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Molly herself was responsible for bringing Christina into the house. Old Theresa was ailing; and with four children, each only a year apart, Molly couldn't cope with all the work. Besides, she was pregnant again. Christina, her first cousin, unmarried and a willing worker, was unemployed. It seemed an ideal arrangement. What Molly didn't know (although the neighbours did) was that John J. had begun to consider himself a ladies' man, and that Christina's behaviour was wide open to suggestion, especially after a few sips of whiskey. "Why didn't ye send for me sooner, ye poor dear?" Christina gazed fretfully at Molly and frowned with concern. "Ye just sit down now, and I'll take over for you. Maybe ye'd rather go up and lay down?" Her dark eyes sent a message to John J. that had nothing to do with the words she was crooning. "Ain't that right, John J.? Shouldn't she lay down for a while?" "I suppose it would be all right," John J. answered, as if trying to puzzle the whole thing out in his head. He had read the message in Christina's eyes. Everyone was happy. Even John R. looked less miserable than usual. Molly spent more and more time resting. Theresa liked to have the younger woman beside her and was glad of her presence upstairs in the loft. The children, on their own most of the time, were happy in the roughly made teeter-totter and swings. John J. and Christina took full advantage of every minute they had together • in the loft, in the barn, on the side roads, during their shopping trips, any place they'd not likely be discovered. Ronnie MacLean began to call. No one could remember just when. Christina teased him on the sly, when she thought John J. wasn't looking, but not enough to give him courage to ask her out. He'd been calling about a month, when Christina, who'd been silent and moody all week, went looking to find John J. in the barn. "Where's Ben and Tim?" she asked. "The old fella sent them for a load of firewood. Himself cut it up on Chauncey's hill a while back. Why?" "Just wanted to know if they was around. I've got something to tell you, • private." "Go ahead." John J.'s voice was unconcerned. "No one's around to hear. What is it?" "John J., I don't know how to say it • " Christina twisted her fingers nervously. The skin on John J.'s forehead gathered into three folds above his eyes as comprehension spread across his face. "Dia, iodhoV. (Gaelic curse combining the word for God, Dia, with iodhol, the word for pagan idol. Together, they sound like ye-a-in- hane.) Ye can't be! Are ye? Jesus Christ! What are we gonna do now?" John J. never flinched for words. In his way he loved Molly, as much as he could love anything; and nothing was going to change his life. He and Christina stood facing each other in the gutter behind the cows, each holding a bucket brimming full of milk. No tender little slaps or playful teasing marked this moment of isolation. Both were dead serious. "Ye're in it as much as me, John J.," said Christina. "Can't ye think of something?" "I know! I know!" John J. passed a hand over his hair. He had no mind to throw away his playmate with a few hasty words. "Look, Christina, there's Ronnie. He'll be a rich man when his old man kicks the bucket. Och, now, don't look like a pile of manure fell on ye. It won't make no difference between us two." "Are ye sure, John J.? Are ye sure it won't?" "Of course not." John J.'s face relaxed. "Why should it? Ye've done a bit of flirting with



him already." "Oh no! John J., I never!" Christina sounded hurt. John J. glanced down at her and snorted. "Ye didn't think I saw ye. I did though." His tone became serious again. "Now tonight, when Roimie comes, ye just give him the eye, like ye did me the day ye came. He'll understand." Christina had the decency to bow her head. "Get him to ask ye out for a walk or something and make damn sure he comes back responsible. You sure now? Couldn't be ye've made a mistake? Then we wouldn't have to be doin' all this." The Cape Bretoner Motel Conference Facilities • 200-Seat Banquet Facilities m Indoor Pool 560 KING'S ROAD SYDNEY NOVA SCOTIA PHONE (902) 539-8101 Completely Renovated with New Suites Locally Owned Licensed Restaurant and Quiet Lounge Christina gave him a lopsided smile. "I'm sure," she said. She liked the way he'd said we. That evening, John J. was especially cheerful. He put on a wheedling voice and asked Molly to stay down a little later dian usual, to make a foursome with Ronnie and Christina for a game of forty- five. Molly blushed at her husband's unexpected m. SCOTSBURN The Dairy Best MILK THE DAIRY CENTRE P.O. BOX 1240 SYDNEY. N.S. B1P6J9 564-5581 Cape Breton Dairymen ICE CREAM SYDPORT P.O. 80X188 SYDNEY, N.S. B1P6H1 564-2000 DON'T MAKE A MOVE WITHOUT US! ' • LOCAL • LONG DISTANCE • OVERSEAS LARGE OR SMALL - WE MOVE IT ALL 'MOFFATT Moving & Storage SAFELY, EFFICIENTLY & INSURED CALL THE PROFESSIONALS • OVER 40 YEARS EXPERIENCE FREE ESTIMATES 562-0222 80 MARINE DR., SYDPORT WMkands & Altar Hours 564-0963/562-1978 Adas VAN LINES/AGENT