

advisable to leave my work. When I went in he was saying: "I like stand-offish girls, and I like sensible ones. Ye don't gas and jaw like most of them girls about 'ere. Ye've got the sense to shut up, and give a bloke a chanst to speak. That's why ye suit me."

"But I really don't care to hear this. Talk about something else."

"Well, then, let me teach ye the accordion."

"No time, Mr. Drake. It is almost tea-time."

"Well, I'll come in of evenin's and learn ye."

"But I'm sure I could never learn to play as you do."

"You won't try?"

"I won't try."

The Bloke told us that he was going to Eketahuna next day. He was most pressing in his offers to post our letters for us, pointing out that we should thus gain three days, as the local mail did not close till Wednesday. Louise handed him two letters. I saw that one was addressed to Harry Markham.

Tea passed off fairly well, until the Bloke, his hunger appeased, began to talk. I happened to say that the bridge over the creek was getting shaky.

"Yes," he replied, "it will want more money spent on it soon. A good job for some poor workin' man."

"The bridge can't be very old."

"No, but it has not lasted well. Me and Ike, we cut the timbers for that bridge. They was to be good old 'eart-wood of the usual sorts, and we simply 'adn't got it to saw. We cut a good deal of young sappy stuff—far easier to cut—and Ike 'e says: 'The boss will never pass this.' 'Take my tip 'e will,' says I, 'when I've faked it a bit.' So I got a lot of hinau bark, and made a dye with it, and we splashed it well on the sap-wood to make it dark and old lookin', and so we bested the boss."

"I'm surprised to hear you boast of such a thing," said I.

"Oh, we took the contrack too low! 'Ad to get even somehow."

"It was a dishonest act!" cried Bert, hostly. The Bloke looked surprised.

"Don't ye understand that it was a Guvment job?" he inquired. "Why, everybody makes a rise out of the Guvment! Ye dunno 'alf of what goes on."

The rest of the evening was spent in playing five-handed euchre, a particularly silly game. The Bloke played with noise and vigour. His little way of slapping a card on the table, and bawling: "Play to that," was rather trying, but we could have borne it. Soon, however, he was inspired to pat Louise on the shoulder, and to grasp her hand under the table. She turned and looked steadily at him, with all the dignity of offended nineteen. His armour of vanity was pierced at last, and he went home crest-fallen, but by no means vanquished.

Bert and Jack went to their rooms. Louise knelt on the hearth beside me, laying her head on my knee. She has done this ever since she was a very little girl, and it always means that good old dad is not to be angry with his little daughter.

"Dad," she began, "that man is always here."

"I saw little of him, my child, except when he came a-borrowing, until you young people came. So you are tired of him, too?"

"He is unbearable, dad."

"Yes. If he comes to visit us again—which I don't expect, after our extreme coldness to him to-day—I shall plainly tell him his company is not wanted."

"Poor man! But we can't have him here. Of course I know we are ever so poor now, and away from all our friends, but a man like that—eh, dad?"

"I have been rather weak, perhaps. This Drake is always trying to put me under obligations, and once or twice I have found it necessary to accept his help. I do not like to impute selfish motives, but he trades upon my gratitude, and what I do for him in return he forgets. In future we must decline his pigeons and all other favours. I am rather sorry you gave him your letters to post."