

in check this month past. He came slowly to a standstill, swung round and looked at the girl's clear-cut profile against the dark manuka scrub.

"This is better than waltzing to a band. It is the most intoxicating thing in the world. Do you know why?"

"No," she said slowly, "unless because it brings a different stratum of feelings uppermost." She was looking past him straight up the gorge, where frozen mountains drew the eye, on and on, in dim illimitable perspective, and a tangle of bush on a lonely spur twinkled where the stars peeped through.

"Or because I have never danced with you, Joan."

Her eyes dropped, and from the far end of the lake, "Susie-oo, I lub you true," obligingly filled up the pause that followed.

Neil was telling himself that he had not meant to say this, but he knew that he had ridden all those miles over the rough road on purpose to say it—and a few other things. And so he said them, leading Joan Kestiven by strange, sweet paths into an undreamed-of paradise.

The moon was paling as he rode homeward along the miles of wire fencing, with a new joy in his heart, and a new trouble to swing the scale level. The morrows, for which he had taken no thought, began to rear their heads and ask unanswerable questions. His horse stumbled heavily through the tussocks, and he began to call himself names to which bit and stirrup clicked a derisive accompaniment.

The gleam of a light in the dining-room window, as he opened the gate, caused an irrelevant word to awaken the shocked night. Humphrey was evidently waiting for him, and Humphrey's keen eyes saw many things which the younger brother would fain have hid.

He looked up through a cloud of smoke as Neil entered bringing with him a rush of cold air, and his rugged face was graver than usual.

"Had a good time, old chap?"

"No—yes. Confound it all! I wish you'd smash that pipe. It smells vile."

"It's mine own familiar friend," returned the other equably, taking stock of the long, lithe back presented to his gaze as Neil leaned his elbows on the mantel-piece. "Anything gone wrong? Who was there to-night?"

Neil kicked the logs into a blaze, desiring much to tell Humphrey to find out for himself, but he bethought him that this night's work must out before long.

"Oh, the usual Summer Hill lot, and—one or two from Wakarewa!"

"Miss Kestiven still at Wakarewa?"

"Yes," sullenly; "inquisition finished, I hope? I'm off to bed."

"Hold on a minute." Humphrey laid down his pipe, feeling much as if he was going to explore the mechanism of a lighted bomb. "I want to speak to you about something."

"Hurry up, then. I'm dog-tired!" His manner was no more encouraging than his words. Humphrey's heart sank as he crossed the room, and he rubbed his slippered foot nervously against the fender.

"Neil," he said, very gravely, "what are you doing? Are you teaching that girl to care for you?"

Neil dropped his head on his folded arms.

"Don't," he said hoarsely. "For Heaven's sake, let me alone, Humphrey! I won't be badgered to-night!"

"You must!" was the stern reply. "You are doing a dastardly thing, and you know it! I thought you had more pluck. The third or fourth generation, Neil; there's no getting away from it. It's old ground, I know. We've dug it to dust, and we've tramped it to flint, but it always pans out the same. Our grandfather died mad, so did his ancestors, *ad infinitum*, so may we. It's not a pretty story, but it's true, and we have got to face it. But you know we vowed to face it alone, old boy—you and I, and we came to the uttermost ends of the earth to do it!"

Neil moved restlessly.

"Curse the vow!" he said in a stifled tone. "I didn't know her then." He lifted his