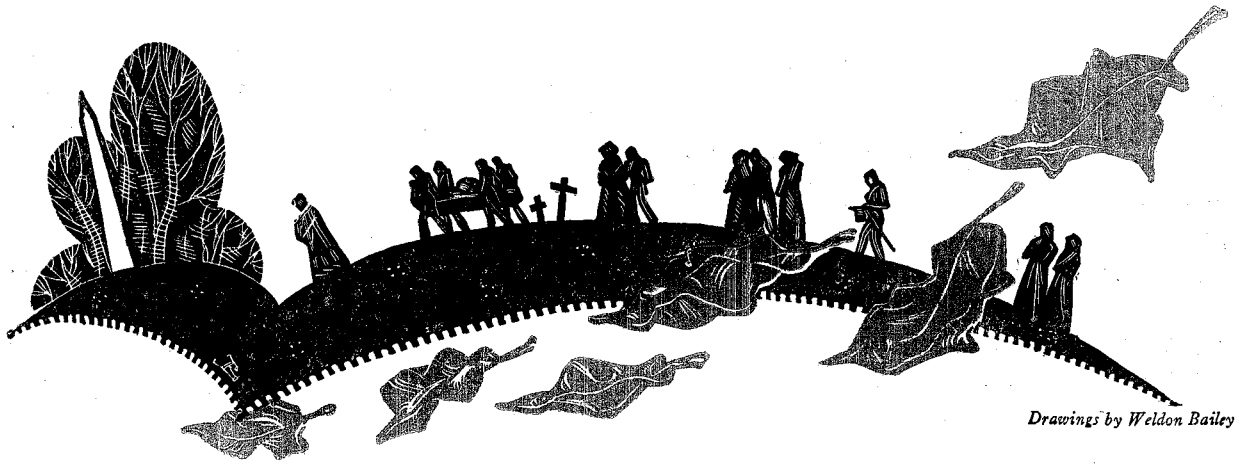


Drawings by Weldon Bailey

Bailey's Beach

***by* ESTHER FORBES**

I

STILL LOVING life and loathing death, James Euclid Sloane abandoned a well-worn body capable of withstanding everything but time. And he left behind him his steel interests, his house on Madison Avenue, his residence at Newport, the villa in Florida, his yacht, his first editions, his queer Victorian "art collection," and many such inanimate things. And he left people behind — a widow, a brother, sons, grandsons, a daughter, granddaughters, and many others of his own blood. Twelve of these human beings went with him on his last ride from Madison Avenue to the church on Fifth, from the church to the Staten Island cemetery where he was to lie forever with generations of dead Sloanes.

A fall day, a chill October day. Sear leaves fell upon extravagant funeral wreaths. The wind trounced the rector's robes about his knees. "In the midst of life we are in death." How seemly, sad, expensive the black of the mourning men. How white-faced, aloof, the black-shrouded, mourning women. A beautiful day — blue and gold.

At a slightly faster rate of speed the twelve mourners returned to the dead man's house, sitting soberly together in the widow's drawing-room, waiting for the announcement of lunch and for the excitement of the will. Mr. Parkingham himself, of Dulles, Rollins, Parkingham, and Frost, was coming up with it after lunch. Plenty of money for everybody. The rector thought of that Lady chapel he had always hoped to build. Lady Hubbard, the pretty granddaughter, thought of the little house at Pau, where, if fortune favored her, she could live most of the year far from her husband and do exactly as she pleased. Her mother, Edith, the dead man's only daughter, thought of money — largely in terms of reforms, charities, and vast organizations. She was even thinking vaguely of Congress.

Each of the potential heirs withdrew from those other, curiously distant people seated in the room. All were lost in dreams and memories. The vast, muffling silence of the drawing-room seemed to drown out the roar of traffic below the windows. Throughout the silence was the ticking of the clocks. The grandfather clock in the hall. The ormolu French clock upon the mantel. Gold watches in men's waistcoats, jeweled watches on women's wrists. This ticking wove together, making a thin rivulet of sound pulling away into eternity. It was the music of eternity, time, death.

II

THE WIDOW in her desolation sat alone. With dry and hooded eyes, she looked out upon the family gathered about her. She knew the rector was thinking of his Lady chapel even while he murmured to her little words of small comfort. She did not hear his voice. She heard the voice of her young husband, for long ago he had been young, and she had called him Gyp, and he had called her Jacky.

She had not thought of him by this, his private, secret name, for years, but during his last sickness he had cried out to her in a moment of bewilderment and despair not as Jacqueline but as Jacky. In his delirium it was not his wife of many years that he had needed, but Jacky, the child in her teens who had loved him with passion and who had married him in faith. Well, that poor little thing had not lasted long.

The old woman closed her eyes to shut out the present. She did not see the rococo drawing-room. She saw sunlight in a Cambridge garden. Her father, the professor, upon the veranda; herself, Jacky, the tomboy, romping with the Saint Bernard upon the lawn. She saw the girl look up. Gyp, whom she had met the summer before, was coming toward her through the lilac bushes. Jacky was thrown into happy confusion. He was so wonderful, so handsome, rich, dashing — why, most wonderful of all, Aunt Myra disapproved. Aunt Myra had heard that he was "fast." More god than mortal was that slender, eager, luminous creature. If only he loved her as she loved him. And that soft light in his eyes told her at that moment of meeting that he did love her — and that he would love her forever and forever.

The rector's voice went on. He was speaking to her of her "great loss." *Her* "great loss." Mrs. J. E. Sloane's "great loss." She glanced at the very spot where so recently a casket had rested. But Jacky's loss — that had come, it would seem, a hundred years, a thousand years ago. A far-off era when the world was young and Arcadian. Then there had been none of this ordered mourning, only the black of the night. No mourners but the crying gulls. (I'll never forget them, those gulls wheeling and wheeling against the sunrise. But I haven't so much longer to remember, and when I die, who will remember, who will remember — Gyp, my Gyp?)

How could one compare the ordered, unctuous, inevitable departure of death with that other horror, that confusion, that death of the soul? Looking back, she could smile a little patronizingly at the blazing, heartbroken girl she once had been. Well, Jacky, you got your death blow then, my dear. Poor child, poor child. Why could not James have let her have that first year of marriage quite, quite to herself? She was so naïve; she could not appreciate the wealth, the social prestige he lavished upon her. All she had wanted had been himself — and that was the one thing he was unable to give.

Luckily Jacky died early, and a changeling had taken her place — and she, the old woman in black, she was the changeling. But James really had seen through all those successful, affectionate years they had had together. When he lay dying, he had cried out for his lost girl, for Jacky, whom he himself had killed as surely as if he had strangled her with his hands.

III

THAT FIRST summer at Newport. A cottage of her own, the wedding gift of those two handsome older brothers of Gyp's. A pair of young dappled mares, prettily named Fire-Bright and Star-Light. Such a smart carriage — basket-work, rubber tires! And the most loving husband in the world, only she could never have enough of him. His soul's darling must be content with only the week-ends. He could not leave his business, and he would not let her lose her lovely complexion in a dirty New York summer. Then, too, he wanted her to know Newport. It was almost as much his home as New York.

Later she learned that it was during that first summer that he and those famous cut-throat brothers of his had put through the first merger that had laid the foundations of the great business they were evolving. (And there was old Marcus, the last of the Sloane brothers, asleep on the top of his gold-headed cane.) How

The widow in her desolation sat alone.

young Gyp could work! For eighteen hours a day this restless young fellow, who when he was at home could never sit ten minutes in the same chair, patiently sweated out his heart's blood. Yet when he arrived on Saturday morning he had the manner of a man who has thought of nothing but his sweetheart since the last parting.

Of course the crucial state of the business was the real reason Gyp would not let her stay in New York that first summer. Her complexion indeed! And those handsome, arrogant brothers of his — no wonder they had given her a cottage at Newport. Wanted to keep her out of James' way. They had been something alike, those three Sloanes — dark, slim, nervous in youth; ruthless and heavy in maturity; cautious, frosty, and a little dependent in old age. (And there was Marcus, the last of them . . . Joseph had been dead for fifteen years, and James . . . why, James had been buried that morning . . . James . . . my James. . . . Oh, what's the use of living now? . . .)

The week-ends were heavenly, but the weeks themselves were hard enough. She was quite alone, in spite of the endless calling, the croquet games, the drives, the little canters. She had time to wonder what it was these other women knew about her husband, for they all seemed to have known him well for years. Perhaps he had fancied he had loved some of these women before he had met and really loved herself. The stony dowagers sat and rocked all day. How cold, how cynical their eyes, how unlike dear Cambridge their scandalous and worldly conversation.

And the young women — how wise, sharp, fashionable. She had never seen such small waists, such large bustles. As far as she could make out, she was the only lady in Newport who brushed her own hair or wore a larger than four-A shoe. They made her feel like a country cousin, although they were so kind to her, complimenting her pink and childish beauty, telling her she was "such a pretty girl — although you *do* come from Boston, my dear." The weeks were lonely without Gyp.

On Monday morning when her husband left for New York, she always got up at five to drive with him to the wharf. She would stand gazing after his departing boat until it had dwindled off into nothing more than a plume of smoke upon the horizon, then turn and smile at old Corey, her coachman. She did not care if he saw tears in her eyes, for he was her friend, the only friend she had at Newport. He was a spidery old fellow with springy, bandy legs which made him look ridiculous when he jumped off the box and ran to the horses' heads.

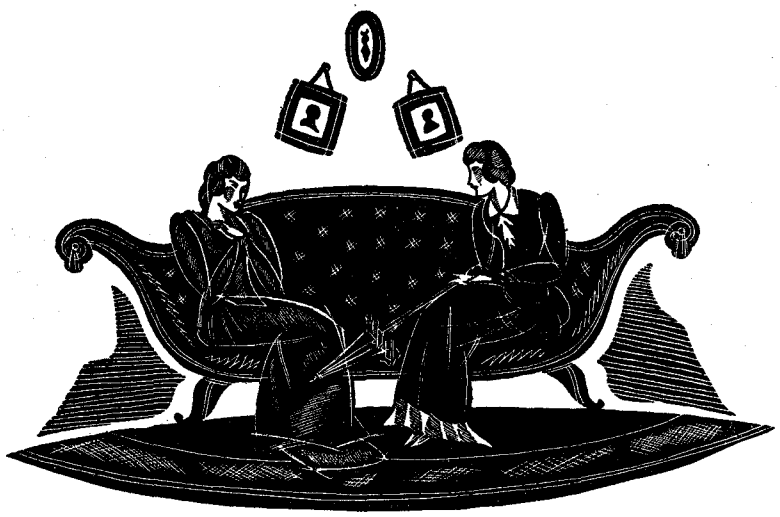
Now the old woman knew that he pitied the young girl who had married and passionately loved young Jimmie Sloane. He wished her well but knew in the end it would not be well. He had been about Newport for years and his cynicism was even greater than the forbidding dowagers'. On the young bride, however, he lavished a doglike, unquestioning devotion. (Old Corey . . . what could have happened to you? Old Corey . . . I always had a feeling that you forgot yourself, upbraided your employer. . . . Now I will never know.)

IV

ONE MORNING, as the boat docked, a woman but a few years older than the very young Mrs. Sloane walked down the gangplank followed by boxes and trunks and attended by two Negresses. Gyp was in the ticket office. They recognized each other, but the woman went away quickly to the pony trap that awaited her. She had a small, pale face — the cheeks already slightly hollowed by sickness, disappointment, or passion — a delicate, willful mouth, and wild, troubled eyes.

(With what cold, ironic interest the old woman summoned this sad and lovely wraith from the limbo of her memory. How firmly from out the past this strange, unhappy woman stepped forth at her command. Charming — very charming; the dowager pronounced judgment. But of course *quite* neurotic. They say she was shut up at the Williamsburg asylum for years, died there — well! She was lonely, I suppose, and so was Jacky — that's why she appealed so strongly to the child.)

The lady's clothes were not as fussy and uncomfortable looking as the Newport belles'. She was dressed entirely in gray. Her tiny hat was of doves' wings. The dress tightly swathed the delicate, shapely body from the throat to halfway down the thighs. It was utterly untrimmed except (as the Parisian dressmaker and the lady herself had intended) by the vase-like curves of the body. In the back, however, was an infinity of plaits and bustles and ruffles. Their profusion and confusion further emphasized the simplicity of the dress in front.



"I want to be your friend."

She watched her husband stare after this lovely vision. He hesitated, and followed her to her trap, shook her hand, exchanged a few words.

"Oh my dearest Gyp," Jacky cried when he returned to her, "why didn't you introduce us? I like her the best of anyone I've seen in Newport. She is so sweet and sad, like a lady in Tennyson's *Idylls*."

"My poor little Baked Bean," he answered affectionately, "I'll never introduce her to you. Rather a bad name — you're too young to understand. Not the sort of woman one wishes one's wife associated with. In fact, child, that interesting object is the famous Belle Marie."

Jacky had heard much of this woman who was known, like a yacht, as the Belle Marie. At mention of her, men put on knowing, virile expressions, and even dumpy, short dowagers managed to look tall and impressive. Jacky had visualized a coarse and showy creature. Instead Belle Marie looked gentle, frightened, exquisite. Gyp explained that the women had ostracized her because of her beauty and her great charm for men more than because of her indiscretions. Women were small-minded, jealous creatures.

"Oh, but I am not like that," promised Jacky. "I love her *more* because of her beauty." He kissed her mouth and said he believed her.

It seemed that Belle Marie had a Virginian husband who could not leave his plantation during the hot season, but the lady's health could not endure the midsummer heat upon the James. Usually she went to Paris for a month or two and then, armed with the most startling and beautiful clothes, descended upon Newport. The women would have none of her, and it was true she had let men call on her and stay too late. Her ball gowns were perhaps . . . a little low . . . and her heels a trifle high. These things had never affected *his* estimate — he had always found her sweet, warm-hearted, and gentle.

"But they would not affect mine either," cried Jacky, stoutly allying herself with the noble male world against the icy dowagers she hated. He laughed and kissed her mouth again.

When she turned back from watching her husband's boat dying away into the west, she found Corey's eyes waiting for her. Something in their expression reminded her of the old women whom she so mistrusted. Disillusioned, worldly. "I used to drive Mrs. Latour three summers ago," he announced sadly.

"Mrs. Who?"

"Mrs. Latour — the lady in the pony trap."

On the way home Corey made a slight detour crossing the high lands that look down on Bailey's Beach. There was a bushy, neglected entrance. Corey pointed down the drive to a sagging old farmhouse, not a fashionable "cottage" at all.

"She lives there."

"Who?" — "Mrs. Latour."

(Oh, what a fool you were. Everyone tried to warn you against that woman. Your husband, the ladies at Newport, Corey, even Mrs. Latour herself. Well, you knew best — young people always know best and it seems to me they always get hurt, one way or another. She glanced at her granddaughter, Lady Hubbard. What a wisp of a little thing, in a little wisp of black — but she should not have those lines at the corners of her mouth, not at her age. And Gyp's eyes in the girl's lovely head, those wonderful, glowing eyes. Oh yes . . . young people always get hurt . . . and old ones too. And Edith — there's Edith, almost an old woman now. I'm sure she has never done a thing she did not want to do — because she has never wanted to do anything that was not right . . . yet even her face looks sad in repose. I'm sure she enjoyed divorcing Phil. She has no conception of suffering, except in great droves — like ravished Armenia, or laboring men's wives.)

The gay young mare raced and played.

V

At last Jacky got what she wanted — she met the Belle Marie alone and found excuse to speak. Her idol walked upon a red cliff by a summer sea. She wore a green muslin frock and carried a lavender parasol, with which she pushed among the crevices of the rocks. She had lost something.

"What is it? Can I help you?"

Mrs. Latour insisted a little hostilely that it was nothing — a cheap filigree earring. She abruptly discontinued her search and made her graceful way over the rocks and across Bailey's Beach. There the bathers sat. They were women and children. They stared at the lovely creature in green and lavender, but they did not speak. Mrs. Latour took an up-turning cart path which led from the floor of the beach almost to her own gate.

Mrs. Latour's hands had been gloved in pale mauve. Jacky's were bare. Alone upon the cliff, she dug and pawed like a terrier until she found the earring. It was in the shape of a small pitcher. Then she hurried over the same route the Belle Marie had taken. All the bathers spoke to her. She excused herself and in a few moments presented her dishevelment to the other woman's perfection.

Mrs. Latour sat alone in the cool of her old-fashioned parlor, sipping a mint julep. Under her own roof she seemed an utterly different creature from the cold woman of the cliffs. She was warm, eager, friendly. Mrs. Sloane must have a mint julep with her. Yes, it was a Southern drink, Mr. Latour's favorite. Her voice was as enchanting as her face and figure. But there were lines of sadness, almost of despair, about the rose-leaf mouth which touched with pity the heart of the young bride.

Like a schoolgirl Jacky blurted out the real reason for her visit. She cried earnestly, "I want to be your friend." Mrs. Latour's lovely faced suffused with delicate color. "Oh, I would love that." She eagerly took her guest to her own room, as if she wished to introduce her to the innermost sanctum of her being. She showed her a miniature of her planter husband, whom she affectionately referred to as Johnny. Then Jacky spoke shyly of her husband, calling him by his sacred, private name of Gyp. Mrs. Latour froze into ominous silence. She became, for a second, cold, hostile, aloof. She suggested that they sit upon her porch and watch the gulls.

In a few moments her coldness melted. When Jacky got up to go, Belle Marie clung to her with feverish insistence. She must come again.

"I need you so," she said. "Do promise me you will come again."

"But of course I will," said the Cambridge child sturdily. "You are positively the only person in Newport I can endure."

(I am sure I can't imagine what I saw in the creature. Lonely, I suppose. And a young person coming to Newport for her first summer should have been so careful of early acquaintances. If I had not been so obviously just a silly child making a sad mistake, I might have been entirely dropped by the right people. As she thought these wise thoughts, there was before her eyes — minute and distinct, as if seen, not through time, but the wrong end of a telescope — the fragile, lovely Belle Marie; and that bright little gamin called Jacky. She saw these two walk upon the sun-drenched beach. Now the waves roll in, blue and sparkling. Now the air is sweet with the life and the death of the sea. Oh the sea! Where, where has your beauty gone? What has happened to Bailey's Beach? It never smells like that nowadays. Now it is a dull, lifeless place. . . . After all, one place is much like another.)

Jacky gathered from the sly words of the other women that at one time her husband and the Belle Marie had been "great friends, my dear." If this were true, it seemed to her cruel that Gyp now so consistently refused to see her.

He had told his wife that he had never been in love with Belle, and Jacky had exclaimed in astonishment, "Why, of course not!" (Actually — as naïve as that. Didn't know that nice men like her husband sometimes fell in

love with married women. Frenchmen did. Perhaps Italians — but not Americans like Gyp.)

VI

ONE FRIDAY her husband arrived a day early. Oh the poor dear! He had walked up from the dock? He paused a moment. No, Mrs. Latour had given him a lift. He seemed anxious to dismiss the incident. The next morning when she met Belle, she was surprised to learn that Mrs. Latour had first driven him to her own house, Gray Gables. She had given him a mint julep. He had hung a picture for her. Also he had promised to come back Sunday to look over her spaniel for ticks. She dared not look herself. She was so afraid of ticks.

Belle was frank about these plans. Gyp never mentioned them. He was more restless, preoccupied than ever. His eyes glowed with that curious golden light. He constantly fretted against his collar, like a restive horse. If his collar was uncomfortable, why didn't he put on a different one? For the first, but not the last time in her life, he looked at her quietly and did not answer. The look terrified her.

She ran down to the stable. "Corey, Corey, saddle Fire-Bright for me." She rode alone, as she had been accustomed to ride when she was in Cambridge. The gay young mare raced and played. When she came back she was happy again. Gyp had surely not heard what she had said about the collar. He had not intentionally slighted her.

Sunday afternoon Jacky timidly suggested that they both go over to Mrs. Latour's. Gyp would not. At five he jumped up, made an excuse about the post office, and returned two hours later without explanation. By then the house was full of callers. He was casual, almost rude to them. Went about whistling, his long brown hands thrust deep into his pockets, his luminous eyes enigmatical, perhaps a little hostile both toward his wife and this fashionable group she had gathered around herself at his request.

The next morning, after he was gone, she played croquet with Belle. Jacky could not conceal her amazement when Belle candidly told her about her husband's call. Belle said she was sorry that Jacky had had such a bad headache that she had been unable to come to Gray Gables Sunday afternoon. It was true that Jacky had complained of a headache early in the morning when the question of church had come up, but Gyp must have understood that that was only an excuse. This was why he had not told her where he was going. He had wanted to spare her the hot trip over.

Love and trust welled up within her, and for Jacky (not for Jacqueline) love and trust were one thing. But the dowagers, throned in rocking chairs upon their costly verandas, continued to regale her innocence with legends of seduction, adultery, betrayal. She hated their suspicions of a world which she had always found benevolent and honorable.

In July her mother asked her to come home for a few days. One of her brothers had typhoid and had set his heart on Jacky's return. She went for three days and stayed three weeks. Safe once more in the professor's garden, she forgot the cold eyes, the immaculate life of Newport, almost forgot that she was married. But she never forgot Gyp. He wrote her loving

(*Continued on page 250*)

What girl is this who runs upon the beach with streaming eyes and wild, disheveled hair?

Two Woodcuts

by

GAN KOLSKI

THE FISHERMEN