

feel nothing—hear nothing but it. I don't even know how I tore my arm." He put out his hand with its blood-stained bandage. "When I was in the bog, and the death-cold creeping higher and higher, I found the warm blood trickling down—the first time I had noticed anything was the matter." He paused for a moment, and then went on more quickly: "When I was saved the first time (even as you rescued me to-night) thought came, and I remembered what a master of the instrument he had been in life." He stopped, gazing into the fire with eyes that saw I know not what strange scenes, then flung his head back with a laugh.

"Ah, well," he cried, gaily, "let us eat, drink, and be merry, for I don't think it will be to-morrow that we die."

I was startled by the suddenness of the change, and yet I never knew him serious—never heard him speak a grave word—from that time to the end.

It was scarcely odd that we should become friends hard and fast from that hour. He had obtained a billet on the station to which he had been going on the night of the storm, and as the homestead lay only eight or nine miles distant, we saw a good deal of each other. He never again alluded to his coming fate after that one night of serious outpouring, and I am quite sure I am the only man on earth at this moment who knows his story. For the first month or two his face wore a strained, expectant look, and he continually turned his head sharply and quickly, as one who listens for distant voices of which he can only just catch the faintest of far-away whispers. By-and-bye, however, when the winter had passed and the glorious Otago spring stole gradually upon us, this tense look passed. The lurking shadows died out of his eyes, and the summer sunshine settled there instead. I know he was happy that last year; who could doubt it, looking at his face?

I began to wonder if the story he had told me was true—I mean the part that referred to Eva Hilton, when he had said he cut the rope, not to save the lives of his comrades, but because the road would be clear to the woman he loved. His was such a bright, buoyant nature that I could not imagine such a deed on his part. And yet, who knows? If Mortimer Cassidy were guiltless, why did the dead man's vengeance follow him so relentlessly, for surely if any see clearly the dead do?

Days flowed into weeks and weeks into months and still Mortimer had no further hint of his coming fate. Gradually, in the bustle and gladness of summer days and summer work, the memory of that night of storm and darkness grew less vivid, but not so the picture of the master musician himself, which above all else I shall carry to my grave unmarred and undimmed.

Mortimer's teaching, too, had begun to show one another path than that upon which I toiled with bitter heart and aching feet. A path straight and true; a path where the fresh air of heaven blew gently, and over which the golden sunshine played temperately. When my time comes, Mortimer, may I have done as much for another in all my life as you for me in your one year.

The last month of summer was well advanced when the end came. Did he feel his fate draw near? I trust not. May it have come suddenly, without any days of foreboding or nights of repentant anguish. He said no word to me in those last weeks of a fear that the sword was about to fall; and I think he would have done so had the dread been there.

And the thing befell in this wise. The house party at the station had long looked forward to an expedition to the summit of the Marwera Range and at last the date, after many alterations, had been definitely fixed. Mortimer was to go, of course. I also, but in a humbler capacity.

The day dawned gloriously I was awake at the first paling of the stars, and as the pink light stole gradually down the great brown range a foreboding—a feeling of deepest sadness took possession of me, fading only when the great sun rose resplendent and the new day—the last of Mortimer's short life—began.

There was the usual delay in starting our journey and three o'clock had passed before we reached the topmost peak on the range. All were gay and light-hearted when they sat down to lunch. Mortimer the gayest and brightest of all. Ah, how clearly I can see him now—my life's benefactor—with his cheerful face, his quick, blithe speech, and deft, helpful ways. He was the life of the party that day. I could see how the others sought him and deferred to him continually; how the womenkind hung upon his words. How quickly the hours fled.

We had turned to go back, and still all was well. My depression of the early morning had completely passed away. About half-way down the hillside the sun set—for us—and we passed into the shadow of the mountain. Then presently a miracle of beauty, the moon rose, and her silvery rays mixing impalpably with the soft twilight, we moved in a fairy world. Such an evening! Far away, the soft hazy hills from which the sunlight had died. Just opposite, the great silver shield of the new moon floating on a faintly tinted sky. The air fresh, crisp and exquisitely clear. How I can feel and see it now.

We were picking our way slowly round the edge of a deep, rock-fringed gorge, the stream far below showing but as a faint steely gleam now and then. One of the women had dismounted, and I saw that Mortimer, some yards in front of me, was leading two horses—his own and another.

Suddenly he stopped and turning his head back over his shoulder looked past me, up the track down which we had come. Then indeed slow horror

took possession of me, when I saw and felt that he was listening—listening.

I had come close to him by this time—close enough to see that his face shone white in the strange half-light, and that his eyes glowed like coals.

And then I knew, even though this time I heard nothing.

"Mortimer," I tried to say, but the word would not come. "Mortimer." It was a whisper, short and quick, but it had barely passed my lips when he had let fall the reins he held and was already many yards up the hill, running swiftly, surely, and without trip or stumble up the narrow path. One or two had noticed his hurried departure, but none attached any importance to it.

"Dropped something," I heard one say. "He'll be back in a minute."

But I knew better. I had seen his face as he passed me, and the sight had burned into my brain like a white hot iron. Mortimer Cassidy would never come back. I saw him reach the spot where the path turned out of sight. Then I saw him pause, spring lightly on to a jutting crag that overhung the deep ravine, and stand for one second silhouetted blackly against the pure sky.

"Mortimer," I tried to cry again, but the word died in a choking gasp, and I fell forward on my face senseless.

When consciousness returned I found they had brought him up—my friend. He was cruelly shattered, but his face—his gracious, noble face—was untouched. For that much I shall remain thankful always.

At last he had paid his debt. Paid for the minute's cruel madness; and I, thinking over his story in these later years—thinking of the good he wrought to one who else had never sought or dimly found the light, think too, that even as he paid the price of wrong in this life, so will he pass blameless unto that other which is behind the veil.



WAITING FOR PEARLS.