

CHAPTER SECOND

DESIRE UNDER THE EIMS

CHAPTER SECOND

DESIRE UNDER THE ELMS

Leaving two sons behind Mrs. Cabot died. Ephraim Cabot married again and his second wife was the mother of Eben. She also died leaving the farm in which she worked hard, to her husband's care.

Mr. Cabot had two sons from his first marriage, Simeon and Peter. Eben was his son from the second marriage. For the third time Ephraim married Abbie Putnam. She to some extent could play the role of a wife, but it was impossible for her to be the real mother of the three sons of Mr. Cabot.

Eben's mother died. Eben held his father responsible for the death of his mother. She was a good woman. She was good to her stepsons, simeon and Peter also. Their conversation reveals all this.

EBEN. (intensely) I'am Maw - every drop O' blood

PETER. She was good t' Sim'n' me.
A good stepmaw's scurse.

SIMEON. She was good t' everyone¹⁰

Mr. Cabot was all the while causing torture to his sons' they all were well aware of Mr. Cabot married Eben's mother only with the intention of possessing the farm.

Eben's mother worked hard on the farm as well as

10 The Play of Eugene O'Neill : (New York, Random House ; 1974), p.207.

shw worked at home also. She used to come back from the farm to help to fry bacon, to shake the fire, her eyes were bloody with smoke. She could not sleep or rest naturally

Still it was her nature not to complain . Even though she got tired, She was now used to it . Eben vowed to take revenge upon his father for the death of his mother.

[Min's character has got the minor importance. To her Eben was attracted.]

The news of Mr. Cabots' third marriage came to his sons. They felt very nervous. As a result Peter and Simeon decided to leave home. They thought it was no good to live there then.

After the death of Eben's mother and the news of Abbie's arrival Simeon and Peter took the decision to leave for California.

ABBIE. is thirty five, buxom, full of vitality. Her round face is pretty but marred by its rather gross sensuality. There is strength and obstinacy in her jaw, a hard determination in her eyes and about her whole personality the same unsettled, untamed, desperate quality.¹¹

Abbie married Ephraim Cabot when he was seventyfive in order to get the farm. Since the time that she had worked in other people's homes, she had cherished the desire of having her own farm. After the death of her first husband who

¹¹ Ibid. P. 221.

was a drunkard and also that of a child from him she was free to live according to her own will.

The play is based on the domestic situation. The heroine is discribed by men here.

Eben hated his father for his irresponsibility made his mother die. His mother's death was caused by Ephraim.

Both came together with different motives. Eben wanted to take revenge upon his father and Abbie had the desire of having the farm of Ephraim with the help of Eben. So they decided to fulfil their desires. Abbie fell in love with Eben. She asked Eben if he loved her really. He also liked her. But liking is not loving. At last, he also developed love for her. The following talk shows that both were successful in their different motives;

ABBIE . We made it our'n last night, didn't we ? We give it life - our lovin' did (A pause.)

EBEN . (with a strong look) Maw's gone back t' her grave. She kin sleep now!2

Abbie reminded Eben of his mother as he was drawn to her. It was because of his lust, greed and desire that he fell in love with Abbie. He actually did not love her. But he wanted her to take revenge upon his father.

Abbie made Eben believe in her. She was frank to him, regarding her past life. She wanted to form a close relationship with him. She frankly told him of her past. By this she could calm the anger of Eben.

She loved him ;

ABBIE (Both her arms around him with wild passion)
I'll sing fur ye! I'll die fur ye!
(Inspite of her overwhelming desire for
desire for him, there is a sincere maternal
love in her manner and voice - a horribly
frank mixture of lust and mother love)
Don't Cry Eben! I'll take your Maw's
place ! , I'll be eveythin ! she was t '
ye ! let me kiss ye pure, Eben!

Abbie had an intense desire of possession. She was so eager to enter her own house. She was very happy to know that she got her own home and her own kitchen, her nice bedroom and bed.

Eben hated her for her occupation of his mother's place. But she knew that it was through Eben that she was to be able to get her desired farm. She didn't like to pretend to be his Maw. She wanted just to be his friend.

But Eben was not in the mood to listen to her and he called her a harlot. He simply hated her. But even then she continued loving him.

She was there to have her own things, The two stepsons having already left for California, Only Ebea was there .She thought to win him in order to enable her to achieve her goal.

Abbie was bold, and straight forward also. She loved Eben when he was in his excited moments. Though he opposed her, she very skilfully and gradually took him in her possession.

To fulfil her dream, she loved Eben. She told him if he cried, she would tell Mr. Cabot that he was trying to make love to her.

According to Doris Nelson ;

.. "Abbie Putnam has nothing else to offer, so she must sell herself in marriage in order to stake a claim on the farm (her first real home) which father and son struggle over a matter of right.¹⁴

Her greed of property forced her to do everything.

She was always reminded of her past. The comparison of her past with the present taught her much. Her past life was dependent on others. Now she desired the life of her own. She wanted to emulate her past employers, and possess farms and houses, like them. For her all their happiness lay there only.

14 Doris Nelson, "O'Neill's Women: A special Section ",
The Eugene O'Neill News - letter, (Summer fall, 1942).

Abbie set material values above the spiritual goal. The beauty art and all human relations are corrupted by the mad pursuit of gold.

The desire of gold compelled the brothers to go to California. This greed for gold is seen in the beginning of the play.

Every activity in Cabot's home was motivated by the greed of possessing something.

The seduction of Eben is the culmination of her cleverness (She was the fullscale' character in the play.)

Husband-wife relations and mother-son relations are clearly revealed here.

When Abbie gave birth to a child from him (Eben) Eben threatend to leave her. For Eben's love Abbie killed the child. She proved her love to Eben.

Furiously, Eben went to the police to report her crime. But he also felt guilty. His lust was transformed into love. By the killing of the baby they were again united.

Abbie told Ephraim the why she murdered the child. Here also she was bold enough to answer Cabot. She says;

ABBIE. Don't ye dare tech me, what right hev ye t' question me 'bout him? He wan't yewr son Think I'd have a son by yew? I'd die fust! I hate the sight O'ye an' allus did! It's yew I should 've murdered, if I'd had good sense! I hate ye! I love Eben-I did from the fust. An' he was Eben's son - mine an' Eben's not your'n! 15

Abbie was frank and open to Mr. Cabot. She gave him the realization of his age. When Eben came from the police, she confessed her offence. She told him that she killed the child to prove her love. He also confessed that he loved her.

At the end the she riff who came to arrest them was also, haunted by the desire of the farm.

15 The Plays of Eugene.

O'Neill, (New York : Random House : 1949), p. 264.