

those days. You see I had got Kitty's promise to marry me, and Kitty was one of them as knows how to keep a promise. She was Colonel Bagot's servant girl, and the track of our true love had run smooth enough until the trouble came. . . . What trouble? Now you're askin'. Well, I suppose I'll have to let it out at last. To cut the yarn short, it was a lonely fight in an empty bar-room, a fair an' square stand-up ding-dong go, but I got in an unlucky left-hander which landed his head fair on the brass knob of the fire grate, and the fool died in hospital. Reston, you know. Eh, Mr. Rhodes? You remember the little affair, do you Lord? I'm giving myself away, even now!"

The old man suddenly gave a violent start, and tried to rise, but he was too weak, and sank back, fainting. But a nip from the bottle revived him, and after a while he continued, though in a somewhat subdued voice:

"I may as well finish, now that I've gone so far. I think I've had my last spree. Feels like the time a' comin' to—Well, well! Never mind that. Where was I? Yes, I worked my way back and crawled up at dark, and give the old knock on Kitty's window. . . . I must shorten up this yarn, it ain't nice in the tellin'. . . . I stole Kitty off at head of night, like as I was one o' Fennimore Cooper's Indiyans. . . . But of course Kitty was willin' to be stole, and I tramped right bravely over the ranges and through the bush with me, her pretty feet sore and tired, and her hair all out of curl from campin' in the open air, for we had to keep clear o' the main tracks and settlements, as the folk might be askin' uncomfortable questions. . . . On the third day, when Kitty had done all the tramping she wanted to do for the rest of her natural life, I made for old Ropai's kainga, and there my coloured friends fixed us up with a big supply o' tucker and a dug-out canoe, and I paddled away down the Waipa to seek round for uttermost seclusion and bliss! I found a likely spot, miles from the beaten pakeha tracks, and rigged up a bark whare, and our prospects and Kumara beds flourished. Of course we obeyed the Maori law, and got a tohunga to mutter his matrimonial charms over our cere-monial weddin'. There weren't no cake nor no cards!"

"I should have told you that, Connor. The town policeman, had for long been wanting my fiancé to marry him, though he knew that she was my property. So, when Kitty was stole, Connor guessed that I had resurrected myself, and what must he do but start to follow up my trail, like the snivelling blighter he was. He had old Tewae, the tracker, to help him. Remember Tewae, Mr. Rhodes? You don't, eh? Why, he was the bloodhound who dug young Murray, the sailor, out of the Waitomo Caves after he'd shot Pemberton for argyving about dividin' th spoil they'd collared out of the East Coast mail!"

"Well, Connor reckoned on trackin' me, and so gettin' a good healthy murder case, as well as a collarin' of what he calculated was his girl, and posin' as a hero of the first water in clatchin' the languishin' female from outer the willyun's grasp!"

"And right enough, after months of pinpin' round, and hidey-go-seek, he collared me! I had left our whare early one morning to go eel fishin'; and I had a good haul, but Kitty never cooked above eels! A cold revolver muzzle against my ear was Chapter the oneth, three days' trudging in handcuffs to the town lock-up was Chapter the twoth of that little affair, and I wondered what Kitty thought?"

"I wouldn't own up to murder, but the jury brought me in 'Guilty.' The judge thought fit to rub it in to me. 'A well merited sentence,' says he. 'You have evaded justice long enough. May the Lord have mercy on your soul.' And then he went to his dinner."

"A few days later, Connor bawled through my door that he'd got a week's leave of absence, and was off to bring Kitty home, also, that I was to have a six-foot drop. He took care, though, that three inches of kauri boarding lay between us before he chose to cheer me up with this little eppy-tone of news. But his spite was soon to suffer fatty re-generation of the heart, for he didn't get away as soon as he had expected to, and in a couple of days he was forced to carry very different tidings into the condemned cell—nothing more nor less than a slap-up reprieve, and my order of release! He sulkily told me that the real murderer had had a fit of remorse, and had confessed! I

was staggered a bit, nat'rally, but collected my wits and said: 'The Lord's will be done,' or some such language, just to allay my suspicions, you know, and to hide my feelin's a bit."

"When I got away from the jail, I set straight off to Kitty, wonderin', and settled in my own mind that my proxy (they would not tell me his name) was either a lunatic, or someone too aart to commit susanside, so thought he'd get the Government to carry out his little short cut to Glory for him. But that was his business. Mine was home and Kitty. So on I trudged, merrily enough, and building all sorts of castles in the air ('Chat-oo dee Spain,' as Crapaud calls 'em) about our shiftn' to the town, and holding our heads up among the folk, and me gettin' on the School Committee like a respectable city father, and—er—But when I arrived within sight of our whare, tired and weary, though cheery as a locust, I got a sudden shock on seein' that no smoke came from the eod chimney. Boys! The very soul seemed to go out of my body when I found that Kitty had gone, and that she had left no sign. Yes, one sign I saw the marks of

reveal—ation, an awful thought, of a heroine, a self-sacrificing Kitty—flashed into my mind, and I ran all the way to the cells. As I had been directly concerned in the case, I got immediate permission to go in and institoot inquiries. I found that my nightmare of a notion was all too true, for Kitty had bravely carried out her cracked-up yarn, but woman-like, broke down when she saw me, and told me all about it, and then she put her arms round my neck, and lung on! Boys, I tell ye, the devil came into my soul, and I shut my teeth hard. I gripped Kitty round the waist, and fetched out my sheath-knife."

"The warden came first, but I had a strong wrist then-a-days. Kitty's scream at the blood-flow fetched Mr. Policeman Connor, but I saw him in time, and he dropped with a broken jaw. My course was clear, for the old lock-up boasted no system of high walls and turnkeys. I half carried Kitty, for she was too dazed and faint to run, and we made off into the bush."

Nat's voice grew lower and lower as he recounted his startling life story. He paused, and we reprimed our pipes

"Well, as nothing happened to alarm us, we soon felt secure enough, and by-and-by welcomed the signs o' Christmas a' comin' on the pohutukawas. But one morning, just about when Christmas Day would be sending out the holiday-makers (lucky beggars), a big, white-sailed pleasure yacht came skimming into our bay. We could see that picnickers were aboard, by the cut o' their clothes. Presently they came ashore, I suppose to see our lonesome hut, which would nat'rally attract attention in that solitary spot. We hadn't time to get away, and, besides, Kitty wasn't too well anyway, so I had to put a bold face on it, and went out as if I was almighty pleased to welcome the visitors to our abode! You can imagine my disgust when I saw, all too late, that a laughing lass had 'snapped' me with an infernal three-legged camera she had quickly fixed up. I suppose my wild rig-out gave me a sorter Robinson Crusoe appearance. 'Howsomever,' this camera affair was dangerous, though on consultin' Kitty when the yacht had gone and we were at last alone, we decided that only deuced bad luck would bring that photograph under official gaze. Besides, and this is what was the decidin' fackter, the main thing was, that Kitty was not fit to take to the bush again just then. So we risked circumstances."

"But circumstances was our enemy. I tell ye, boys, inside of a month, as we were peacefully finishin' our evenin' meal o' roast clams, and yarnin' about layin' a store o' tucker for the winter, our blessed whare was surprised and rushed! My wits gathered up the facts in a second, but my heart seemed to drop clean outer my body and my brain veeled, when I saw that no less than seven armed men were coming at us!"

"But Despair beats numbers. I tore our slab table off its posts and heaved it at their leader, who dropped, and even in my wild fury I recognised the features of the warden I had left for dead in the lock-up. The second man blazed a pistol at me, but his arm was knocked up, and he fell back from a blazin' root that Kitty thrust in his face. How we did it, I can't tell you, but after a mad and desperate scramble, and though runnin' awful risks from the 'pepperin' pistol bullets, we got into the bush unhurt, but just about in fit mood to join hands and take a flyin' leap over the cliff, and end matters on the rocks below! But the blankness o' Death is a bitter notion to young folk, and Love seems to cling to Life! Poor Kitty could not travel so I gathered her a heap o' moss and made her as comfortable as it was possible in the gatherin' darkness, and then I went back to re-con-noiter. Picture my feelin's when I saw the raiders sittin' round the glowin' ashes of what had been by Home, and a loved home too, for there Peace had dwelt, and Love had softened Care! I turned to go back to my wife, but again bad luck followed me, for I lost my way in the darkness of the bush, and daren't coose to her for fear o' bringin' the men after us. So Kit was left alone, and when, after a cruel night, I crept along at streak o' dawn and found the hidin' place where I had left her, they were both dead and cold!"

Again the old man paused; his voice had died away to a whisper. We looked at him inquiringly, and Rhodes ventured, "Both?"

"Yes, both," and after another long drawn silent pause, "Both Kit and her kiddy! What troubles me most—I can't speak any louder, I had to bolt away, for I heard the police startin' off to look for us, and when immediate danger is at hand, no matter how sick o' Life we may be, 'Life is sweet.' They were only a few yards off, but I got away, though I hadn't even time to kiss the dead lips I just said, 'God rest. . . .' I must turn in now, boys. I'm quite warm 'Cam old man. Good night, all!"

We helped him to his bunk, and then remained silent, listening to the rain, and thinking. That silence was Kitty's Elegy!

The next morning broke fine and clear and Rhodes woke me up early.

"Come here," he said, and beckoned me towards Nat's bunk. I went over, and shook the old man to awaken him, but suddenly stopped to listen, and then gently drew the bush rug over his face for Nat had joined his "Kit and her kiddy!"



A FIGURE STUDY IN HOLLAND.

Together: "Aeh! Gott!" "Gee-zwiz!"

her twelve-and-sixpenny boots, leading off on the mountain track, a real dangerous short cut to town! So after a night's rest, back I goes on the same tramp, hungry, tired, and puzzled, but feelin' sorter relieved to know that I was following on Kitty's track!

"I met Tewae the tracker, who told me that some woman, whose name he had forgotten, had confessed to hitting Reston on the head with a lump of firewood, that she had followed him up to the pub because he had jilted her, and got him alone in the bar-room, and in a fit of fury had landed him a crack on the head with a piece o' rata she hauled outer the fire! The Court believed her on oath, of course, and all as in a dream (for Connor and Co. had kept me in the dark) I had got my walking ticket, for things in the justice line then-a-days were not like they are now, you know. Bless me, no. Why, I remember down at Paterangi Bush, old Capt'n Loram finin' a pal o' mine a bottle o' whisky for bangin' the Bush Clerk on the eoker-nut with a rika-stump, and the liquor had to be fetched and lowered before the Court broke up!"

"But that ain't my yarn. A sudden

in silence. Another "first mate's" nip at the bottle seemed to revive the old man, and presently he cleared his throat, and in a half mutter went on.

"I must pass over a long time now, how we lived on fern roots and tawheras, and tucker begged from friendly Maoris; how we hid, tramped, and hid for months and months, till we hit on a retreat away on the West Coast, where a big kauri bush backed the coastline, and where the sea-beaches provided us with plenty of pipia and pawas. By the way, we call that bush district 'Hokianga' now."

"My rough cut whare gave us shelter, poor enough though, for the few tools I had begged from old Ropai were not fitted for mansion building, exactly. My poor girl suffered hardships ity outer the question to tell of. You can all imagine what she had to put up with! Patience! Why, she twisted maunga-maunga around a stick o' dry puriri, and rubbed it into dead tawa pulp until she got a fire a'gain! She was a female Mark Tapley, she was, and never a complaint did she make, no matter how we far'd, bless her."