

THE
PASSIONATE PURITAN

JANE MANDER



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BY THE SAME AUTHOR

THE STORY
OF A NEW ZEALAND RIVER

"The author not only knows her country, but those who live in it, and she describes both with strong feeling and yet with artistic restraint."

—*Boston Transcript.*

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**TO
MY BROTHER**

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CHAPTER I

It would not have mattered to Sidney Carey what kind of morning it was when she stepped out of the train at the Whakapara station for the first time. As it happened, it was blazing January heat, in the summer of 1912. But she hardly noticed it.

When he handed down her travelling cases the train guard wondered again who she was, and why she had stopped there. He thought of her several times during the day, and when he reached home he did not wait for his wife to begin her usual inquisition as to who had gone up and down the line, but volunteered a description right away of the only first-class passenger he had had on the morning train.

Sidney Carey was prepared to wait at the Whakapara station. Prepared because everybody she had ever heard of told picturesque tales

of waiting at wayside stations. Prepared also because the unusually explicit letter of instructions she had received told her not to be disturbed if she had to.

For a minute she stood still looking about her. After one glance at the dusty bench in the stuffy three-walled waiting room she decided to leave her luggage where the guard had dropped it, and to put up her umbrella, and walk up and down the platform. She saw the other passengers go towards a group of low wooden buildings on the other side of the clay road that ran parallel to the railway through the valley. She had no time to observe them individually because a stooping man, whose only insignia of office was a battered headgear like a yachting cap, came up to her. He carried a mail bag stamped Whakapara under one arm.

"Miss Carey, miss?" he asked.

"Yes, I am."

"Somebody'll be down for you before long, miss. They know you're coming."

"Oh, thank you. Do you know if my luggage has arrived?"

"I guess so. There's a lot of stuff gone up for you."

"Thank you."

The station master touched his hat with a rare respectfulness, and turning from her moved some

cases into a small baggage room attached to the waiting room, locked the door, and with the mail bag under his arm followed the passengers across the road.

Sidney walked after him to the end of the platform and looked curiously across at the building. She saw Whakapara Store and Post Office on a sign over the door where he disappeared. She saw the passengers and farmers and settlers gather to wait for the opening of the mail. In spite of the heat and the yellow dust that lay over everything she felt fresh enough to be curious about all she saw. She recognised one of the buildings as a blacksmith's shop, another as an extension of the store. All, save the smithy, were set on low wooden blocks, with a sad assortment of tins and rubbish stowed away beneath them.

A little apart from the central group stood the Town Hall. Sidney was to learn later what a Poohbah among buildings this absurd barn was—how it housed the activities of all denominations of ministers, of all brands of politicians, of the undertaker, the coroner, the wandering lecturer on character reading and "bumps"; of how it housed the annual agricultural show, the church soirees, the occasional bazaar, the intermittent movie, the ambitious wedding, the weekly dance, the anniversary ball—those hallmarks of western

civilization that follow the British flag to the remotest ends of earth. Sidney did not take in all this as she looked at it, nor did she foresee in what circumstances she might learn to have a great affection for it. It did not look like a place that offered a chance for thrills.

Her eyes roved along the valley over the hills, partly wooded, burned and smoking in places, and all curiously desolate, even under the summer sun. Then she strolled to the other end of the platform and looked north. She could see the clay road and the railway running together for a quarter of a mile. She noticed that the train had stopped and was shunting empty trucks into sheds at the base of the hill on the right that rose like a cliff sheer up from the railway line into a mountain range. She remembered the station master's "up" and "down." And she knew without being told that somewhere up there was the Puhipuhi forest, lying like a land of dreams remote beneath the summer sun.

Sidney gazed hopefully up at its uneven skyline. She knew adventure lay ahead of her up there, knew it as surely as a child does when it sets out to dodge imaginary lions in a shrubbery in the twilight.

The train puffed on, and the sounds of its strenuous snorting died away. As Sidney was about to turn she heard a low rumbling up in the

hills, a rumbling that swelled and stopped suddenly. Then something caught her eye on the brow of the cliff above the railway line. To her amazement she saw a pile of timber shoot over the top and drop down to the empty trucks with a short roar that echoed round the valley. Since she could not see the machinery by which it was done it had the appearance of magic. As she watched, another load came over and dropped and reached the bottom safely. It filled her with excitement. She knew it was linked up with the timber mill in the bush whither she was going.

Sidney Carey, at the age of twenty-four, expected great things of herself and of the world. And in this belief she had been encouraged by most of the people she had met in her native city, Auckland.

She had recently been arrested by a sentence by Arnold Bennett to the effect that whatever a person was was due merely to the accident of being born in the other bedroom, and because she had absorbed the profound truth in this remark even before she read it she was not as harmed by the success of her personality as she otherwise might have been. It was because she was born in a bedroom where the good fairies lavishly dealt out objective tendencies and gave but a minimum of introspective ones that she had sailed through the world with her head up, her eager eyes and mind

roving to learn of anything and everything but herself.

Though not beautiful as a child, she grew more attractive every year. She was tall, slight and supple. Her hair was warm brown, touched in the sun with reddish lights, her colour clear and good, and her eyes blue and steady.

At the age of fifteen she had passed her first teacher's examination second on the list for the Auckland Province. For the three succeeding years she had headed the list. In the wider state examinations for her certificates she had gained first-class honours for every subject she took except algebra, thereby establishing a record that nobody in the whole of New Zealand had reached at that time.

Being an inspired teacher, as well as a first-class student, she was naturally a favourite in educational circles, and naturally every headmaster in Auckland wanted her for his head assistant.

But some time before her dramatic triumphs the Auckland Board had ruled that every teacher applying for a big city position must have taught for two years somewhere in the backblocks. This was not only for the good of the teacher's soul, but also for the good of the children of the remote farmer, the gumdigger and the bushman, who, the Board felt, ought to get some contact

with the best it had to give them. After some wirepulling, and adverse criticism thereon, the Board had become rigid about enforcing the rule. Sidney Carey could not hope to escape it, even though she were a friend of the chairman, James Ridgefield. The most he could do, he said, would be to send her to the new school at his mill in the Puhipuhi where she would be within three hours of Whangarei, the largest town in the north, which was itself eight hours by steamer from Auckland.

And Sidney, knowing she had to go somewhere, said this would do finely. Once she had adjusted her mind to the idea of the change, and it did not take her long, she was enchanted by the visions she conjured up of things she had known only in short vacations. She liked the idea of the little bush school she was to open and start upon its way.

And she wanted something new. She had come to mental crossroads. She saw she had lived far too much in books.

Sidney was not a typical teacher. She loathed the idea of ever becoming hallmarked. It was her secret pride that no one who met her socially took her for a teacher, or could guess her profession. Out of school she never talked shop. She had already begun to project her mind into other fields. She wanted to write. And some

success with newspaper articles had turned her thoughts to journalism. A discriminating newspaperman told her to get away from books, from teachers and theories, to talk less and feel more.

"You're not half developed, even for your age," he told her. "Why, you've never been in love! And you really don't know the country. You have lived far too much in rooms, and you're surfeited with other people's vibrations. By all means go to the Puhipuhi. The very thing you need."

Sidney knew he was right. And that was why she was glad to be on the Whakapara platform that summer morning, waiting for someone to meet her.

CHAPTER II

As Sidney continued to look at the siding, wondering if a third load would drop from the hill-top, she saw a man appear beside the trucks walking along the railway line towards the station. She wondered as he came on if he was to meet her. She saw that he was tall, that he held his head well up, and that he swung easily without stumbling along the uneven track between the lines. When he came to a high bridge crossing a dip not far from the station, he stepped from sleeper to sleeper without diminishing his speed.

Not wishing to stare she retreated to sit down upon her baggage, and did not look again upon the stranger till he stepped upon the platform. Then as he came towards her she rose.

Jack Ridgefield did not smile, for he rarely smiled. And meeting a strange woman meant nothing to him. But his grave courtesy was a force that radiated from him, powerful to attract almost every kind of person. It was one of the secrets of his enormous influence over the men in his father's mill. He raised his hat some seconds before he spoke.

"Miss Carey?"

"Yes, it is."

"I'm Jack Ridgefield."

Her face lit up as she held out her hand. She always met people with the air of finding them the most interesting thing she had encountered in a long while. Then she knew a good deal about Jack Ridgefield. She knew much more of what his father thought of him than he did himself.

"I'm sorry you've had to wait," he said.

"I didn't mind it a bit, thank you."

"I have to get the mail. I shall be back in a few minutes."

She had noticed that he carried a dirty canvas bag. She watched him go along the platform and cross the road to the store. She knew his old dusty tweed suit had once been the best of its kind, and that his soft cotton shirt and collar had been clean that morning. She had seen that his eyes were hazel and his hair neither dark nor light. That there was nothing vivid about him but his strength and the sense of confidence he inspired.

In the store Jack met a sandy-haired country boy whose wagon was hitched outside.

"Are you in a hurry, Jimmy?" he asked.

"No, mister."

"Would you run some luggage along to the siding for me?"

"You bet."

"Thanks, Jimmy. It's there on the platform with a lady. Don't take the lady."

Grinning, Jimmy ambled out.

Sidney Carey looked at him inquiringly.

"I'm to take your baggage, miss," he said awkwardly.

"Thank you," she smiled.

He was well along the road before she heard Jack Ridgefield's steps again. She turned to meet him.

"We shall have to walk to the siding," he said, nodding his head at it. "I should have met you with a buggy, but we had a bad washout on the road up above two days ago, and it isn't fixed yet."

"Oh, I don't mind. I'm ready to do anything the country asks of me."

A suspicion of a smile crossed his eyes, enough to make her feel he thought her words a boast. Indeed, he looked at her tailormade citified appearance and wrongly judged she had no idea what she was talking about.

"I'll take that," he said, reaching for her umbrella.

"I can carry it, thank you. You have that bag."

But he took the umbrella, as he took everything

he intended to take, and they started together along the dusty yellow road.

"Would you like it up?" he asked.

"No, thanks. I like the sun."

She calculated, as she swung along beside him with a step as free as his, that he was only a year or two older than herself. She felt already that he was difficult, that he was the kind of man for whom most speech was meaningless.

But Jack felt that as a host he must exert himself. He began by asking her what kind of boat journey she had had to Whangarei, and they found no difficulty in asking and answering questions till they reached the siding.

There the boy in the wagon passed them.

"Thanks, Jimmy," Jack nodded at him.

The boy grinned back, pleased to have served him.

Sidney followed on between the rails of the siding. Men unloading fitches from the mill trucks to the railway ones looked at her curiously, touching their caps. Beside a shed she stopped and gasped. From her feet straight up into the sky ran a line of steel rails. Her bags were already strapped to one of the two wooden trucks that seemed to hang at the bottom of a heavy steel rope.

"You don't have to ride up," said Jack Ridgefield, "there's a path."

She saw now the zigzag outline of it.

"Does anybody ride?" she asked, remembering her boast.

"We usually do. But I prefer not to take up people who don't like the look of it."

There was nothing in his voice or manner to imply that he thought nervous people foolish.

"I'll ride up," she plunged.

She had hoped for a responsive look from him, but she was disappointed. It didn't matter to him whether she was scared or not. But he carefully arranged his coat on the back truck for her to sit on, told her how to place her feet, for the trucks were not boarded right across, showed her the chain to hold on to, and then with another man jumped lightly onto the front truck and gave the signal to start. Someone at the shed blew a horn which was answered up the hillside, and they began to move.

The whole way up Sidney kept her eyes fixed on Jack Ridgefield's reassuring back, and held her breath. She would have been ashamed to admit her relief when they came to a standstill, and when a log was lowered as a buffer across the line behind them.

Waiting for them at the top was a short sad-eyed man with a pair of magnificent draught horses.

Sidney began to get up.

"Oh, we go on," said Jack, turning to look at her, "unless you'd rather walk. This line runs right into the mill. It's three miles."

She knew that if she walked he would have to walk with her. She settled back.

"Certainly, I'll ride," she answered, determined to enjoy the novelty.

After the horses were hitched to the trucks in tandem fashion they began slowly to ascend a long slope of even steepness. Almost immediately they plunged into high bush, the trees often meeting overhead. Sidney began to be thrilled. Down one side she saw a good way into the depths of a ravine and heard water roaring out of sight at the bottom. On the other side she stared into tropical undergrowth that looked as if no man had ever worked his way through it. She knew it must have been a tough job to lay that railway there. She learned afterwards that Jack Ridgefield had engineered it and overseen its construction as a boy of twenty.

Sidney sat, as she had to, very still, sniffing the bush, delighting in the rattle of the trucks, in the click of the horses' hoofs on the wooden sleepers, in the crack of the sad-eyed man's whip as he walked beside them, his queer language of exhortation moderated considerably by her presence. For a mile they proceeded ever upwards till they came suddenly out upon an open space

where there stood a shed, a stable and a water trough. Two small trucks lay on a siding beside the line, and nearby there were piles of spare timber, large cans of black grease and a heap of sand.

Here the trucks were braked to a standstill and the horses unhitched. The driver, Bill Hardy, slapped the hindquarters of the animals with an exclamation intelligible only to them, and, their harness clanking, they set off along a track that ran beside the line.

Jack Ridgefield jumped off, the driver taking his place. The front truck then began to move, Sidney had not noticed why, and went off slowly at first, but gathering speed down the slope till it whizzed out of sight.

Jack held out his hand to her.

"Get off for a bit, Miss Carey, and stretch," he said. "You must be stiff."

She found she was so stiff that for a minute she could not straighten herself.

When she looked about her she was disappointed to find that haze and smoke veiled most of the country. She could see clearly only about half a mile down the line where the other truck had disappeared. She and Jack Ridgefield stood alone somewhere up in the air. She felt rather than saw that they were above everything for miles around. A gentle breeze, warm with passing over

hot valleys, but sweet with the scent of burnt fern, refreshed her.

"It's a pity it's so hazy," he said, seeing she was enjoying it. "There's a good view from here when it's clear. If you're rested we will go on."

He helped her back, let go the brake, gave the truck a starting shove, and jumped on.

That first bush ride, shooting down slopes and along flats, was one of the most exciting things Sidney had known. She knew well there would be no accident with Jack Ridgefield at the brake. She magnified the difficulty of his job absurdly at the time, so that the ride carried with it not only the romance of racing through a veiled and unknown land, but the thrill of certain danger if one thoughtless move were made.

She was conscious of spinning by the two big horses tramping their way back to the mill, of glimpses of a road on her right, and of bush on her left, and of racing down a last slope on to a wide flat, a curious flat, unlike anything she had ever imagined. As far now as she could see there were no green trees, there was only fern and scrub, with enormous table-topped stumps, bleached white, rising everywhere above the parched brown. And here and there were clumps of twisted skeletons patched white and black, pitiful remnants left by many a fire to mark that

lesser company of trees that had stood around the giant kauri like pages round a throne.

The great stumps stretched out their roots above the ground like the arms of an octopus, and all above them and around them rose visible waves of heat like the lines on watered silk. In spite of the wind created by the speed of the truck, Sidney was excessively hot.

In a few minutes buildings and timber stacks covering an extensive area began to shape themselves in the film ahead, and now above the roar and rattle of the truck she heard intermittent sounds that she could not recognise.

On the outskirts of the concentrated part of the village Jack Ridgefield braked the truck to a standstill.

With an inquisitive glance down an avenue of timber stacks at a huge zinc mill belching boards, she followed him along a narrow track in the fern, past stumps and rotting logs, at the back of a cluster of small houses, till they came to a newly-built structure set in the middle of a burnt patch. It looked to her just like a little shed.

"This is the school," said Jack, pausing a moment.

She was rather astonished at its crudeness, but in a mood of being prepared for anything remarked merely that it would seem small after what she was accustomed to. Then she followed

him on round the burnt patch to the end of a row of cottages, surrounded by paling fences, set a chain or two apart, on the western side of the village.

In this row lived the mill aristocracy. First nearest the school was her own house. Then came Jack Ridgefield's, then that of Bob Lindsay, his chief accountant, then the head saw doctor's, and at the end, the chief engineer's.

In front of her own prim little gate Jack turned with one of his rare smiles.

"Well, Miss Carey, here you are."

He opened the gate, and followed her in. He picked up her two bags which had already reached her verandah, opened her front door, and stepped after her into her one large room. It was filled with furniture and trunks and boxes of books.

"We've left everything for you to fix as you want it, Miss Carey, but I'll come along after dinner and open up your boxes, and you can have all the help you need. If you don't like the shelves where they are I'll move them. Anything you want done can be done without any trouble. The whole place will want to look after you. As a teacher here you'll be a god. You'll probably be bored to death."

She smiled eloquently at him.

"It will take a lot to kill me," she said gaily.

"That's fortunate, or perhaps it isn't." Now

I'll take you to the Mackenzies. We've arranged for the present for them to give you your meals. You can make any change later you like. But as Mrs. Mackenzie is the best cook in the place you will probably stick to her."

At the saw doctor's cottage a pleasant little Scotch woman bustled out to meet them. Sidney's eyes lit up at the sight of her. She looked so hospitable and capable, as indeed she was.

Jack introduced them briefly.

"Come in, Miss Carey. You must be very tired and hot."

"I'm leaving you in good hands," said Jack turning away. "I'll see you later on."

Sidney entered an oppressively immaculate little dining-room, with a beeswaxed floor that she knew set a standard for the village, and everything shining aggressively in keeping.

Mrs. Mackenzie, flustered with importance, drew forward a rocker to the open window.

"Sit here, Miss Carey. The mill whistle will blow in five minutes and then my husband and boy will be here, so we'll wait for them. But you shall have a cup of tea at once."

CHAPTER III

By the middle of the afternoon Sidney had hardly begun to unpack the boxes and trunks that Jack had opened for her, because she had been beguiled from real work by the interest of examining her little house and the school.

She had settled with James Ridgefield that she would try the experiment of living by herself. She had almost enough furniture, she said, and he told her the Board would supply necessary things that she would leave behind. He assured her she would be perfectly safe, and he agreed with her that she would not want parents about her ears all the while, that her soul, being rather an individual specimen, would need all the aloneness it could get in a place where her habits would be continuously in the centre of the village green, as it were, for inspection.

"They mustn't know you smoke," he had said.

"Of course not," she laughed, thinking that would be easy.

In fact, she thought it would all be easy, absurdly easy, as she made her first exploration.

Her little house had a peculiar charm. It was

brand new, unpainted, as were all the other houses, and zinc-roofed. It had one large room, as rooms went there, with an open fireplace, two large windows (one set in an alcove with a broad seat), and well placed bookshelves. It ran from front to back, and opening off it were a bedroom and a kitchen. The whole thing was unpapered, simply lined and ceiled with heart of kauri, sweet with the exquisite freshness of the pine.

In the yard she had found a woodshed and wash-house, and the primitive sanitary arrangement of those parts. There was a fine pile of wood cut ready for her and a big box of kindling. One or two heavy thunderstorms had fortunately half-filled her zinc tank. The ground round her house had been dug, and someone had begun a flower garden for her. She was deeply touched by all this preparation.

For a chain or more outside her fence the fern had been recently burnt off, as it had round the school and all the other houses. Sidney was to learn later that in the summer and autumn fire was the demon against which the whole village guarded unceasingly.

When she had gone through her house half a dozen times, changing her mind each time as to where she would put her furniture, she walked over to the school. It was the smallest institution for the improvement of the race that she

had ever seen. Its one room and porch were like a toy house. But in her comprehensive mood of loving everything she felt an instant passion of proprietorship for it.

The desks and furniture were all there waiting to be arranged. Again she blessed the Ridgefields, father and son, for having made her beginnings so easy. So far she had not discovered anything essential that they had not thought of, and even the Board had been prompt with her first batch of supplies.

She was full of unbounded interest and curiosity about the whole place.

After dinner she had stood on Mrs. Mackenzie's verandah looking over the tops of buildings at the mill. Set at the corner of the village farthest from the school it dominated the plain as a cathedral dominates a mediæval town. Its two giant smoke funnels rose, spires of industry, above everything for miles around.

The village lived by it, for it. The first morning whistle woke the whole place up; the second started streams of men along paths leading to it from all directions. At the third there arose a palpitating roar of machinery that vibrated out over the flat. Later whistles guided the lives of the men and their families throughout the day. In case of fire there was hardly a man who would

not have deserted his own belongings and rushed to save it first.

The plain about the mill extended for some six miles one way and three the other. It was a kind of table top between the lower ranges about Whakapara and the higher ones of the Puhipuhi proper. It dropped into deep gullies on three sides.

Thirty years before the entire flat had been covered with one of the finest bits of big kauri in the country. It had been cut by James Ridgefield's predecessor, who left him the much harder job of working out the forest on the ranges. The flat was thus a graveyard for the old trees, their enormous stumps the eloquent tablets to their memory.

The Puhipuhi had also known the glamour of silver mines. Years before, the rumour of metal back in the ranges had drawn a horde of prospectors seeking a new El Dorado, and though the gullies were mostly strewn with forlorn hopes, the magic name still clung, and there were still men who poked about its stony ravines with imperishable optimism.

Mrs. Mackenzie had taken Sidney past the engineer's house at the end of the row, to a spot where they got an uninterrupted view of the mill dam and the open plain beyond. The mill was built beside a shallow bush creek that came down

from the ranges. Nothing but the genius of James Ridgefield and his son could have made a working proposition of that summer dry water-course. By a series of fourteen dams on various tributaries back in the hills the power for bringing logs down to the mill was so well managed that it never ran out of timber. When the mill dam got low and the logs scarce the "system" was set to work, and the birds of that country fled from the extraordinary sight of great trees bobbing down the dry river bed on the first rush of a flood that came from no rain they knew of.

So there was always more or less water in the mill dam, and when it was full it made a narrow lake an eighth of a mile wide at the facing and a mile long up the creek. Then, too, the overflow roared down a precipitous ravine into a lovely gully that broke the flat a chain or so behind the cottages. There was a curious rock formation under the dam that carried off at all times a certain amount of water by an unseen waterfall, so that if one stood in the gully below looking up the face of the precipice, there would, when the dam was low, be no sign of water falling anywhere, and yet there it gushed out at one's feet with weird cavernous gurgles, to run swiftly on through the valley. It made a continuous under-current of sound, often drowned by day by the greater noises of the mill, but always by night an

accompaniment to the breeze that stirred the fern.

Between the place where Sidney and Mrs. Mackenzie stood and the dam itself was a second bed where the creek had divided on coming to the precipice. This was now always dry, and above it was built the wooden framework of a railway that carried large trucks of sawdust and timber ends to be tipped over into an everlasting fire that burned on the face of the ravine among the rocks, occasionally shooting bursts of flame that were visible by night for miles, always smoking, always perfuming the air, always spitting and cracking and sparking. Every now and then, too, there would be a sharp crack like the shot from a small cannon that would make a newcomer jump, as a rock split with the heat.

Sidney observed enough of all this to realize the individuality of the place, and to have something inside her go out to meet it.

CHAPTER IV

THAT evening, after supper, or tea as the village called it, Jack Ridgefield brought the school committee to meet her.

Sidney had never thought of a school committee. She had never come in contact with one, as that was the business of headmasters. She did not even know the duties of a school committee. She had taken it for granted that she would have official relations only with James Ridgefield and his son.

She was in the midst of unpacking when she heard the tramping of feet on the baked ground outside her fence. Looking through her window she saw six men filing through her gate after Jack Ridgefield. She recognised Tom Mackenzie, the saw doctor, as one of them.

As she stood framed in her open doorway, her face flushed with stooping, her eyes alight with an instant recognition of the human interest in the curiously assorted group with its hats off in front of her, each man according to his vision got a picture of her that stirred him to profound respect. Subconsciously they were all influenced

by her official position. To them she was more than woman, as a minister and a doctor are more than man to the small community dependent on them for emotional and physical comfort. Firstly, she was The Teacher. Secondly, in her simple blue print dress, she was a very attractive girl, much younger than they had expected.

"This is your school committee, Miss Carey," began Jack Ridgefield, with something like a twinkle in the corner of his eyes. "We wish to welcome you in the name of the village."

"My school committee!" she exclaimed. "Why, do I have one?"

As she looked at the youthful appearance of the men her comical surprise dispelled a certain stiffness that had threatened to make the occasion formal.

"Of course you do," he smiled back.

"Please come in," she said, forgetting the state of her room. There was not a chair that was not piled up with books or clothes.

"Of course we have come to help you to unpack, Miss Carey," said Bob Lindsay, the accountant, who was the village humorist.

Sidney flashed a responsive gleam back at his merry blue eyes, recognising him as a kindred spirit.

"Don't move anything, please," began Jack, hurriedly. "We won't stay a minute unless there

is really anything we can do. Later in the week we will meet you officially to find out what we have forgotten. Now let me introduce your humble servants. Mr. Bob Lindsay, your chairman. Mr. Mackenzie, whom you already know, your secretary. Mr. Alec Graham, our chief engineer, the treasurer. Mr. Stanley Dickson, our cook. He is the mill autocrat. He would be the hardest of all of us to replace. If everybody else fails you he will see that you do not starve." The cook was much pleased by this digression. "Mr. Dave Hansen and Mr. George Brody. They will do more for you than the rest of us put together. They've promised to keep the grounds in order, look after your wood supply, and do any carpentering you want. And, incidentally, they each have four children coming to school."

Sidney had tried to give each man an individual greeting, and because the last two had been the only ones mentioned as parents, she paused to ask them questions.

"Our boss has left himself out," said Bob Lindsay, with a smile at his employer. "He has refused to be anything but vice-chairman."

"I think a school is the business of parents. I'm the only single man present. And the rest of your committee have children of school age. So I'm going to take a back seat on this."

Sidney rightly suspected him of inability to be anything but a paramount influence.

The little group of men stood round her in a ring, the oldest of them, Tom Mackenzie, who was about forty, being years older than the cook, who came next. She was vividly conscious of their deference. And she thought what a curious thing officialdom was. Then and there those men constituted themselves her helpers and protectors. And when months afterwards some foul-mouthed worker used her name lightly in the presence of the cook he found himself dazed on the ground, with the raging Dickson calling upon him to retract his words or "take some more."

"I brought them last night purposely," said Jack Ridgefield to her the next day. "I knew it would please the men." By "the men" he meant the cook and the two mill workers. "It's hard to be democratic with these chaps, and I take all the chances I see."

"Of course," she answered approvingly. "And I can't make any distinctions, even if I wished to. To me they are all parents. By the way, would you give me a list of the children who are coming? I want to call on the mothers."

"Oh, you don't have to do that," he objected.

"Why?" She raised her eyebrows at him. "I came a week earlier to do it. You bring the

fathers to me. Of course I must go to see the mothers."

She was disturbed by this first opposition.

Then he told her rather bluntly about Mrs. Bill Hardy, the wife of the sad-eyed driver of the horses.

"They have eleven children," he said, "and poor Bill doesn't know how many of them are his. Only one of them looks like him. It's a favourite pastime in the kitchen trying to match the rest up among the men. Six of them will be coming to school. At first we said we wouldn't have them. But poor Bill took it so badly, and went away and got drunk, and when he came back we hadn't the heart to stick to it. The kids are harmless anyway. The only trouble is they use foul language. But we've cautioned Bill and Mrs. Bill that if they do that in the school grounds they will be expelled. Now you really can't call on Mrs. Bill. And I've forbidden her to come near you."

"You have!" A flush of annoyance spread over Sidney's face. "May I ask why?"

"Because she's not fit for any decent woman to see."

He looked down upon her with the old-fashioned respect that is both obnoxious and charming to the modern independent young woman.

"Why, she couldn't hurt me, and I might do her good——"

"You might!"

She regretted that foolish remark.

"Well, after all, she is a parent. And why do you have them here if she is as bad as that?"

"Bill is the best man with horses in New Zealand," he said slowly. "And his wife is not his fault. I've tried to get rid of her and him. I've sacked him ever so many times, and she's deserted him ever so many times. But he always comes back to me, and she always comes back to him. And I always take him back, and he always takes her back. I bow to the inevitable. Can you explain it, Miss Carey?"

Sidney laughed suddenly, and her resentment at his interference left her.

CHAPTER V

BUT Sidney had her way about visiting the mothers. At the end of her first week she had seen all of them except Mrs. Bill Hardy. She had compromised with Jack to that extent, but not until he had told her something that had caused her many times to break off in her preparations and laugh immoderately.

"If you will pardon me, Miss Carey," he had said, "I really think you had better take my advice about Mrs. Bill. She can be a horrible nuisance. And I have at last got her to keep from pestering the women in the place."

"Then she does take notice of you?"

"She does," he said grimly.

"Why?" she asked, suddenly curious.

He hesitated a minute.

"Well, about a year ago, before I had built my house, when I lived in a shanty, I came home one evening about nine to find Mrs. Bill in my bunk. She'd tried it on every man in the place. But I never thought she'd try it on me."

He looked over her head while a queer smile distorted his mouth.

"I went out, and before she saw what I was going to do I had a bucket of cold water over her, bunk and all. I gave her two minutes to get out, and told her if ever she set foot on my ground again I'd have her arrested for stealing. When she'd gone I went and told Bill, poor devil, and sacked him again. He got drunk and he beat her, and broke her arm among other things. In fact, what he did to her would have killed many a woman, so I heard afterwards from a Whangarei doctor. I had to tell the story to the police down there to save Bill from being prosecuted. She was in the hospital for two months. She's never been near me since, and she's been mighty quiet and civil whenever I've met her around."

This tale decided Sidney that she had better leave her meeting with Mrs. Bill to chance circumstance. She was flattered that Jack had told her, rightly judging there would be few women to whom he would have trusted the story.

Sidney was sadly disappointed in the personality of the village. What she had heard of "raw human material" had led her to expect that she would discover treasures of native wit and philosophy in the bush settlement. But the village was too prosperous. Everybody in it was saving money. And the women especially reflected the influence of growing bank accounts. They had evolved from the crude state that produces native

philosophers into the state of "getting on in the world" wherein philosophers rapidly perish and die. The village was almost a perfect specimen of bourgeois respectability. Mrs. Bill was the one blot upon its fair escutcheon. There was no Irish "drunk" to delight Sidney's heart, no cockney charwoman to take the world with vivid humour.

Not a woman in that place dared to have a front room suite of furniture that differed essentially from anyone else's. And if anyone had tried to set up a new style of decoration, or had deviated from the accepted white bed quilt and white lace curtains, she would have been regarded as an eccentric snob and severely criticised.

The aristocracy of the mill naturally held itself a little apart, but in the kindness of its heart it allowed itself to be neighbourly. Mrs. Mackenzie, Mrs. Lindsay and Mrs. Graham knew it was their duty as superiors to help the less fortunate wives of "the men," the generic term applied to all who did not live in the row with Jack Ridgefield. They were willing to be seen on the bowling green, where the men all met on equal terms, and take their turn at giving the teas, feeling that peculiar exaltation that is the reward of patronesses all the world over when they lend their gracious presences to give distinction to a gathering of humbler folk.

Of the trio, Mrs. Mackenzie was by far the most intelligent and the most human, and among her superiors would always have been greatly respected for her sense and kindness. But here she had unconsciously acquired a pose as the leader of her sex, the result of her husband's position. As he had preceded the other two in the Ridgefield employ, she felt she was entitled to senior rights, and was able to impress them without being unpleasant on both Mrs. Graham and Mrs. Lindsay. The fact that she had been selected to board the teacher was an enormous feather in her cap, and one she could not refrain from waving occasionally, though she humbly confided to the other two that she could not see why she was so honoured.

Mrs. Graham and Mrs. Lindsay had one satisfaction denied to Mrs. Mackenzie. Being no rivals, but recognising their husbands as equal in the eyes of Jack Ridgefield, they enjoyed luxurious gossips on the absurd claims of Mrs. Tom to be better than they, and they had a kind of gentleman's agreement that they would stick together, and not try to get ahead of each other in the favour of Mrs. Mackenzie or anyone else. They had to admit in their secret hearts that as a cook Mrs. Tom was a marvel, and if one of them managed to coax a method or a recipe out of her she was in honour bound to share it with the other.

These three set the standards for the village. The wives of "the men" sniffed at them, envied them and copied them.

Naturally the coming of Sidney provided a sensation. Every scrap of information that could be gleaned about her beforehand had been worn to shreds in rapid and continuous passage from fence to fence. The main interest that summer had been getting clothes ready for the children to make the finest possible impression upon the teacher, and those parents whose children had been unable to walk to the Whakapara school, had patiently struggled with the alphabet and reading and sums, in order that their offspring should make as good a mental showing as possible.

Of course the women of the village knew the teacher would be immeasurably beyond them, somewhere up in those lofty strata of society of which they dreamed in moments of yearning for better things. And what James Ridgefield had told the Mackenzies of Sidney's attainments added to her elevation. They knew perfectly well that all talk of their husbands about democracy, and all men being equal in Socialist New Zealand was just rubbish when it came to women. They may have wondered why they were not as good as Miss Carey, but they knew they were not, and that was the end of it.

As far as the trio were concerned, they felt they would at least have the great and glorious satisfaction of rivalling each other for her notice. Fortunately for their continued friendship they each had children to go to school to report what the teacher said and did.

Mrs. Mackenzie had one boy twelve years old, a quiet precocious boy, who was not a success as a news carrier, but who was destined to win a scholarship under Sidney, to the everlasting pride of his parents and the glory of the village.

Mrs. Graham was secretly delighted that she had a bright and dainty little girl for whom she had prepared clothes that she knew would distinguish her beyond any other child. Fortunately Mrs. Bob had no girl to rival her, but two boys, intelligent and merry like their father. These boys were not slow to perceive, nor their mother to inform them, that the school was peculiarly their perquisite as their father was chairman of the committee.

On the day of Sidney's arrival Mrs. Mackenzie had a continuous succession of proud moments. Not only was she delighted to be the first woman to set eyes on her and talk to her, but she was thrilled by the prestige she derived from the event in the eyes of her neighbours. No sooner was Sidney back in her own house than Mrs. Bob and Mrs. Alec, who had been looking through their

windows to see that neither got ahead of the other, ran simultaneously out of their front gates to meet at Mrs. Tom's back door.

They were all agitated as to whether they should call on Sidney, or wait for invitations, or be called on by her. Bob Lindsay was delegated to ask Jack Ridgefield the etiquette of the situation. Not for worlds would either of the three have failed to do the correct thing. Nor would one of them risk doing anything without the other. Jack's reply was that Sidney would call on them, and that then they should wait for her invitations.

"For heaven's sake, ask the three of them together," he said to Sidney as he talked it over with her.

"I see," she laughed.

And understanding perfectly she had them all to tea on the Friday afternoon. Even Mrs. Mackenzie was affected with nervousness, but they grew more composed as the visit progressed, feeling sure that they were all behaving correctly.

They were all amazed at the difference between the teacher's tastes and their own. She had no suite of furniture, no lace curtains. She had no sofa or couch, as they understood those objects of veneration. She had what looked to them like an ordinary single stretcher bed with a strange cover over it that they did not recognise as a fine

oriental, and an extravagant lot of cushions. She did not have two chairs alike. She had pictures that rather alarmed them, and two little statues they thought indecent. Her books they took calmly, unable to distinguish between them. She had copper dishes they could imagine no use for, and her curtains were queer like the bed cover.

But they had a wonderful gossip about it all afterwards. Not for a moment did they question her superiority, and already they asked themselves how they might imitate her.

Into this hornet's nest of touchiness and rivalry Sidney strode smiling, conscious of a good deal of it, and determined to be very careful to have no favourites. She knew everything she said and did would be talked from fence to fence. She knew her position was impregnable, but because she was naturally a diplomat among women, and good humoured and idealistic, she meant to manage her parents without giving cause for bitterness.

In visiting all the other mothers she had been careful not to appear to know everything about children. She had shown she would not expect too much of them. There had been nothing patronizing in her manner. She had succeeded so well that everyone warmed to her and trusted her. By the Friday night there was only one mother left for her to visit.

CHAPTER VI

It was with a feeling of expecting nothing that Sidney set off the next afternoon across the sizzling fern in the direction of the ranges to see the mother of the three Maori children who were among her pupils.

The hills to the northeast were veiled in a violet haze. The smell of burnt fern sweetened the hot air that scarcely moved above the flat. The whitened stumps around her looked like an array of plates set upon parched greenery for some giant's feast. Their uniformity of size and height was extraordinary. She tried to picture the trees that had once stood upon those great foundations, and the immense peace of the forest they adorned. It was a pleasant picture to conjure up on this stifling afternoon as she made her way along the dusty narrow tracks that cut in all directions across the flat to the main road leading up from Whakapara to the Puhipuhi.

Jack Ridgefield had told her how to get to her destination, nearly three miles away. But he did not hint at what she would find there.

As she looked from the ridge down upon it,

Sidney called it the Joyous Valley right away. It was really little more than a hollow. And it was cultivated from top to bottom and from end to end. To a person standing above, it was like an upturned smiling face. And it beckoned hospitably. It said "Come down and play with me."

Set in the middle of it she saw the ordinary bush cottage, with its verandah along the front, its lean-to at the back, and the detached sheds in the yard. It was almost covered with creepers and surrounded with flowers. It was built beside a stream that cut the farm in half, a delightful stream that gurgled along a ferny way to fall at the end of the hollow into the beginnings of another gully. Sidney saw fields with horses and cows, plots of corn and potatoes, grape vines, a large vegetable garden, and many little houses for bees. She was struck, as she walked on, with the orderliness of everything. The Maori, though possessing æsthetic sense and appreciation, is not, like temperamental people elsewhere, always famous for his tidiness.

A puppy rose up from the verandah and barked at Sidney. Then she saw a face appear and disappear at a window.

As she stood in the doorway she was astonished to see a piano and books and pictures inside the front room, but not so much astonished that a Maori should possess them as that they should be

there, in that remote place. While staring at unexpected things she was conscious of a flurry of movement in the back part of the house. She knew somebody was getting ready to meet her.

She forgot she was hot and tired when Mana Tahere came through the middle door.

Mana was a splendid thing, taller and straighter than most Maori women. She belonged to the family of a northern chief, and showed her patrician ancestry in every line of her fine features, and every movement of her beautiful body. She had the unconscious dignity that clothes so subtly the bearing of aristocrats all the world over. She had, besides, the sensuous charm of the South Seas. And she had more. Because there was some white blood in her she had an elusive sophistication added to the philosophical temperament of her own race.

She had been educated and brought up in an Episcopal school, and years of living on the land had not driven her back to her native dress or customs. She had slipped on a violet print dress, and tossed her heavy black hair in a circling coil round her head. A magnificent greenstone tiki hung on a black ribbon above her breast, and fine greenstone earrings dangled alluringly from her ears.

Her cheeks had a peach blush under their pale tawny skin. Her nose was straight, and her lips

full and finely moulded. But it was the glamour of her manner, and the lure of her soft gazelle-like eyes, dark with that haunting mystery that so bewitches the white man, that fascinated Sidney into immediate delight in her.

"I am Miss Carey, the teacher," she said at once, holding out her hand.

"From the mill? How kind of you to come all this way! You surely haven't walked!"

She drew a rocking chair to the open window.

"Oh, yes, I love walking." Sidney continued to stare frankly at her.

"Then you must be very hot."

Mana caught sight of a head at the door.

"Hira, bring a glass of water, and don't stare, dearie," she said to it.

Then she sat down in a low chair opposite Sidney.

"I am so glad to have my children come to your school. It was too far for them to go to Whakapara. But you will find them very stupid. They know so little. I am afraid they will be a great trouble to you, and I quite expect they will be the duffers of the school."

Sidney was struck with the contrast between Mana's words and the remarks of most of the village parents about the talents of their offspring.

"They will be no trouble to me," she answered

positively. "I shall be able to give more individual attention here in a small school than I could in a city one. I hope I may see your children to-day."

"Yes, Miss Carey, when they become tidy."

Then Hira, a little soft-eyed girl, wistful and shy, stole in like a spirit with a glass of water. She had no shoes or stockings on, and over her shirt but one print garment that did not reach to her knees. There was a remarkable delicacy about her. She looked as if a wind would blow her away.

"This is my Hira," said her mother. "Hira, this is your kind teacher who has come a long way to help little girls to learn all sorts of wonderful things. Shake hands and tell her you are going to be very good."

The child did it with indescribable sweetness, and stole out as unobtrusively as she had stolen in.

"You've been a week at the mill," Mana smiled curiously at her guest. "What do you think of it?"

"I don't quite know. Do you go there often?" Sidney wondered if she were friendly with anyone there. She had not heard anyone speak of her.

"I only go to the store," answered Mana.

"You don't call on the aristocracy?"

Mana's eyes lit up.

"No. I don't care for gossip. I suppose I am unsociable."

"Unfortunately I can't be," said Sidney.

Mana looked at her. "I wouldn't have your job for anything," she said, smiling sympathetically.

"I know," laughed Sidney. "I feel as if I were naked on the top of a post down there. I am sure that when I first put my washing out somebody will report on the kind of lace I have on my under-clothes, and the shape of my night-gowns."

"Of course they will. They have not had anything as interesting as you for a long while."

Sidney felt her spirits rising. She knew she could talk to Mana.

"The worst of all is I shall never be able to say anything disagreeable. A teacher is expected to be so good."

"Yes, that is hard," agreed Mana softly.

"Much worse than that. It is uninteresting."

"Truly, very dull." Mana's eyes glowed again.

"Aren't you dull here, all alone?" asked Sidney.

"Oh, no. I love the country. And I have the children and my friend Rangi. And many people come to stay with me. I am never dull."

"You fortunate person. That's due to something in yourself. And I forgot your garden. People with gardens are never dull."

"That's it, I think. And the flowers are nicer than so many people. Now I must get you some tea. Will you excuse me?"

When she had gone out Sidney stared round her with keen interest. She saw that the books were mostly novels, including Wells and Conrad. The pictures on the wall were popular prints and photographs of Maori men and women. There were photos of Englishmen on small tables. She recognised one of James Ridgefield. There were fine old Maori weapons and pieces of carving on the walls, and native matting on the floor. The furniture was simple and varied. How she had escaped the suite that made every front room at the mill offensive, Sidney did not know. Like herself, Mana had a couch that was really a stretcher bed. It was covered by a valuable Maori mat rich in huia feathers, and had picturesque cushions.

The whole thing was individual, and nothing about it jarred. Sidney was delighted to think she would have it to take refuge in. She stole to the piano to look at the music. She saw there were a number of good concert songs, several of them for a baritone voice, and many books of piano pieces.

When Mana returned with the tea she brought her three children with her, all fresh in plain print garments, and shoeless. There were two

girls and a boy. At first they were too shy to speak, but Sidney had a way with children, and presently they were clustered round her listening to a fairy tale.

Later, when their mother sent them out to play, Sidney begged for some music.

She realized again the truth that life is full of surprises as she listened to her. Mana played and sang delightfully. She would never have made a public artist, for the stiffness of an audience would have killed her spontaneity, and her flute-like voice would have been lost in a large hall. But here in her own little house she was always a seductive musician, and there was something about her as she sat at her piano, crooning cradle songs to her children, or drawing whispering romances from the keys, that produced a delicious coma in the brains of those who listened.

Mana and Hira walked half way home with Sidney, partly to carry a basket of grapes for her, and partly to show her a short cut.

Sidney learned that evening from Mrs. Mackenzie that Mana had a husband of her own race, an interpreter, who was away a good deal working in the native land courts; that brothers and cousins descended upon her at intervals to fix up her farm for a season; that she had lived there for many years and was liked by everybody; that she never visited anyone, but that she now and

again had famous visitors, for Mr. Hone Heke, M.P., and Dr. Pirani, Minister for Native Health, had stopped off on their way north to stay with her; and that James Ridgefield often took people to see her.

CHAPTER VII

SIX weeks later, on a Saturday evening, Sidney walked out into the fern beyond her house to watch the moon rise over the Puhipuhi. A faint haze shrouded the flat with a gossamer film, so that what skeleton trees there were looked like shadows touched in delicately by a super artist upon the silver glow. Though the autumn was well on its way it was still warm enough to sit outside.

After Sidney had looked for a while at the moon she turned down an old wagon track leading into the gully at the back of the cottages. She wanted to be alone for the evening, and she was never sure of solitude if she stayed about her house or the school. Already a light in her windows acted like a magnet to draw some child or parent who wanted to know something that they supposed only she could tell them.

And Sidney felt she needed the gully. She had barely got home from her tea that evening when Bob Lindsay knocked at her front door. She was always glad to see Bob. She would have been gladder still to see him if he had not always been

so furtively glad to see her. He was easily emotional about women, and it was obvious that his dull wife had no hold on him whatsoever. He had a piano and a melting tenor voice, and was always begging Sidney to drop in in the evenings and play his accompaniments for him. She would have liked to go, but she saw she had to be careful with Bob.

The great passion of his life was his devotion to Jack Ridgefield, and if there had been nothing else about him to admire, this would have constituted a bond between him and Sidney.

"I've some news," he said, as he sat down in her front room. "Give you five guesses."

His blue eyes, always merry, told her nothing.

She tried twice. An inspector was coming. The school organ had arrived. Then she gave it up.

"The boss is back."

Jack Ridgefield had been away for two weeks.

"Well?"

She had known he was expected that day or the next.

"And he's married. His wife's with him. And he never even told me he was engaged."

Bob was more taken up with this lack of confidence in himself than he was with the effect of the news on Sidney. In fact, it had never occurred to him that there would be any effect on

Sidney. And he saw nothing out of the way in her astonishment.

"What! That is something for the village to talk about," she exclaimed, her eyes full of amusement. "Have you seen her? What is she like?"

"I haven't. They drove in while everybody was at supper. Jack told me ten minutes ago. I'm not telling anybody but you to-night. I guess the gossips can wait."

Sidney had to smile at his manner of making exceptions. Then he went on to tell her that the school organ *had* arrived, and that they were going to move it in in the morning.

When he was gone she put on her coat and went out, feeling curiously bereft of something, she hardly knew what.

For six weeks she had been consumed with interest in Jack Ridgefield. She was not physically in love with him. But she had wondered if she ever would be. She had a passion of admiration for him, as she had always had for men of stirring action. It was a mental passion, but her mental passions were just as fierce as any physical ones.

Though her admiration for him had fed her mentality he himself had provided no company. She had never had a chance to be human with him for more than a minute. She had noticed that whenever she forgot she was a teacher and began to be a woman he became aloof and went off.

She told herself she could have given him a perfectly distinterested friendship as she had his father, and she was piqued to think he had not cared to take it.

He had been in many ways the most disconcertingly uncomplimentary man she had ever known. Though he had shown no interest in her as a human being he had gone out of his way to be helpful to her as a teacher. He had seen her every day for a month to be sure she had everything she wanted. And when he went away he left her formally in the care of Bob Lindsay. Sometimes he had stayed as long as half an hour to talk shrewdly about the village parents and such minor problems as the school provided. At others he had come and gone with a question.

As he was still there to be admired she wondered, as she walked down into the gully, why she should feel so blank about his marriage, why she felt the chagrin, the hurt vanity of someone who had been snubbed. It was silly, she told herself.

But for the first time in her life she had a painful sense of her grievous loneliness.

And more than that, she was now troubled by the lack of challenge in her work. There was nothing big or dramatic about her "daily round." Her "common task" was much too common for her, and she had no sentimental illusions about

"brightening the corner where you are." She yearned for obstacles. She had come up primed to conquer them, only to find there were not any.

The shy and docile country children hardly presented a difficulty after some of the city classes she had known. Even the Hardy children were no trouble to her. After one or two solemn talks on the subject of their vocabulary they made such desperate efforts to be good that they could not be considered a bother.

The rather dull brains of most of her pupils did not worry her. She could grade them as she pleased, and she knew that in a new school whatever she did would be taken without question. As Sidney Carey, she could even have loafed on her job without fear of criticism. She thought longingly of a class of sixty boys she had had in Auckland, a terrible class that faced her every morning keen to get the best of her all day long. It had taken her two months to get them under, and even then she had to interest them, keep them busy every minute, or face a riot.

But here the twenty-five faces that smiled confidently at her as they answered their names were guileless of any intention to plague her. Even the boys never dreamt of mischief in those awe-inspiring precincts. To have been severely reproved by her would have been generally felt to be an overwhelming disgrace. Of course Sidney

had cleverly created most of this atmosphere, and she was backed in the homes by the deferential regard of the parents.

She knew now, also, that there would be nothing in her daily life to trouble her. When James Ridgefield was up three weeks before he had shown that he regarded her as a person to be pampered. He did realize better than anyone else the things she had to go without. He decided she should have a horse to ride, and when she mentioned casually that she missed music, he asked at once if an organ in the school would be any use to her.

"Then we can have services once in a while," he had said. "That will please the women. They have been saying something about the place being big enough now for a church."

"Oh dear," groaned Sidney. "Then they will want me to teach Sunday school. But I refuse to give up a minute of my Sundays to anybody."

"Then don't. There's no reason why you should. You don't have to mind what anyone here thinks about that."

"Thanks. You are the most satisfactory superior officer I ever heard of," she laughed.

She had been rejoiced to see James Ridgefield. He was a successful man of fifty, with a shrewd knowledge of human nature, and a lot of worldly wisdom. He had known Sidney since her girl-

hood. There was a warm, thoroughly honest friendship between them. Though he was chairman of the Board of Education they both forgot the fact. She had never traded on it to get favours, and he had never assumed the right to dictate to her about anything she wanted to do. She knew that as far as he was concerned she was as independent in his mill school as she would have been under another Board. He was concerned solely with her comfort.

But the trouble with Sidney was that she was too clear-sighted to be satisfied only with comfort. And though she despised the idea of being an example in the ordinary sense, she was not without her notions of the mission of the teacher. She meant to influence her children. She meant to be something they would talk about when they grew up. She wanted to influence the parents. She was in ways a born reformer and would never quite get over it. But the thing that appalled her here was the conviction that she would never change anyone's ideas.

She saw she had only to suggest a new way of doing some familiar thing, such as bottling tomatoes, and everybody in the place would at least have tried it. But if she had suggested a new way of thinking about God as force, or sin as defective education, they could not have followed her an inch.

At the end of six weeks she hated the smug prosperity of the mill population. She had heard there were "characters" about—men in the bush, and women in a little back settlement that rejoiced in the explanatory name of Harlot Town, but she knew she would never see them. So far she had not set eyes on Mrs. Bill Hardy, whom she suspected of having distinctive traits.

She saw sadly that as far as the village was concerned there was neither stimulus nor diversion to be had. And now, with Jack Ridgefield married, some edge had gone off her interest in him.

She thought gratefully of Mana, whom she had been to see again. But she could not hope to see her oftener than twice a month, for she did not lack employment. She did her own housekeeping on Saturdays and Sundays, and she had already seen the possibility of a scholarship for George Mackenzie if she gave him extra tutoring, which she had made up her mind to do. He was her only clever scholar, and she was glad to think she could give him this chance.

As she walked back and forth on the old wagon track the beauty of the night diverted her. On the side of the gully running up to the cottages there were no trees, only the everlasting fern and stumps, but immediately across the track on the lower side there was one of the most perfect

bits of undisturbed bush in the whole country. The kauri saplings there had been too small to be felled when the rest had been cut, and they stood like beautiful slender grey pillars rising above the soft rimu and titoki and nikau and fern.

Sidney walked to the creek that rushed out at the foot of the precipice below the mill dam. Here was a glade of legendary loveliness, where one could imagine every kind of elf and pixie disporting itself in glee. It had formerly been the favoured haunt of bell birds who had immortalized it with their incomparable song, and now the tuis perpetuated their memory by imitating their delectable notes in the depths of the dell. In the moonlight it was beyond all description, elusively exquisite.

Sidney had discovered it with delight, and was pleased to find that no one but herself seemed to want to go there. It was a wonderful place for a retreat and a smoke. The hidden waterfall, gurgling its mysterious way under the face of the ravine, made a stimulating accompaniment to thought. No sounds drifted down from the village, and nothing of it was visible but the top of the dam and the fantastic frame of the waste tramway, now caught and glorified by the moon. The mill fires, burning low, scarcely coloured the night.

Sidney took out her cigarettes, and presently

she forgot the lack of challenge in her life. On nights like these she felt the place could give her something no human being could, and she let herself go out to meet the appeal in the calm moon and the pale stars.

She was amused during the next week to receive a disgusted letter from James Ridgefield.

"What the devil has that son of mine been doing? I didn't know he had a thought of marriage in his head till I got his letter three days ago. I had visions that you and he might hit it off. Should have liked nothing better. Be warned. Never arrange anything for anybody. It's fatal. Tell me what kind of woman he has married. I never have known his taste in girls. What should I give her?"

At the end of the week, when Jack told Sidney his wife would be glad to see her, she had already adjusted her mind to the change.

CHAPTER VIII

BEFORE she saw her Sidney was sorry for Sophie Ridgefield. She felt she was doomed to an even greater isolation than herself. She foresaw that Jack would want to keep his wife apart from the gossip and pettiness of the village, and that probably she and Mrs. Jack would now constitute a little aristocracy of their own. For that reason she fervently hoped they would have something in common. But, though she hoped for the best, she was not optimistic as she walked the short distance between the two houses on the Saturday afternoon.

So far, nobody had seen the bride, about whom there was the fiercest curiosity. Mrs. Mackenzie had asked Sidney every day if she had met her, and had reported the absence of news afterwards to Mrs. Bob and Mrs. Alec.

Sidney saw at once that she would like Sophie, and she was grateful to Jack for marrying her. Though the bride was nervous and shy, giving at first acquaintance no indication of the substance that was in her, Sidney was discerning enough to see that there was much more in her than met the eye.

Mrs. Jack was small and quiet. She had fine dark eyes and hair, a sensitive and expressive face, a nicely rounded figure, and beautiful little hands and feet. She was one of those people who carry elusive defences buried in their persons. It was impossible to imagine anyone's being rude to her, or being in any way objectionable in her presence.

But she was hard to talk to. She had not the modern fever for self-expression. Sidney thought her conversation colourless, but suspected that her husband had limited her by telling her to be very careful what she said. As a matter of fact Jack had told his wife that Sidney was the one person in the place she could trust and make a friend of. But Sophie was affected by what he had told her of Sidney's cleverness, and it was to take her some time to feel at home with her.

As she walked home, Sidney told herself that Jack's marriage would probably turn out to be more interesting to her than his singleness. There would now be at least one house in the place where she could talk freely, one home that she could enter as an equal. And she foresaw that she might see more of Jack than she had before, and that now that he was married, he might be more human.

About nine o'clock that night Sidney heard steps approaching her gate. She opened her door to see Bill Hardy with a lantern in his hand.

"Good evening, miss," he began respectfully.

"Good evening, Mr. Hardy. Come in." She wondered if he had come about her horse.

He stepped timidly to the door, but would not enter. His manner towards everybody in the place was that of a creature that knew it had no excuse for living, and that apologised with every gesture for approaching others. Only when he was drunk did he recognise his human rights.

"I'm sorry to trouble you, miss, but Rosy, my little girl——" he paused.

"Oh, dear. I hope she isn't ill." She had sent the child home the day before looking very sick.

"I'm afraid she is, miss. She's wrong in the head. And she's been calling 'Teacher,' miss."

"I'll come with you at once," said Sidney. "Have you sent for a doctor?"

"No, miss."

"I'm very glad you came for me," she said warmly.

She did not know it had taken him two hours to screw up his courage to appeal to her.

She wondered at once if she would at last see Mrs. Bill. The Hardy home was on the far side of the village, removed from it by the space of the kitchen garden that covered some acres. To reach it they had to cross the tramway and pass by the stables. Even before they entered it Sidney knew Mrs. Bill was no housekeeper. The

lantern light shone on heaps of tins and rubbish lying around. There was no attempt at a garden, and the fern encroached upon the yard. Even in that sweet windswept place the house smelt of garbage and stale food.

In the front room a woman in a loose soiled wrapper rose up from a narrow cot over which she had been leaning. Hysterically worried though she was, Mrs. Bill suggested her usual air of cheerful brazenness. She was of the Amazon type, with green eyes and bleached hair. There was nothing sinister about her, even though she was almost uncannily vital. She suggested a sleepy tiger, after a full meal.

Mrs. Bill was a rabbit among mothers. She glowed with fecundity. She bore the ravages of her passions with astonishing freshness and gaiety. In spite of eleven children of assorted fatherhood she was youthful, and her figure fairly well preserved. It may be that paternal monotony often has a saddening effect upon the female of the species. At any rate Mrs. Bill flourished the happy results of polyandry in the eyes of all her monogamistic world.

But she had not handed her vitality on to her children. They were a pale devitalized brood. Mrs. Bill's vigour was fiercely individualistic. In some curious way it turned back upon herself.

At any other time Sidney would have been in-

terested to take stock of her, but she was concerned now about the child. She gave Mrs. Bill one quick look, determined to be very business-like with her, before she turned to the bed.

Mrs. Bill was not nearly so sure of herself with women as she was with men, and she was clever enough to see that Sidney was too much for her. She presented her best maternal front at once.

"I can't make out what's the matter with Rosy, miss. Very good of you to come," she said obsequiously.

"Not at all, Mrs. Hardy."

Sidney had taken first aid and nurses' courses and knew from one glance at the face on the pillow that something was seriously wrong. The moaning child did not recognise her. It was fast sinking into a coma.

"How long has she been like this?" she asked.

"Most of the afternoon, miss."

"Why ever didn't you come for me before?" she asked sharply. Then she saw they had hesitated about it.

"Where's the nearest doctor?" she went on more gently.

"Whangarei, miss," said Mrs. Bill. "Is she very bad?"

"I'm afraid so," Sidney looked her straight in the eyes. "Have your children never been ill? Don't you know anything about nursing?"

Mrs. Bill felt a condemnation of herself in Sidney's tone. Coming from anyone else it would have aroused antagonism in her, but from the teacher it made her feel uncomfortable.

"They've 'ad 'oooping cough, and the measles and colds," she said.

"Well, you know fever when you see it, don't you? The child must have a temperature of 104. And it's not a cold. It's something internal. She's getting blue. Somebody must go for a doctor at once."

She turned to Bill.

"I'll go, miss."

"Oh, no. You stay. I'll see that somebody goes. Would you like me to come back?"

"Please, miss." It came from both of them.

Taking his lantern Sidney hurried to the Ridge-fields'. Jack, who had just undressed, came to the door in his pajamas, expecting to see one of the men.

"Why, Miss Carey! What's wrong?" He was obviously conscious of his appearance.

But she was oblivious of it.

"One of Bill Hardy's children is dying. Something internal. Probably appendicitis."

"Oh, Lord! You've been there?" he frowned. She resented his attitude.

"I have. Bill came for me. Of course I went. Is there no doctor nearer than Whangarei?"

"Nobody any good. And I doubt if anyone would come up to-night."

She thought his calmness heartless. She did not realize that he had a much longer acquaintance with human tragedies than she had.

"Why, it's a matter of hours—an operation as soon as possible, if it's appendicitis. What do you do in such cases?"

"We've never had appendicitis. The worst thing we have is accidents. And we take them on stretchers to Whakapara to the train. We can telephone from there to Whangarei. I'll get someone to go. But no doctor will come up till the morning, I know that."

"Have you a thermometer?" she asked, as he turned away.

"Yes, just a minute."

When he brought it back Sophie followed him, a wrapper over her nightgown, although he had told her there was nothing she could do.

"Does anyone up here know anything about nursing?" Sidney asked. "I don't know what to do for this child."

"I doubt it. Ordinary illness is all we have had. And if anyone did she would not go near Mrs. Bill."

"Indeed! Well, I'm not afraid of her. I'll do what I can," she retorted.

"You're going back there?"

"I certainly am." She flashed a determined look at him.

"Why, of course she will," broke in Sophie. "If I can help, will you let me know, Miss Carey?"

"Yes, indeed," said Sidney, rather surprised at her offer.

Jack's eyes softened.

"I'll go after a messenger at once," he said.

Sidney hurried off with the thermometer. She found Bill and his wife sitting helplessly beside the cot. They had moved Rosy into their only room that was not a bedroom. It was a kitchen and eating room combined. It was dirty and close. No windows were open. Sidney knew the sick child had not been washed all day.

"Could you get me some hot water, Mrs. Hardy," she asked at once. "And we must have some air in here. I'll leave the door open for a while."

Mrs. Bill was glad enough to do something.

When Sidney took Rosy's temperature she found it was 105. She was hardly sure whether she should let the poor little creature sip water, but she took that risk. Apart from making her clean she did not know what to do but wait for the doctor.

It was not long before they heard a horse's hoofs going off along the tramway. That sign

of help to come cheered Bill, who sat without a word, a dumbly appealing object, beside the window.

He had not realized the child was really ill that morning, and he had been away all day with his horses. He never took the Saturday half holiday, having nothing to take a holiday for. When he came home to tea he saw something was wrong. His wife told him Rosy had been talking queerly all the afternoon. She had given her a 'dose of castor oil, she said, the thing she always gave the children. She did not know that this time it was the worst, instead of the best thing she could have done.

Mrs. Bill brought the hot water to Sidney with the air of rendering distinguished service.

"Have you a clean sheet?" asked Sidney.

"Yes, miss."

"Bring it, please. We must make things as nice as we can for the doctor."

Just then they heard steps, and to Sidney's surprise, Jack Ridgefield's form filled the line of light that shone out of the door.

Bill turned in his chair.

"It's Mr. Ridgefield," she said.

He got up, and his wife retired quickly to a back room. Mrs. Bill never met Jack if she could avoid it.

"I've brought some medicine," Jack said, hand-

ing a bottle to Sidney. "My wife says you can safely give it in any kind of fever. The instructions are on the bottle. If you need anything more she has a medicine chest."

He turned to Bill.

"Tony Hand has ridden to Whakapara to telephone for a doctor." Bill mumbled something intended to be thanks.

"Is there anything I can do?" Jack turned to Sidney again.

"I'm afraid not," she answered.

"If there is, you'll let me know?"

"I will."

She wondered after he had gone if that quiet little Sophie had made him come.

She called Mrs. Hardy back.

"I want you to help me to wash her," she said.

The two women hung over the now unconscious child. Sidney was too preoccupied with the unpleasant job to consider the dramatic aspects of her association in such a way with a woman like Mrs. Bill. She felt only it would be dreadful for a doctor to find the child in the state it was in. Mrs. Bill, now thoroughly alarmed and subdued by her manner, did her best to help. She had the wisdom to keep quiet.

At last the child was comparatively clean, and lay between a clean sheet. When she had given it a dose of the medicine Sidney knew there was

nothing more she could do for it. She wondered if she should stay. She sat down on a wooden chair near the door to wait a little while. But she began to feel very uncomfortable.

She saw that nothing she had ever learned out of books would help her here. She looked at Bill huddled up beside the window, and at Mrs. Bill leaning over the cot. She knew she had only one means of communication with these people—she could only order them about. She did not know how to talk to them, how to comfort them. She did not know whether they wanted to be talked to or comforted. Her utter ignorance of a human situation like this humiliated her.

And yet, out of all the village, she was the one person they had appealed to. She felt she must stay.

At half past ten the night began to grow cooler. But Sidney kept the door open, even though something in the stillness outside worked upon her nerves. The house was not far from the creek, and there was a good deal of swampy land beyond it. It began to be filled with invisible presences. She knew she would not have gone out at that moment and crossed it for anything in the world. She looked at the cot and began to be afraid.

She had never seen anything, not even an animal die. She wished the sick child would move or

moan or give some other sign of life. But Rosy lay exceedingly still.

The strain of inaction had just reached snapping point with her when Mrs. Bill called sharply:

"Oh, miss, please!"

Sidney jumped, and she and Bill hurried to the cot.

Poor Rosy opened her eyes with a glassy stare, seeing no one, and then stiffened and turned grey.

They all stared stupidly at the body for a minute.

Then with a feeling of horror Sidney forced herself to put her hand on the dead child's forehead. She knew instinctively it was the end.

"She's gone," she mumbled. "We can't do any more."

Mrs. Bill gave a wail like an animal.

Utterly overwhelmed by the shock of death and ashamed of her helplessness Sidney turned quickly out into the night and left them.

Blindly she stumbled on past the stables, across the tramway, and so to her own house. But she could not go in. She was afraid of the blackness inside it. She sat down on a log and stared up at the stars. She felt as if she had swelled enormously, she was so full of emotions that stretched her very skin.

The stillness of the village startled her. How could people sleep while there was such a thing as

death in their midst? And yet there they were, all peacefully oblivious of it. This extraordinary spectacle of humanity's indifference to humanity's greatest calamity staggered her. In her first contact with it she felt death to be so terrible a thing that it must needs stir people out of sleep.

So far she had never had an emotion that she could not easily control. Her parents had died when she was too young to miss them. An indulgent aunt and uncle had brought her up in pleasant easy paths. She had never had anything to worry her deeply. No one she had known intimately had died since she had grown up.

She saw now that this was extraordinary. And she was capable of depths of emotion out of all proportion to the significance in the scheme of things of so commonplace a thing as death. Rosy's end was but one pathetic bit of waste out of millions of discarded ends, but to Sidney it was the revelation of the end of herself, and of everything she loved.

She sat out till she was chilled. Starting at every sound she got to bed feeling she could never be light-hearted any more. She did not fall asleep till the dawn broke.

At half past seven she dressed and went to tell Jack Ridgefield. He was lighting his kitchen fire.

"The child's dead," she said solemnly, as he came to the door. "It died at eleven last night."

"Lucky for it, poor little devil," he said.

Then he saw he had shocked her.

"What on earth had she to live for?" he asked.

"It's not that," she gasped. "It's death," and feeling he would not understand, she turned quickly away.

Nor were the Mackenzies startled by Rosy's death.

"What a blessing!" said Mrs. Tom, when Sidney told her.

CHAPTER IX

BUT it took Sidney days to shake off her pre-occupation with Rosy's death. She forced herself to go to the Hardys' on the Sunday, not knowing what on earth she could say to them. She was disgusted with herself for being unequal to the situation. She had always supposed she would be able to cope with any situation life brought to her.

She was wise enough to see that the Hardys needed to be told what to do rather than what to feel, and she gave Mrs. Bill some good advice about nursing to distract her attention. The doctor arrived that morning to give the death certificate, and besides him and Jack Ridgefield Sidney was the only person to go near the house. Sophie told her afterwards that she had wished to go, but that her husband would not let her.

The whole place heard that Sidney had been, and regarded her as a saint for so doing. They hoped Mrs. Bill would not trade upon her good nature as a result, and voiced their fears freely. But their prophecies were not fulfilled. Sidney never had any trouble with Mrs. Bill.

After this, seeing that she might be needed, and glad of something else to think about, Sidney was determined to add to her knowledge of illness and accident, and sent to doctors and nurses she knew for books. For a time she had a notion that she would start a first-aid course in the village. But when she mentioned it casually to Jack he threw so much cold water on the scheme that she gave it up.

It surprised Sidney that no one in the place seemed to worry about death. She learned there were occasionally bad accidents in the bush that put the place under a cloud of solemnity for a few hours, but otherwise no one was concerned with it. In talking to Mrs. Mackenzie she found out that that calm little woman had seen a dozen people die, and appeared to think nothing of it. Of course people died, she said.

But Sidney walked for hours back and forth in the gully moralizing as she never had before.

The next Saturday afternoon she went to the store for some candles. It always amused her to go, for the store was a cosmopolitan place, and she was likely to see there men from all parts of the Puhipuhi. Jack had once suggested that she give himself or Bob Lindsay a list of the things she needed so that they could save her the experience of being stared at. But Sidney was determined that she would not be kept in cotton wool

that way. Much as she admired Jack Ridgefield, she was not going to let him dictate to her as to where she should go about the place. She had recognised his right to forbid women going into the mill, but the store was a public place, and she meant to go there.

It was built beside the tramway close to the mill, and on the side nearest the main houses. Outsiders reached it by a road running between the timber yard and the first line of cottages. Sidney could never see anyone pass along this road because it was hidden from her by the school and timber stacks.

As she neared the store she was surprised to see tethered to one of the hitching posts a fine bay horse, well groomed and saddled, guarded by two splendid game dogs. As she had seen nothing like them there before she wondered who the rider was.

She was somewhat prepared, therefore, for the sight of a stranger. But the back of the man she did see the minute she stepped inside was so much of an apparition that she stopped and looked inquiringly at Bob Lindsay's assistant who was talking across the counter to him.

The spectacle of an English riding suit complete with fine boots and a silver-headed crop was even more than the horse and dogs had sug-

gested. The wearer happened at that moment to be the only customer.

Seeing that someone had come in, he turned. His tweed cap came swiftly off his dark head, and his brown eyes lit up with flattering interest.

"Miss Carey, Mr. Devereux," said Bob Lindsay from his desk.

"Oh, I've heard of you," he said, taking her hand, which went out impulsively. But he did not say when or where.

"Of course," she said ruefully. "Everybody has. I wish there might be somebody who hadn't."

"As bad as that?" he asked, instantly comprehending the nature of her complaint.

"Yes. It's awful to be one of the village sights. I can see the strangers nudged as I go by, and hear the whisper 'The teacher.' "

"Yes, that's pretty bad," he agreed. "I doubt if too much public inspection is good for the soul. Getting into the window bleaches the colour out of one. But you like the place?"

"Oh, yes, I love the place. And I have discovered the wind."

"Ah, that is something of a discovery, isn't it?" His eyes lit up charmingly. "I've never been able to live without the wind. It has a wonderful effect upon the mind, once you have realized it.

Have you found that you always want to face it?"

"Why, yes, I believe so," she smiled.

"And if you turn your back on it you catch cold. It's a synonym for life. That's why it is so intoxicating."

For a minute they stood looking at each other, oblivious of Bob and his assistant.

"Where have you dropped from?" she asked impertinently.

"Why, I belong to the place. But I have been away all the summer. You haven't heard of me? And I flattered myself I was a celebrity! What's the matter with my friends?" and he glared at Bob.

It was true. Nobody had mentioned him to her.

"Well, you see," she explained, "I'm only supposed to be interested in parents—to have official affiliations merely. If you were a parent I should have heard of you."

"Distressing limitation," he exclaimed. "I'm not a parent. Does that cast me into the outer darkness? Is there no hope for the future?"

Sidney laughed gaily. She thought him exceedingly diverting.

"The future is the special perquisite of the hopeful," she replied.

"Then here's one man who commandeers the future," he retorted.

They had to stand aside to let three men get to the counter. At once Arthur Devereux held out his hand to her.

"I shall see you again soon," he said, dropping his voice a little, and then, turning to take the package of things he had bought, he nodded to Bob and went out.

Sobering instantly Sidney turned to him to order her candles.

"He's a great chap," Bob began, divining her interest.

And she answered at once lightly, "How funny to see that kind of a get-up here!"

"Yes. I thought he was awfully affected at first. But he isn't a bit. He's just like a kid. And he's got a glorious voice. I must have him down soon so that you can hear him sing. Funny he likes to live alone. He has a little place back in the Puhipuhi. Grazes some cattle. And prospects for silver. Doesn't do much. Must get money from home."

The stimulus of meeting Arthur Devereux exhilarated Sidney for some hours. She could not help thinking of his good looks, his fine athletic build, his rich speaking voice, his freshness and vitality. She was familiar with many of the types of wandering Englishmen who pursue mysterious ways through the colonies, but he was more than a cut above any she had met. In no sense was

he going to seed as so many remittance men did. That is, if he were a remittance man. She wondered what explanation would explain him.

She was amused that anyone like him should have turned up in the Puhipuhi, and she began to look forward to seeing him again.

CHAPTER X

IN the middle of the next week Sidney received a note from Mana, brought by one of her children to school.

“Dear Miss Carey—I am hoping you can visit us on Saturday.”

Sidney was glad to look forward to it.

As she looked down upon the Joyous Valley she forgot all disagreeable things. The little farm laughed in the sunlight, and she had a feeling of great contentment as she looked at it. Other people were enjoying it too. She heard the children screeching down by the creek, and a man's deeper voice joining in. She wondered if it were their father.

Presently she heard splashing, and knew they were bathing in the pool near the house. As she strolled on she saw emerge from a clump of bushes first the three tawny bodies of Mana's children, all in short cotton pants, and then a tall white figure in sporting trunks. To her surprise she recognised the dark head of Arthur

Devereux. She stopped on the path to let them keep well ahead of her.

The children began to run towards a shed at the back of the house, and he followed, chasing them. The sun glistened on their lithe wet bodies. To Sidney it was a refreshingly healthy scene. She was instantly curious about Arthur Devereux's presence there. She wondered if he had prompted Mana's note.

With her feelings indefinably intensified she walked on to the house. Mana met her at the door.

"It's always warm when you come," she smiled.

"I hope it always will be. I love warmth. I'm awfully glad to see you, Mana. I've been depressed since I was here last. You heard about Rosy Hardy's death?"

"Yes, a good thing, poor child."

"Why, Mana!"

"A good thing, surely," repeated Mana.

"That's what everybody says. But, you see, I had never seen anybody die before."

"Oh! That is different, yes. It is not pleasant to see people die, even if it may be pleasant to know they are dead."

Sidney looked curiously at her, smiling in her low chair. She looked herself like life incarnate.

"It's a pity more people do not die when they

are young; people like Mrs. Bill, for instance," went on Mana.

"Perhaps. I wasn't thinking of the individual death. I was thinking of death. It is horrible."

"Why?" asked Mana. "Would you have us go on for ever just getting up every day and eating and sleeping? Very dull, I say."

Sidney smiled. "You are right. If we knew we should live for ever and that nothing could ever kill us how queer it would be. Nobody would ever do anything. The incentive to hurry up would be gone. The thought of death is hounding us all the time, somewhere down in our subconsciousness."

Mana looked as if she thoroughly understood, without ever being troubled by her understanding.

Sidney wondered if she would mention Arthur Devereux before he appeared. But she did not. One of Mana's fascinations was that while she had exquisite manners, she was ruled by no conventions whatsoever. She lived and moved by secret springs of her own.

In a few minutes Arthur swung round the house, followed by the children, and entered as if he belonged there. He had on white flannel pants, a soft white shirt, and a navy flannel coat, and looked as if he were on an English tennis

lawn. A considerable volume of life entered the room with him.

"Hullo, Miss Carey. How d'you do? How charming that you know Mana! Here, at least, you can be off the pedestal. Do you smoke?"

He was stopped by a sh! from his hostess, who indicated her children with a glance.

"How stupid of me, Miss Carey. Of course, you do not smoke," he corrected himself quickly.

"Children," said Mana, "you all go out and ask Rangi to give you a piece of cake, and to make us some tea. And then you go into the garden and pick teacher a big bunch of flowers, the best we have, and don't come in till I call you."

"The deuce! I forgot they went to school," said Arthur, after they had gone out.

"They might talk," said Mana. "They wouldn't mean——"

"Of course not. Then, Miss Carey, you do." He extended his cigarette case.

"I do," she smiled, "but I don't know how Mana knew it."

"I didn't, but I thought you might be going to say yes."

Sidney smiled at her own dullness.

Mana took a cigarette also, and Arthur lit them both. Then they all leaned back puffing happily.

"Thank God, I am again among human beings," exclaimed Sidney.

"Why, you do have a few of them at the mill," said Arthur. "What about Jack Ridgefield? And Bob Lindsay's a very human chap."

"Very," smiled Sidney. "But you've mentioned only men. And they are both on my school committee."

"I see," his eyes twinkled.

"Mr. Ridgefield is a wonderful man," said Mana softly.

"I don't doubt it," she answered. "He subdues even me. But he has one unfortunate characteristic. He has a passion for saving women from things. He would save us from our own feelings as he would save us from chopping wood or carrying water. He thinks we are too delicate and gentle to be allowed to feel. He just sees women as sweet young girls, or as dear old ladies in lace caps. He never sees us in the intermediate stage where we want to go adventuring with life."

"He's young. He'll get over that," said Arthur. "He's really a remarkable chap. It's no bally joke managing the mill and the bush, hundreds of men, the tough nuts they are. And your labour laws have made them a pretty independent crowd. Democracy is a fine idea, but it's a deucedly hard thing to work. No reverence for your position. You've got to beat them with your

personality, and that's a big job nowadays. But Jack has methods of his own. Bob Lindsay told me a great story about him the other day."

He paused to take a few puffs at his cigarette.

"It seems that some two months ago Jack found some filthy language chalked up on the mill buildings. One day while the men were all at dinner in the kitchen he walked in with a black-board and an easel under his arm. He'll probably never let you see the men eating in the kitchen. It's a sight. Bob happened to be there that day, as his wife was away in Whangarei. They keep the food very good. James Ridgefield often eats there when he's up. Likes to be democratic, you know. Well, everybody looked up when Jack walked in, and they had a suspicion something was up. Bob says there was a funny silence. Without a word Jack set up the black-board at the end of the room, and put a box of chalk on the table. Then he said he wanted to speak to them for a minute. He was very quiet, very courteous. He told them he had seen the language. He said he was sorry he had not foreseen that they would like to write that kind of thing, or he would have provided for it before, but, as they knew, he had been pretty busy, and it was hard to think of everything. He said he thought for the sake of the women and children about the place it would be better if they

would confine their writings to the blackboard. He hoped they would spend many pleasant evenings with it. If there was anything else they could suggest that would add to their amusement, French postcards, for instance, he would see that they got it. Bob says not a man dare look at him. He waited a minute, and then said 'Thank you, men,' and went out. And not a word has been written about the mill since. What do you think of that, Miss Carey?"

His eyes shone as he finished the story.

And Sidney's eyes shone too, and she was as much stirred by his appreciation of the incident as she was by Jack Ridgefield's management of the situation.

"I certainly think it took some courage to do that," she cried.

"More than that. An extraordinary self-possession. If he'd made a slip he would have been done. But Bob says those men were really ashamed, he made them feel so darned small. It's a great gift."

"It certainly is," she said, and leaned back in her chair thinking about it.

Somebody called from the kitchen.

"Ah, the tea," said Mana rising.

"Allow me," Arthur said, springing to his feet. As he went out Sidney wondered how long he had known Mana.

When he brought in the tray he stood to hand Sidney her cup and poured out his own as he liked it.

They talked idly for a while of the bush and the kind of people to be found in it, and then they smoked again.

"You will stay for the evening, won't you, Miss Carey, and we will have some music?" said Mana.

"Oh, may I? I'd love to."

"That will be nice. Now Mr. Devereux, you must entertain Miss Carey while I help to get the tea."

He jumped up.

"Come on, Miss Carey. It is delightful now in the garden."

He led the way outside.

He pointed out things as if the place belonged to him, but he had the subtle fascination of including her as a companion in a discovery.

"How did you find Mana?" he asked frankly.

"Why, she is a parent!"

"To be sure," he laughed.

"I just came, and I could have fallen on her neck, I was so delighted to find her different from the mill women. But she would be different anywhere, wouldn't she?"

"Indeed she would. Charming! You've heard her sing?"

"Yes, rather. You sing, too, I believe?"

"Yes. I'm fond of music."

Then the children saw them, and ran up with bunches of flowers.

Sidney liked the way Arthur played with them. They called him "Uncle," and showed no signs of shyness with him. She watched them all curiously, much attracted by his ability to amuse them. A man who is genuinely fond of children has a pass key to the hearts of many types of women.

They stayed outside romping till Mana called them in.

The "tea" was not the ordinary expurgated meal of those parts. Too often it had to be a rehash or an extension of the midday dinner, for there were no ice chests to delude the memory or elongate the distance between the pie and the pie end. But Mana's tea was not an aftermath. It was a complete event. There was a whole cold chicken, and potatoes and corn, and junket and cream and grapes.

"Please carve, Mr. Devereux," she said.

"With pleasure." Arthur sat down at the head of the table.

Mana's companion, Rangi, sat with them. She was rather fat, and the most easily quiet person Sidney had ever met. As for herself and Arthur, they behaved absurdly. They egged each other

on to tell ridiculous stories that convulsed Mana and the children. But when the meal was over and they turned into the front room Arthur changed the mood.

"Look at that," he said, going to the door, and nodding at the sunset.

They all went on to the verandah to look at it. It was a startling sky splashed with a fan-shaped design of little blood red clouds. Lower down, there was a broad strip of bright pea green spotted with flakes of molten gold. They stood still watching the colours deepen and change and fade.

Sidney said nothing, and Arthur was struck by her silence. He looked at her, admiring the lines of her figure, and the easy way she stood still.

Mana sent the children to bed. They sat down on the verandah chairs. Arthur gave them cigarettes and filled a pipe for himself. They smoked for a while in a companionable silence. Then Mana went in to the piano and began to play and sing.

When he had finished his pipe Arthur followed her, and Sidney sat out to watch the light fade from the sky. But at the first sound of his voice she stole in, went to the sofa, and sat so that she could look at him without being seen.

In spite of what Bob had said she was no more prepared for his voice than she had been for

Mana's. He had one of the best trained and richest baritones she had heard. It stirred her as nothing had stirred her since she had heard such music last. He sang some popular concert songs, and then some old English and Irish ballads.

Mana played his accompaniments perfectly, and had evidently learned his ways. Sidney watched them as she listened, vaguely jealous even then of the bond between them. She herself loved music, and understood it, but she played but little, and envied all women who could entertain as Mana could.

She looked out once at the deepening dusk and wondered how she was going to get home. But she would not break that spell. They sang for a while in the dark till Arthur lit the candles, and then they continued, inspired by Sidney's appreciation, which they felt without the medium of words.

And she listened, feeling more alive than she had done for months.

About half past nine they tired.

"Well, that was quite a concert, Miss Carey," said Mana, turning round on her stool. "I hope we have not tired you."

"Tired me!" she exclaimed, sitting up. Then she looked at Arthur. "You could be on the stage with that voice," she said, her eyes shining.

"I've been told so," he smiled. "Have a cigarette."

"No, thank you. I must get home now." She stood up.

"Oh, I'll see you home, after a cigarette."

"Thank you. But you can't come all that way."

"Of course I can. I'm riding. I've got my togs outside. Sit down."

She sat down, quite willing to be managed.

They smoked and talked for another half hour, and then Sidney said she really must go.

Arthur went out to change his clothes and saddle his horse.

"You have given me a treat," said Sidney, with enthusiasm. "What a delightful man!"

"Very," said Mana, with equally frank enthusiasm.

She knew how to be disconcertingly brief.

Sidney knew how to hide her curiosity. She turned easily to talk of the pleasure she expected to get out of the organ, which, though small, had a good tone.

"I shall love playing it at night in that empty schoolroom," she said.

Mana's eyes glowed in company.

Then Arthur called from outside.

He stood by his horse's head.

"Can you ride, Miss Carey?"

"Yes, I can."

"You get up, then."

"Why, what are you going to do?"

"Walk beside you, of course."

She laughed, knowing he would have his way.

"You'd better have a lantern," said Mana.

"We don't need it, thanks. It's a clear night."

Sidney jumped lightly into the saddle, despising his assistance. She felt absurdly glad that she could ride. They set off forgetting the flowers.

Mana thought of them as she re-entered the house, and ran into the kitchen for them, and then, thinking they would be a bother to carry, she looked at them sadly, and left them where they were.

Arthur walked up Mana's road holding on to a saddle strap.

"How far are you from here?" Sidney asked, when they had cleared the garden.

"A good four miles. Over in Ridgefield's country. There's a bush camp about a mile from me, and I'm not far from one of the big dams. Have you seen a tripping yet?"

"No. I believe they had one the week I opened school."

"They're due to have another soon. I hope you can see it. Close the school, anyway, and I'll come down for you."

Sidney laughed suddenly.

"My dear man, I can't do that kind of thing! I'm a civil servant!"

"Oh, Lord!" he grumbled, with a comical disappointment that was very flattering.

"Well, I can't," she repeated. "But tell me about it."

He gave her a vivid picture of the system as they went up the ridge. Then, at the top, he pulled the horse to a standstill.

"The stars are wonderful to-night," he said, throwing up his head.

In the blue-black velvet sky every southern constellation was brilliantly outlined, and every star seemed to be a magnetic point aimed to draw puny human beings off the earth. Sidney had a curious feeling that if she continued to look she would be sucked up off the horse.

She stole a look at Arthur, standing hatless, his face upturned. She saw he had forgotten her, and because he had she became more vividly conscious of him, and the excitement of being out there in the night with an unknown man.

"Well," he said regretfully, after a while, "I suppose we must go on. Have you ever had a clear view from this ridge in the daytime?"

"I have. It is glorious."

"Mana chose a charming spot. She's rare, isn't she?"

"Indeed she is," she answered warmly. "I won-

der if you have the feeling I have about her sometimes. I keep being surprised at her charm and her understanding. If she were a white woman I should have no such feeling. I'd take her all for granted."

"I know. It's our damned Anglo-Saxon assumption that we are superior to everything with a dark skin. We can't help it. It's subconscious. We Englishmen feel the same thing when we go out to India. We go to handle 'the natives.' They are defined in our minds as that and nothing more. It's the same with the whole empire. But, by Jove, in India it brings one up with a round turn to look into the eyes of some of those fellows. You'd give your soul to know what they are thinking about. It is something so much more complex than the things we dream of. And when it comes to power of will, and nervous and physical endurance, why we can't touch them. But just because we are ahead of them in organizing power and in devising quicker ways of killing we think we are superior."

Sidney was impressed by his understanding of her thought.

"And yet we can rule them," she said.

"Yes, we can rule them, because we begin by letting them think we are going to teach them a new way of ruling themselves. And we can go a long way on that bluff. And when they find

us out they have also learned that we are the least of two evils—ourselves or someone else. Their insight into that fact is the power behind the British Empire.”

He went on to talk to her of India, where he had spent two years. She asked the kind of question that spurred him to talk. She hardly noticed the distance, and was astonished when they reached the mill tramway. The reflection of the waste fire had guided him in turning off the main road.

“Where do you turn in?” he asked.

“By the back road. I’m one of the aristocracy,” she said with mock importance.

“To be sure. I know it. You are next the Ridgefields. By the way, have you seen his wife? It was like him to do it like that, wasn’t it?”

“I don’t know. I don’t pretend to understand him. Yes, I’ve seen her. She is a quiet, but attractive little thing. Very feminine. But I shall not be surprised to find her more liberal in ways than he is.” She went on to give a description of Sophie.

They arrived at the gate that Jack had put across the back road with a sign saying it was private.

Arthur stopped and looked over at her house.

“Do you like living alone?” he asked.

"Well, it's a new experience. But it's the only way I could live here."

He gave her his hand to dismount. She wondered if she should ask him to come on and have something to drink. He had walked fast, and was hot and dusty.

But he jumped straight into his saddle and held out his hand.

"Good night, Miss Carey. Awfully nice to have you to talk to. We must have these evenings often."

"Good night. Awfully good of you to come all this way."

"Don't mention it."

Swinging his horse he rode off. She turned round the end of the gate, for there was no fence, and walked slowly towards her house.

She wondered why she could not sleep. But, she reflected, she had always been like that. If she enjoyed herself, she became blazingly alive. If she went to a theatre or a concert it was always the same. She lay awake for hours hot and restless.

CHAPTER XI

"It's eleven o'clock. Jack ought to be showing up any minute now."

James Ridgefield spoke the words to a group of people who stood with him by the face of the Big Dam.

It was Saturday morning two weeks after Sidney's last visit to Mana. The final tripping of the autumn was to come off that morning. James Ridgefield had arrived the day before from Auckland bringing friends and tourists especially to see it. Sidney, who now had her horse and saddle, had ridden with two of the men, and stood beside him, smart in her new habit. Mrs. Jack stood with her, glad to know someone in the group of strangers. Their horses and vehicles were hitched behind a group of camp buildings a chain or two away.

James Ridgefield had explained the "system," and properly screwed up the feelings of his audience. Now was added the touch of suspensive delay needed to put them on the highest height of excited expectancy. For, of course, nothing could happen without Jack.

He was working his way up the fifteen miles of creek from the mill, tripping dam after dam as he came. The Big Dam was the last in a chain of operations, and the way had to be prepared for it. The tripping had really begun two hours before. But the Big Dam was the chief glory of the spectacle. It was twice as large as its nearest rival there, and was easily the largest in New Zealand. It had taken twelve months to build. It was a quarter of a mile across, fifty feet high in the bed of the creek, and backed up a temporary narrow lake two miles long, and in places half a mile wide.

This lake, now a jam of logs, containing four million feet of timber, seemed to take up the whole of the valley in which it lay. Leading through the bush, over the ridges all round it were the wooden tramways and roads that fed it.

The valley itself was picturesque in a ragged desolate sort of way. It had been swept by fire many times, and was mostly a graveyard of skeleton trees. Everywhere the fern and scrub had rapidly covered up the ashes.

James Ridgefield was beginning to grow impatient when he spied three men riding fast round a bend at the lower end of the gully.

"Here they come at last," he said.

The sightseers eagerly watched the horsemen, and a gang of bush workers carrying long spiked

poles set off from the camp down the dry bed of the creek to meet them.

When they came up to each other they paused while Jack gave some final instructions. Then, as the three men came on Sidney recognised Arthur Devereux as one of them. She had wondered why he was not already on the scene, feeling sure he must have heard of the event. The third man was Bob Lindsay.

"How's she going?" called James Ridgefield, as they came clattering up.

"Fine," replied his son. And they passed on to the camp.

Arthur Devereux was the first to reappear.

"Hullo, Ridgefield," he called as he strode over the stony ground.

"Hullo, Devereux. I wondered where you had got to."

And then began general introductions. When they were over Arthur stepped back to Sidney.

"I went down for you," he said, lowering his voice. "We could have ridden up the creek with Jack and watched the other dams go. I've seen two off already."

"Oh, dear. But how was I to know you meant to do that? And besides, I should have had to come with Mr. Ridgefield's party, as he asked me days ago."

But she was pleased he had thought of her, and

her spirits grew even more elated than the glorious morning and the ride had already made them.

Arthur turned to Mrs. Jack.

"Your husband's a wonder," he began, with the frank admiration of other people's achievements that was one of his charms. "Look at that dam for a piece of work."

Everybody stopped talking and looked at it. Little Mrs. Jack blushed at being thus hurled into the limelight.

"How could he know the angle to give that face to make it resist the pressure of all that water?"

Having it thus pointed out to them the visitors stared intently at the face of the dam, and at the enormous timbers that propped up its underside. And they knew it was a job to be proud of.

Just then Jack Ridgefield came along with Bob Lindsay and another gang of men with pike poles. The group gazed deferentially at him, as a man clothed with mysterious attributes of power. But the hero of the day wore a very unassuming air, and was quite indifferent to the homage of his father's friends.

"Are we all right here?" asked James Ridgefield, while everybody hoped Jack would stop to talk.

"Yes, all right," he answered, passing by, and seeing no one but his wife.

The group stood on a mound on the steep side of the creek. Here the gully rose so suddenly that they were near the gate, which was the centre of operations. It was on the other side that the dam stretched over lower ground for a quarter of a mile.

Jack and his men went on to a footbridge that ran the whole way across the top, the latter going right over while he and Bob stayed above the gate. Workers who had been poling logs into the centre of the lake now made their way back to the shore, jumping from log to log, and giving a final push to the one they landed from.

It was a clear morning, and the valley was very still. There was no sound of bush work, for every man had been taken off to stand by the creek to prevent jams at the numerous bends all the way down to the mill.

The visitors looked upon the lake ruffled only by the movements of a few rolling logs in the great pack, and upon the dry bed of the creek below; and wondered when the fun would start.

Suddenly the clear air was cut by the exciting sounds of horns blowing a series of signals far down the gullies. The echoes ran round and died away. And then there rang out one long clear call, followed by three short ones.

"Get your cameras ready," said James Ridgefield unnecessarily to the tourists.

Sidney was so thrilled that her throat swelled. She wanted to seize the hand of Arthur Devereux, who stood beside her with his hat off and his face tense. She knew he was feeling about it as she was.

Jack Ridgefield turned on the footbridge, gave one look to see that no man was left on the logs, called to the men and was answered, and then waved his hand at his father with a funny little dramatic sweep very unlike him.

"Away she goes," he called.

The watchers stiffened. They saw him lean down, pick up a rope and pull it.

And there was no more peace in the valley that day.

On the lower side the great gate heaved up over the first rush of water that was churned instantly to foam upon the rocks. In a minute the dry creek became a raging torrent, filling the valley with its roar. Then in the dam there was created an enormous suction that drew the logs from all sides. They came slowly at first, till caught by the undertow they rose up like prehistoric water monsters coming up to breathe. They stood on end, poised for a fraction of a minute, and then they dived head first down at the foundations of the dam, hitting the gate upwards with a deafening boom that echoed round the hills. Clearing the gate they leapt up out of the water

below it, thundered back upon the rocks, staggered, were swept onwards, hoisted one upon another, and swirled off again in a torture of movements that it worried the eye to follow. To the boom of the logs hitting the gate was now added an extraordinary thud, thud, thud, as they bounded from the rocks in the bed of the creek on their mad way to the mill.

For ten minutes the visitors stood spellbound.

James Ridgefield had tried to yell an explanation or two, but had to give it up. Nobody could hear him. Jack and Bob came off the footbridge and stood near them.

"How long will this go on?" one man screamed into James Ridgefield's ear.

"All day," he yelled back.

Magnetized, the visitors stood and would have continued to stand. But there were other things to be seen. They were to follow the logs part of the way to the mill, in many cases to get ahead of them. The creek wound so that it was possible to leave the Big Dam half an hour after it had been tripped, and by following a straight track to beat the logs to the second dam, to watch them go through it, and so on most of the way down.

Presently James Ridgefield beckoned to his party to follow him. They went back to the horses, leaving Jack and Bob by the dam.

Sidney, Arthur Devereux and two other riders set off together.

"Stop at Watson's Bend, Devereux; that's the best place," called Jack after them.

When they had ridden fast some distance over ridges and gullies they pulled up beside a dry creek bed.

"We'll see it turn splendidly here," said Arthur.

"Why?" exclaimed Sidney, "is this the creek?"

"Yes. The water hasn't got here yet. Seems funny, doesn't it? We'd better tie our horses up over there." He indicated a safe spot.

When they had fastened their animals securely they walked back to the bank. Through some straggly trees they could see a group of men at the bend, waiting also.

In a few minutes they felt rather than heard a peculiar beating on the air, a pulsing something, vibrating like the panting of a fast advancing monster. Then they distinguished a dull roar with a distinct intermittent booming in it—a roar that grew into a more exciting crescendo than any ever imagined in the brain of a gloriously mad musician. It came on and on, like a march of fate, a pulverizing roar grounding into nothingness every sensation but that of sound.

It was the weirdest thing Sidney had ever heard. She was so lost in it that she did not

notice the arrival of the rest of the party till they were out of the vehicles and there beside them.

"This is a bit near," said James Ridgefield. "The water will be over the banks here."

They all moved back a little.

Now they began to see things heaving up and down among the trees above the bend. Above the roar and the booming they heard the churning of the water on the rocks.

All at once, on round the bend it came, a dirty frothing wave ten to twelve feet high, sweeping over the banks on either side, levelling the fern, and on the crest of it, swirled as if they were matches, tossed the tangle of logs. The water came on like a wall. One could have run a yard or two ahead of it without being wet.

When it had raged by and was gone beyond the next bend, James Ridgefield called his party together again. He told them there was a fall of seventy feet half a mile or so away by a track, that they could neither ride nor drive to be in time, that they would have to run for it, and that weak hearts had better miss it and be driven to the lunch rendezvous by the road. He was leaving drivers for the purpose.

But laughing they all set off like a lot of children to follow him. It was rough underfoot, but otherwise the track was open. Now and again they could hear the logs booming their way down

the creek ahead of them. Then they would lose the sound to pick it up somewhere behind. And so it zigzagged about them as they scrambled on.

Mrs. Jack and Sidney and Arthur Devereux ran together. Sidney had been a good runner in her childhood. The race intoxicated her, and did not tire her at all. It added to her excitement to know that Arthur kept looking at her as they ran.

A shallow stream threatened to hold up the party. One of the women looked at it and gasped. James Ridgefield settled the matter by catching her up in his arms.

"Go ahead, gentlemen," he laughed. "No time to argue."

Sidney splashed in at once leaving Arthur free to help Mrs. Jack.

"Come on, Mrs. Ridgefield," he smiled.

She submitted gracefully, and on they went again as if they were running away from a fire.

It was a dishevelled, panting, red-faced lot of people who broke from a bit of bush beside the fall, and saw to their everlasting satisfaction that they were on time. Nothing but a feeble trickle was dropping into the pool below.

They followed their leader down and on to a hillock where they had a splendid view of everything. Here, under a fine puriri tree baskets of lunch awaited them—a delectable spectacle to the

exhausted and hungry runners, who dropped on the ground and began to mop their faces.

To Sidney's surprise Jack Ridgefield and Bob Lindsay came towards them from a gang of polers by the pool.

"Why," she exclaimed, "how did you get here?"

"We rode by an old track. It *was* a bit hard on the horses." Jack threw himself down by his wife. He was glad of a spell.

"That man is like the eye of God," whispered Arthur to Sidney. "He is everywhere."

"Sh!" she whispered. "He'll hear. Listen. It's coming."

They all sat up.

The great crescendo was bursting the valley again. It was as if the wrath of the gods was upon them, as if the accumulated roars of all the ages had been merged into one to split the ears of humanity.

With their eyes fixed on the smooth rocks at the top of the fall they waited breathlessly. All at once the wall of water heaved up into the sky, curled and rushed downwards. The logs, turning somersaults, leapt clear of it. Some of them dived head first into the pool to shoot up later, or be smothered under others coming down. Some among the first fell flat with an enormous splash. In a torment of motion they were swirled round

till the current caught them and carried them off once more down the creek.

A gang of men poled vigorously from the banks, for this was a bad place for a jam.

For a long time they watched, perceiving no diminution of the roar.

Jack and his father consulted as to whether it were not too noisy for them to eat lunch where they were. But the tired visitors voted against change. So, with little conversation, they opened and ate the lunch prepared by the kitchen cook. At the end of another hour they could see no change in the tumult in the creek.

They rested till the horses and vehicles were brought along, and then James Ridgefield started them off once more.

This time Arthur and Sidney rode together.

Farther down they came to one of the three dams they were to pass. The water had partly subsided as a lake, and the logs were sweeping through it on a current already made for them.

They rode now to the accompaniment of continuous sound, for the waters of the first tripping had long since reached the mill, and were creating a thunderous outside fall over the overflow and down the ravine.

Sidney and Arthur rode mostly in a companionable silence. They found each other easy from the beginning.

At intervals he told her facts of the day's work, that Jack expected to get between four and five million feet of timber down, that when it was over the logs would lie in an unbroken line up the bed of the creek for four miles, that it would take small trippings to bring the stragglers on, but that this combined flood would carry the mill for months, and that by such a system the place was independent of the weather. It had taken Jack and his father three years to work it out, he said. The older man had told what he wanted, and the son had seen that it was done.

The day ended with a supper in the pavilion of the bowling green, prepared by Mrs. Mackenzie, Mrs. Lindsay and Mrs. Graham, who were flattered that James Ridgefield had asked them to do it. Also, they were secretly expectant, for he always made expensive presents to the wives of his men who obliged him in such circumstances.

Before Sidney went home she had had a chance to ask James Ridgefield the question she would never have asked anyone else in the place.

They had walked away from the pavilion to look over the face of the mill dam at the cataract raging down the precipice.

"Who is Arthur Devereux?" she said, with a frank curiosity. If he thought her interest significant he did not show it.

"He's an awfully decent chap, so far as I know. Came up here about eighteen months ago to shoot, liked it, took a place up in the hills, and stayed on. Nobody knows why. Probably no reason at all. He's travelled a good deal. Probably left England because he wanted some fresh air. I've met him at Government House in Auckland. He's stayed there. So he must be known to the Governor."

"He looks so funny up here," she said lightly.

"Yes. These Englishmen do get into unexpected places. I've learned that you can meet an Oxford accent all the way from a gumfield hut to a university."

She laughed.

"How did the horse go?" he went on.

"Oh, splendidly. Nice and easy."

"Good. You can't beat a Maori pony for these parts. They are as surefooted as goats."

When she got into bed that night Sidney was too tired to review the day. But she was not too tired to realize that it had been the most interesting day in her life. She did not know whether Arthur Devereux had made it so, or whether the day had intensified her interest in him, and she was too sleepy to sort out her impressions or attempt a classification of her emotions.

She dropped into a deep slumber with the dam overflow pounding like surf in her ears.

CHAPTER XII

"God! Did you ever see anything funnier in your life?" said Arthur Devereux, without moving a muscle of his face.

"I certainly never did," Sidney agreed, making desperate efforts to control her amusement.

They sat in a fern bower in a corner of the Whakapara hall, watching the dancers at a charity ball.

A young and popular farmer had been killed by a fall from his horse, and the shocked community had risen as one man to assist his young wife and two babies, who were left with little but mortgages and debts. Only too glad of a dramatic event that would draw everybody and make the occasion memorable the young people decided for a ball, easily persuading their elders. Something about a real ball, they knew, always stirred the single men to propose as the weekly dances never did.

Every girl for ten miles around slaved to get the finest supper and produce the most lavish decorations the Whakapara hall had ever known. And, in truth, there was little wrong with either.

The bare walls of the building were entirely hidden by ferns and greenery, which also festooned out of sight a considerable part of the unsightly ceiling. The sitting-out bowers had received special attention, and were cunningly devised to obscure the vision of people without as to what was going on within. In a hard row all round the hall in front of them were the chairs designed for the chaperons and the middle-aged.

Almost the entire thing was contributed. Only the Chinese lanterns and the programmes had to be paid for out of the proceeds. The committee at first fixed the price at five shillings, but wisely changed it to half a crown, so that whole families could afford to go.

Everybody who had ever been at a ball, and a great many who had not, were there. At least fifty Ridgefield men went from the bush and the mill, many of them giving half a sovereign and refusing the change, for your bushman is a human of generous instincts. They swelled the number of males to an exciting surplus. Every girl knew from the start there would be no wall flowers that night. This fact added considerably to their spirits and the general sparkle.

Jack Ridgefield sent a cheque for twenty pounds, but did not go. Mr. and Mrs. Mackenzie did not dance, and Alec Graham's wife was ill. • So Bob Lindsay was, besides Sidney, the

only member of the mill aristocracy present. He had willingly consented to contribute his talents as a piano player. There were, besides him, two violinists, both men from the mill, and a man from far back in the Puhipuhi who played the flute. To fill in, if necessary, there were two first-class accordeon artists.

When Arthur Devereux asked Sidney to go with him for the fun of the thing, she accepted with childish delight. Her first thought was that it would be lovely to dance with him, for she was sure he was an expert. And her second was that it would amuse her to see how he fitted in to so incongruous an environment.

It was now well on in the winter, and she had seen him many times since the tripping of the dam. Not only had they met at Mana's, but they had met at the Lindsays', and they had gone riding together on Sunday afternoons. She felt the keenest enjoyment of his good company and his impersonal brotherliness.

So far nothing about him had touched anything but her mind. And he had given no sign whatever that he regarded her as anything but pleasant company in a dull place. Sidney had gone along without asking herself any questions about the friendship, or seeing there was any reason for asking any.

But now, as they sat together in the fern bower,

she felt her interest in him intensified, she knew not why.

Arthur was not in full evening dress, as were many of the men present. He wore the orthodox white shirt and tie, but his suit was a square cut navy blue, and he looked much like a naval officer. As Sidney seldom saw him out of riding clothes, she was struck anew by his good looks, his fine fastidiousness, and his boyish charm.

She, herself, was in semi-evening dress, in the colour that suited her best, a grey blue, that put deep shades into her eyes and brought out the colour in her cheeks. She wore a large salmon velvet rose at her belt, and no jewellery whatever. She had dressed her hair very carefully, so that it was perfectly balanced on her head.

Arthur was intensely aware, as he sat beside her, of her distinction, her physical vitality, and the glory of her unpoisoned youth. He, too, got an entirely fresh impression as he watched her. But he was suspicious of impressions—he had had so many. Sidney baffled him a little. He had not yet been able to estimate how sophisticated she was. Somewhere down in his consciousness he knew he had asked her to-night to see if the evening would enlighten him.

But for some time after the dancing started they were too much amused watching others to

think of themselves. Never, indeed, had either of them been in such crude company.

Arthur had provided against possible encroachments upon his partner. He had foreseen that some of her "parents" might presume that they could dance with her. So he and Bob Lindsay had filled her programme beforehand. Bob, as pianist, got only two dances, but he was delighted to get that out of the limited number that Sidney meant to dance, for she and Arthur left their bower only for the waltzes.

It was the lancers they were watching from their corner when Arthur spoke. It was a pretty rough-and-tumble business as danced in the Whakapara hall. There were wild shrieks, the result of much clutching of the female by the male, and many retirements to the cloakroom to adjust unsteady garments.

As he watched it he got all the wandering vibrations as he had at other balls more gilded and refined. He spoke his thoughts aloud.

"Yes, it's funny, as all balls are funny. But it's the pretentiousness of it that makes it absurd. These programmes, for instance," he looked at the gilt atrocity that hung by a cord from her arm. "What an affectation here! But apart from little things like that it is the universal ball."

She looked up at him.

"Where did you dance last?" she asked curiously.

"I guess it was in Auckland, at the Governor's," he answered, as simply as he could. He detested the appearance of bragging.

"Did you ever go to balls in Calcutta? I have read in novels that they were particularly glittering."

"Yes, I've been there. They are pretty gay, curiously exciting, an undercurrent of sex intrigue always about them. You know they mean liaisons and divorces and elopements and the hell of a row generally." He smiled, pursuing some memory of his own.

She laughed, ignoring his retrospection.

"What a contrast!" she said, looking out into the *mêlée* that kicked up the dust from the floor.

"In ways, yes. The method's different, cruder, but the fundamental thing is the same. There isn't a single girl here who isn't hoping she will get a love affair out of it, if she hasn't got one already. And that's the object of all balls."

"Really, I suppose that's true," she began, half laughing.

Then suddenly she remembered that she was one of the single girls present, and she looked quickly away from him out into the final scramble of the lancers. She rarely blushed, but now she could not keep a quick heat from her face.

He was not aware that he had said anything that could be taken personally till he saw the deepened colour on her cheeks. He had spoken lightly, thinking of the ways of nature in general. In a minute he saw that he had either suggested a possibility to her, or made her more aware of something she already suspected.

But Arthur Devereux was an artist with a very delicate touch. It didn't interest him to rush anything in the way of a human attraction. He knew well that once the climaxes were reached something alluring was gone for ever.

So he went on talking lightly, and completely disabused her mind of any personal intent.

"Of course it's true. From the African bushman upwards all dancing is sex dancing. By the way, that's one thing the natives beat us hollow at. They are beautiful and artistic in their primitive ways. We are showy and vulgar and hypocritical in our artificial ones. You have seen the Maori poi dance?"

"Oh, yes," she answered, recovering.

"Well, compare it with that."

He nodded his head at the last disentanglement of the lancers.

Mopping their faces, perspiring tanned men led their steaming and dishevelled partners to the bowers or the cloakroom. There was hardly a graceful pair in the whole crowd. If they were

young and healthy they were crude. If they were middle-aged, they were stiff. Most of those who had lived and danced in what they would have called superior places were pretentious and ridiculous.

Sidney, who had quite recovered her composure, agreed that the aboriginal in his unashamed simplicity was the superior.

"It's a waltz next," said Arthur, examining her programme. "Let's try it if there is not too much of a crush."

She agreed gaily. She was pining to get up.

Seeing that they meant to dance at last, Bob Lindsay, who had glanced their way several times, chose "The Tales of Hoffman." He had learned that Sidney thought it very seductive.

And, indeed, it always stirred her profoundly. She vibrated to something in its sensuous rhythm, she had never asked why. She felt it was a delightful coincidence that it should begin her dancing acquaintance with Arthur Devereux.

As she had foreseen, he danced perfectly, and she knew, with secret pride, that he could find no fault with her. As a dancing pair they were splendidly matched. Also, he held her in the good old-fashioned way, the way she liked to be held. She had never danced a second time with a man who made mistakes in the ballroom. She had always felt it was the poetry of motion one

danced to achieve. She was furious with anyone who had not her sense of fitness, and who projected personal attentions into it.

Arthur Devereux appeared to forget her as he danced. She appeared to forget him. They each wondered if the other really did, and liked having to wonder. They were both more vividly alive when they went back to the bower.

"That was good," he said, sitting down beside her. "By Jove, I wish I had you where there was more room. I know I don't have to tell you you're a glorious dancer."

But it made her glow inside to hear him say it.

He fanned her idly and made no attempt at flirtation. He had decided early in their acquaintance that there was no fraction of a coquette about her. She was singularly lacking in one of civilized man's greatest arts.

They were now diverted by a youngish pair who came to sit on the chairs immediately in front of their bower. The newcomers were obviously jointly responsible for the two infants they carried. They were thin, gaunt, and saddened by overwork. But they had a determined air of having come out to enjoy themselves. They had not been to a ball since they were married. They each hoped to catch again a fleeting renewal of the glory of their courtship, which had begun and progressed in this same hall. They sat down,

hushed the babies, and gazed about them, looking for acquaintances.

The woman had made pathetic attempts to dress up, but had only succeeded in looking eccentric. The man had done better only because he was more limited. His idea of festivity was an enormous buttonhole.

The parents had agreed beforehand to dance alternately, while the other held the twins.

As they had sat down Arthur tapped Sidney lightly on the knee. "Look," he whispered.

For some minutes they watched silently, talking merely with their eyes, as the parents settled, and patted the babies off to sleep again.

A farmer came up to them.

"I see yer got 'ere, after all. What about a dance, missis? Will ee let yer?" He grinned at the husband.

"You bet. It'll be my turn next. If she don't be'ave I won't. No flirtin' now."

And they all laughed foolishly.

The father was left with a twin on each arm. For the next dance he found a partner, while the mother held the infants, who hardly resented the change. And so it went for several rounds. Then it came to the waltz that Sidney and Bob had together. As they went off Arthur, who had said he would go out to smoke, noticed that the par-

ents of the twins were sitting dejectedly together. Neither had found a partner.

Arthur realized that they were not getting something they had come for, that their poor emotions were being sadly disappointed. An inspiration struck him. He stuck his head through the bower, and touched the man on the shoulder.

"Pardon me, but wouldn't you two like to dance together?" he asked. "I'll take the kids."

They looked round at him, astonished, and then delighted.

"You're very good, sir, but——"

"No buts. They'll be all right with me. There's a kind of couch in here. Hand them over."

Grinning, they did so, and the amazing infants slept.

Arthur did not know that Sidney and Bob saw the incident as they went by. He had not had his eye on the gallery.

"Now that's a Christian act," said Bob warmly. "Only one man in a thousand would have given up a smoke to do that."

And Sidney felt he was right. Arthur's action warmed and excited her. It coloured her feeling about him then and ever afterwards.

"You are a brick!" she said, when she returned to him. "Don't move them. We may as well keep them awhile if they are asleep."

As the twins filled half the couch there was room only for Sidney to sit comfortably. Arthur balanced himself on the low end of the sofa above her. The parents looked through, expecting to claim their offspring.

"All right. Go ahead and dance some more," said Arthur. "We are sitting out the next three. The kids are sound asleep."

The parents went off in great spirits.

"Poor devils," he whispered down to her. "At first I thought them merely funny. But they're pathetic. They need to dance so badly."

She looked up eloquently at him, passionately admiring this simple bit of human kindness, and wondering why she was surprised that it should come from a man of the world.

"You were going to smoke," she said. "Please go out now. Yes, please. I shan't feel deserted. I really wish you to."

"Thanks. Then I will."

Alone in the bower with the twins she looked tenderly into their hot and ordinary little faces, aware that she had become absurdly emotional about babies. Plain though they were, they were the unconscious means of stirring something in Sidney that had never been stirred before.

Arthur came back at the end of the dance.

"It's a wonderful night. How long do you want to stay?"

"One more waltz. It will be suppertime, and there will be more room."

"That's true. And we must have some supper. I looked in at it. It looks scrumptious."

She smiled. "Yes, you can always be sure of a wonderful meal in the backblocks, I believe. Everybody can cook. They can even create food."

They had their waltz, the best of the evening, and some of the cold chicken and ham and trifle. After saying good-bye to Bob they got their coats and started for the mill.

CHAPTER XIII

THEY had not ridden down because of the difficulty of changing clothes at the hall. They agreed it would be much more interesting to walk back to the top of the ridge above the drop, and brake themselves home on a truck to the mill. This was the usual way of getting home from Whakapara at night when one did not ride. There were usually trucks left on the little siding for the purpose. This night there were several for the use of the first people who came along to claim them.

Braking a truck was a simple business, Arthur said. He had often done it.

A full moon filled the valley with light. The night was cool, but there was no sting in it. It had been a friendly winter, exceptionally warm. There was a heavy dew.

Sidney and Arthur set out with a swing, glorying in it. It was about one o'clock, and as the dance was to last till four they were the first to leave. Even the bush workers would stay to the end and get back to go straight to work. But as it was a Saturday morning they did not mind. Men accustomed to fighting fires for fifty hours

on end thought nothing of giving up a night's sleep for a dance.

Before they had gone far Arthur took out his cigarettes. Sidney lit hers from a match in the hollow of his hand, and was conscious that his fingers touched her cheek. Then he filled and lit his pipe and they went on, speaking only when the spirit moved them. They did not go by way of the drop, but by the longer road zigzagging up the ridge. It was fringed with bush, and had beautiful outlooks upon the valley below. Now and again they stopped to look down. The night was so still that they could hear the music in the hall and the dancing feet.

As they walked on Sidney pondered over the fact that Arthur Devereux never offered to assist her over obstacles. Every man she had ever known lost no chance of taking her arm or gripping her elbow, and assuming generally that she was a feeble creature. But he paid her the supreme compliment of recognising that she was a sure-footed sylph, as able as himself to jump ruts and dodge roots.

As she had not yet reached the stage when she wanted excuses for physical contact with him, she was interested in his apparent lack of any desire to avail himself of his privileges as an escort. He never offered her his arm all the way up the long hill. And she was quite satisfied that he

should enjoy her company, as he so obviously did.

They took a cut into the tramway a little before they reached the top, and when they broke from the bush at the crest of the hill they cried out together. One of the sights of a lifetime made the world a dream of magic about them.

Every tree round the clearing, every foot of fern and trampled grass was veiled with diamond wheels that glittered in the moonlight. Millions of spiders' webs caught by the dew shrouded them. It looked as if every spider in the country had gathered for a celebration, and as if the moon had collaborated to make it unforgettable.

"God! What a sight," said Arthur, half to himself, after a few minutes. "Incredible if one didn't see it."

Though Sidney said nothing her silence spoke forcibly for her.

He turned to her with the first bit of personal impulsiveness he had shown.

"Do you know, little girl, it's fine to have you like everything as I do."

The "little girl" took her by surprise and startled her into answering lightly, "Of course I enjoy everything."

However, she knew she was blushing again, and he knew it too.

They stood a few minutes longer absorbing

that fleeting beauty into their souls. Then they walked on to the trucks.

The one nearest the mill happened to be small, with only room for two. Sidney grew excited as she thought of the ride. Arthur helped her to arrange herself so that she sat firmly. When he got on beside her they saw they would have to sit as closely as they could to each other to avoid having their clothes caught by the wheels. He tucked her cloak carefully under her legs.

"Don't let that flop over. If the wheel catches it you will be pulled off," he said.

He took the rope of the emergency brake in one hand, and pushed the other with his foot. As they were on the incline already they began to move without a push, and in a minute they were off.

They gained speed as they went, and presently they were tearing through the night. Arthur put his left arm round Sidney and held her firmly against him. He did not look at her to see how she took it. His face was set, and his eyes keenly on the lookout, for a stone on the line would have wrecked them, and there was always the danger at night of a wandering pig or a cow.

It was impossible for Sidney to tell how necessary it was for him to hold her, so she could not judge of the significance of his action. And she did not care to speculate about it. That strong

arm round her back gave her a thrill above anything she had ever known. She wished it might last for ever, and that was all she cared to feel then. The excitement of racing like that through the dead of night, with the wind they made stinging their cheeks, and the clatter of their going disturbing the peace of the still valleys, made for her an experience that shook her right out of the accustomed smoothness of her ways.

She hated that it should come to an end, which it did all too soon, for it took only ten minutes to do the two miles, even though the speed acquired on the slopes dissipated considerably on the flats.

Arthur braked the truck to a standstill by the stables, where he had left his horse and clothes. At once he withdrew his arm from Sidney, stretched himself and jumped off.

"Wasn't that sport?" he asked gaily, giving her his hand.

"Glorious," she cried, looking frankly at him. "I have enjoyed it all. Thank you so much."

"Oh, I'll see you safely to your gate," he smiled.

They walked along the track in silence, enjoying the deep stillness of the village.

It was an alluring night on the ghostly flat, and the stumps looked more reminiscent than ever as they raised their smooth tops to the moon.

They both realized they did not want the evening to end. When they stopped at her gate they had their first moment of hesitancy. But Arthur diagnosed it at once, and was not to be caught now by that kind of impulse.

"Good night, Miss Carey. You've given me an awfully jolly evening. We'll do it again."

She lightened at once.

"I've just loved it," she said warmly. "And I thank you."

For a few minutes after he had left her she wondered if he had enjoyed it all as much as she had, and if he had felt the same regret at the end.

As she undressed she felt that in accordance with all her preconceived notions of the creature, Arthur Devereux was that greatly-to-be-desired rarity—a thorough gentleman. She approved of the whole evening, of the things he had left undone even more than of the things he had done.

She did not sleep for hours. For the first time in her life she indulged in the exciting pastime of projecting herself into a future made for two, and was amazed when the dawn stole in upon her visions.

Arthur Devereux thought about her a good deal as he rode home. He told himself he must not drift into an affair with a girl of her type. He acknowledged that apart from delighting in

her company he was becoming more and more stimulated by her physical attractions. He was not by any means a woman hunter, but when women turned up as she had done he could not help looking into the future.

He was not yet in love with Sidney, and did not know whether he ever would be. He did not speculate about marriage as he rode. But his thoughts wandered far as he tried to decide how sophisticated she was.

"I wonder if she ever would," he said to himself.

CHAPTER XIV

THE next day Sidney began a critical investigation of her feelings, and the situation generally. As she was not yet in love with Arthur she was able to think rationally about being in love with him. Though her vanity was pleased with his attention she had no illusions about mere attentions from men. She had always had their attention. She was clear-sighted enough to see that so far Arthur had given her no sign that he cared for more than her company. And she was proud enough and strong enough to keep her feelings down until she was sure what a man meant.

In considering the subject of marriage she had always been very sure of what she wanted. She believed she would always be able to manage her feelings so that she would not fall in love with an undesirable man. She was not ignorant of the ways of men. She had read scientific sex books. She had been the confidante of friends who had been horribly disillusioned. And she was determined that she would never make the mistakes they made. She was sure she could trust her own judgment, and more, she was sure that if she

found herself deceived she could pull herself up and be glad she was saved in time.

Sidney was tolerant of moral lapses in others. She had always said on hearing of them, "Well, I'm not dead yet myself," but while lightly uttering that profundity she had always meant to keep clear of emotional messes. She was young enough and inexperienced enough to be sure she could not love a man who would not be faithful to her. That was her first requirement in a possible husband. Exactly how she was going to be sure of faithfulness she had never asked herself. She took it for granted she would be.

Now, in considering Arthur, she realized she knew nothing whatever of his past, of his code about women, and she told herself very firmly that though his company was delightful, she could not allow herself to drift into anything serious with him until she did know more.

Fortified by this analysis she met him coolly for their next ride, ready to frustrate any advances he might make. But noticing some subtle difference in her, and fortified also by his own resolutions, Arthur was as impersonal as the merest acquaintance.

Then Sidney went to Auckland for her winter vacation and in a week of mild dissipation almost forgot him.

On her return she found a short note from him

saying he hoped to meet her as usual the following Saturday afternoon. While they were riding away in the hills it began to rain. Arthur suggested they should make for his cottage, which he said was a mile or two away.

Sidney looked round the sky, seeing it would not clear for hours, and answered lightly that she would get wet anyway and that the sooner she reached home the better.

Arthur had not had any deliberate motive in making the suggestion; that is, he told himself he had not, but he wondered if she thought he had. He did not leave her to go home alone, but rode with her to their usual halting place on the road a mile away from the mill, and made light of getting wet.

One soft night in the early spring Sidney rode out alone.

Her horse was always kept in the stables or in a little field close by. She had never had to get it for herself, no matter when she wanted it, for Bill Hardy seemed to live, eat and sleep with the horses. He was now her devoted slave. He got her horse for her, and groomed it as if he were performing a religious rite. If he wondered where she went on Saturday afternoons, or thought the nocturnal rides she now began to take were funny he kept his opinions to himself.

From Bill Sidney learned all there was to know

about horses. He could not talk of anything else, and when he talked of them his sad eyes glowed. She liked to think that life had given him this great compensation, and that between him and the animals he loved there was a real understanding.

She was able to come and go to the stables unnoticed, as what she called her track to the tramway was hidden from the village by the school and the timber stacks. She could be seen leaving her gate only by the Ridgefields, but the houses were so situated that they could not tell whether she went to the school or beyond it.

She had never hesitated for a moment about going out with Arthur, but she was determined to keep her jaunts with him to herself. She could not have endured for a moment the kind of curiosity the village would have had about it, or the familiar banalities that the more privileged of her parents might have ventured upon the subject. Indeed, with her own friends she would have been fiercely reticent. She had no fear that Bill would suspect, for Arthur never rode in to the mill with her.

This night she went off up the main road toward the ranges. She had a fine sense of freedom out there alone with the stars. She had discovered much more than the wind in the Puhipuhi. The place had taught her to love her own com-

pany and explore her own mind in a way the city had never given her a chance to do. She walked her horse and smoked in intense enjoyment of her independence.

When she was not far from Mana's road she heard a rider coming towards her. But the horse did not come on. It turned off, and the sounds of its hoofs died away. Sidney knew the only track anywhere about led into the Joyous Valley. She wondered who it was that had ridden in there. Then she suspected who it was, and asked herself why the suspicion should disturb her.

But it disturbed her so much that she wanted to be sure. When she got to Mana's road she stopped her horse. Then she told herself she was a fool. Of course Arthur visited Mana, and there was no reason why he should not. It was early in the evening (she had the common illusion that hours were significant) and, of course, they were going to sing together.

She rode on for some time before turning homewards. On the way back she stopped again at Mana's track. She found the impulse to ride in irresistible. At the gate on the ridge she stopped to listen. She despised herself for thus playing spy, a thing she had never done before, and told herself that she would learn nothing by knowing that it was Arthur who had ridden in. It was no business of hers if he had. But when she

heard the piano and his voice floating up to her she found that some inconvenient emotions inside her took it seriously.

She would have liked to wait there to see how long he stayed, but taking herself sternly to task she turned her horse and rode out and homewards. She told herself she had no grounds for suspecting that the relations between him and Mana were anything but friendly. And supposing they were, what difference did that make to her? She could go on enjoying his company. For that she had no business to pry into his private life. And she could break off the acquaintance any time she chose.

As she had never yet had to sever any human relation she supposed it would be easy. Action had always meant yes or no to her. And so far her decisions had left no inconvenient trails of indecision behind.

She had herself well in hand the next time she went riding with Arthur. He knew she had retreated, and he speculated concerning the reason, feeling his interest in her sharpened. It stimulated him to his best in conversation. He talked to her about the British Empire, that inexhaustible subject of inspiration to wandering Englishmen who flutter about it criticising other Englishmen who are its props. He talked of Africa, and the native problem there, of Canada and the

French-Canadian problem, and of his favourite topic, India.

She loved to listen to him, though she knew he played with the problems of nations as a philosopher does with ideas. He was a dilettante, dabbling in events. He refused to take even the British Empire too seriously.

"We're doomed, like Greece and Rome, and Austria and Spain," he said lightly to her. "It's America's turn next. We've lost our grip. When the native races are organized and educated we're done."

Having more of a feminine interest in the present Sidney could not take the prospective fall of the British Empire seriously. But it entertained her vastly to listen to him, as she did this evening. When he was tired of the problems of the Empire he began to recite poetry. He gave her bits from Homer and Ossian, rolling the rich words off his tongue with a passionate delight in every syllable, that communicated his love of them to her.

She felt more than ever after she had left him that evening that she would hate to lose his company.

Their next meeting was at Mana's.

At the end of the evening Sidney told herself she had been a fool to suspect them. She had been unable to detect a sign of any secret relation

between them, and she was sure she would have sensed something if it had been there. She felt she had been unjust to them both. And for penance she was resolved to be even more responsive than she had been.

The following Sunday morning an Auckland curate, a friend of Arthur's, held the first Episcopal service in the school. Mrs. Jack Ridgefield and the Bob Lindsays were Episcopalians, and about the bush there were a number of Englishmen belonging to the Church.

Sidney decided that having stayed away from all other services, she would have to stay away from this, even though Arthur had asked her to go. She sat behind her curtains watching, and was astonished to see the number of people who arrived. Word had gone round that the curate was a good speaker, and that Arthur Devereux would sing.

More than a hundred men from the bush and the mill gathered there, and most of the village, for the Nonconformist section had no prejudices about hearing any brand of doctrine. They were only too glad of a diversion. There was not half enough room for the congregation. Almost every man had to stand, and they packed the school-room right up to the little platform on which the curate stood at Sidney's desk.

She felt, as she sat at her window watching,

that she was missing something, that she could have let her consistency lapse for once. But she had the feeling that her going would have been too significant, too much of a tribute to Arthur's powers of persuasion.

When she heard his voice rise above all others in the opening hymn she was curiously thrilled. In the sweet fresh morning it rang out and reached her, enhanced by the short space between the buildings. She tried to turn her thoughts to something else, but she sat on listening for it again.

Arthur sang two solos that the men wanted to encore. He told Sidney afterwards that he had never sung to a more appreciative audience than that curious collection of individuals. The curate said it had inspired him also. Altogether it was a unique service. She was always absurdly annoyed that she had missed it.

She was also hurt to think the Ridgefields had not asked her to dinner with Arthur and the curate. She knew they had very little room, and she knew she had made scornful remarks in their hearing about churches and clergy in general. But still she was chagrined to be left out. She had the poor satisfaction, as she watched them go by after the service, of seeing Arthur glance once or twice at her house.

Then she went on to listen as pleasantly as she

could to the Mackenzies gush about the fine sermon and Arthur's wonderful voice.

It amused her to discover that she hated to be left out of something. She realized the pressure behind those people who are smitten with the fever for being in the swim.

After dinner she determined to compose her mind. She had just decided she would go for a ride when she saw Arthur and the curate coming to her front gate. In a minute she was keenly aware how glad she was to see them.

As she opened her door she remembered that Arthur had never yet been inside her little house.

"Of course a heathen like you does not deserve the beguiling influence of the clergy," said Arthur, after he had introduced his friend. "But as it is always good for the souls of the clergy to meet the people who cannot be misled by them I've brought Carruthers to be stimulated by your unbelief."

"Then I'll promise to be the most ungodly soul he has met for a long time," she laughed.

"Thank you, Miss Carey. I do need the value of contrasts, I assure you," smiled the curate, and with this understanding beginning they began.

"Carruthers, we are in the presence of the cleverest woman in Auckland," said Arthur solemnly, looking round at Sidney's books.

Indeed, for the first time, he understood one of the things that had made her such a sympathetic and stimulating listener. If she had read all her books she was already familiar with most of the things he talked about, he told himself. And, to his surprise, she had things he knew nothing about.

The curate picked up that book of remarkable drawings by the Australian artist, Norman Lindsay, who has captured from the storied pages of Petronius and recreated in cool black and white the many-mooded hot voluptuousness of Roman hedonism.

In his wanderings Arthur had somehow managed to miss the peculiar genius of Australia. He had heard of the Sydney Bulletin, of course, but thought it rotten taste, and left it there. He had heard of Lindsay Gordon, of Rolfe Boldrewood, and Henry Lawson. But of the clever modern school of Australian cartoonists, etchers, painters and sculptors he knew next to nothing, and he sat back and listened humbly while Sidney and the curate talked of people he had never heard of.

This gave him leisure to observe her in the setting of her interesting room.

Sidney had made the place speak for her with no uncertain voice. Fortunately for her, she had always had artistic friends, and she had been

given fine things collected by a cousin who dealt in Oriental goods, so that her possessions represented a taste that had had hothouse cultivation, as it were. Also, she had a sense for colour, and for placing things so that they preserved friendly relations as to size and tone.

Arthur saw Sidney from a new angle as he sat watching her and listening to her. He saw that when she got a chance she talked well, even though, from his point of view, she took herself too seriously. And she had social ease and a grace of movement in a room that attracted him immensely. And besides her polish she had an eagerness and spontaneity that had survived the rigours of pruning for the social mould.

"Of course she wouldn't. What a fool I am!" said Arthur to himself, à propos of something known only to himself.

A knock at her back door interrupted the tête-à-tête between Sidney and the curate.

She found Jack and his wife standing there with two trayloads of food.

"We thought you might like to keep them to tea," said Mrs. Jack, in a whisper, "and I thought you might not have enough food."

"Well, you are bricks," she said, forgiving them instantly for not having her to dinner.

"It was my wife's idea," said Jack, who scorned to take credit for anything he did not do.

He put the trays on her scullery table.

"I will tell the Mackenzies you will not be there to supper," he said.

Then Sidney asked the two men to stay to tea with her.

"That's awfully good of you, Miss Carey," began Arthur, "but I half promised Mana we'd go there." He saw a fleeting shadow cross her eyes. "Still, we can have tea with you and go there later. And you could come along too, couldn't you? Carruthers is going home with me afterwards. Our horses are at the stable. Let's do that."

Sidney was annoyed that the mention of Mana had upset her, and she agreed quickly to hide any possible change in her manner. As it was a lovely afternoon she asked if they would not prefer to walk, and suggested the gully.

The two men were enchanted with it, and the glade and the hidden waterfall, and the exquisite bit of forest. Sidney easily forgot Mana, for she was really enjoying herself immensely. And when they got home she made her visitors help with the meal as if they had been her brothers.

She was fully aware that Arthur was watching her, but she did not guess that his attitude of mind towards her underwent a somersault that afternoon. Something she had never felt before

stimulated her to pay much more attention to the curate than she did to him.

They reached Mana's just at dusk. She had expected them to tea, and her hospitable table was spread in readiness. When she heard they had eaten she gave no sign of the quick disappointment she felt. But Sidney sensed it and felt very mean.

"Let's turn it into late supper, Mana," she said. "I gave them a very light meal, and they will be hungry again soon."

She turned to see Arthur's eyes fixed upon her with an eloquent look. He, too, had sensed the situation, and her kind intention. Feeling that she was about to blush she turned quickly to the curate and led him up to a rare piece of Maori carving.

Mr. Carruthers and Sidney openly flirted for the entire evening. It is true that they forgot each other while Arthur and Mana played and sang, but they seemed otherwise to take up every available moment as if they found it to be the kind of moment they had been looking for for years.

"She can flirt, after all," said Arthur to himself. "Is it for my benefit, I wonder?"

At ten o'clock they all did full justice to Mana's supper.

The two men rode most of the way home with

Sidney, and afterwards the curate bored Arthur to death with his praises of her.

At the end of that week Sidney was surprised to get a letter from Arthur, written from Auckland, saying he had gone down with Carruthers, and expected to be away some time. It was an absolutely impersonal letter, so much so that she thought it cold, and wondered if she had offended him by flirting with the curate.

That disturbed her, and she felt also that she would be very lonely without him. As he had given no explicit address she could not write, and felt hurt to think he did not care to hear from her.

CHAPTER XV

Two weeks later he wrote again from a Rotorua hotel. He was there, he said, with a friend from England who was visiting New Zealand for the first time. He gave her an entertaining description of tourists and the unique atmosphere of the colony's famous resort. He said nothing about his return to the Puhipuhi, but he did say he should be pleased to hear from her.

Sidney was more than glad to hear from him. She was finding the place blank without him, blanker indeed than she cared to own. She spent more time tutoring George Mackenzie, who was now studying feverishly for his scholarship, and eager for all the attention she could spare him. And so it went to her spring vacation.

On her return she spent the Saturday in Whangarei with a friend who happened to be there, sent her bag up by the guard in the morning and caught the late night train. She had no fear of the walk at midnight, and hoped there would be nobody she knew who would think it his duty to escort her. On the way up in the train she wondered if Arthur were back. She

had not heard from him since he had left Rotorua, two weeks before.

When they reached Whakapara she hurried out of the carriage round to the back of the waiting room to let a crowd of drunken bush workers get ahead of her. She had not gone many yards away from the platform when she heard steps behind her.

"Hullo, Miss Carey. Where did you get to? I looked everywhere for you. How are you?"

And Arthur grasped her hand and looked to see if she had anything to carry.

She had been feeling very tired on the train, but now she was suddenly alive and ready for anything.

"Why, when did you get back, you uncommunicative and secretive person?" she demanded, as if she had a grievance against him.

"I came on Wednesday's boat. If I had only known that you were coming last night I would have waited."

"Indeed! Well, if you had been an ordinarily decent correspondent, and had displayed the slightest interest in my movements, you might have known."

Though she spoke lightly he saw she had felt his apparent indifference.

"I know. I forgot your vacation. Forgive me," he said with flattering seriousness.

"Did you come down to meet me?" she asked wondering.

"I did. At the store this evening Bob volunteered the information that you were expected up to-day, and that, as you had not so far arrived you must be coming on the late train, and that Jack had said somebody would have to come down for you. I took the hint."

"I thank you," she laughed. "But I do wish they would get over the idea that I can't look after myself."

"That's not quite the idea, is it?" he asked, as they swung along the road. "I think Jack's notion is that life may be more pleasant for women if they don't hear the kind of language that drunken bushmen are liable to use. I'm no sissy, but I assure you there can be something pretty nauseating about the way these fellows put sounds together. I was haunted once for a week by a dose I got. That crowd ahead now. You really would not like to hear what they are saying."

"I suppose not. But I didn't propose to."

"Well, you never know, Miss Independence."

"I'm not that, really," she said half laughing.

"I know you're not. I've punctured that veneer," he retorted.

"Oh, you have, have you?"

She could not tell why, but she felt there was

something warmer about his manner than there had been in the past, and she wondered if it were merely because he was glad to see her again.

"Of course," he answered. "Nobody is independent."

They swung along in great good spirits.

"Did you know Mrs. Bill had deserted Bill again?" he asked presently.

"Why, no. When?"

"This week, so Bob said to-day. Went off with one of the bush hands, quite a decent chap, quiet, a good worker."

"Heavens! How can they do it?" she exclaimed. "Poor Bill."

"You needn't waste any sympathy on Bill. I should say he was glad to see her go."

"Perhaps," she said.

"Let's cut into the tramway and get ahead of the men, if you can hurry," he said. "There are only two trucks up at the top, so we must get there first or walk the whole way."

She would not have minded that, but she said she could run if necessary, so they quickened their steps and turned into the bush. Arthur lit the track with a flashlight till they came out upon the line. Then without a word he took her hand and led her into a slow run, stepping from sleeper to sleeper. She did not attempt to talk

as they trotted thus up the slope, for it took her all her time to keep up with him.

When they could hear the drunken laughter of the men at a safe distance behind them Arthur slowed down. As they were breathing too hard for conversation they went on silently. But he still held her hand.

At the trucks they stopped and stood to regain their breath. Then he moved the truck on a little so that it would run when the brake was released, and they got on together.

He put his arm firmly round her and they started off. He drove faster than he had the previous time, and she caught the infection of something reckless in his mood, an abandonment that he had never shown before. She was sure something had altered him. She felt now something come out of him to clutch her.

The excitement of it was over all too soon. But it had stirred them both. When they got off the truck at the stables, he took her hand under his arm, and turned with her along her track, talking nonsense all the way.

At her gate he stopped and showed no disposition to linger.

"Good night, little girl. Do we go for a ride to-morrow?"

She tried to be casual.

"I'm afraid I can't," she said. "I have too much to do."

"Next Saturday?"

"Yes."

"All right. Good night."

He raised her hand to his lips, and laid it for a moment against his cheek with a most beguiling gesture.

Then he turned quickly and left her.

CHAPTER XVI

THAT night Sidney told herself she really cared for Arthur. But as she was not yet sure he was the right kind of man to care for she embarked upon her first experience of decisions that did not decide. What a mess that experience was to make of her principles and her peace of mind she fortunately did not foresee.

When she met Arthur the next time or two she was prepared for advances that he did not make. He talked better than ever, and on parting from her kissed her hand and put it against his cheek, as he had before. His restraint baffled Sidney. She had expected that he would try to kiss her. She was sure now that he cared for her, that he meant to make her care. She wondered what was holding him back, and suspected it was the caution born of some sad previous love affair.

She grew extremely restless. One evening after eight o'clock she was overcome by an impulse to go off on her horse. It was an irresistible night. There were moments when the stars talked so eloquently about the magnitude of the universe that she forgot the human atom. Her

friends the stumps mourned more arrestingly than ever the loss of their former glory, and every breeze that stirred the mantling fern whispered to her the secrets of the spring.

Within her a potent force was stirring. It seemed to swell to bursting point the bounds of skin and bone while something about her in the night pressed from without to get in. She had a curious sense of being caught up and carried off on a great wind, even though the night was very still.

She rode on into the ranges, not caring where she went. The pony always seemed to know his way, and when she turned him he found the road home. She had no fear of meeting anybody dangerous. The bush workers had other ways of working off their emotions than assaulting solitary women. She would only have had to say who she was to be treated with respect.

When she had ridden for some time, believing she had kept her sense of direction, she pulled up on a ridge, looked round at the unfamiliar skyline, and saw she was lost. But only for a minute did she feel uneasy. It was too warm for her to catch cold. She decided to give the pony his head, believing he would get somewhere.

She took out her cigarettes, and let him stand while she smoked. She looked up at the stars and round at the sleeping hills and gullies, and

grew drunker every moment with the allurements of the night.

Some time after she had started her pony again he turned off the well-defined road upon a track that passed through straggly bush down a slope and ended at a gate. In a clearing ahead Sidney saw a light. Whether it was a bush camp or a farm she did not know, but she thought it might be wise to go ahead and ask where she was.

As she proceeded two dogs ran out and barked furiously, and when she got nearer she saw a horse tied to a post near the house. The figure of a man moved on the verandah.

"I've lost my way," she called at once, pulling up. "Would you be good enough——"

"Good heavens, Miss Carey. I've been thinking of you, and wishing I had you here to go for a ride with me. I was just about to set out alone. And now the gods have brought you."

Though he spoke lightly Arthur had a sense that Fate had taken a hand in this, and he felt a sudden rush of vitality through his limbs.

He had been about to go to spend the night with Mana. He had told her he would go, but he did not want to go. He had been sitting for an hour shirking it, swearing it should be the last time. He had always hated breaking with wom-

en, and he disliked the thought of hurting Mana more than he had disliked anything for years.

Sidney's heart jumped when she heard his voice. She, too, recognised the hand of Fate.

"Why," she gasped, smitten with embarrassment. "I was lost. I had no idea where I was. The pony turned in here."

"Well, you needn't apologise for him," he laughed. "He's a most intelligent animal. Perhaps he was born here, and grew reminiscent out under the stars." He patted the pony with his face turned up to her. "Now that you're here," he went on, "get off, and come in and look at my diggings."

"Oh, thank you, but I think I'd better get back," she said quickly. "It must be late."

He felt her uncertainty was due to something besides the lateness of the hour.

"It's only about ten o'clock. For heaven's sake, child, come in. I'm not an ogre. I won't eat you."

She felt at once that her hesitation was silly.

"There's nobody else here, and nobody will come," he added. "Of course I should not ask you to be seen and gossipped about."

Sidney jumped off her pony, determined to take the adventure as adventures should be taken.

"Why, you are an awful way off," she said, as he tied up her horse.

"Oh, no. Not so far. You have been wandering round, I expect. I don't wonder you came out. What a night! And the moon is coming up. One step. And don't expect to find my diggings like yours."

She was intensely curious to see how he lived, and horribly disappointed with her first look round his front room.

The unpapered walls were bare of anything save an enormous pipe rack holding an incredible number of pipes, and several guns. There was no couch of any kind. On the three tables were piles of books, papers and magazines. There were several more or less comfortable chairs. The floor was bare. Two doors opened into a bedroom and a lean-to. It was clean and fresh enough except for a concentrated odour of tobacco.

But to her it seemed an impossible setting for the man, other than as a hunting shack or a temporary camp. Surely he did not regard it as a home. The forlornness of living that way struck her. She wondered what on earth lay behind it, and felt she must know before she went any further with him.

He had the air of having money behind him. She knew he did not need to live this way. She told herself there must be some reason for it other than mere aimlessness.

He sensed her critical attitude, but waited for her to put it into words. He took out his cigarette case.

"Do you like living this way?" she asked, with more of an incredulous tone than she had meant to use.

"At times, yes. One gets the value of contrast, you see."

He smiled across the corner of his table as he handed her a cigarette.

"That's true. Government House must be really interesting as an antidote to this."

As he had forgotten that he had ever mentioned the Governor to her, he wondered how she knew he went there, and asked himself if James Ridgefield had been talking.

"Exactly," he answered lightly. "And after Government House this is health and the other half of wisdom."

"You Englishmen certainly are funny. You find wisdom in such out-of-the-way places."

"That explains the Empire," he retorted.

"Why do you do it?" she asked, impertinently.

"Do what?"

"Go to the ends of the earth?"

She looked at him over a puff of smoke.

"Meaning why did I come here?" he smiled. He knew she was quizzing him, and he admitted

her right to. But he would tell her only in his own good time.

"Let me see," he went on. "Why does anybody ever do anything? Does anybody know?"

"The whole of humanity is not as aimless as you. I certainly know why I go here or there."

"Wonderful," he said solemnly. "If you had the *Wanderlust* would you know why you had it? Do you know why you are healthy and sane?"

"Oh, well, if you come to inherited complications——"

"Are there any that aren't? But let's avoid that interminable subject. I'll come to something much more pleasant."

He rose and went out through one of his doors. She heard the sound of glasses. Something about being there alone with him in his own house excited her to an extent that alarmed her. She took another of his cigarettes, and tried to calm her nerves.

Arthur came back with a tray. He had the gay air of a boy preparing himself to do something solemn in a game.

When Sidney saw the shape of the bottle and the brand of the Burgundy she recognised an aristocrat, and instantly remembered the smart saying of a friend to the effect that a man never wasted good wine on a tête-à-tête without hope of reward.

Alarmed at her own excitement and uncertainty, and not at all sure of him, and quite inexperienced in such a situation, she ran into a blunder.

"Oh, that's awfully good of you," she said hastily, "but please, don't open it. I don't want any. I never drink wine."

"You don't want any!"

She flushed furiously under his astonished look. It made her feel she had committed the unpardonable sin in an evening of good fellowship. She saw at once she had blundered. She felt as happy as a nervous person who has just upset a glass of water into his neighbour's plate at a formal dinner.

For the minute he was merely boyishly disappointed to find there was an occasion to which she could not rise. If she had not looked so attractive as she flushed, so absolutely distressed, he would have been hurt.

He knew she had lied about not drinking wine.

"Why, my dear girl, do you know what that is?" he held the bottle up, gazing adoringly at the label.

"I know," she stumbled. "But please, I—don't care for any now. It would be a shame to waste it on me." She knew she was making it worse.

Then he saw there was something in her mind that he did not get.

"All right," he said. "Then it's consecrated to a future party. You promise that?"

"Yes," she answered, trying to be light, and glad to put it off that way.

As he carried the tray out he wondered why she had refused to drink with him. He had had more than a hospitable idea in offering that wine, but it was not the idea she had feared he might have had. It was a sentimental idea that amused him, suggested by her fateful appearance, the idea of cementing a secret contract with his soul.

When he returned, Sidney was standing in his doorway watching the moon coming up.

"We are wasting a wonderful night," she said, trying to be casual. She wanted to get out. She felt she could not stay inside any longer now that she had done something to the pleasant flow of their mood indoors.

"Then we won't waste any more of it," he said, as willing as she to go.

He called in his dogs, shut his door, and they mounted the horses. As they reached the end of his track they heard a rider, travelling fast down the main road towards them.

"Damn!" exclaimed Arthur. "Quick. Get back."

They turned round and got behind a clump of ti-tree.

The rider came up and passed, but a dog following him stopped, sniffed and barked.

The horseman slowed down.

"Here, Tiger, Tiger," he called, whistling it off.

"Jack Ridgefield," said Arthur, under his breath.

"More like the eye of God than ever," laughed Sidney.

She had now recovered her composure, and was determined to make amends for her mistake.

"I'm glad he didn't see us. He would not approve my nocturnal rides."

"I suppose not," he mused. "There must have been an accident up this way, or something gone wrong. It's wonderful the way he gets round this place. There isn't a thing he doesn't know. He's a most disturbing beggar. It isn't pleasant to be constantly reminded of one's own futility."

"Then why are you futile?" she asked snippily.

"Yes, indeed. That is the question. But, my dear girl, you take my up-bringing—the usual thing, tutors, public school, Oxford, sport, the estate, family, clubs, the Code, and you have your machine-made product—me, futile because I am machine-made. Put me against a man like Jack Ridgefield, why, I'm pathetic. I'm a pleasant no-

body. And worse still, I know it. I've never done a big thing in my life. I couldn't build anything. I haven't an original idea about life. You think. So does Jack Ridgefield. You've both got the courage to change your habits. You'd change half of them for the sake of a new idea. I wouldn't think any new idea was worth changing one of mine for. That is what the system has done to me. But, by God! I can appreciate men like Jack. The capacity to do that has not been trained out of me."

She had never heard him say as much about himself before. He ended with the first touch of bitterness she had known in him. But his little speech of depreciation drew her to him.

"Well, at least you Englishmen can die wonderfully. Look at Captain Scott, and those men——"

"How like a woman!" he interrupted her. "Your sex thinks so much of dying decently. That's training, like everything else. Of course Englishmen die decently. The country trains them to die. It would be much more sensible if it trained them to live half as well."

She laughed.

"Well, there must be a few Englishmen living usefully. The British Empire is a substantial affair."

"Yes, my dear, but the English aristocrat isn't

running it. He's riding on the shoulders of the men who are, and they are coming from what he is pleased to call the inferior classes. In London a man like Jack Ridgefield would not be allowed to join an exclusive club. Bally rot! Thank God I've learned that by getting away from England."

She enjoyed his castigation. But none the less did she admire a great deal of what he stood for, and the picturesque class that had produced him.

Also, she noticed that for the third time that evening he had said "my dear" to her.

The full moon was now well up. Arthur stopped his horse, and she reined in hers beside him. They were on the crest of a ridge that she did not know. They could hear water falling somewhere below them.

"What is that?" she asked.

"That's a fall, a beautiful little fall, too. There'll be a lunar rainbow. Let's go down."

"All right," she assented willingly.

"We shall have to walk."

They jumped off and tied their horses.

He led the way, turning now and again to see if she needed assistance, for the track was rough. She caught her divided skirt over one arm, and but for it looked like a boy in her leggings and pantaloons, as she scrambled down after him.

Once or twice he stopped to admire her sure-footed litheness.

They came out of scrub at the bottom onto a large flat rock. The fall dropped into an exquisite little gully, a natural conservatory of selected ferns. As he had hoped, the moon illuminated it all. And arched in the spray above the palms there was a perfect silver bow.

He dropped down on to the rock, and she sat beside him. For a while they thought they forgot themselves and each other. Then, without any preliminary manœuvres, Arthur stretched himself out on his back, and calmly moving her hands out of the way, put his head in her lap. He took out his cigarette case. His whole action was designed to give the impression that he meant to be comfortable.

Then he lit Sidney's cigarette from his own and handed it to her. Coming from him it was a significant familiarity, and she knew it. But she took it with a calm "Thank you" and looked up at the moon. Here under the stars she was not afraid of herself or him.

He turned his face slightly away from her, so that she could see against her dark skirt the lines of his clear-cut features. His cap had dropped off.

For the first time in her life Sidney's fingers itched to caress a man's hair. And because it

was the first time she supposed it would have been too bold a move. She had the old idea that a man must make all the gestures that lead up to a declaration of love. But she longed to do it. Her desires were now speeding fast ahead of her traditions.

After Arthur had lain still for some time she moved slightly to relieve the stiffness of her legs, and when she settled she let one arm drop easily across his chest. Then he caught her hand, holding it firmly, and continued to lie apparently absorbed in the beauty of the night.

Presently he raised himself.

"Am I hurting you?" he asked, with deep notes in his voice.

"Not at all," she said, catching his eye, and looking quickly away again.

But he sat up.

"I'm sure that's not comfortable," he said positively.

And he drew her round till her head was against his shoulder, and his arms were clasped about her as if she had been a child. Then, as her heart began to thump alarmingly, he threw his head up and started to sing softly to the moon.

He sang Hindoo melodies, weird and crooning. And as he sang he became more irresistible every minute.

Sidney forgot her uncertainty, forgot her feeling about Mana, forgot how little she knew of his life. And if she had remembered she would not have cared. When a man can sing to a woman and the moon as he sang what else matters in a sad world?

When he stopped they both stayed very still for an eternity. Then his face looked down as hers looked up. Mysteriously the distance between them was eliminated.

They kissed as if they both felt they should have begun years before, and as if their lives would never be long enough to make up the loss. When the first passion of abandonment was over Arthur let his lips wander about her hair, her ears, her eyes, her cheeks, in a seductive trifling.

"I'm glad you got lost, dear," he whispered.

"So am I," she whispered back.

She was so blissfully engulfed in this first drunken orgy that she did not want to speak. And though it was much less of an emotional upheaval for him, he did not want to either. As he sat with her head perfectly placed for the play of his lips, he could think of other things—of the witchery of the night, of the witchery of all such nights, of the painful transitoriness of all such nights, of the flat aftermath of such nights.

But he had spells of complete absorption in the

present. It was an unforgettable memory for both of them. As they sat there certain of each other, they touched heights seldom reached and never quite duplicated in poor human lives, so pitifully barren of great moments, and yet so capable of great moments, if only the champion miser, Circumstance, would yield more opportunity from her secret treasure.

They realized then and remembered afterwards that the hour had not been spoiled by either trying to put into words things that can not be put into words.

Once Arthur broke into a few bars of song having nothing to do with the progress of love, and once he quoted his favourite Ossian on the moonlight.

Some time in the night they both found themselves growing cold. They got up together, stood and looked at each other, threw their arms about each other, and swayed upon the flat rock. Then silently they climbed up the ridge to their wondering horses.

It was not till they stopped on the road near the mill that Arthur said the words she was expecting him to say.

The horses, who seemed to understand the situation, stood still together.

Arthur pulled Sidney half off her saddle.

"I love you, dear," he said simply. "Good-night."

And as she rode on she did not wonder why he had said no more.

After he had left her he rode fast for some miles. When he pulled his horse to a walk, he looked up at the moon.

"The devil! What am I to do with Mana?" he asked himself.

Then he sought forgetfulness from that unpleasant question in his faithful pipe.

CHAPTER XVII

THE next day Sidney was a wreck. She told herself she must not indulge in any more nightly rides. It was three weeks off her summer vacation. She had her first school examinations ahead of her. She had to put every spare minute into coaching George Mackenzie. She saw she must not allow her emotions to run riot till she had this over.

But she breathed an air that week that created strange mirages round her in the little school-room. It took all her conscience and all her will, neither of them negligible quantities, to keep her from seeing Arthur's dark head in the corners, and between the rafters of the ceiling, and in the sunlight that streamed through the windows. Notes of his song mingled strangely with incongruous questions as to the result of nine times twelve, and the words "I love you" obtruded themselves into her object lesson on the making of soap.

She could scarcely endure life till she saw him again, which she did the next Saturday afternoon. They rode a short distance into a clearing that had a fine outlook for twenty miles.

There they dismounted and tied up their horses.

Having reasons for it Arthur had thought more in those three days than she had. He met her meaning to tell her one of two things he felt she ought to know, and if she had given him any lead or asked him any question he would have done so. He said to himself it would not matter in the end.

And perhaps it did not.

They had one more gloriously irresponsible orgy, within limits, of course. There were kinds of caressing Sidney would not allow, and he was quick to see where he had to draw the line. He did not mind the restrictions. They only added zest to the ultimate surrender. And he was wise enough to know that the prehistoric view of the ultimate surrender had anticipatory values of its own.

When they parted Sidney told him she could positively spare him only the Saturday afternoons till she went away. She was thrilled when he replied that he would be compensated only if she gave him some of her summer. To that she gaily agreed.

Looking back afterwards she thought it strange she should have given herself up so thoroughly to these two meetings with Arthur in view of the amount of speculation she had indulged in about

him immediately beforehand. But having tasted love she found it irresistible. She might have gone on some time without further questioning, but for the unexpected.

In the middle of the next week she went out after eight o'clock and down into the gully to smoke. She was possessed with a fierce restlessness, a terrible energy that overpowered her. She could not get tired. She could not sleep.

She sat down near the dell, and after finishing one cigarette she went on dreaming.

Presently she heard men's voices coming towards her. Jack and his father, who had come up the day before, were strolling down.

Sidney did not move. She meant to get up if they came up to her, or if she heard them speak of things she was not intended to hear. But they came to a standstill a little way off, out of sight of her. Jack made some remark about tripping the dams again soon, and then after a short silence she heard James Ridgefield speak.

"It seems that Devereux's married. I heard it last week from the Governor."

"That so? I wonder if he has told Miss Carey?"

"Why, what has she got to do with it?"

"They have been knocking about a bit together."

"Pooh! That's nothing. They naturally would up here. Is it being talked about?"

"Oh, Lord, no. I may be wrong. But I've seen them together riding."

"That's harmless. Don't mention it up here, anyway. Nobody is ever likely to hear."

They had turned back, and their voices died away.

For some time Sidney sat stunned, almost unthinking, conscious mostly of a hard pain in her stomach that turned to nausea. For the first time in her life she was pitted against something of which she had no comprehension, deception. She did not know how to cope with it. The great art of living one way while you make the world believe you live another could not yet claim her as one of its devotees.

So she took it hardly. When she came out of her trance of pain she began to rage against Arthur. She saw now why he had hesitated and retreated in his advances with her. She knew he must have told himself he had no business to go on. But he had gone on.

Before she dozed fitfully in the early morning she had learned her own capacity for feeling misery, and she was appalled by it. She had stupefied moments fearing that a fate that had shot this bolt at her might strike again. She did not see what she had ever done that a thing of this

kind should happen to her. If a man like Arthur Devereux behaved in this way whom could she ever trust?

Once or twice she asked herself if there might not be a mistake. But she felt that Arthur's behaviour was explained by James Ridgefield's statement, and she never really doubted it.

She never knew how she dragged herself up the next morning to face breakfast at the Mackenzies. But cold water and brisk rubbing did wonders to her face. She explained her tired eyes by saying she had not slept very well. Fortunately nobody expected her to look anything but tired, with her school examinations just ahead of her. And the Mackenzies, knowing the amount of overtime she was giving George, would have been the last people in the place to wonder why she looked pale or weary.

She came to herself a bit in the schoolroom. Her twenty-five devoted and respectful pupils were there to remind her that life goes on much the same about the ruins of the individual heart. She dragged through the day, forcing herself to respond to the constant appeal of those upturned faces. She did not shirk anything. She was only too glad to work on with George Mackenzie until after nine that night, and felt hypocritical about taking the eloquent thanks of his parents for her devotion when she left.

Then she went down into the gully to pace up and down till midnight. She wanted to tire herself out. She knew she must sleep.

The minute Arthur rode up to her on Saturday afternoon he saw something had happened.

Sidney had not thought of postponing or cutting out the meeting. She told herself to go and get it over.

At the first sight of his smile the passionate anger that she had expected to sustain her dissipated shamelessly, and left her looking helplessly at him. She was almost sorry to think she was going to upset his fine good humour.

"What on earth have you been doing to yourself?" he asked, with a quick anxious look at her.

Then because she rarely shirked anything, she steeled herself to meet his eye, and act as she had intended to act.

"I know you are married," she said coldly.

"The devil!" he muttered, reading difficulties in the hardness in her face, and wondering how on earth she had found out.

"I'm sorry, my dear, that you have found out before I told you," he added quickly. "I meant to tell you last Saturday. I was going to tell you to-day."

His quiet voice enraged her. Was it possible he saw nothing out of the way in his behaviour? Till that moment she had had a subconscious

hope that there might be some mistake. And now he calmly admitted that it was true. Before he could go on she burst out furiously.

"You calmly admit that you are married, and that you have made love to me, made me care for you without a thought of the results——" She choked, unable to go on.

"My dear girl, I've thought of nothing but the results. I'm going to get a divorce, of course. Now please listen to me. You will understand when I tell you all about it. I had no idea you would ever hear up here or I should have told you long ago. I suppose James Ridgefield told you, curse him! But it doesn't matter. It's not going to alter anything in the long run. Let's ride over there and talk about it."

The mention of a divorce had not pacified her in the least. It did not at that moment offer any way out. Indeed, it made the whole thing worse in her eyes.

"There's no use our discussing it," she cried passionately. "Our acquaintance is at an end."

He looked at her with real fear in his eyes. And something of what he felt for her escaped from the veneer of his restraint.

"Is it fair to judge me like that without hearing what I have to say?" he asked.

"Perhaps not. Say it, then. I'll listen."

But her tone was terribly discouraging.

He pointed again to the place where they had been the previous Saturday afternoon.

"Let us go there and talk about it."

"No, not there," she said sharply. "We can talk as we are."

"We can't stay here," he said firmly. "We must get off the road somewhere," and he turned his horse.

For a minute she let him go on, and then she could not help herself. She gave her horse the rein and followed.

They rode like that in an uncomfortable silence for more than a mile. Then he took a narrow track that led nowhere in particular, and stopped when they were out of sight and hearing of the main road. In a small fireswept clearing with a narrow vista over one of the numerous gullies he tied their horses.

Sidney sat down on a stump on which it was impossible for more than one person to sit. Her hard coldness was the most uncomfortable thing Arthur had known for years. But he told himself it served him right. He sat down on the ground opposite her, prepared to be exceedingly diplomatic.

"I'm terribly sorry," he began. "I know I ought to have told you before. But I never dreamt you'd hear. I can't understand James Ridgefield. Men don't usually talk——"

"Mr. Ridgefield did not tell me," she interrupted coldly.

"Then how the deuce——?" he paused. He saw that did not matter, and that he had better begin his story.

"I am married. My wife is in England. I left her years ago. I have started divorce proceedings. I began when I was away this spring. I knew before I went away that I cared for you. But I did not tell you, I did not make love to you, till I was sure of the divorce, and as I shall be free within six months, and we can marry any time after that I did not think it would matter exactly what week I told you."

Though she felt an immense relief at his words, at the possibility of a way out, she was still full of the idea that he had deceived her, and she had suffered too deeply to rebound quickly.

"That's just where you are wrong," she answered coldly. "You should have told me in the beginning. Nothing can alter the fact that you have deceived me for months. And if you deceive me in one way you will in another. I can't be sure you are going to get a divorce. Indeed you can't yourself. What proof have you?"

"The friend who came out this winter told me the facts," he went on, quietly. "In England, of course, I have to prove my wife unfaithful. It has only recently become possible. My friend

told me that my wife is now living with a man known to us both. He is much wealthier than I. They are anxious for me to get the divorce. There will be no difficulties put in the way. It is certain, as certain as anything in this world."

"I shall not consider it certain till I see the proofs," she said harshly. "And you have put me in a false and difficult situation. I hate under-hand behaviour. You tricked me into feeling and showing what I felt. And I think it is outrageous."

She was so angry at his calmness that she could have screamed at him.

"My dear girl, for heaven's sake don't read into this thing obstacles that don't belong to it. I am exactly the same man that you loved last week."

"Oh, no, you are not," she exclaimed angrily.

"Will you please explain the difference?"

"Last week I trusted you. Now I don't."

"That doesn't alter me. It merely alters your conception of me."

"Good heavens! Isn't my conception of you the whole thing as far as I am concerned?" She was exasperated at his lightness. She told herself to get up and leave him, but could not.

"The whole thing?" he repeated. "For how long? Conceptions are as changeable as the weather. Your idea of me will change every year.

My idea of you has changed entirely in six months. The one thing that has not changed is that I love you. You loved me last week, and you love me now. Oh, yes, you do. The only difference is that last week you admitted it, and now you think you shouldn't. But you love me just the same."

Sidney fought back her increasing helplessness, determined that she would not be talked round like this, savage to think that after her three days' misery he should sit there looking at her with his vanity triumphant, and his calm unruffled.

She stood up.

"I don't think there is any use our discussing it any farther," she said, turning to walk off.

He let her go a few yards till she began to walk as if she were blind, and then he sprang to his feet and followed her.

"Sidney, please don't be a fool," he cried.

And as she paused he caught up to her and seized her by the shoulders.

She could not look at him. There was a film across her eyes. She had a queer feeling that she was trapped, that she would never get away from him, that her intelligence and her principles had nothing whatever to do with this business.

"Sidney, you have never lied to me. Do you love me?"

All the feeling that life had left him, and it was a considerable amount, went into his tone.

"It doesn't matter whether I do or not——"

"Really! Now, that's the first lie you have ever told me. You know as well as I do that it matters more than anything else in the world to both of us. What is the matter with you, child? You have suffered far too much already for my damned mistake. Do you really have to suffer any more?"

Something about his tone broke her. She cursed herself for her weakness, but the tears welled out of her eyes. She bit her lips and choked. Then she found herself down on the ground with his arms about her.

Arthur said nothing for some time. Far more powerful than any words was the language of his arms held still about her with no attempt at caressing. But when she had ceased to sob, and lay still, he leaned down and put his cheek against hers.

"Damn it all," he said hoarsely. "Not for worlds would I have had you hurt like this."

She drew herself up and out of his arms, and stared away across the narrow bit of gully visible between the trees. She felt as if she had lost her soul, or whatever it was she called herself.

"Listen to me, dear," began Arthur, with a voice that was fatal to wavering principles, "I

love you. I made one tragic mistake years ago. I know that in loving you I'm not making another. That's why I want you, why I must have you, why I would do anything to get you. Now, don't think I deceived you—that is, I did, but please see why I did. And as I had no idea you could ever hear of my being married I did not think it mattered so much what day I told you."

Turning she looked keenly at him.

"When did you first hear you might get the divorce?" she asked.

"When I went to town with Carruthers."

"Suppose you had not learned you could get a divorce, what would you have done?"

"I don't know, my dear. Do we have to settle that inconvenient problem now, when it doesn't exist?" There was a smile in his eyes.

"You cared for me before you went away," she went on, her eyes still fixed on his.

"I believe I did."

"And you would have come back?"

"I don't know. I went meaning to stay away."

"You did?"

"Yes, but I should probably have come back," he said frankly.

She looked away from him. His love might be immoral, but after all it was a warming thing. But she was strong and ruthless. She told herself she must make a stand for her principles.

"You should have told me months ago," she repeated.

"I know that."

"Why didn't you?"

"You might have refused to go out with me. And then you would never have learned to love me."

"I see. You meant to deceive me till you were sure of me?"

"Yes, I suppose I did."

"You see that method allows me no freedom. I should have preferred to know and to care knowing."

"You are conventional and very strong. I was afraid."

"That's just it. You thought of yourself and not of me."

"Does that matter now? Now that we care for each other? Now that I am going to consider you and not myself?"

Drawing a long breath she looked away from him again, and made a desperate effort to think her own thoughts.

"Arthur, you talk wonderfully. When I'm with you it's a case of 'Almost thou persuadest me.' But I live a good deal of my life away from you, and if when I am away from you I feel I cannot trust you the result is going to be something you cannot control. It's true I cannot talk

against you. But I can think against you. And I cannot continue to care for a man I do not trust. You have given me a horrid jolt. You have put doubt into my mind. You have abused my trust. And the thing I see is that you will do it again, if you think it wise, without any reference to me. Now if you wish our acquaintance to proceed you will have to give me your word of honour that you will never deceive me again."

"Oh, my God!" groaned Arthur.

There was something so comical about his gesture of despair that her sense of humour righted itself.

"My dear girl," he cried, "you can't be serious. I expect to deceive you, or at least to try to, scores of times. How like twenty, or whatever it is you are! No woman of forty would ever ask such an impossible thing of a man. She'd say 'For God's sake, don't tell me what you are doing. Deceive me. Let me keep my illusions.' But I will tell you what I will do. If you will promise and guarantee beyond all doubt that you will never be disturbed by the truth, whatever it is, that you will never be upset by anything I do, then I promise to tell you everything I mean to do and don't, and everything I don't mean to do and do. Is it a bargain?"

Sidney dropped her head into her hands.

For a minute he did not know whether she were laughing or crying. In truth, she was hiding a smile. She had seen the absurdity of her request. But youth is such a stickler for certainties, has so voracious an appetite for illusions, finds it so hard to reduce life from the glamour of the fairy tale to the garish light of realism.

Sidney told herself she must not let him win as easily as this. That if he could not make standards for himself she must make them for him.

She raised a serious face.

"You know what I mean, Arthur. You must not lie to me about essential things. Now don't ask me to define 'essential thing.'" She had seen that coming. "You know what I mean. And whatever you may say, I cannot regard myself as engaged to you till I see the proofs of your divorce. Indeed, now that I come to think of it, you have not asked me to marry you." Her eyes narrowed as she looked at him.

"My dear girl, of course I ask you to marry me. I supposed you understood that." But he was conscious that in the beginning it had not been his intention. He had not foreseen that he would care as he cared now. "I ask you now, formally, Sidney Carey. Will you marry me as soon as I am free?"

"I don't know," she said gravely. "I cannot

say that yet. In any case I cannot call myself engaged to you."

"All right, my dear. I don't care what names you call our relation so long as our relation goes on." He smiled wisely at her.

She looked at him wondering if she would ever get the best of him. She knew she was already beginning to feel that his being married would not make the difference she had supposed it would. She was curious to know one or two things.

"How long is it since you left your wife?" she asked.

"About seven years."

"And you haven't got a divorce?"

"I didn't care enough about anybody to try," he said, looking gravely at her. "And then, I left her. I needn't go into the reason. A common story. I left her on my estate with an adequate income. And I left England, and have knocked about ever since. We had no children. As far as I know I could not have got a divorce till recently. But then, I never tried to find out how she was living. Is there anything else you would like to know?"

She saw that the whole thing was a hideous memory and that he hated to speak of it. The fact that it was so remote made a further difference to her feeling about it.

"No, indeed," she said, her tone softening. "I did not mean to be curious."

"I know you didn't. And you are entitled to know anything you wish to know about it. But the whole thing is rather a ghastly memory. I hate to think of it. I hate to have it raked up in a divorce. And I should have preferred to have the thing over without telling you. There really was no need for you to know. By the way, how did you find out?"

She hesitated. "I heard Mr. Ridgefield tell Jack. I was placed so that I could not help it."

"The devil! Jack, of course! I hope they will keep it to themselves."

"I'm sure they will." Then she thought of something, and looked away. He saw at once she was going to speak, or repress the desire to speak of something significant.

"Does Mana know you are married?" she asked, trying to be casual.

"Mana! No, my dear. Why on earth should she?" There was natural surprise in his tones.

"Oh, I don't know. I just wondered if you had told her."

She looked straight at him.

"There is something on your mind," he said quietly. "What is it?" He wanted to find out then and there whether it was knowledge or suspicion that had caused her to speak of Mana.

"I suppose I'm stupid," she said, rather doubtfully, "but I want to ask you one more thing. Is there anything between you and Mana? You know what I mean."

"You mean are we living together? No, my dear, we are not. And will you tell me why you ask? Let's settle that bogey here and now."

He risked this answer. It was true, but he dare not tell her then how recently it had become true.

"I don't know," she answered, with a sense of relief. "I've had a feeling there was."

"For heaven's sake don't cultivate feelings of that kind, my dear. They're unnecessary, and they're uncomfortable. I tell you again, there is nothing but a pleasant friendship between Mana and me. And it will continue as long as I stay here. I have no reason for breaking it. I shall go and see her occasionally, as I always have."

He spoke with a deliberate frankness, and with considerable relief to think he had cleared that danger so easily.

She looked out over the valley thinking how absurd her suffering of the last three days had been. But it had been, and she could not forget it all at once. Like a person who has had a serious illness she had to learn again to walk the ways of ease and gladness. Though she saw she would have to accept Arthur's explanation, in-

deed, she was only too glad in her secret heart to accept it, she had lost something she would never get back. The dreamer in her was gone. The first flush of irresponsible loving was over. She would keep her Arthur with reservations, seeing him a little more clearly. She had begun the funeral services that human beings have to hold over their illusions once they are committed to idealizing a member of the opposite sex.

Seeing that the worst was over, Arthur took out his pipe. But he did not do it lightly. He had spent a wretched afternoon so far. It had made him see how much he cared for her, and how much he hated to hurt her.

He lit a cigarette for her. As she took it their eyes met.

Impulsively he threw an arm around her.

"Please forgive me, dear," he said hoarsely. "If I can help it you shall never suffer like this again."

And she knew he meant it with all the decency that was in him.

She put her head against his shoulder.

And the peace of that reconciliation was a peace that passeth understanding.

CHAPTER XVIII

SIDNEY had adjusted her mind to a renewal of their warm relation before she left on her summer vacation. She had been a bit worried at first lest anything should hold up the divorce. But she was only too glad to tell herself that she loved Arthur well enough to wait for him, well enough to share obstacles with him. Her relief as she lay awake the night of the explanation showed her how deeply her feelings were committed. It would not be long before she could laugh at the dreadful days that had preceded it.

But the knowledge that Jack Ridgefield knew, that perhaps Sophie knew, determined her to be very careful in the Puhipuhi. Not for worlds would she have forfeited their respect. She saw Arthur only once again before leaving for her six weeks' holiday. That sacrifice intensified the delight she felt in looking forward to the time they would have together in the summer.

Arthur had made good use of their last meeting. He turned her thoughts to the future. He painted alluring pictures of England, of trips to the Continent, of London. And she saw how

much he looked forward to seeing it with her, and to having her help him to forget the tragedy that had driven him from it.

She needed no stimulus to look forward to it. That magic phrase "the estate" conjured up scenes of rural charm and old-world atmosphere that in their secret hearts the most democratic of "far-flung" pioneers adore. And London! No Englishman is capable of feeling for London that concentrated reverence and yearning that comes to the dreaming colonist on a New Zealand hill-top or an Australian plain. To most of them London has the painful lure of the unattainable—the mournfulness of saying year after year "Perhaps I can manage it next," and of fearing the while that it won't be managed. But the illusion is hugged and fed and never allowed to die. There is always the prospect that something may happen—and one may really get there at last.

Almost the entire professional New Zealand world saves up for it. Doctors, lawyers, professors, teachers, and the civil service see it in extended vacation dreams. Farmers see it in that happy future when their children shall be grown up, and the farm prosperous. Business men see it in the extension of their trade. Politicians see it in the High Commissioner's office. Miners see it when they get the windfall. The plain working-man sees it in his savings bank balance.

No one can tell you what it means to him. It is just London, sung from the tongue, with a comprehensive smile, and something indefinable in the eyes.

Sidney already had her passage money in the bank, and it must be confessed that the vision of her future with Arthur took all the significance out of her first annual examinations, and rendered her strangely indifferent to the success of George Mackenzie, upon whom she had bestowed so much careful tutorship.

After two weeks in Auckland of friends who were not breathing the rarefied air of a secret passion, Sidney was thrilled to meet Arthur, and to learn that they were to go with a party on a cruise of the islands in the Hauraki Gulf. It was an entrancing trip that she had always wanted to take. They went on a large launch belonging to one of his friends, carrying provisions and tents. There were six men and six women, one of the couples being married to provide the farce of chaperonage that never chaperones.

The whole thing was rather breathlessly informal. Sidney had never experienced anything quite like it. But she was determined that she would live up to Arthur and not spoil sport. Also she was interested enough on her own account to be amused at it. It was a very clever and jolly crowd.

The men were supposed to sleep on shore at night, and the women to occupy the cabins on the launch. Sidney had a suspicion that queer things happened to this arrangement. Very irregular hours were kept, and as little clothing as possible was worn with an air of superb naturalness. The men usually wore their pajamas to breakfast, to change afterwards into bathing suits, and did not dress till the night meal.

Arthur had a pair of blue silk pajamas that were the envy of everybody on board. They were a most unusual shade. Sidney was a little startled the first time he appeared in them, but he looked so adorable, and they were so obviously worn to fascinate her, that her mild scruples speedily vanished.

She told herself many times that Arthur was behaving beautifully. He paid her the subtlest kind of attentions and never for a moment allowed any other woman to claim him. It had been a carefully selected party. Only couples deeply interested in each other were asked. So there was no poaching, no friction. Sidney had her man to herself as much as she wanted him. And what can be more satisfying, more productive of a charitable point of view? She easily closed her eyes to some little things that were not quite up to her standard of ethics.

But she saw before the trip was over that she

and Arthur were faced with the problem of most engagements. One night as they sat in a nook by the sea, a mile away from their camp, Arthur forgot for a moment that he and Sidney were not the free unfettered lovers of an Arabian Night's tale. Disengaging his arms with a firmness not to be mistaken she got to her feet and walked a few yards away, and then stood looking out on the water.

Presently Arthur rose and came up to her.

"I'm sorry," he said simply, and taking out his pipe began to smoke.

She took his arm and they started walking in silence along the beach.

Sidney was not afraid of love, but she had set a standard for herself which in spite of the relaxing moral atmosphere of the launch party she meant to maintain. She could be humorous on the subject of unconventional love where others were concerned, but she did not intend it to become even a problem for herself. She just buried her head in the sand.

As she was wondering what she should say to Arthur, another couple that had been sitting on the beach ran down and joined them in the walk back to the camp.

CHAPTER XIX

SIDNEY went back to the Puhipuhi to find a halo round her head. George Mackenzie had come second on the scholarship list for the Auckland Province, and the Inspector had reported her first year results as remarkable. The Board sent her a letter of congratulation, and her "parents" met her bursting with pride in her. Mrs. Mackenzie almost wept, and Tom was at first unable to speak of the success of George, for they well knew that Sidney had made the chance for him, and had let nothing go that would count.

Jack Ridgefield and Sophie welcomed her back with a warmth that surprised her. Her school committee racked its collective brain to think of something that would show its appreciation. After proposing all kinds of impossible presents they finally took the advice of Jack Ridgefield simply to write her a letter with their signatures appended and have it suitably framed. Bob Lindsay spent three evenings and compiled nine editions of it before they were all satisfied. The committee called upon her in a body to present

it. And Sidney, contrasting the simplicity of the scene and the honesty of the expression with much of her exotic summer setting, found it good. She did not wish to get into a state when she saw the whole of life as one kind of atmosphere.

She had seen at once that the Ridgefields were expecting their first baby. Though they lived in an intense world of their own anticipating the event, they determined they would not be publicly idiotic. They had not mentioned it to anyone yet, and had the idea that nobody knew. Sidney felt the difference in Jack Ridgefield. He had softened. She wondered how that quiet little Sophie had done it.

Sidney had been rather surprised to see how deeply she had enjoyed meeting Jack and his wife again. They stood out in contrast to many of the people she had met that summer, particularly to the men and women of the launch party. The latter were all right, she told herself, for occasional dessert, but give her Jack and Sophie for a steady diet.

They asked her to tea the night after she returned. Later, when Jack had gone to the store, Sophie brought out a basket of sewing, and made no pretence of hiding the little garments. She announced the fact to Sidney merely by holding up a midget shirt.

"Well!" exclaimed Sidney, as if she had not

guessed. "Of course you're delighted. What do you want it to be?"

"Oh, a boy, I suppose. Jack, of course, wants it to be a boy." And then Sophie began to talk of something else. She had a horror of boring Sidney with a subject so unintellectual as babies.

But Sidney, now dreaming of babies-to-be for Arthur and herself, would gladly have talked about them, and worked off some of the emotionalism running riot in her. She almost told Mrs. Jack, but decided that, as the situation was peculiar, and as it was Arthur's business as well as her own, she had better not.

There were reasons why she was glad Arthur was not returning to the Puhipuhi for two or three weeks. She had lived so intensely during the summer that she wanted time to catch up with her composure, as it were. She did not want to become the kind of drivelling idiot in love she had known some of her acquaintances to be. Also, she had to appear in the village as if nothing had happened to her. And, above all, she wanted to be normal before the Ridgefields.

With more time on her hands she wandered about at night, thinking and dreaming. Even though she was bound hand and foot to Arthur she liked to think she was judicial, that she could stand off and view herself and him. She liked to analyse him; his comfortable mind, his boyish

ways, his many attractions of heart and manner. He had been a long way more interesting, she told herself impartially, than any man she had ever met.

One night she stole into the mill, over the sawdust, under the maze of belts and wheels, and sat down at the edge of the dam. She had managed several times to get in there unseen by the old night watchman. She loved the powerful silence of the stagnant machinery, the vast energies chained in those belts and wheels, the symbol of power in the great construction.

And thinking of them her thoughts wandered to Jack Ridgefield, who had built this thing, who knew the significance of every nut and screw in it, who controlled the men who daily changed it from a sleeping giant to a torrent of motion where man trod warily among a thousand jaws of death.

She had lost no fraction of admiration for the Jack Ridgefields of the world. Unconsciously words of Arthur's drifted into her mind, "I could never build anything." She shrank from the obvious comparison, feeling it was disloyal. Then, because she had shrunk from it, she turned back to it. She saw that her ideal man would have been a combination of Arthur and Jack. Was it an impossible combination? she wondered. It was not the first time she had seen that there were things Arthur could never give her.

Stealthy steps broke in upon her thoughts. She started to find Jack standing close beside her.

"Why, Miss Carey! I thought it was the watchman!" He looked curiously down upon her through the gloom.

She felt like a child caught stealing jam.

"Oh, I came here to listen to the silence," she said uncertainly; "it's weird, isn't it?"

"Yes," he answered. "I'm rather fond of it myself. Do you often come here?"

"I've just been once or twice. Nobody has seen me."

She knew he had a rule that women were not to enter the mill unless accompanied by himself or his father.

"Of course," she added lightly, "I might have known you would find out. You are the eye of God, you know."

Jack gave his curious little snigger, intended to be a laugh.

"You don't suppose I could run this place if I wasn't, do you?"

"How do you do it?"

Much of the admiration she felt deepened her voice.

"How do you teach, and make records?" he asked.

"It's not the same," she said. "Children are very easy to manage."

"Men are easy to manage," he said. "And I found out why years ago."

"Why?"

"Because they have never ceased to be children."

"All the same, few people can manage them as you do."

"It seems very simple to me," he said quietly.

"Well, you were fortunate enough to be born knowing how."

"Yes, that's all it is."

They were silent for a minute.

"Were you looking for the watchman?" she asked. "I heard him up above, I think, a few minutes ago."

"Yes. I'll find him presently. I usually look him up in an evening."

"Dear me! Does he need to be watched himself?"

"No, indeed. He's a fine old fellow with a conscience. But it's pretty dull hanging round here all night. I like to drop in and show him I think he's worth noticing. That kind of thing costs nothing and goes a long way."

"Yes," she smiled up at him, "that's how you manage the men."

"Hm!" he said, as if his thoughts were a long way off.

He towered above her, mysterious like his

wonderful machinery. She wondered if he were lonely, and felt he must be. She questioned if his quiet little wife understood him, or touched his life at many points. She probably managed him wonderfully, all the better because she did not understand him, and did not struggle to. She accepted him without probing too deeply into the intricacies of his temperament. Certain combinations of men and women get on very comfortably that way.

As he went off Sidney had the feeling she had always had that she would have liked the chance to try her personality on him, would have liked to get at him. She saw that Arthur was a transparent babe beside him.

Jack wondered as he walked away why she wandered about in the night. He knew she had ridden out alone since her return without the object of meeting Arthur. He wondered if there was anything between them, wondered with a vague condemnation of him, but none of her. She now interested him because she had shown that she could do good work. Because she had managed to keep her independence and yet offend no one in the village. Because she had a conscience and character. He thought particularly well of the start she had given to George Mackenzie. But he did not understand her in the least. If men were simple to him, women were inscrutable

mysteries. He was more or less at sea with her mentality and always would be. He was extraordinarily pure male. And he got near to women only through the medium of sex.

Sidney sat on, continuing her comparison of the two men. It disturbed her rather to have the shadow of Jack Ridgefield cast upon the pedestal upon which she had exalted Arthur. It disturbed her that she could think about the difference between them. She thought of friends to whom love had been an engulfing delirium that had obliterated all smudges upon the shining robes of the beloved. And she wished she could have been capable of the glorious folly.

She saw now that she was doomed to go through life on compromise, that grim adjuster in the aftermath of great expectations that youth defies as long as it is able, and succumbs to only in the last ditch.

She went home wishing she did not see these things. She wanted her Arthur as irreproachable as she could make him. She fell back upon her happy summer. For that he had been a perfect lover, she told herself. And what was almost as good to her, a constantly interesting and responsive companion.

The summer had dissipated her doubts about him. He had talked freely about his past, a remote past, when he had done things he did not

care to think about, the usual things that young men did when trying to learn about themselves and the world. She had heard him, asking no questions, forgiving that past, as she knew all women did.

She was more interested to have him talk of the future, a future in which he meant to take up the responsibilities of his estate. She was eager to contribute ideas for the benefit of tenants, eager to spur him on to benefit the human race. The fact that he had had no real work to do had troubled her more than she would have admitted even to herself.

But she was no less in love with him when he returned because she had been able to think clearly about him in his absence.

CHAPTER XX

SOON after Arthur returned Sidney found herself faced with the problem that had cast its shadow before that summer.

They had met in the dell at his suggestion. He was tired of going out with her in riding clothes, he said.

Sidney was only too glad to share with him the romance of the one place about the mill where she had been able to enjoy beauty and solitude. The lovely little gully was indeed a perfect setting for the exalted mood of happy lovers. Its elusive witchery stirred to further eloquence their already inspired tongues and they rhapsodized together about themselves and their future and the glory of the night.

Presently they sat down in a little natural arbour by the brook, and with his arms about her Arthur began to sing snatches from the love songs of Tristan and Isolde. And, as he sang, he brought the words out of their legendary setting; brought the burning words there as the eternal voice of love whispering from the haze around them in the little dell.

He stopped suddenly, and drawing Sidney's face upwards he pressed his lips against hers.

She yielded for a moment, and then started out of his arms and moved away from him. They both felt as if a rock had crashed down into the peace of the glen behind them. At first they had the curious mental discomfort of the broken mood. Then Arthur felt a keen sense of irritation at Sidney's attitude, at what he called her utter lack of the adventurous spirit, but because he really adored her he sat still for some minutes trying to hide his annoyance. Then he scrambled to his feet, took out his cigarettes, and lit one.

"Let's walk," he said abruptly.

They began to smoke, and without talking walked slowly up the track and out on to the flat among the reminiscent stumps. The hazy summer night soothed their fretted nerves. Arthur threw off his feeling of resentment and recovered his sense of humour. Taking her arm he began to talk with a detached frankness and quiet seriousness about the problem of man and woman.

They paced back and forth, talking late into the night. Sidney had never discussed the subject even with a woman at such length or with such plainness. She was surprised how natural it was to be doing it with Arthur. And she was surprised to find that an examination of the sub-

ject lessened in some mysterious way the traditional taboo.

At the end of the conversation she found she had not an argument in favour of chastity. There was not a thing she could say that Arthur could not prove to be merely a superficial command that no one with a particle of character considered. But throughout the talk he kept the personal note entirely out of it. He did not ask her to change. In fact, at the end, he told her he understood and admired her attitude.

But the result of this conversation was that in a day or two she began to ask herself why indeed she should not live with Arthur. And thereby set herself the most difficult problem that life sets the modern woman. And in comparison with this moral struggle her previous ones were as a grain of sand set up beside a mountain.

For now she had to reckon with the life force pounding through her. And life forces care nothing for the scruples of the mediums through which they forge their way. She was terribly disturbed to find she could not settle the problem by simply saying to herself "I will not." Her mind to-day revoked the decision of yesterday till she felt she was a pawn in the hands of some grim player whose only idea of movement was a zig-zag between adjacent lines. The thing that frightened her most was the strength of her own

feeling. She began to be afraid to be alone with Arthur. She felt he was not trying as he might to help her.

"You don't play fair," she reproved him, as they rode together.

"Of course I don't," he laughed back. "Whoever heard of a man in love playing fair? You seem to think, my child, that we can manage this business. We can't. It's managing us. If I could carry you off this minute I would. So keep your weak moments away from me."

"The thing I complain of is that all your moments are weak," she retorted.

"No they're not. But unfortunately they are very likely to coincide with your weak ones."

She had to laugh. She could not complain of his lack of frankness now.

She thought a good deal about his charge that she took herself much too seriously.

"You women eternally overestimate the importance of your actions to the universe," he complained, looking at the stars. "What do they care?" He pointed upwards. "You think everything will go to pieces if you don't have the right idea about the family or the status of God in modern civilization."

"I don't care a bit about the family or the status of God," she retorted.

"Perhaps not. But you think your physical

chastity for a certain number of months is a big thing to humanity."

"I don't. But I think it's a big thing to me."

"That's exaggerated egoism."

"All right. Then that's the disease I have."

But it was no joke to her as she walked alone with the ghosts of the ancient forest. She began to look up at the stars asking what the morality of one poor little female atom did mean to them. How could it matter to the great progression of events whether she lived with Arthur Devereux or not? How absurd to put the importance she was putting into her puny problem!

Then she went to sit with Mrs. Jack Ridgefield, and told herself it mattered very much. Jack and his wife were the unconscious antidote to her moral apostasy. In their house she felt the value of strength and ideals. They stood for something she felt she could never live without. She felt that if she lived with Arthur she would have to give them up. As she had been born with dreams of influence, born to official relations with the world, she knew she could never bear to lose that status. She was not so much afraid of the risk as she was of the effect of a clandestine love affair upon her own affections. And her affection for Arthur was something she would not jeopardize. This she always felt in the presence of the Ridgefields.

Sophie was glad to have her company. Jack was now usually so tired that he went early to bed, and as his wife was becoming rather nervy and sleepless, she disliked sitting up alone. They both urged Sidney to spend as many evenings with them as she could.

And Sidney was only too glad to go there to have her sense of balance restored. She was soothed by the normal atmosphere of their little house. Something about Sophie quietly sewing for the coming baby made Sidney feel that she had to keep herself above suspicion for the sake of the babies she was to have. She knew this was sentimental. She knew the fever in her blood despised it. She looked at little Mrs. Jack, and wondered if she had ever had such a temperature.

Fortunately for her, Sidney had always loved being in the open air, and the delight she had felt from the first in the peculiar atmosphere of the Puhipuhi proved now to be as the shadow of a great rock in the weary land of her emotional struggles.

One evening, when she felt in no mood to go to the Ridgefields, she walked across the mill dam out over the flat in a direction she seldom went, because it meant going through the village. But every time she came this way she meant to come oftener, because a mile away from the mill

the plain dropped precipitously into a gully, and from the top there was a glorious view to the north.

This way came the soft warm winds that travelled from Australia over the Tasman Sea. This way came storms and walls of rain. This way came the flocks of birds that travelled their mysterious way from foreign lands. The long valley leading to hills that were always blue on the horizon seemed like a finger pointing to the sunny north. On a clear day you could see fifty miles of its intermittent cultivation, its clumps of stiff pines, its yellow roads, its white farm houses, its desolate gumfield wastes. And if you happened to be there at the right time you could see the thrilling trails of smoke that followed the train as it made its leisurely way along to Kawakawa, its terminus in the "lonely north."

A wooden tramway ran into the mill dam from the brow of the plain, where a windlass drew logs up a perpendicular drop from the gully below. There was a camp and a dam at the bottom, and as Sidney sat in the fern she could hear a rough laugh now and then, and the sounds of an accordion.

She lay back, clasping her hands behind her head, and looked up at the rose and grey clouds forming out of the magic of the sunset. She had lain some time when she heard the voices of men

coming nearer. Then she heard steps on the sleepers. She raised herself and saw the heads and shoulders of Jack Ridgefield and three others above the fern. Something about the way they walked roused her curiosity. As they got out into the open she saw they were carrying something under a grey blanket on a stretcher.

She sprang up and hurried after them. If it was an accident she might be needed.

Jack saw her coming, stopped the procession, and met her a few yards away.

His face was white and drawn.

"You can't do anything, Miss Carey. I'm afraid we won't get him to the hospital alive. I'm going to drive him right on to Whangarei."

"Who is it?" she asked, a lump in her throat.

"John Hay. Single man fortunately. Tree fell on him." And he turned back to the others.

She stood watching them go off along the tramway. Tears filled her eyes. Never in her life had she seen anything so powerfully appealing as that grey hump on the stretcher. She forgot all about her own problem.

With her mood entirely changed she did not want to stay out any longer, but turned homewards. In front of Bob's house she met Jack.

"Don't tell my wife, Miss Carey. Hay was dead when we got to the mill. I don't want her

to hear to-night. Can you be with her for the evening?"

"Yes, I can," she said, willingly.

And as she sat with Sophie embroidering her-ringbone stitches on tiny fine flannel gowns she could not keep her thoughts off the poor corpse that was lying somewhere in the village.

As before, the presence of death suffocated her. It seemed incredible that she and Sophie could sit there unconcerned, working as if nothing had happened.

When Jack came in his wife noticed that something was the matter, but she said nothing. She had learned already she could help her tired husband most by leaving obvious remarks unsaid.

But when he was gone to bed she voiced her feeling to Sidney.

"Something has happened," she said. "And Jack isn't telling me because he thinks I shall worry. Aren't men funny? They think we do not see through them?"

Sidney smiled into her beautiful soft eyes.

"Yes, they are funny," she said, and would have given her soul to talk out to Sophie. She was so sure there was a fount of wisdom behind those eyes. "But I'm glad we see through them. It would be so much worse if they saw through us."

"Yes, that would be awful, wouldn't it?" laughed Sophie softly.

And Sidney wondered what secret thoughts lay behind that remark.

She hardly slept that night. The grey hump on the stretcher haunted her. She could not have told what it did to her, but for days afterwards she forgot she was an object drifting on a great river of impulse, for she was absorbed in the wonder of the stream itself, in the mystery of its origin and of its end.

CHAPTER XXI

ONE night the following week, as she was finishing her supper at the Mackenzie's, Jack dashed in without a word of apology.

"Miss Carey, please come with me at once," he called sharply, without further explanation, and leaving Tom Mackenzie to follow to find out what had happened, Sidney ran after him.

She had gone cold, thinking at once of an accident to Mrs. Jack. But he turned towards the mill.

"We've just fished Bessie Hardy out of the dam," he said as they ran. "She's alive, I'm afraid. Much better if she'd been dead, and now we have to try to save her."

"Oh, heavens!" she gasped.

The village had learned that week that Bill Hardy's eldest girl, who was fifteen, was going to have a child. The cook's wife, who had been the first to suspect it, had spread the news. Sidney heard it from Mrs. Mackenzie the same evening that Bob Lindsay told Jack.

When she had gone afterwards to sit with Sophie she found Jack there in a white rage. He

had just come from breaking the news to Bill, who had had no suspicion of it. Mrs. Bill was still away. Nobody had heard of her since she had gone off in the spring.

"Hell!" Jack had growled. "I'll wring the neck of the man if I get hold of him. And I'll be sorry for him when Bill gets at him."

And he had gone to bed in no mood to sleep.

"Poor Jack," said Sophie. "He does have to do horrid things. He hated like anything to tell Bill, but he knew he would rather hear it from him than anyone else. He left him with poor Bessie trying to find out who the father is."

But poor Bessie, fearing for her lover, would not tell, and no one seemed to have a suspicion. For two days Jack and the men he trusted had tried to find out.

And now Bessie, a mild colourless girl, who had never shown a spark of initiative, astonished everybody by this act of desperation. She had chosen her time after the mill closed, when the village was at supper, and before the night watchman went on. She walked half way across the footbridge of the dam to where the water was deepest, and jumped in.

By chance Alec Graham had been working after time, and as he stood in his yard washing the worst grease off his hands before going inside he saw her. Calling to his wife to go to

tell Jack Ridgefield he dashed for the dam. He was a good swimmer, and before Jack and Bob Lindsay got to the landing, where a boat was kept to aid men who fell off the logs, he had found Bessie, and was swimming with her towards the mill.

They spread her on the landing, and Alec began what he knew of restorative measures.

A group from the kitchen had gathered before Jack and Sidney got there.

It fell back as they arrived, and she set to work.

"Has anyone been to tell Bill?" asked Jack at once.

Nobody had.

Sidney gave him an eloquent glance as he turned to go himself. As she worked over Bessie's limp body, with help from Alec, she listened curiously to the remarks that were muttered round. There were curses for the absent Mrs. Bill, and for the man who had seduced poor Bessie, and much pity for her and Bill. But there were those who said that Bill's wrath had driven her to it.

Jack Ridgefield did not return for half an hour, and then he came alone. The crowd that had gathered would have been delighted to know what Bill said and how he looked, but they were doomed to everlasting ignorance on the subject.

Nobody ever learned what had passed between the two men. It was known next day that Bill had gone off, presumably to get drunk. He was away a week.

"How is it?" asked Jack, leaning down over Sidney.

"She's alive. We'll get her round all right."

Although she was tired she refused to be relieved.

"We'll need a stretcher," she said. "Don't you think we'd better take her to my place? I can look after her better than anyone else. It won't hurt me to sit up with her to-night."

"That's good of you. It would be the best arrangement," he answered.

And so Bessie was carried to Sidney's house and put into Sidney's bed.

But that was not the day's end of the little drama.

Jack had scarcely finished his belated supper before one of his trusted mill workers came to see him.

"I think I've a line on Bessie's man, boss," he said.

"Go ahead," said Jack, his face hardening.

"Sandy Kinney."

"What! That kid!" He realized at once it was no case for the wringing of necks.

"I'm sure of it. He went white when he heard

she had jumped in the dam. I was watching him. He's been looking rummy for days. And now he's changing into his best clothes, and says he's going down to Whakapara for the evening. I wouldn't mind betting he's going to clear out."

"Go and stop him, by force if necessary. Tell him I want him. No, I guess I'll come with you. We'll go down past the school, in case he has started."

And, indeed, when they reached the tramway, Sandy Kinney was just emerging from the canyon of timber stacks.

"Why, Sandy, are you going to a party?" asked Jack lightly.

"I guess so," mumbled Sandy. But he could not look his boss in the eyes.

"Sandy," Jack put his hand firmly on his shoulder, "you're running away because you're afraid to meet Bessie Hardy."

The poor youth who had no power to deceive a man like Jack was caught.

Ridgefield nodded to his worker, who went off.

"Had Bessie told you about the baby?" he asked.

Sandy shook his head.

"She hadn't! But you'd heard?"

Sandy nodded.

"Why didn't you go to see her at once?"

"I dunno."

"I do. You were scared?"

Sandy nodded.

"You're twenty-two years old, I believe?"

Sandy nodded again.

"Do you happen to know the law on the subject of getting girls under sixteen into trouble?"

Of course Sandy did not.

"Well, Sonny, what you've done is a crime under the law, and you will go to gaol unless you are willing to marry Bessie."

Sandy went white and shrivelled up.

"You needn't be scared, Sandy. I'll help you. You come along with me and talk it over."

Two hours later Jack stepped on to Sidney's verandah and spoke her name quietly. She was sitting with Mrs. Mackenzie beside Bessie, who had recovered consciousness, but was still too weak to talk.

"You have someone with you?" he asked, as she opened the door.

"Yes, Mrs. Mackenzie."

"Then you could come out for a bit. I want to talk to you."

"We have a wedding on our hands now, Miss Carey," he began, grimly. "I've found Bessie's lover—Sandy Kinney, you know, the lanky red boy who feeds the timber ends into the waste trucks. He's a bit soft."

"What! You would have them marry!"

"Certainly. I've told Sandy it's that or gaol for him. A fine set of alternatives, eh? But he's willing enough now that I've got him used to the idea. And I've told him I will put up a shanty for them and raise his pay. Now I want you to talk to Bessie as soon as she is well enough, and advise the poor kid."

"Advise her!" interrupted Sidney. "My heavens! I'm so capable of advising her, aren't I?"

"Look here, Miss Carey, these poor kids don't know what they want. They will do anything they're told. She's probably willing enough to marry him anyway."

"But think of the responsibility of mating two such people! And she's only fifteen!"

"I know. And think of all the children they will have, which is much worse. But they're coming to it anyhow. Unmarried, Bessie will be seduced every year by somebody, now she has started, and Sandy will find somebody, if somebody doesn't find him. It's one set of legitimate idiots against two sets of illegitimate ones, to put it baldly. I really think we had better marry them, Miss Carey. And there is Bill, too, to be considered."

There was no refuting the grim logic of his argument.

"What a situation!" she said.

"Common enough," he answered.

"But surely they ought to be considered. They ought to see each other and come to it themselves. I think it would be awful to make her marry him if she does not want to. She'd be better in a home for the rest of her life."

"She is not defective enough for that. Don't worry, Miss Carey. They will be as happy as most people."

And next morning, when she talked to Bessie, Sidney saw he was right. The poor child brightened at once when she was told that Sandy would marry her, and that she should have a home of her own. Sidney kept her for two days. Bessie was afraid of her father, but she went home when Jack told her he was away and that it would be all right when he came back.

He told everybody to look out for the return of Bill and to let him know at once about the marriage. He rightly guessed that it would make all right as far as he was concerned.

Jack set men to work at once on a three-roomed cottage. He engaged a Methodist minister. Sidney said they should be married in her house, and she and Mrs. Mackenzie made Bessie a blue silk wedding dress, and went to Whakapara on Saturday to get her a few clothes.

"The poor child shall have her little thrill out of it if we can manage it," said Sidney to Sophie.

"It will probably be the last she will ever get."

They were married two weeks after the accident, Sidney, Jack and Bill being the only people present. Jack gave them money to go away for two weeks.

When the pair returned there was enough in their shanty to start them. Most of the village had found something that could be spared. On their arrival Jack and Sidney went together to welcome them, and he preached them a little sermon about trying to get on together, and told them if they were in any trouble to come to him. It was the kind of thing that suited their intelligence and their emotions, and in spite of what the cynics might say it did them good.

"Poor kids," he said to Sidney afterwards, "somebody will have to look after them all their days."

This event took Sidney's thoughts off herself, and helped to restore her balance. It did more for her than a year's moralizing would have done.

She talked a lot about it to Arthur, and was glad to find that he got all the light and shade in it as she had. He had wanted to go to the wedding, but she told him neither she nor Jack would pander to his vulgar curiosity. But she gave him a vivid description of it afterwards.

"I wish you could have seen Jack Ridgefield there," she said. "He was stunning. Indeed,

he was through the whole business. He knows what to say to people. He's so simple and kind. And I used to think him hard."

"Look here, woman, you've done nothing but talk about Ridgefield lately. I'm going to be jealous now."

He pretended to be serious.

"Oh, don't be ridiculous, Arthur. Anybody would admire Jack Ridgefield."

He looked at her with a smile.

"My dear, you're half in love with Jack. He's the alternative to me. You'll always be liable to turn from my type to his type. If you don't know it now you will some day. You're complex enough to want us both. Sometimes I wonder if I'll be able to hold you."

"Why, Arthur!" She was astonished and disturbed by his insight.

He laughed.

"Don't let it worry you, child. We won't cross that bridge till we come to it."

But for days she thought over what he had said.

Then she received a note from Arthur telling her he was off to Auckland to meet a friend from England, and expected to be away at least two weeks. He hoped, when he returned, he said, to have definite news of the date of his marital freedom.

CHAPTER XXII

SIDNEY had seen the first time she went to visit Mana that she, too, was going to have another baby. There was an epidemic of babies that autumn. Mrs. Mackenzie told Sidney she had noticed that it often happened that way.

When Arthur had returned at the end of the summer she had told him, and said she supposed they could not now go together to sing there, and he had agreed that probably Mana would prefer not. She had ridden up herself several times, for her delight in Mana and her music had never waned.

Mana's baby was born two weeks before Bessie jumped into the dam. Sidney had not yet seen her since the event, and the week that Arthur went back to Auckland she told the children to tell her she would ride up that Saturday or Sunday. But as Mrs. Jack was very unwell Sidney stayed with her most of the two days, and did not set out for the Joyous Valley till the Monday afternoon.

She took her horse as usual to Mana's stable. From the end of the building there stretched a

line of washing. Sidney's eye was caught by the garments nearest her.

Every scrap of colour left her face as she stared at them. They were a pair of fine blue silk pajamas, of a most unusual shade, and she knew only too well where she had seen them before.

She stood with her mouth open as if she had been stricken by an angry god. At last she staggered back, fearing someone might be watching her. She drove her fingers into her temples, setting her teeth till her gums ached. In a minute she was so nauseated with pain that she thought she would be sick. She felt she could not go to the house, she could not face Mana.

She remembered her baby was only about a month old. The facts of the situation repulsed her to an overwhelming disgust. Her one idea was to get out her horse and fly from the whole thing. To go madly somewhere, anywhere, so that she could stop thinking about it.

She was forced to make a desperate effort at control by the sight of Rangi coming towards her through the garden.

Fortunately Rangi was one of those comfortable people who see only objects, and never the qualities or moods of objects.

"Oh, Miss Carey, I saw you ride down," she began when she was some yards away. "Mana

has been sick since yesterday. She ate something that did not agree with her, and she was up most of the night. She's asleep now, and I don't like to disturb her."

Sidney was so relieved she could have cried.

"Never mind, Rangi. I could not have stayed long. Mrs. Ridgefield has been ill, too. I've been up with her." She meant this to explain her white face. "Tell Mana I came, and that I'm sorry she's ill."

Her voice sounded calm, and she was sure Rangi noticed nothing. She made a remark about the long autumn, turned to the stable, got out her horse, gave one quick look at the fatal pajamas, and with a good-bye to Rangi, rode off.

Sidney thought before, when she had heard Arthur was married, that she had plumbed the depths of human misery and despair, and that never again could she go through such mental agony.

But the thought of losing him then was nothing to the knowledge that she had to cast him off now, for since the first renunciation she had added to him a vast number of things that she was to get with him, and how much those things meant to her she had had no idea till now.

But in the first hours it was the deception that stunned her, the insult of the long-lived lie. She told herself she had been right in the beginning,

that she should have gone by her own suspicions and intuitions. She was terrified by the deception, terrified that she had been taken in to this extent. What had become of her knowledge of character? She still thought it was what she called character that prevented people doing such things. How was she ever to trust anyone again? What did she have to guide her?

Her vanity was stung to death, her egoism bruised beyond repair. And her jealousy was aroused to a frenzy of which she had never dreamed. She hated Arthur. She hated Mana. She could have killed them both. She was appalled by her own anger.

She rode on and on, her passion growing. She had told Mrs. Mackenzie she might not be home. She was thankful that she had hours ahead of her, hours in which to rage.

Everything about Arthur now rose up to witness against him. What a fool she had been to trust that easy tongue! She saw that his very responsiveness was a poison spot. Of course he would be a fool in the hands of any woman. Hadn't he shown her how easily he would have succumbed to her?

Here a horrible thought confronted her. Had she driven him to Mana because she would not yield? Then she told herself that if he were that kind of man the sooner she knew it the

better. She was thankful she had found it out in time. In a year or two from now she would have got over it. But married to him she would have had to face it for ever.

She told herself she would never see Arthur again. She would write and tell him what she had found out. She could not see a glimmer of excuse for him. Her reaction was simply one of fury, jealousy and disgust.

It was not until she had been in bed for some time that the horror of self pity was added to swell the strenuousness of her emotions. She thought one by one of the things she was going to lose with Arthur, and the sight of them fling away into shadows in her mind was too much for her. Her anger broke into tears of desolation.

She woke from a doze in the morning, at first unable to realize what had happened to her. Her head ached dreadfully, her eyes were swollen, her limbs stiff. Then remembering, she buried her face in the pillow and wished she could die. She wondered if she could not stay away from school. But she knew that would bring an avalanche of inquiry down upon her. Even if she did not go to the Mackenzies' as usual for breakfast she knew someone would come at once to see if she were ill. She could not escape the eyes of the village.

Mechanically she got up and looked at her face in consternation. She saw at once she would have to be ill with something. A night of toothache and neuralgia would have to be her ally. She was thankful that no one would have the least idea what was the matter with her, not even Jack, she told herself.

Her toothache went unquestioned. It agitated almost the whole village. Every remedy known to the inhabitants had been left at her house before night. Jack and Bob insisted that she take the afternoon off. Mrs. Jack made poultices which she could not refuse to take. Mrs. Mackenzie was sure she had an abscess, and said she ought to have a doctor. Sidney had to laugh that night as she surreptitiously emptied out parts of the various bottles that had been lent to her. It was the one glimmer of humour in the cimmerian darkness of her dull despair.

She dragged through the next days as people do who know they have nothing to live for and who curse the useless instinct that keeps them going. More than anything she was filled with a fear that this kind of thing would happen to her again. As she became more able to think about it she could not see how she could have avoided this horrible disenchantment. She refused to give up her illusions that there were wonderful men somewhere in the world who

would never behave as Arthur had done. She was sure Jack Ridgefield would not.

As the days passed she did not write to Arthur. She felt she wanted the satisfaction of telling him face to face what she thought of him. But there were times when she was afraid to meet him, when she feared he would explain this away, that he would talk her round. Telling herself she would never get the truth from him she made a sudden decision on the Saturday morning that she would go up and face Mana that afternoon with her discovery and see what she had to say.

The sunlight shone as happily as ever upon the Joyous Valley, but Sidney saw nothing but gloom in it as she stopped to open the gate. As she did not intend to stay long, she decided to leave her horse there. She walked on down the path seeing and hearing no one. Mana's children had driven with Rangi to the mill store for groceries. There was not a sound about the cottage.

Sidney hoped Mana was not asleep. She had come screwed up to ask questions that she wanted answered then and there. Her one idea now was to shake this thing off and be done with it.

Nothing moved as she neared the house. On the verandah she saw the new baby's perambulator. As she had never seen a tiny Maori baby she stepped curiously up to it, and moved back the cover.

Then she started back as if she had been shot, and everything went black around her.

She had no need now to see Mana, no need to ask any questions. Her answer was there. She forced herself to look at it again. There was no mistaking it.

The baby was white.

Sidney staggered off the verandah and through the garden, praying that no one had seen her. She heard no sound as she walked on to her horse. Nobody had seen her.

Until this moment she had had some vague submerged hope that something would explain away the pajamas. She had considered that there might be more than one pair of pajamas in the world of that peculiar blue, and that by some chance some one of Mana's male relatives might own them. And even while she had told herself that this was a thousand times improbable she had still cherished a shred of a notion that it was possible.

Now she knew. And her future with Arthur was an empty dream. He was the father of Mana's child. He was living with her again. For a year his life had been a piece of the cleverest deception and all his words to Sidney false and meaningless. It hurt her afresh to think she could not now look back with pleasure on a single hour spent with him. If he had died she

would have had warm memories, but now every minute was blackened with perfidy. She was stunned again by this revelation of duplicity.

She determined now to write at once. On no account would she ever see him again.

Arthur had been away two weeks. He had written to her twice in that time; at first a long and entertaining letter glowing between the lines with his feeling for her, and then a shorter one asking why she had not written.

CHAPTER XXIII

FOR a few days Sidney's mind was untroubled by indecision, except that she put off writing to Arthur.

It never occurred to her to doubt that this one chapter of her life was closed. In ways she was right. She had left behind for ever one phase of her evolution. She was to look back afterwards and be thankful that sentimentality was killed in her so suddenly that a healthy cynicism born of this trying period was to save her from long-dragged-out funeral services over departed dreams. The sharp lance of disillusion had gone deep, leaving no roots of blind faith to sprout again.

She was determined never to allow herself to be hurt in the future as she had been. And she saw that to avoid that she must never expect again what she had expected.

Instinctively she turned to unchangeable things to help her, to the night, the stars, the slumbrous stumps browsing upon their past. That following week, too, she was helped by something else.

The autumn had been exceedingly hot and dry.

The area round the mill and the village had been more carefully burnt than usual. Jack had doubled his night watch. But the menace of fire came on him from a source he could not control.

In the middle of the week it began in a gully, fifty miles away, from a fire left by picnickers, and a rising wind blowing incessantly from the northeast had fanned it into an ever-growing danger. Men were sent from various directions to try to beat it out, but it got beyond them. It broke across the Ridgefield boundary in spite of all the help that Jack could organize to stop it. And on the Saturday morning it had become so imminent and serious that he closed the mill and ordered all hands to concentrate on the bush camps, the tramways, the dams and the logs in the creeks.

The mill and the village were fairly safe from outside attack. Jack was more afraid of careless smokers there than he was of flying sparks. But the whole place was on its guard. The curious loyalty that in time of danger warms the heart of the man born to lead rewarded Jack Ridgefield as he rode from place to place, keeping watch and shifting his forces as circumstances demanded.

On the Saturday morning the smoke was so dense that Sidney could hardly see the mill chimneys. She felt very deeply the suspensive danger

in the air, and was glad to feel it, glad to feel anything that would help her to forget herself. She walked over to Sophie before breakfast to learn if anything had happened in the night.

Little Mrs. Jack was more concerned about the small amount of sleep her husband had had than she was about the probable loss of a dam or two. Seeing she was worried about him Sidney decided to spend the day with her and help her to forget. Jack had gone off to the ranges saying he would not be home before night, if then. He had left Bob and Alec Graham and Tom Mackenzie to watch the mill and the tramway over the flat to the drop. This tramway and the camp and dam below it were the nearest points menaced by the flames. About the middle of the afternoon one of Sidney's pupils, Mary James, a girl of nine years, who had always had the air of carrying the world on her shoulders, came to the Ridgefields' looking for Sidney. She brought a note scrawled in pencil from her mother.

"Dear Teacher," it said, "I am very sick. My baby is seven days old, and my sister had to leave me yesterday as mother is ill. I am now alone and I am afraid. The smoke is all round me and I cannot walk yet. Is there anyone who could come and help me? Mollie James!"

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Sidney, looking into the oblivion beyond the village.

The Jameses lived two miles up the creek. They were not mill people. Mr. James was a government surveyor, away from home a good deal.

Sidney turned to Sophie.

"I'll see if Bob can suggest anything, and if there is no one else to go I will."

She turned with Mary to the store.

"Christmas!" exclaimed Bob, when she told him. "I can't spare a man. I've just got back from the drop. They're fighting fire over there now down in the gully below, and it will take them all their time to save the camp and the logs in the dam. There's hardly a scrap of water there. And there isn't a man left here but the two watchmen."

"Well, I could drive for her," said Sidney.

"You couldn't get up that side of the creek with a vehicle now. The track's too bad. You'd have to get her over this side. But I have not got a horse left anyway."

"Well, for heaven's sake, what am I to do? I can't carry her and the baby. Send a woman or a boy down to Whakapara for a horse and buggy. Can't you do that?"

"Yes, that's the only thing I can do. You get on up, Miss Carey, and get her over the creek if you can. I'll get somebody up to you before night."

"Is the fire really near the creek?" she asked.

"Up there? I don't know. A lot of it may be just smoke."

Sidney looked about her very doubtfully as she hurried on with Mary. The child knew every inch of the way, as she came by it to school. It was the main creek road leading to the ranges. Sidney had ridden it several times.

Presently Mary took a track leading to the creek which ran in many places parallel to the road. They crossed easily, stepping from one to another of the logs that had been left by the last tripping. The smoke here was so dense that they could hardly see the house on the other side, though it was only a couple of chains from the bank.

Sidney found the poor mother frantic. She had dragged herself out on to the verandah, and lay there on a mattress, the baby beside her. She was gasping for breath.

The heat round the house startled Sidney. She could not tell how near the flames might be. She listened anxiously, not realizing how desperate the situation would have been if she could have heard the fire coming on.

When she found out that Mrs. James had had food before Mary left for the mill she decided to get her over the creek at once.

"But what about the house, Miss Carey?" objected the sick woman.

"We must leave the house, Mrs. James," she said firmly. "I cannot stop it from being burned if the fire comes on. But I can save you. Now there is no time to be lost. We must get over the creek as soon as we can. When we get over I'll see what we can do next."

It almost seemed as if Mrs. James would prefer to be burned, she was so reluctant to leave her possessions, but bit by bit Sidney got her to the edge of the creek, while Mary carried the baby. Then Mary went for a fan to keep the flies off her mother, and an umbrella to keep the glare from her, while Sidney dragged the mattress to the bank. After a rest they began the slow crawling from log to log.

When she was nearly over Mrs. James fainted. Fortunately Mary knew where her mother kept the brandy. She ran for it. Sidney gave the unconscious woman a good dose, and leaving Mary to fan her and hold the baby she dashed back to the house for a bucket of water and towels. She bathed Mrs. James' face and slapped her chest, and when she had come to, Sidney dragged the mattress to her and got her on to it, deciding that as they were nearly over she had better rest here for a while.

As soon as she could speak Mrs. James began to mourn her possessions. Couldn't they save some things? So leaving her on the log with the

baby under the umbrella, Sidney and Mary began a race back and forth for clothes and silver, and ornaments and even furniture. Sidney had never been so hot in her life. The perspiration poured from her and poured from Mary. She developed a swift new emotion—a profound admiration for Mary. The child knew everything her mother valued, knew where to find it, and was consumed with a passion to save it.

Presently the logs near Mrs. James were covered with a strange assortment of articles, and Sidney said firmly it was all they could hope to get across the creek before dark. She was alarmed still about the heat which seemed to increase even though the sun were going down.

She sat down to draw breath before buckling to the task of getting Mrs. James on another stage.

Suddenly her heart ceased to beat and, in spite of the heat, her blood ran cold. She started up, her head set like an animal's at the first suspicion of an approaching enemy. She distinctly heard a vibration on the air, and then an intermittent thud, thud, thud, resounding weirdly round her in the smoke.

"My God! The dams! They've tripped them!" she gasped under her breath.

She gave one wild look round. Not far from the bank on the safe side was a large kauri stump.

She saw that it would hold them all, and would keep them out of the water. It was the only possible thing.

"Mrs. James," she said, trying to keep her voice steady, "we must move at once, and get on to that stump; see? We can manage if you keep calm. You must not faint. Take this brandy. You carry the baby, Mary."

With help Mrs. James managed it, but fainted again when they got there. Sidney rushed back for the brandy, and the bucket of water, and the towels and the fan. Then, while Mary bathed her mother's face she managed to save the mattress, and a bag of silver, and several bundles of clothes before the flood came roaring round the bend.

Gasping herself, Sidney dropped on the stump, her ears booming, her head whirling, her throat dry, her limbs trembling like reeds under her. For a few minutes all she could feel was that they were safe, and that the water would cool the air.

When she raised herself she saw Mary's face stoically set against the tears that would ooze from her eyes, a white strained terrified face. But Mary was holding the baby, and fanning her mother, as she had been told to do. The sight of her almost upset Sidney, and she carried a vivid memory of the child's frozen courage with

her all through life. A strange plant to blossom in such an atmosphere!

Sidney set herself at once to reassuring her. But Mary was not only afraid. She had seen two chairs that her mother prized and several other things carried off on the backs of the reckless rollicking logs never to be seen again, and all the pathos of lost possessions disturbed her little soul as she anticipated her mother's grief. And then, very unfortunately, she thought of the cow, left behind to be burned.

Mrs. James recovered a little and for some time Sidney did her best to comfort them both. But she began to be terribly uneasy. They were marooned upon the stump. The flood stretched beyond them over the fern, and she knew that if many dams had been tripped it would last all night. And though now she had no fear of fire, she began to be afraid of the thickness of the smoke. It became harder to breathe. She kept a wet napkin over Mrs. James' face, and watched the baby anxiously. In the growing dusk she got more and more alarmed.

She saw she must send Mary back to the mill with a desperate call to Bob for immediate help. She tried the water, and was relieved to find it only a foot deep, and that the current would not carry her off her feet. Telling Mary what she wanted her to do and say, she carried her out to the road.

There another inspiration seized her.

"Do you think you could carry the baby to the mill, Mary?" she asked. "I'm afraid it won't be able to breathe this thick air much longer."

And Mary said she could. Sidney went back for the baby.

After carefully repeating her message, and primed with the stimulus of her praise, Mary set off, a heroic little figure fading away in the smoke.

For a minute Sidney looked after her, her eyes dimmed. She was herself happier than she had been for two weeks. She had completely forgotten her own tragedy. And in the intensity of that danger she was aware of feelings much more significant than any self pity.

One has learnt much when one knows that there are other things in the world worth feeling besides love and hate.

Sidney waded back to the stump, and began again to make air for Mrs. James.

She had strange reflections upon the uncertainty of life and the foolishness of anger as she sat there waving a wet cloth back and forth over the semiconscious woman.

The logs hurtled by her like mad monsters. The roar of the water drowned every other sound. The smoke grew denser, and now she began to see the glow of fire all along the northern

and eastern horizon. It grew harder and harder for her to breathe.

She could easily have saved herself, but she knew she could not carry or drag Mrs. James out to the road, and once or twice she asked herself why she could not leave her there. The inaction drove her frantic. She knew she could not desert a sick woman in such circumstances even if it meant her own death, and she wondered why human beings had decided it was finer to lose two lives than one. It seemed strangely illogical. But one thing she knew was that she could never have faced Jack Ridgefield with the tale that she had saved herself while she left Mrs. James alone to suffocate upon the stump.

Looking round her and listening every minute, she realized that even if help came she would not be able to hear any call above the creek, and that in the dark they might not be discovered.

But even as she thought this she heard a faint cooee above the flood.

Startled into unexpected strength, she sprang to her feet on the stump and answered with all her might. Again she heard the call, and again she gave it. She had a splendid thrill. This being rescued was a wonderful thing.

"Mrs. James," she shouted, "we are saved. Lie still, while I get out to the road. I will be back in a minute."

Jumping from the stump, she waded out to dry land. Through the smoke she saw the lights of a buggy coming from the direction of the mill. She cooeed again.

The lamps grew clearer, and in her light dress her figure showed up to the driver, who lashed his horses to a last run.

Then Sidney heard her name shouted through the smoke, and a quick faintness swept over her. Her rescuer was Arthur Devereux.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE steaming horses dashed up to her.

She made a desperate effort to be calm, to quell her anger that Fate should have sent him, of all people, to spoil the excitement of that moment. And she was annoyed to think he had sent no word that he was returning that week-end.

"Miss Carey? Hullo! Is that you?" he cried, pulling up, desperate anxiety in his voice.

She found herself answering shortly that it was.

He sprang from the buggy, and seeing she was alone, held out his hands.

"Thank God, Sidney, are you all right?"

"Arthur, I can't talk. Please fasten the horses and follow me. Mrs. James is very ill. Bob ought to have sent someone long ago."

Her voice was sharp. She was fiercely irritated by his aggressive cheerfulness. In that instant he seemed so remote from her mood as to be like some stranger intruding his feelings upon her. And in the face of what she had just gone through the personal element seemed trivial beyond expression.

He looked quickly at her. The light of the

buggy lamps showed him enough of her haggard face to alarm him. He saw at once she had had a terrible experience. He turned quickly to the horses, and tied them to a stump, a most unnecessary proceeding, as not for worlds would they have moved for hours if they could have helped it. Sidney noticed the foam on their flanks, heard the panting of their nostrils, and knew he had driven as if he had had the devil behind him. But that did not stir her.

She turned into the flood, he following. There was just light enough for them to distinguish the stump as a shadow in the smoke.

"Did you meet Mary?" she shouted. It was the only thing she wanted to know.

"I did," he called back. "About half a mile from the mill. She scared me into fits about you. I don't think Bob realized the seriousness of the situation at all. But he had a good deal to think about down there."

When they reached the stump Mrs. James did not seem to understand that she was being saved. With great difficulty Arthur got her into his arms. Sidney took the water and the brandy and followed him in silence. Out by the road he put the sick woman down in the fern, and Sidney dropped beside her. She had no need to simulate weariness. She was herself almost beyond speech.

But Arthur had an uneasy feeling that exhaus-

tion alone did not explain something in her manner. She had shown absolutely no relief, no gladness at being rescued from that precarious position. That seemed to him almost inhuman.

But he said nothing as he ploughed into the flood again for the mattress.

As Sidney sat mopping Mrs. James's face she heard the sounds of a horse pounding along the road. It seemed to bound out of the smoke, and before she could get up it reared above her.

"Miss Carey," shouted Jack Ridgefield.

"Yes, yes, all right." She sprang to her feet, alive and grateful beyond words for his dramatic appearance.

"What's all this?" he cried, dismounting. "I came down the short cut a while ago, and caught up to Mary just this side of the mill. She told me your message, and said someone had come on for you. But I wanted to be sure."

"Yes, Mr. Devereux. I haven't had time to ask him why. Was Mary all right?"

Somehow little Mary seemed to be the most significant person in the world just then.

"She was. Great kid! Wouldn't give up the baby. She was going to carry it to Mrs. Mackenzie's because you had told her to. She was immovable. And as she was nearly there I let her go on. Now, where is Devereux?"

They heard him splashing through the water with the last load of Mrs. James's possessions.

Sidney dropped down to the ground again, feeling light-headed. She said nothing while the two men lifted Mrs. James and the mattress and her things into the floor of the buggy. As in a dream she heard them talk.

"How is it in the bush?" asked Arthur.

"Pretty bad all round. The fire's up to the creek in many places. I'm afraid of the dams. But the men are sticking fine. I've just run down to tell my wife how things are going, and then I'm off back to the Big Dam."

"I'm with you if I can help."

"You bet you can; thanks. Did you happen to hear how things are at the mill?"

"Everybody was over at the drop, except Tom Mackenzie. There was a bit of a fire there, I believe. But they were getting it under. How the deuce do you do anything in this smoke?"

"It isn't all as bad as this. There's a lot of green stuff back here. This is pretty deadly. How has all this happened, do you know?"

Arthur told him what he had heard from Tom when he had arrived at the mill, and how he had raced down to Whakapara and commandeered the horses and the buggy. Jack looked at the flood and guessed something of what Sidney had been through.

When they had settled Mrs. James, he turned to her.

"Miss Carey, I guess you'd better get in at the back here too. You look as if you needed to lie down. How long have you been here?"

"I don't know?" she mumbled, now dangerously near a breakdown.

They both knew from the way she moved that she was done, and that she was in no mood to talk.

They set off, Arthur driving slowly, for he knew that Mrs. James could stand little jolting. When they had gone half a mile Jack said he would go on and prepare somebody to take her in.

Arthur turned round in his seat. Both women were lying prone on the mattress. He felt very uncomfortable about Sidney. He could not imagine that danger and exhaustion could put the something into her manner that he had felt there. But he knew it was no time to talk, and he drove the whole way in silence.

The smoke grew less dense as they went on. When they reached the mill he made a detour to get on to the road leading to the store. At the entrance by the timber yard one of the men's wives who had been told to look out for him came out to tell him to go to Mrs. Mackenzie's.

When they got there Sidney did not give him a chance to speak to her again. She got quickly

out of the buggy and went into the house. Tom and Arthur followed with Mrs. James.

"Mrs. Ridgefield is waiting for you, Mr. Devereux," said Mrs. Mackenzie. Arthur went on at once without attempting a meeting with Sidney. After he had eaten a hurried supper he arranged at the stable with Bill Hardy to look after the borrowed team for the night, and return it to its owner in the morning. Then, taking his own horse, he rode off with Jack to the Big Dam.

He could not get out of his mind the something that had looked at him out of Sidney's eyes. Had the anxiety been such as to daze her, he wondered, for she had looked at him as if she did not recognise him. He hated to go off and leave her like that. And through the following hours of frantic energy he was haunted by the memory of her vacant stare.

All day Sunday the wind continued to blow and the smoke to blot out the world.

Sidney did not wake from her slumber of exhaustion till after ten o'clock. She was still stiff and strained, and felt a bit nauseated. As soon as she was dressed she went to see if Sophie had any more news. She heard that Mrs. James had been taken to the Whangarei hospital early that morning in a dangerous condition. Her temperature had gone up by leaps and bounds in the

night, and Bob Lindsay had taken the responsibility of sending her off.

Mrs. James was at death's door for weeks, but finally recovered. Mrs. Mackenzie kept Mary and the baby till relatives were able to come for them.

Sophie told Sidney that the fire over at the drop had been almost beaten out, and one shift of worn-out men was sleeping. There was a sense of strain everywhere, and great anxiety as to how they were getting on back in the bush. Every hour eyes were turned to the sky where the high wind now threatened rain.

In the middle of the day a rider on a foaming horse dashed into the village with a message from Jack asking for any men who could be spared to get as quickly as possible to the Big Dam.

A message for Sophie told her not to be alarmed and not to expect her husband down that night.

Men who had had a few hours' sleep were wakened by their wives, and, cursing the whole history of fire, dressed nevertheless, and went, with Bob at their head.

By the middle of the afternoon there was not a man left at the mill but the two watchmen, Tom Mackenzie, who was lame and not equal to fire fighting, and Bill Hardy, who never left his horses in a crisis, never, that is, when he was sober.

Sidney sat with Sophie the whole afternoon. They did not try to hide their common restlessness. Sidney loathed the uselessness of women in such a situation. She was annoyed to think that the strain of the day before had been sufficient to reduce her to inactivity.

She had tried to keep her thoughts off Arthur, but she was surprised to find that her anger against him was gone. In the common fear of the people round her she had lost her personal bitterness.

In the evening the women gathered in little groups, wondering if they would get any more news that night. They told each other that it was certainly going to rain, and that the wind was dropping. But the smoke seemed to be as thick as ever.

Sidney sat up late with Mrs. Jack. At eleven o'clock she went out to give a last despairing look at the sky. She heard somebody stumbling towards her. It was Bob Lindsay, so done up that he could hardly walk.

He propped himself up on the Ridgefield back gate, as Sidney asked who it was.

"Why, Bob, what's happened?" she gasped.

"Nothing, but I couldn't hold out any longer, curse it! So Jack sent me down."

"How are they getting on?"

"It's pretty bad up there, but it will rain by

morning, and if they can only hold out to-night they'll save the dams. God! but I've never seen anyone go like Jack and Devereux. Didn't know Devereux had it in him. And the men are great. They'll keep up as long as the boss does. Anything happened here? How is the drop?"

He spoke brokenly.

"Some of the men are still there, that's all I know," she answered. "Then Jack will not be down to-night?"

"No. But tell his wife he's all right."

And Bob staggered off.

Sidney stood a moment. His words about Arthur troubled her. She did not want to hear anything good of him. It made it so much harder for her to face saying to him what she meant to say.

She stayed the night with Mrs. Jack. They lay together in the big bed, because Sophie did not like to be alone, and slept but little. Between four and five in the morning Mrs. Jack started out of an uneasy slumber, and Sidney woke with her.

"Listen," said Sophie.

"Rain."

"Oh, thank God!"

Sidney looked at the clock, and raised herself.

"You lie still, Mrs. Ridgefield. I'm going to

light the fire and get water ready. A hot bath's a good thing for a tired man."

She started the range in the kitchen, and the log fire in the dining-room, filled all the kettles, and went back to lie down. At intervals she got up to tend the fires.

By seven o'clock it was pouring, a healthy, solid rain equal to putting out any conflagration that ever burned.

The two women dressed, looking now for Jack to arrive at any minute. Sidney was in the back porch when she saw two men in oilskins ride up to the fence. Something about the way they sat their horses startled her. They almost fell off, throwing the reins over the fence, and staggered, holding each other up, through the gate.

Sidney gave one look at them and rushed in to Sophie.

"Mr. Ridgefield and Mr. Devereux are here," she said quietly. "They look dreadful, but don't be frightened. They are only worn out."

The two scarred and shattered men stumbled into the kitchen. Their eyes were sunk back in their heads, their faces were seamed like the faces of old men, their figures hunched as if they had spine disease. They were unshaved. It was Monday morning and neither of them had slept since Friday night.

They were incapable of any kind of greeting.

Jack raised his hand feebly as if to ward off words.

"All right," he muttered, "bed, bed."

His eyes closed even as he said it.

Sophie had already begun to help him to throw off his oilskin.

And Sidney found herself doing the same thing for Arthur. She could not keep a gulp from her throat as she tore off his rain and riding coats. He had not looked at her with any sign of recognition. He was unaware of her. His body was so strained that his mind did not act.

Feeling his way as if he were blind, Jack stumbled for his bedroom. Taking Arthur by the arm, Sidney led him to the sitting-room couch. He dropped on to it and was instantly asleep.

As Jack fell onto his bed his lips moved.

Sophie caught the words, "Tell Bob, holiday, two days," and he was gone.

Thinking he had fainted, she called sharply for Sidney.

They decided that both men had simply swooned from exhaustion, and that the first thing they needed was to lie still. They looked helplessly at them with lumps in their throats. To them it was a thing marvellous to tears that men could endure as they had done.

"What are we to do with them?" asked Sophie in a whisper, looking at her husband's inert form

spread over her spotless bedclothes. "We can't leave them like this."

Both men were, indeed, distressingly dirty, their clothes soaked with perspiration, their wet boots still on.

"Of course not. We can wash them. That won't wake them. But you mustn't do any lifting. I'll get Bob."

Bob Lindsay was just up. He went at once for Tom Mackenzie, and they undressed Arthur and Jack and got them into bed. Bob was sure they were all right, but as Sophie was very anxious, Sidney thought he had better send Bill Hardy to Whakapara to telephone for a doctor. So, leading the two horses, Bob went off to the stables.

Sophie and Sidney began to wash the faces and feet of their two unconscious men.

As she washed Arthur, Sidney felt extraordinarily remote from all her past experience with him. She could not feel that she had ever loved him. She did not see that she was emotion stale, and that it would take her days to get back her elasticity. She thought with astonishment that it was easier to cease to love a person than she had supposed. She felt no bitterness against him now at all. She felt a great pity for his terrible weariness.

She wondered why he had come back there. Was it to find out how she was? Could he really

love her? She was sorry for him if he did. But he would easily get over it. As for herself, she could not imagine why she had ever suffered about him.

When she had washed him she put a hot bottle at his feet, which were cold.

Then she went to get some breakfast ready for herself and Sophie. When Mrs. Jack had finished with her husband, she stole out as if she must not make a sound. Then it struck Sidney that all the men in the place must be in the same state, and that they had heard nothing of what had happened in the night.

"I'll find out if they saved the dams. I'll be back in a minute," and putting on Jack's oilskin she went out into the rain.

The Mackenzies had heard nothing, but Mrs. Graham opened her back door with her finger on her lips. Her husband had got back from the bush two hours before, unable to say more than that all the dams were safe. Was Sidney going to have school? What were the mothers to do to keep their children quiet on such a day?

And while she ate breakfast Sidney saw that the women had their job before them. Before she and Sophie had finished Bob returned from going the rounds of the village.

Throwing off his overcoat, he sat down and talked in whispers, though it was unnecessary.

No noise known to earth would have waked either Arthur or Jack.

"Bill has gone for the doctor. And except for the cook, who came down last night, and Mackenzie and me there isn't a man awake or likely to be awake before to-morrow in the whole place. They're all like the boss and Devereux, done. You ought to see the kitchen. Most of them dropped into their bunks sopping wet. The cook's undressing them by degrees. There's a heap of soaking clothes in the middle of the floor, and a heap of boots. I'm going back to help him. But they've saved the dams. A good many logs charred, I believe, and one camp gone, but nothing else to speak of. But it's the worst fight we've ever had. Now, Miss Carey, here's a problem for you. The women are worried to death about noise. What are they to do with the kids a day like this? And the houses must be kept quiet."

She thought a moment.

"What about collecting them all in the bowling green pavilion, and giving them a picnic? The mothers can leave the men to sleep, and look in at them at intervals. I'll have school as usual for the bigger children, anyway."

"That's the idea," said Bob.

The bowling green was across the creek on the other side of the mill, where no noise could disturb the sleeping men.

Sidney went round to see what the mothers thought of the scheme. They thought exceedingly well of it. And so there began a series of funny little processions under umbrellas in the rain. When Bob had finished helping the cook he and Tom Mackenzie took a hand in the migration of the children from the homes to the pavilion. By the middle of the day every young human being was segregated. Enough food was collected from the homes and the cook for two meals, and mothers prepared themselves patiently to have their nerves torn to shreds.

Mrs. Mackenzie and Mrs. Lindsay took in women with young babies who needed a fire. Sidney kept school with her older pupils and led them in procession to the pavilion for lunch and back after the lessons were over.

Several times during the day she ran in to see Sophie. But there was nothing to do for the two men who lay as they had fallen that morning.

In the afternoon the doctor arrived. He went the rounds deeply interested. He said he had never seen such an accumulation of exhaustion in all his life, and that there was nothing to be done but to let them all sleep it off. He told Sophie that Jack and Arthur were badly strained, that they might suffer from nausea, that they must eat carefully for a week or two, rest thoroughly before getting back to work, have hot packs and

massage, if possible, and be careful not to overdo for some time.

Altogether it was a queer day. A hush like that of death hung over every house but the bowling pavilion.

There indeed, as the day wore on, there was noise enough and to spare. At first the children had risen to the occasion, believing this to be a spree designed for their entertainment, but as the afternoon progressed they seemed to discover the fraud that was being perpetrated on them and were consumed with a howling desire to go home. Every kind of device was employed to distract their attention. After school Sidney organized them into games, and heroically tried to keep them interested till suppertime.

By then the mothers were worn out and every kind of infantile cussedness was at its height. The evening meal provided an interlude, but the following hour was a horror. Tired children screamed and kicked and scratched and fought till they were sleepy enough to be taken safely home.

Sidney hated all children and all mothers for bearing them long before the last lot was mustered for the return. When it was all over and she surveyed the wrecked pavilion with its hideous remains of two meals she felt as if she had been through a war.

But she felt also a great satisfaction. Something had been accomplished. The broken men who had stood by Jack Ridgefield had had ten hours of peace with the night still before them. She felt strangely glad as she wended her way back through the soaking rain to Sophie.

CHAPTER XXV

SIDNEY did not get to sleep till long after midnight, partly because she was overtired and deeply stirred by the atmosphere of the last three days, and partly because she was wondering what on earth she was going to say to Arthur. After all she had never written to him, and she knew now she could not write. And everything that she had meant to say a week ago now seemed childish and hysterical.

The fire had changed her. Who knows what it is that such experience does to one?

Last thing that night before returning to her own house she had stood with Sophie to look at the two men. They had shown signs of life in the evening only by moving a little, but their faces were losing the ghastly strain of the morning. For an hour the two women had put hot packs to their backs to ease their stiffness while they slept.

Sidney wondered if Mrs. Jack suspected anything between herself and Arthur, if she knew he was married. Sophie had given no sign of curiosity. She had not wondered aloud why he had

come back there with Jack. She had accepted his presence as naturally as she had her husband's.

Sidney did not want to meet Arthur till he was well. She knew the sight of him as he stumbled in with Jack had weakened her will. She knew that the fact that he had worked himself as he had for interests not his own had warmed her heart. She knew she could never be hard with those memories close upon her. And she told herself that she had to be hard, that it was all over, and that she must tell him as soon as possible and be done with it. As she lay listening to the rain she felt tired of all feeling and wished she could go off somewhere where nobody knew her, and where she could vegetate like an animal for a while and rest.

The first thing she thought of when she woke in the morning was how she could avoid meeting Arthur that day.

She called to see Sophie on her way to the Mackenzies' to breakfast. She learned that both men had waked and spoken and eaten a little, and fallen into a doze again. There was nothing she could do, Sophie said.

The rain had stopped in the night, and the morning broke clear and fresh. Sidney met her pupils with a funny feeling that it was hard to get back to the normal round again. All day she had a queer feeling of blankness, of suspense. She

looked often out of her windows, but saw no sign of life about the Ridgefields'. She did not want to go there again, and shirked it till after supper.

Then she was surprised to find that Arthur had ridden home in the afternoon, leaving a note with Sophie for her.

It asked her to meet him the following Saturday afternoon, as usual, out on the road. He hoped she had fully recovered from her experience. He would have called upon her if he had had clean clothes.

She opened and read it before Sophie, as if it meant nothing.

"He ought not to have gone back," volunteered Sophie. "He really is not well enough to look after himself. We begged him to stay, but he was worried about his clothes."

Then they went in to Jack who was sitting up talking to Bob.

Before he would talk he insisted on hearing about her experience with Mrs. James. Sidney made light of it, it seemed so insignificant.

And then they all got into a mood of exaltation about the men.

"It's worth all the grind to have the fellows stick to one like that," said Jack. "Funny thing, the most godless blackguards will work the hardest for you in a pinch. Ordinarily they'll slack, they will make mischief, but give them a fire and

they will go till they drop. They like the excitement, I suppose. But Devereux surprised me. I didn't know he had the strength. Spirit will do wonders for a man. And he kept the men going. I'm afraid, though, he's worse knocked up than anybody. I know I don't want to go through it again in a hurry."

His head fell back on his pillow.

Sidney wondered if he had had any intention in talking thus of Arthur. In spite of her resolve that she was done with him she felt a very live concern about his health. And before Saturday came she was anxious to know how he was.

The mill did not start again till Thursday morning, and Jack made it clear that no man who did not feel able was to return to his job, and for some days the work went easy. Jack himself, and several of his men felt the strain for weeks.

James Ridgefield came up on the Wednesday night in answer to a telegram from his son, and went the rounds of the camps thanking the men for their loyalty. He was shrewd enough to know that if they had not paid most of them on a scale well above the union wages the loyalty might have been a doubtful quantity. But he realized also that appreciation, or a wise expression of it, did a great deal to oil the machinery between master and man in the troubled days of mutual suspicion.

CHAPTER XXVI

AT the appointed time on the Saturday afternoon Sidney walked out to the road to meet Arthur.

She had spent an uncomfortable three days shirking the meeting as she had never shirked anything before. She did not know now what she was going to say to him, although she had rehearsed a hundred conversations.

When she was still half a mile away she could see him waiting on his horse. She had not ridden because she could not bear to spoil a ride, and she did not expect the interview to be long.

As soon as he saw her he rode to meet her.

"Why didn't you ride?" he called as soon as she could hear.

And then, "What's the matter?" when he was near enough to see that she did not smile at him.

"Get off, please, Arthur, and let's walk. I've something to say to you."

She was relieved to find that now that she was face to face with him she could be cool.

But he was more disturbed by her cold calmness than he would have been by any display of anger.

"What's the matter, my dear?" he asked, jumping down beside her. "For God's sake say it and be done with it."

He was startled to see how ill she looked, and she was startled to see how ill he looked. She looked miserably into his eyes.

"I'm sorry, Arthur, if I am going to hurt you. But it is all over between you and me. Absolutely over. I cannot stand for your lies and deceit. I've found out that you and Mana are living together."

As she was staring straight at him she saw the look of astonishment that animated his tired eyes. And she noticed that he did not appear to take in the force of her words.

"My dear girl, you're crazy. I'm not living with Mana, so you can't have found out that I am. What nonsense have you heard?"

The slight impatience in his tone angered her.

"Arthur, I will never speak to you again if you do not make up your mind this instant to stop lying to me. I will not stand for it. It is an outrageous insult. And I tell you you cannot deceive me. I'm not going by what I've heard. I'm going by what I've seen."

He looked keenly at her, seeing she was deadly serious. For a minute he was scared that something had happened to her mind.

"Seen! Seen what?" he asked quietly.

"The child. Yours and Mana's," she answered harshly.

"The child!" he repeated, staring at her.

"Yes, haven't you seen the baby?"

"No."

"Well, you might as well, as it's yours."

"Mine? How do you know?"

"It's white," she answered coldly.

He was silent, thinking it was pretty hard luck that he and Mana should have been caught at the end of the liaison like that. For the moment he was nonplussed. He thought he had better make a clean breast of it at once.

"I'm sorry, Sidney, that you should have found that out at this late date. I was living with Mana before you came, and for a while after you came. But when I grew to care for you I made the break, and by the time I told you I loved you it was over. I did not feel bound to tell you my whole past history. And I owed Mana silence. I never made out to you that I was a saint. I told you many things. As far as I see the only thing that concerns you is that I've been faithful to you since I told you I loved you. And it has not been so easy. It was not easy one night last week in Auckland."

This last sentence startled her, and she only half believed the rest of his story.

"That's just it," she cried. "I've come to see

that you are the kind of man who would keep me eternally suspicious. I cannot trust you. You *have* deceived me. You told me in the spring there was nothing between you and Mana, perhaps only a week or two after you had cast her off. You call that the truth. I do not. The time to tell me was then. If you had, I should have understood it. It would have hurt me, but I should have understood it. I am not a baby. I did not suppose you were a boy of sixteen. As a matter of fact I have never expected to marry an inexperienced man. I don't know that I should want to. But if I can't marry a straight man I'll never marry at all. You didn't tell me you were married till I found out. You don't tell me this till I've found out. And I cannot believe you now. You tell me you are not living with Mana. I saw your pajamas on her line two or three weeks ago." She finished in a white heat.

"My pajamas," he repeated quietly. He had waited for her to finish with a patience that intensified her exasperation.

"Yes, your pajamas. The same blue silk pajamas that fascinated the women on the launch last summer."

A curious light, as near a smile as he dared, for he perceived this was a serious business, flickered across his eyes.

"My dear girl, I have two pairs of those pajamas. In fact, I have three pairs."

"What on earth does that change?" she cried. "Then they were your pajamas?"

"I suppose they were," he said. "I must have left them there."

"Of course you left them there. And I suppose you will tell me you forgot all about them."

"I did."

"Oh, what a horrible liar you are——"

"Oh, the devil! Sidney!" he interrupted her, angry now himself. "Did you ever hear of a man who would go around collecting his pajamas? Ask Mana what she was doing with them. I don't know."

It was the first time he had ever shown anger with her. It filled her with a quick fear, and the fleeting contempt in his eyes put her in the wrong. He had made her feel a fool. So she got angrier than ever. She turned on him, her eyes blazing.

"Arthur, you evidently think this is a joke. You think deception and lying is a joke. You think a broken engagement is a joke. You don't see that I believed in you. That's the cruel part of it. I believed in you. And you've disillusioned me. I shall never be the same again. Oh, God! If men could only be disillusioned as women are."

Her voice broke.

They were still standing where they had met in the middle of the road. Arthur moved a step nearer her.

"My God! Aren't they? When I was a perfectly good boy of twenty-three I had my illusions shattered by a woman seven years older than myself. The tragedy of my life has been that like a chivalrous fool I married her."

If she had not been thinking so much of herself, she would have realized what years of disenchantment lay behind his tone.

"It's a fine piece of justice that you should pay her out by disillusioning me, isn't it?"

He turned from her with a gesture of utter weariness, and for the minute she thought he was going to leave her.

Then he controlled himself, and stood still.

"Oh, for God's sake, my dear girl, be fair. I know I deserve some misery for making you suffer. But it's enough for me to see you look as you do. Don't rub it in. And I tell you this thing was over when I showed you I loved you. I've been faithful to you since. What more could any woman ask?"

"I ask more," she said, but more gently. "I ask that I can trust the man I marry. Trust him to be straight with me. And trust him to be

above suspicion for a few years at least, as far as other women are concerned."

"Oh, Sidney, you could never really trust any man to resist all kinds of temptation. You could only hope that he would avoid the temptation."

"Arthur, I won't believe that. There are men one could trust anywhere."

"Oh, Lord! Why will you women hang on to that delusion? You wouldn't call by the name of man the kind of thing you could trust anywhere. Picture it, the anæmic, underfed, expurgated sissy!"

"Yes, I picture it. Jack Ridgefield, for instance," she answered triumphantly.

"Oh, damn Jack Ridgefield!" he burst out. Then a smile crossed his eyes.

"Well, I suppose you may as well hug that delusion," he added.

"What do you mean?" she asked sharply, with a sinking feeling.

"Oh, nothing." He was immediately sorry he had let that slip.

"You did mean something," she exclaimed. "Do you mean to say he is living with somebody?"

"Oh, no. Not that I know of," he answered quickly. "But he's never left this place for months. He told me the other night he dare not go. That if he did the first thing he would do

would be—well, I need not say. He could only be faithful to his wife by staying here and working himself to death every day. And you don't suppose he has been such a damned fool as to tell his wife about it, do you? Any man worth the name keeps things like that to himself. Why should we worry the women we love with our beastly struggles? Here, my dear, don't, don't. Oh, please, Sidney, don't cry. Dash it all, my dear, I love you, and God knows I mean to be decent. That's all any man can say."

But she turned stumbling along the road, with her handkerchief to her face.

For a minute or two he stood wondering whether he had better leave her alone. Then he followed, leading his horse, and without a word took her arm and led her off down a track out of sight of the road. He tied his horse, and sat down beside her, took out his pipe, and began to smoke.

He cursed himself for all this, and wondered if her love would have stood it in the beginning. One never knew.

His thoughts went back to his trusting chivalrous youth, to his cruel breaking in, which only amused him now. He had learned that for the strong life is happier and much more amusing with knowledge than without it, and that the sooner one gets over the transition stage the bet-

ter. The thing that he regretted most was the temporary eclipse that one's sense of humour suffers during the trying period.

He knew what Sidney was crying about. He knew she had fortified herself against him with the shining pillar of Jack Ridgefield to lean upon, as he had once fortified himself against one woman with the vision of another. He was only too glad that she had let him stay with her. He regarded that as a hopeful sign.

Presently she grew quieter, and got to her feet.

"I'm going home," she said stupidly.

"You'd better bathe your face, child, in case you meet somebody. There must be water near by. I'll look for it."

Soon afterwards he called to her that he had found a spring. When she came up he solemnly handed her a clean handkerchief of his own, and stood back while she bathed her swollen eyes.

Without a word they walked back to the road. There was just one more thing he wanted to know.

"Did Mana show you the baby?" he asked.

"No. She doesn't know I saw it."

"Oh! Have you seen her since? Have you talked to her at all?"

"No, I have not. I've no desire to. I never wish to see her again."

They stood still. Arthur was wondering. He thought it very curious that Mana had not

told him about the baby. He had not seen her since it was born. But she had written to him.

He knew it was useless to say anything more to Sidney that day. He held out his hand.

"I'm terribly sorry, child. Won't you please forgive me this once?" His voice and his eyes pleaded eloquently.

But she was too sick and tired to answer.

He was wise enough to see it. Raising her cold hand to his lips, he turned to his horse, mounted and rode off without looking back.

When he pulled his horse to a walk farther along the road he took a little jeweller's box out of his pocket, opened it, and looked at the exquisite pearl and diamond ring inside. A grim smile twisted his mouth.

"'The best laid plans of mice and men,' " he quoted bitterly.

Then he put it back into the pocket containing the proofs of his divorce that he had brought to show her that day. He had hoped that she would consent to marry him in her winter vacation, a month away.

CHAPTER XXVII

FOR more than an hour after he had left her Sidney walked up and down the road.

She could hardly be said to be thinking. Her mind was a chaos of mangled mental waves that struggled to become thoughts and failed. As at first she did not really believe Arthur's story, she did not begin to feel the relief she might have done. That his living with Mana was a thing back in the past did not immediately change her attitude. She had suffered too much of a shock for that.

In that first hour she simply felt at sea with everything she had ever believed about human beings. Arthur's words about Jack Ridgefield troubled her absurdly. In the curious way that people do when life hits them hard she limited her world to these two men and her smashed illusions concerning them. It was not till the next day that she remembered that the world was a considerable place, and that vast numbers of women seemed to be getting on very comfortably with men as they were.

The thing that irritated her most in the next

few weeks was the training that had made her believe in a world of phantom men. Her dear sentimental aunt, married to a mild, lovable man who had been satisfied with her, had pictured men of gigantic moral proportions, St. Anthonys and Sir Galahads, as being quite common in the world, and had assured her niece that her only hope for happiness lay in getting one of them, and that she would know him by some mysterious mark when she saw him.

She now cursed her foolish aunt for committing her to such folly. And she was mad at herself that after several years of meeting men freely, and hearing a good deal about them she should have remained so unsophisticated. She saw what a fool she must now appear to Arthur, not at all a consoling thought.

When she went to see Sophie that evening she found that her nurse had arrived, a superior nurse, and an old friend of Mrs. Jack. Sidney was glad to feel that she would not be wanted there now in the evenings. She did not want to see Jack. She thought she was sick of the sight of everybody she knew. She would have given anything to get away somewhere alone.

The next night she went into the schoolroom to play to herself. She hoped Bob Lindsay would not come as he had on two occasions when he heard the organ. She wondered why she liked

Bob. He was obviously emotional, and putty in the hands of any woman who wanted him. She had never supposed him chaste or faithful, and yet she liked him. She did not condemn him for being an ordinary male. She knew it was because he had no power to hurt her.

What a horrible thing love was! What a weapon for agony it put into the hands of the people one loved. Was marriage a constant succession of sword thrusts? If so she could not stand it. Better be lonely and unstabbed. She envied the bovine women who did not suspect their husbands. She hated her own imagination.

Sidney loved the empty school at night. Its peace was intensified by the memory of the activity of the day. In its curious isolation she could almost enjoy her breaking heart.

She opened a book of Handel and began to play. She was absorbed in it when she heard the door open behind her. She was vexed with Bob for intruding. She turned to find herself looking up at Arthur Devereux. She stared helplessly at him as he stepped up to the organ.

"Well, child," he said, taking up one of the hymn books. He turned the pages rapidly, while she tried to stifle a smothering thumping of her heart.

He set the open book down over her Handel.

"Let's sing 'Lead, Kindly Light, Amid the

Eternal Gloom.' It seems appropriate," he said solemnly.

She dropped her face, sternly setting her lips against a smile.

"Oh, don't laugh," he said forbiddingly, looking down at her. "If you began to laugh, you might like me again. And then what would become of your principles?"

It was rather an unfortunate remark, as she had not yet recovered her sense of humour, and was feeling very touchy about her principles because they were in a precarious position.

"You needn't sneer at my principles," she retorted. "Men of your type are very particular about them when it comes to your wives, I've noticed."

"Oh, for heaven's sake, Sidney, what have you done with your sense of humour? Let's go out and look for it."

Because she felt strongly the pressure of his personality, she deliberately set herself against it, determined that she would think her own way out of the mess she was in. And she was still full of the idea that he had deceived her for his own ends, and that his code of morality was not hers.

"Arthur, you had no business to come here. I'm too tired to discuss anything to-night," she said harshly.

"I didn't suggest a discussion. I suggested a

search. You've lost your most valuable possession. But I suspect we may find it in a star."

He looked at her with such a comical expression that she wanted to jump up and, like a child, throw herself into his arms. But she was a ruthless young woman, inhumanly strong. And she had the idea that if she taught him a good lesson now he would remember it. This obnoxious idea was one of the results of her training and her dear aunt, who had always believed in improving the occasion, a method that seldom improves anything but the occasion.

"I'm in no mood to talk to-night, Arthur. You think I've changed, but I have not. I still feel I cannot trust you. I'm sick about the whole thing. I do not consider myself engaged to you or bound to you in any way. Now will you please go? Somebody will come and find us here."

He knew quite well that her heart really belied every word she said.

"Then they will," he said calmly, drawing a second chair up to the organ.

Flushing with quick anger because he took no notice of her, and really afraid that somebody might walk in at any minute, she rose and left him.

He blew out the candles and followed her. At her gate his manner changed.

"Just a moment, Sidney," he began, in tones

that startled her. "If you dismiss me like this, I swear I'll never come to you again. I've every sympathy for your bruised mind. I remember what I felt like when I went through it. God knows I'm sorry enough if I've been the man to open your eyes. I should have preferred it to be someone else. But you will get over it, you know, and when you are forty you will laugh to think you ever went through such a phase. Now will you let me talk to you and help you if I can, or are you determined to be a fool? For nobody but a fool would wreck the prospects for happiness that you and I have. They may not be burning brightly at this moment, but they have cast pretty substantial shadows at times during the last year. Well, am I to go?"

The hardness of his tone and manner startled and hurt her. And she was frightened by the alternative he offered. Two weeks ago she was sure she never wanted to see him again. Now the thought that she might not was unthinkable. Of course she had never really supposed he would go right out of her life. What had she supposed? She didn't know.

"All right, Arthur," she said in a crushed voice, "I'll hear you."

"The devil!" he retorted irritably, "if it's as bad as all that I'll go. Good God! I thought you loved me. I see I've been a fool too——"

He stopped, for he saw that her shoulders had begun to shake.

"Forgive me, Sidney. I didn't sleep well last night, and my nerves are on edge. Come on, let's talk this out. We can't quarrel like this."

She turned with him towards the old wagon track leading into the gully behind the cottages. She took the cigarette he offered her.

It was a clear, cool night, with an intensely black sky and brilliant stars. Sidney looked up at the Southern Cross, the great love of southern star gazers, and felt it was ridiculous of her to hang on to a mood and make a religion of gloom. But something had gone out of her relation to Arthur, never to return, and the fact that she had not yet adjusted herself to the absence of glamour made her feel that she had ceased to love him with her mind. It was too soon yet for her to see that the glamour was being replaced by something more lasting than honeymoon hypnotism.

"May I talk to you?" he asked presently.

"Yes, but let me say something first."

She had regained her composure, and her voice was steady and detached.

"This whole thing has been a shock to me, Arthur. I know it seems stupid to you. I suppose it *will* seem funny to me when I am forty. I have been absurdly idealistic, and so this has hurt me, and I cannot get over it all at once. It's

done something to me, I don't know what. And you seem almost a stranger to me, to my mind. It's as if we would have to begin all over again. If you had only told me about Mana in the beginning—but it's no use going over that now. And it was a shock to see the child—it has spoiled everything, all the memories—you may be humorous about it, but I can't—it will take weeks——”

She stopped, feeling that she could not go on without breaking.

“I know, child. I suppose it serves me right. But you don't hate me, do you?”

He stopped on the track, took her face between his hands, and looked earnestly into it. He had been hurt in the school to see how drawn and sad it was.

“No, I suppose I couldn't really hate you, Arthur, whatever you did. But I never thought I—I——” she paused.

“Yes, go on,” he said, seeing she found it difficult to say what was in her mind.

“Well, it used to be so wonderful to think of you, to see you coming——” her voice rasped.

He swore beneath his breath. But he faced it squarely. He took her hand under his arm and walked on a few yards before speaking.

“I know, my dear. It's that wonderful glamour about a person that we want to last for ever.

But it never does last. Most honeymoons see the end of it and the compromises begun. You and I could not have escaped that. And the trouble with you now is that you don't see what is left, what will grow out of the ashes of the glamour—the wonderful plant of good company. Have you thought of that? The things that hold two people together so that nothing can ever disrupt their friendship are companionable habits. I think of you, and I remember that you have never made a banal remark about scenery, that you've never called a sunset 'pretty' or a view 'sweet,' and I have no fear for the future. You are worrying now, you have been worrying about my possible infidelity. The thing that will keep me more than anything else from being unfaithful to you is that you never bore me, that you can be quiet, that you do not try to express the inexpressible, that you do not call me your 'pet' and your 'baby' when I am kissing you, that we like the same things for breakfast——”

Sidney laughed suddenly, surprising both herself and him.

“Good,” he exclaimed. “Patient past the crisis, but great care still necessary.”

She looked at him.

“Arthur, you know, you frighten me. You are such a clever talker, and you appear to have no feelings. There isn't a thing you couldn't joke

about. It really scares me. I've a feeling that you could gloss over everything. Everything is funny to you. And I look ahead and see that it always will be. If you were unfaithful to me, you would try to make me think it funny."

"Well, wouldn't it be a wonderful thing if I could?"

"Oh, Arthur, please, don't joke about that——"

"My dear girl, for God's sake get infidelity out of your head. You women think far too much of it anyway. It is incidental. It is the least of marital tragedies, the least of reasons for divorce. What is it that drives most men into loving other women anyway? Think of the horrors of nerves, and irritation, and banal conversation that your sex imposes on ours without a thought of their soul racking effects! The Americans have the right idea in granting divorce for mental cruelty. If you'll only start off by seeing me as I am, and then continue the habits you have led me to believe you possess, I have no fear about my future infidelity. Of course, if you are determined I shall be unfaithful to you I may have to be to prove you right. Because, of course, it would never do for you to be wrong."

Sidney laughed again, a healthy laugh this time.

"Good," said Arthur again. "Patient now able to sit up and take nourishment."

She laughed on rather helplessly, and was afraid she was going to take hysterics. She pulled herself up with difficulty.

Arthur dropped his foolery.

"You're really awfully tired, child, I know that. That damned fire and everything. By the way, I haven't heard the whole of that Mrs. James story yet. The house was burned, wasn't it? Tell me how you got to that stump."

It seemed curious to her to talk to him about ordinary things again. The time when she had done so seemed so far away. She told him briefly how she had got Mrs. James across the creek. He fully appreciated the grimness of his being the person to go to her rescue.

Then he gave her the full story of the fight at the Big Dam, omitting any reference to his part in it, and praising Jack and his men, and so talking got back to her gate.

He was wise enough to see that she needed a rest from him, that she would grow nearer to him in his absence.

"Sidney, you are very tired. I'm not going to worry you. When you really want to see me again, will you let me know?"

He held out his hand. He had meant to tell her that he now had his divorce, but he decided that he would not try to force her feelings in any way.

If he had held out his arms, she would have fallen into them, for her body was not as obedient as it ought to have been to her mind. But he was afraid to hurry up her convalescence, for he knew they had had a narrow escape. He did not know her, for no man ever knows the intricate contradictions between a woman's words and her emotional needs.

"All right, good-night," she said stupidly, for she was very tired.

He gripped her hand, and in a moment was gone towards the stables.

She lay awake cursing her pride and stupidity, and hungering for his arms and lips.

CHAPTER XXVIII

DURING the week Sidney received a note from Mana.

"Dear Miss Carey, I have not seen you for a long time. Could you come up on Saturday?"

At first she told herself she could not go. She wondered if Arthur had asked Mana to send the invitation; if he would be there. Then she saw he would never do that. She reviewed her feelings as to Mana. She did not hate her now, but she felt she could not see her yet. She wondered what they could say to each other. And then she began to be curious as to what Mana knew of the whole situation. She saw she could test Arthur's statements by what she would say. She still had doubts. By Friday morning she meant to go.

But Mrs. Jack Ridgefield became ill that day, and late in the afternoon the Whangarei doctor arrived. The baby, a boy, was not born till five o'clock on Saturday morning after an awful night. Jack Ridgefield spent it pacing the path between his house and Bob's, cursing the ways of nature,

and vowing it never should happen again. Sidney sat in their kitchen all night waiting on the nurse and the doctor who stayed on till the middle of the next day.

Sophie was so low in the morning that the mill was closed so that she should not be startled into death by whistles or the screeching of the circular saws. She was a little safer by night, better on the Sunday, surprisingly better on the Monday, and then got on splendidly.

The happiness of this household meant a great deal to Sidney; indeed, she was astonished to see how much. She looked at Jack, seeing him with new eyes as a man struggling with inner demons, moved by his concern for his wife, and his first indifference to the queer little infant feebly squeaking its entrance into the world. As it was her first experience of childbirth, the pain, the danger, the emotional upheaval were a considerable shock to her. And she saw it was all a considerable shock to Jack.

He was touched beyond expression at the anxiety of the village. The faithful Bob had sat up with him, tried to calm his ravings, had answered questions for him, and had spread the glad news when the danger was over. On Monday morning the whole place felt nearer to its boss than it ever had before. And all day long parents greeted him with a glow of secret understanding.

Jack thought with astonishment of the men who had been through all this before him, and of the women who had faced death as Sophie had, not once, but many times.

Later on word went round the village that anyone who wished was invited to call upon the little Jack, and women who had never set foot in the Ridgefield home, and who never expected to, went to see Sophie, and were later visited by her. One touch of a first baby will do more for democracy than all the theories of all the economists.

In the middle of the week Sidney sent a note to Mana telling her she would come the following Saturday if it were convenient.

She had not heard a word of Arthur, and was beginning to be hurt. At least he might have written, she said to herself. She had forgotten that it was understood when they parted that she was to make the next move. She expected him to make it.

As she rode up to the Joyous Valley she wondered if she would hear of him from Mana. What were they to say to each other? They had not met for over two months.

She paused, as she always did on the top of the ridge, to look down upon the little farm sparkling in the clear winter sunlight. She knew that if she had brought hostility with her she would have had to leave it there upon the ridge.

As she stepped onto the verandah Mana came out to meet her, her usual ease clouded by an air of uncertainty.

"I am glad you came," she said, looking doubtfully at Sidney. "There is something I wanted to tell you."

Sidney was surprised that she could begin as easily as that.

"I am glad to see you, Mana."

She could not have said it truthfully two weeks before. It was not the undiluted truth now, but it contained sufficient veracity to carry it.

"I hope you are quite better."

She followed Mana into her front room.

"Yes, thank you, Miss Carey. How is Mrs. Ridgefield?"

Sidney sat down in the rocker by the window.

"She's getting on well now, but it was pretty serious for a while."

"Yes, an anxious time with a first baby," said Mana softly.

"Yes. I didn't know it could be so harrowing," answered Sidney.

Then they looked at one another for a minute. Sidney saw that Mana's courage was ebbing.

"You wanted to tell me something?" she said, trying to make her voice encouraging.

"Oh, Miss Carey, I—I wanted to tell you not to be jealous of me—about Mr. Devereux—it was

all over long ago, and you—you must have made a mistake about the baby."

"A mistake," repeated Sidney blankly.

"Yes, Miss Carey. What baby did you see?"

"Why, I saw it here, on your verandah in the pram."

"When, Miss Carey?"

"Why, I rode in one Saturday afternoon, after you were sick. Rangi told you I came on the Monday, I suppose, and there was nobody about. I came to the verandah and saw the baby, and—I rode right away."

There was a flicker of a smile in Mana's eyes, and Sidney seeing it had a queer feeling that something awful was coming.

"That wasn't my baby, Miss Carey. That was Mrs. Allen's baby. She came over from the camp to see if I could spare some fresh eggs. Her husband was very ill. My baby was asleep inside, and I put hers in the pram on the verandah while we went to look for the eggs. So that is what it was? We wondered how you could possibly have found out after it was all over. I had been so careful——"

She stopped, because Sidney had jumped from her chair and strode outside.

For some seconds Sidney used language entirely unbecoming to a lady. Then she threw back her head and laughed a harsh and bitter laugh at the

scurvy trick Fate and her own suspicions had played her.

Poor Mana sat very uncomfortably, not knowing what to do. And she hardly dare look up when Sidney walked in again.

"Mana, I want to get all of this out of my system now, so I'm going to ask some more questions. You have evidently seen Mr. Devereux since I saw him last. He must have told you also about the pajamas, his blue pajamas. I saw them on your line two or three weeks ago."

Mana blushed under her tawny skin.

"I was wearing them, Miss Carey," she said, in great confusion. "I—I kept them for a keepsake—I liked the colour—I know I ought to have sent them back——" she paused, looking at the floor.

As Sidney stood watching her a flame of shame crossed her own face.

"God! What a beast I am," she said to herself.

She had never given a thought to Mana, or what she might have felt. Had she felt? She had never given a sign. If what they both said was true, Mana must have suffered in seeing Arthur go from her. Even if her code was an easy one she must have had some sad moments. But she had never shown that she had.

Mana looked up.

"Please, Miss Carey, forget all about it, and forgive him."

"Forget and forgive!" she retorted. "Is it as easy as all that? Are you finding it easy?"

Mana looked away.

"It is never easy. But it can be done. And if you don't forgive men you will only lose them. And it is hard to lose them."

Sidney set her teeth, and told herself she hated Arthur afresh for what he had done to Mana.

"Men are not like us," went on Mana, with the finality of fatalism. "And we have to take them as they are or go without."

Though Sidney had heard this profound remark a thousand times, it struck her as a piece of news coming from Mana, who infused into the words a sinister warning.

"Go without," was a menacing phrase.

Sidney walked back to her chair, sat down and looked at her.

"The thing I hate about men is the calm way they dance into our lives and dance out again. Now I can forgive Mr. Devereux for what he has done to me much more easily than I can forgive him for what he has done to you. If I had only known in the beginning——"

"Why, Miss Carey, he hasn't done anything to me. He has been fine to me. Please don't think about me. I knew it was—that it was just

for a while—I never expected it to last. And it was my fault——”

“I don’t believe that,” cried Sidney sharply. “Has he been telling you what to say to me?”

She leaned forward, scanning Mana’s face.

“Oh, no. Certainly not.”

“What did he tell you?” she asked curiously.

“He just said you knew, Miss Carey, that we had lived together, and he asked me about the baby and the pajamas.”

“Did he ever tell you we were engaged?”

“Oh, yes, a long while ago.”

“When?”

“Last year, in the spring.”

“You are sure?”

“Yes, I am quite sure. And we stopped living together.”

Sidney knew she was speaking the truth.

“So you can forgive him,” repeated Mana softly.

Sidney saw why men would always want to live with women like Mana, soft comfortable women who would give much for little, forgive charmingly, forget easily, and begin again hopefully. She knew she would never know the whole story, never get at what it had meant to Mana.

In a flash of illumination she saw also that it must have been very hard for Arthur to break

with her. Indeed, she now forgot herself and began to think about their end of it.

"Oh, Mana," she cried impulsively, "I have thought of nobody but myself. And gosh! what an idiot I have been."

She dropped her head into her hands, the thought of her ridiculous mistakes overwhelming her. But for them they would all have gone on peacefully, and she need never have known. And she saw now that she did not have to know, and that she wanted Arthur anyway, and would have had him whatever he had done.

Now she dreaded to think of the weapon for retaliation that she had put into his hands.

Thinking of it, she groaned.

"Oh, do forget it all, Miss Carey," said Mana, in distress. "It never does any good to think about unpleasant things."

Sidney raised her face with a harsh little laugh.

"I wish I could be like you. But I can't. However, I'm going to try to forget it. I'm glad you sent for me. It would have been awful if you hadn't. And I can never tell you how much I appreciate you—what you have been——"

With a mist over her eyes she held out her hand.

Mana brightened at once.

"Let me show you my baby," she said. "You haven't seen it."

It lay in the fatal pram in the back yard, a perfectly authentic Maori cherub, properly fathered by Mana's husband. It was the cunningest little soft thing, opening its bright brown eyes at Sidney.

"You see it is all right," said Mana, "though I wouldn't have minded if it had been his. But it was a funny mistake." She dared now to smile. "And the pajamas, I will send them back——"

"Oh, damn those pajamas!" groaned Sidney. "They will haunt me all my life. I'll never be able to endure the sight of blue pajamas again. For heaven's sake keep them if you want to, Mana. And let's forget the whole darned mess. I am so sick of it."

As she rode home she wondered how she was ever to face Arthur again.

For days she put off writing to him and then was surprised to get in her mail an envelope in his writing addressed from Auckland. She did not know he was away.

Inside she found a card on which, against a black background, were painted a pair of blue pajamas hanging on a line, and an aggressively white baby sitting in a pram, while a mocking red devil grinned at them from the right hand corner. The thing was well painted and drawn, and was obviously done by an artist.

Below the objects were printed the words "Intuitions. Beware! They are not what they seem."

There was no other word.

But Sidney kissed the absurd thing, and laughed and cried over it, and surrendered.

By the return mail she sent to Arthur's Auckland address a post card saying, simply, "Recovered: a sense of humour."

The next week was her winter vacation, and she wondered if he would be in Auckland, and whether she would see him, as they now had there mutual friends.

CHAPTER XXIX

SIDNEY went to stay with a family who had entertained her and Arthur the previous summer.

After she had unpacked, her hostess told her they would have to leave her alone that evening for an imperative business dinner engagement that would have bored her to death. They thought she would prefer to rest. She was glad of their thoughtfulness, and said she would go to bed early.

When she walked into their drawing-room before dinner a form rose out of a chair, and a voice said, "I hope the sense of humour is healthy this evening."

"Oh, Arthur," she gasped helplessly.

But before they could make a proper beginning dinner was announced. The woman servant who waited on them thought them a very hilarious couple. But she was puzzled by some of their conversation. She wondered why a white baby should be the subject of amusement. She understood better the humorous possibilities of blue pajamas.

At the end of the meal, when they were alone,

Arthur went to the sideboard, took up a bottle and a corkscrew, and turning to the table showed them to Sidney.

"Do you recognize it?" he asked, holding up the Burgundy.

"Why, Arthur! The same bottle?"

"The same. You won't refuse to drink with me now?"

She flushed.

"I always hated myself for that," she said looking down.

"You were afraid of me there, in my shanty," he smiled.

"And of myself," she said.

"You didn't get my mood. I was full of a great resolve. I wanted to drink to it."

She looked up into his face, half guessing.

"That was the night I made up my mind I had to be faithful to you."

Leaning forward, she seized his hand and kissed it.

"And even without the Burgundy I was," he added.

She put his hand against her cheek.

"But it will do no harm to resolve again with the Burgundy," he went on.

Then with an air of solemn ceremoniousness he drew the cork and poured out the wine.

Sidney stood up beside him, and they raised their glasses.

"To monogamy," he said gravely, "and may it be as interesting as it ought to be. The good Lord help us both."

She choked and had to put down her glass.

When she recovered she proposed a toast of her own.

"To the great god Humour, and may he never desert us."

And they finished the bottle in great spirits.

Soon afterwards, in the drawing-room, the pearl and diamond ring was on Sidney's hand. She had seen the divorce papers, and had consented to as immediate a marriage as the Board of Education would allow, on the condition, fiercely emphasized, that certain objects should never thereafter be mentioned between them.

THE END

