels, better than the voice of a million concerts ... Again reverie merged into drowsy absence of thought. How exquisite the sunshine was!...

It fell upon her dark cheek this time with a sharp sting and bounced off on to her hand—a round black stone dropped from nowhere but with strangely accurate aim. She sprang up abruptly. This was getting beyond a joke.

Columbus was still rooting beneath the distant bush. Most certainly he was not the offender. Some boy was hiding somewhere among the humps and clefts that constituted the rough surface of the cliff. She picked up her

walking-stick with a certain tightening of the lips. She would teach that boy a lesson if she caught him unawares.

Grimly she set her face to the cliff and to the narrow, winding passage by which she had descended to the shore. Her dreams were wholly scattered! Her cheek still smarted from the blow. She left the sea without a backward glance. She sent forth a shrill whistle to Columbus as she began to climb the slippery path of stones. She was convinced that it was from this that her assailant had gathered his weapons.

With springing steps she mounted, looking sharply to right and left as she did so! And in a moment, turning inwards from the sea, she caught sight of a movement among some straggling bushes a few yards to one side of the path.

Without an instant's hesitation she swung herself up the steep incline, climbing with a rapidity that swiftly cut off the landward line of retreat. She would give her assailant a fright for his pains if nothing better.

And then just as she reached the level, very sharply she stopped. It was as if a hand had caught her back. For suddenly there rose up before her a figure so strange that for a moment she felt almost like a scared child. It sprang from the bushes and stood facing her like an animal at bay—a short creature neither man nor boy, misshapen, grotesquely humped, possessing long thin arms of almost baboon-like proportions. The head was sunken into the shoulders. It was flung back and the face upraised—and it was the face that made her pause, for it was the most pathetic sight she had ever looked upon. It was the face of a lad of two or three and twenty, but drawn in lines so painful,

so hollowed, so piteous, that fear melted into compassion at the sight. The dark eyes that stared upwards had a frightened look mingled with a certain defiance. He stood barefooted on the edge of the cliff, clenching and unclenching his bony hands, with the air of a culprit awaiting sentence.

There was a decided pause before his victim spoke. She found some difficulty in grappling with the situation, but she had no intention of turning her back upon it. She felt it must be tackled with resolution.

After a moment she spoke, with as much sternness as she could muster,

"Why did you throw those stones?"

He backed at the sound of her voice, and she had an instant of sickening fear, for there was a drop of twenty feet behind him on the shingle. But he must have seen her look, for he stopped himself on the brink, and stood there doggedly.

"Don't stand there!" she said quickly. "I'm not going to hurt you."

He lowered his head, and looked at her from under drawn brows. "Yes, you are," he said gruffly. "You're going to beat me with that stick."

The shrewdness of this surmise struck her as not without humour. She smiled, and, turning, flung the stick straight down to the path below. "Now!" she said.

He came forward, not very willingly, and stood within a couple of yards of her, still looking as if he expected some sort of chastisement.



She faced him, and the last of her fear departed. Though he was so terribly deformed that he looked like some dreadful beast reared on its hind legs there was that about the face, sullen though it was, that stirred her deepest feelings.

She did her best to conceal the fact, however. "Tell me why you threw those stones!" she said.

"Because I wanted to hit you," he returned with disconcerting promptitude.

She looked at him steadily. "How very unkind of you!" she said.

His eyes gleamed with a smouldering resentment. "No, it wasn't. I didn't want you there. Dicky is coming soon, and he likes it best when there is no one there."

She noticed that though there was scant courtesy in his speech, it was by no means the rough talk of the fisher-folk. It fired her curiosity. "And who is Dicky?" she said.

"Who are you?" he retorted rudely.

She smiled again. "You are not very polite, are you? But I don't mind telling you if you want to know. My name is Juliet Moore. Now tell me yours!"

He looked at her doubtfully. "Juliet is a name out of a book," he said.

She laughed, a low, soft laugh that woke an answering glimmer of amusement in his sullen face. "How clever of you to know that!" she said.

"No, I'm not clever." Tersely he contradicted her. "Old Swag at The Three Tuns says I'm the village idiot."

"What a horrid old man!" she exclaimed almost involuntarily.

He nodded his heavy head. "Yes, I knocked him down the other day, and kicked him for it. Dicky caned me afterwards, —I'm not supposed to go to The Three Tuns—but I was glad I'd done it all the same."

"Well, who is Dicky?" she asked again. Her interest was growing.

He glared at her with sudden suspicion. "What do you want to know for?"

"Because I think he must be rather a brave man," she said.

The suspicion vanished. His eyes shone. "Oh, Dicky isn't afraid of anything," he declared with pride. "He's my brother. He knows—heaps of things. He's a man."

"You are fond of him," said Juliet, with her friendly smile.

The boy's face lighted up. "He's the only person I love in the world," he said, "except Mrs. Rickett's baby."

"Mrs. Rickett's baby!" She checked a quick desire to laugh that caught her unawares. "You are fond of babies then?"

"No, I'm not. I like dogs. I don't like babies—except Mrs. Rickett's and he's such a jolly little cuss." He smiled over the words, and again she felt a deep compassion. Somehow his face seemed almost sadder when he smiled.

"I am staying with Mrs. Rickett," she said. "But I only came yesterday, and I haven't made the baby's acquaintance yet. I must get myself introduced. You haven't told me your name yet, you know. Mayn't I hear what it is? I've told you mine."

He looked at her with renewed suspicion. "Hasn't anybody told you about Me yet?" he said.

"No, of course not. Why, I don't know anybody except Mr. and Mrs. Rickett. And it's much more interesting to hear it from yourself."

"Is it?" He hesitated a little longer, but was finally disarmed by the kindness of her smile. "My name is Robin."

"Oh, that's a nice name," Juliet said. "And you live here? What do you do all day?"

"I don't know," he said vaguely. "I can mend fishing-nets, and I can help Dicky in the garden. And I look after Mrs. Rickett's baby sometimes when she's busy. What do you do?" suddenly resuming his attitude of suspicion.

She made a slight gesture of the hands. "Nothing at all worth doing, I am afraid," she said. "I can't mend nets. I don't garden. And I've never looked after a baby in my life."

He stared at her. "Where do you come from?" he asked curiously.

"From London." She met his curiosity with absolute candour. "And I'm tired of it. I'm very tired of it. So I've come here for a change. I'm going to like this much better."

"Better than London!" He gazed, incredulous.

"Oh, much better." Juliet spoke with absolute confidence. "Ah, here is Columbus! He likes it better too."

She turned to greet her companion who now came hastening up to view the new acquaintance.

He sniffed round Robin who bent awkwardly and laid a fondling hand upon him. "I like your dog," he said.

"That's right," said Juliet kindly. "We are both staying at the Ricketts', so when you come to see the baby, I hope you will come to see us too. I must go now, or I shall be late for lunch. Good-bye!"

The boy lifted himself again with a slow, ungainly movement, and raised a hand to his forehead in wholly unexpected salute.

She smiled and turned to depart, but he spoke again, arresting her.

"I say!"

She looked back. "Yes? What is it?"

He shuffled his bare feet in the grass in embarrassment and murmured something she could not hear.

"What is it?" she said again, encouragingly, as if she were addressing a shy child.

He lifted his dark eyes to hers in sudden appeal. "I say," he said, with obvious effort, "if—if you meet Dicky, you—you won't tell him about—about—"

She checked the struggling words with a very kindly gesture. "Oh, no, of course not! I'm not that sort of person. But the next time you want to get rid of me, just come and tell me so, and I'll go away at once."

The gentleness of her speech uttered in that soft slow voice of hers had a curious effect upon her hearer. To her surprise, his eyes filled with tears.

"I shan't want to get rid of you! You're kind! I like you!" he blurted forth.

"Oh, thank you very much!" said Juliet, feeling oddly moved herself. "In that case, we are friends. Good-bye! Come and see me soon!"

She smiled upon him, and departed, picking up her stick from the path and turning to wave to him as she continued the ascent.

From the top of the cliff she looked back, and saw that he was still standing—a squat, fantastic figure like a goblin out of a fairy-tale—outlined against the shining sea behind him, a blot upon the blue.

Again she waved to him and he lifted one of his long arms and saluted her again in answer—stood at the salute till she turned away.

"Poor boy!" she murmured compassionately. "Poor ruined child! Columbus, we must be kind to him."

And Columbus looked up with knowing little eyes and wagged a smiling tail. He had taken to the lad himself.

## CHAPTER II

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## SACRIFICE

"Lor' bless you!" said Mrs. Rickett. "There's some folks as thinks young Robin is the plague of the neighbourhood, but there ain't no harm in the lad if he's let alone. It's when them little varmint's of village boys, sets on to him and teases him as he ain't safe. But let him be, and he's as quiet as a lamb. O' course if they great hulking fools on the shore goes and takes him into The Three Tuns, you can't expect him to behave respectable. But as I always says, let him alone and there's no vice in him. Why, I've seen him go away into a corner and cry like a baby at a sharp word from his brother Dick. He sets such store by him."

"I noticed that," said Juliet. "In fact he told me that Dicky and your baby were the only two people in the world that he loved."

"Did he now? Well, did you ever?" Mrs. Rickett's weather-beaten countenance softened as it were in spite of itself. "He always did take to my Freddy, right from the very first. And Freddy's just the same. Soon as ever he catches sight of Robin, he's all in a fever like to get to him. Mr. Fielding from the Court, he were in here the other day and he see 'em together. 'Your baby's got funny taste, Mrs. Rickett,' he says

and laughs. And I says to him, 'There's a many worse than poor young Robin, sir,' I says. 'And in our own village too.' You see, Mr. Fielding he's one of them gentlemen as likes to have the managing of other folks' affairs and he's always been on to Dick to have poor Robin put away. But Dick won't hear of it, and I don't blame him. For, as I say, there's no harm in the lad if he's treated proper, and he'd break his heart if they was to send him away. And he's that devoted to Dick too—well, there, it fair makes me cry sometimes to see him. He'll sit and wait for him by the hour together, like a dog he will."

"Was he born like that?" asked Juliet, as her informant paused for breath.

Mrs. Rickett pursed her lips. "Well, you see, miss, he were a twin, and he never did thrive from the very earliest. But he wasn't a hunchback, not like he is now, at first. The poor mother died when they was born, and p'raps it were a good thing, for she'd have grieved terrible if she could have seen what he were a-going to grow into. For she was a lady born and bred, married beneath her, you know. Nor she didn't have any such life of it either. He were a sea-captain—a funny, Frenchy-looking fellow with a frightful temper. He never come home for twelve years after Dick were born. She used to teach at the village school, and make her living that way. Very sweet in her ways she were. Everyone liked her. There's them as says Mr. Fielding was in love with her. He didn't marry, you know, till long after. She used to sing too, and such a pretty voice she'd got. I used to think she was like an angel when I was a child. And so she were. Whether she'd have married Mr. Fielding or not I don't know. There's



some as thinks she would. They were very friendly together. And then, quite sudden-like, when everyone thought he'd been dead for years, her husband come home again. I'll never forget it if I lives to be a hundred. I was only a bit of a girl then. It's more'n twenty years ago, you know, miss. I were just tidying up a bit in the school-house after school were over, and she were looking at some copybooks, when suddenly he marched in at the door, and, 'Hullo, Olive!' he says. She got up, and she was as white as a sheet. She didn't say one word. And he just come up to her, and took hold of her and kissed her and kissed her. It was horrid to see him, fair turned me up," said Mrs. Rickett graphically. "And I'll never forget her face when he let her go. She looked as if she'd had her death blow. And so she had, miss. For she was never the same again. The man was a beast, as anyone could see, and he hadn't improved in them twelve years. He were a hard drinker, and he used to torment her to drink with him, used to knock young Dick about too, something cruel. Dick were only a lad of twelve, but he says to me once, 'I'll kill that man,' he says. 'I'll kill him.' Mr. Fielding he went abroad as soon as the husband turned up, and he didn't know what goings-on there were. There's some as says she made him go, and I shouldn't wonder but what there was something in it. For if ever any poor soul suffered martyrdom, it was that woman. I'll never forget the change in her, never as long as I live. She kept up for a long time, but she looked awful, and then at last when her time drew near she broke down and used to cry and cry when anyone spoke to her. O' course we all knew as she wouldn't get over it. Her spirit was quite broke, and when the babies

came she hadn't a chance. It happened very quick at the last, and her husband weren't there. He were down at The Three Tuns, and when they went to fetch him he laughed in their faces and went on drinking. Oh, it was cruel." Mrs. Rickett wiped away some indignant tears. "Not as she wanted him—never even mentioned his name. She only asked for Dick, and he was with her just at the end. He was only a lad of thirteen, miss, but he was a man grown from that night on. She begged him to look after the babies, and he promised her he would. And then she just lay holding his hand till she died. He seemed dazed-like when they told him she were gone, and just went straight out without a word. No one ever saw young Dick break down after that. He's got a will like steel."

"And the horrible husband?" asked Juliet, now thoroughly interested in Mrs. Rickett's favourite tragedy.

"I were coming to him," said Mrs. Rickett, with obvious relish. "The husband stayed at The Three Tuns till closing time, then he went out roaring drunk, took the cliff-path by mistake, and went over the cliff in the dark. The tide was up, and he was drowned. And a great pity it didn't happen a little bit sooner, says I! The nasty coarse hulking brute! I'd have learned him a thing or two if he'd belonged to me." Again, vindictively, Mrs. Rickett wiped her eyes. "Believe me, miss, there's no martyrdom so bad as getting married to the wrong man. I've seen it once and again, and I knows."

"I quite agree with you," said Juliet. "But tell me some more! Who took the poor babies?"

"Oh, Mrs. Cross at the lodge took them. Mr. Fielding provided for 'em, and he helped young Dick along too. He's been very good to them always. He had young Jack trained, and now he's his chauffeur and making a very good living. The worst of Jack is, he ain't over steady, got too much of his father in him to please me. He's always after some girl—two or three at a time sometimes. No harm in the lad, I daresay. But he's wild, you know. Dick finds him rather a handful very often. Robin can't abide him, which perhaps isn't much to be wondered at, seeing as it was mostly Jack's fault that he is such a poor cripple. He was always sickly. It's often the way with twins, you know. All the strength goes to one. But he always had to do what Jack did as a little one, and Jack led him into all sorts of mischief, till one day when they were about ten they went off bird's-nesting along the cliffs High Shale Point way, and only Jack come back late at night to say his brother had gone over the cliff. Dick tore off with some of the chaps from the shore. It were dark and windy, and they all said it was no use, but Dick insisted upon going down the face of the cliff on a rope to find him. And find him at last he did on a ledge about a hundred feet down. He was so badly hurt that he thought he'd broke his back, and he didn't dare move him till morning, but just stayed there with him all night long. Oh, it was a dreadful business." A large tear splashed unchecked on to Mrs. Rickett's apron. "An ill-fated family, as you might say. They got 'em up in the morning o' course, but poor little Robin was very bad. He was on his back for nearly a year after, and then, when he began to get about again, them humps came and he grew crooked. Mr. Fielding were away at the

time, hunting somewhere in the wilds of Africa, and when he came home he were shocked to see the lad. He had the very best doctors in the land to see him, but they all said there was nothing to be done. The spine had got twisted, or something of that nature, and he'd begun to have queer giddy fits too as made 'em say the brain were affected, which it really weren't, miss, for he's as sane as you or me, only simple you know, just a bit simple. They said, all of 'em, as how he'd never live to grow up. He'd get them absces at the base of the skull, and they'd reach his brain and he'd go raving mad and die. And the squire—that's Mr. Fielding—was all for putting him away there and then. But Dick, he'd nursed him all through, and he wouldn't hear of it. 'The boy's mine,' he says, 'and I'm going to look after him.' Mr. Fielding was very cross with him, but that didn't make no difference. You see, Dick had got fond of him, and as for Robin, why, he just worshipped Dick. So there it was left, and Dick gave up all his prospects to keep the boy with him. He were reading for the law, you see, but he gave it all up and turned schoolmaster, so as he could live here and take care of young Robin."

"Turned schoolmaster!" Juliet repeated the words. "He's something of a scholar then!"

"Oh, no," said Mrs. Rickett. "It's only the village school, miss. Mr. Fielding got him the post. They're an unruly set of varmints here, but he keeps order among 'em. He's quite clever, as you might say, but no, he ain't a scholar. He goes in for games, you know, football and the like, tries to teach 'em to play like gentlemen, which he never will, for they're a low lot, them shore people, and that dirty! Well, he

makes 'em bathe every day in the summer whether they likes it or whether they don't. Oh, he does his best to civilize 'em, and all them fisher chaps thinks a deal of him too. They've got a club in the village what Mr. Fielding built for 'em, and he goes along there and gives 'em musical evenings and jollies 'em generally. They'll do anything for him, bless you. But he tells 'em off pretty straight sometimes. They'll take it from him, you see, because they respects him."

"I thought the parson always did that sort of thing," said Juliet.

Mrs. Rickett uttered a brief, expressive snort. "He ain't much use—except for the church. He's old, you see, and he don't understand 'em. And he's scared at them chaps what works the lead mines over at High Shale. It's all in this parish, you know. And they are a horrid rough lot, a deal worse than the fisher-folk. But Dick he don't mind 'em. And he can do anything with 'em too, plays his banjo and sings and makes 'em laugh. The mines belong to the Farringmore family, you know—Lord Wilchester owns 'em. But he never comes near, and a' course the men gets discontented and difficult. And they're a nasty drinking lot too. Why, the manager—that's Mr. Ashcott—he's at his wit's end sometimes. But Dick—oh, Dick can always handle 'em, knows 'em inside and out, and their wives too. Yes, he's very clever is Dick. But he's thrown away in this place. It's a pity, you know. If it weren't for Robin, it's my belief that he'd be a great man. He's a born leader. But he's never had a chance, and it don't look like as if he ever will now, poor fellow!"

Mrs. Rickett ended mournfully and picked up Juliet's empty plate.

"How old is he?" asked Juliet.

"Oh, he's a lot past thirty now, getting too old to turn his hand to anything new. Mr. Fielding he's always on to him about it, but it don't make no difference. He'll never take up any other work while Robin lives. And Robin is stronger nor what he used to be, all thanks to Dick's care. He's just sacrificed everything to that boy, you know. It don't seem hardly right, do it?"

"I don't know," Juliet said slowly. "Some sacrifices are worth while."

Mrs. Rickett looked a little puzzled. There was something about this young lodger of hers that she could not quite fathom, but since she 'liked the looks of her' she did not regard this fact as a serious drawback.

"Well, there's some folks as thinks one way and some another," she conceded. "My husband always says as there's quite a lot of good in Robin if he's treated decent. He's often round here at the forge. That's how he come to get so fond of my Freddy. You ain't seen Freddy yet, miss. He's a bit shy like with strangers, but he soon gets over it."

"You must bring him in to see me," said Juliet.

Mrs. Rickett beamed. "I will, miss, I will. I'll bring him in with the pudding. P'raps if you was to give him a little bit he wouldn't be shy. He's very fond of gingerbread pudding."

"I wish I were!" sighed Juliet, as her landlady's portly form disappeared. "I shall certainly have to have a cigarette after it, and then there will only be one left! Oh, dear, why was I brought up among the flesh-pots?" She broke off with a

sudden irresistible laugh, and rising went to the window. Someone was sauntering down the road on the other side of the high privet hedge. There came to her a whiff of cigarette-smoke wafted on the sea-breeze. She leaned forth, and at the gap by the gate caught a glimpse of a trim young man in blue serge wearing a white linen hat. She scarcely saw his face as he passed, but she had a fleeting vision of the cigarette.

"I wonder where you get them from," she murmured wistfully. "I believe I could get to like that brand, and they can't be as expensive as mine."

The door opened behind her, and she turned back smiling to greet the ginger pudding and Freddy.



## CHAPTER III

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## MAGIC

The scent of the gorse in the evening dew was as incense offered to the stars. To Juliet, wandering forth in the twilight after supper with Columbus, the exquisite fragrance was almost intoxicating. It seemed to drug the senses. She went along the path at the top of the cliff as one in a dream.

The sea was like a dream-sea also, silver under the stars, barely rippling against the shingle, immensely and mysteriously calm. She went on and on, scarcely feeling the ground beneath her feet, moving through an atmosphere of pure magic, all her pulses thrilling to the wonder of the night.

Suddenly, from somewhere not far distant among the gorse bushes, there came a sound. She stopped, and it seemed to her that all the world stopped with her to hear the first soft trill of a nightingale through the tender dusk. It went into silence, but it left her heart throbbing strangely. Surely—surely there was magic all around her! That bird-voice in the silence thrilled her through and through. She stood spell-bound, waiting for the enchanted music to fill her soul. There followed a few liquid notes, and then there came a far-off, flute-like call, gradually swelling, gradually