

The Convalescent

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He: "If it's not OK — "

She: "No, no, it's fine."

He is recovering from an operation. They have rented a cottage in a little seacoast town, an out-of-the-way town you discover while turning your car around, or when you get lost, or where someone's sister lives, or where you take a vacation you hate because you have no talent for vacations.

It is a sunny day. Gray wood of old fences in front of the houses. Long grass. The sea below. They are planning to go for a walk. He has been sick all his life, in and out of hospitals, they have always lived on next-to-no money. He takes a step, tests to see if the operated-on leg will support his weight.

"I can go a little better. Look at this!" He is excited at being able to take a few careful steps down the hill. It is clear that the improvement in the leg has become the one joy in his life. She, on the other hand, is as depressed as she always has been, wonders to herself, Will it never be over?

The vast ocean below in the bright sunlight, a cool wind blowing up the hill.

Then suddenly he falls down. She regards him lying there, groaning, the pleasure of his life suddenly gone, then goes over to him, kneels, says appropriate words, gets up and walks to the house to call an ambulance.

The ambulance comes, men in white lift him onto a stretcher. She, knowing there will be no end, stands watching them place the foot of the stretcher in the vehicle. She goes over and stands at the side of the stretcher. With a faltering energy he tries to take her hand. His eyes say, "It will be better next time, you'll see!" She lets him hold her hand until they push the stretcher inside and close the doors. No end.

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