



IT had taken us a full day's march, and though our swags were light in reality, they felt heavy enough by the time the last long black birch ridge had been scaled. Six of us in a straggling line, with swags upon our backs, rifles in our hands, and fire-blackened billies strung to our respective belts, crawled wearily out into the brighter daylight of a little open patch in the dense undergrowth of the bush, and threw ourselves down on the springy fern. The three dogs of the expedition, by name, Scout, Rajah, and Spring, respectively, came crawling in close upon our heels, with lolling tongues and panting sides.

We had reached our camping-ground in the wild and rugged fastnesses of the Tararua Ranges only just in time, for the shadows were already gathering and thickening among the tree trunks, and up in the heavy foliage overhead. After a short spell we unrolled our swags, and set about pitching the tent and starting a fire to boil the billy for tea. Within an hour of our arrival our little weather-stained tent was securely set up, and made all snug with a great stack of fern fronds spread upon the floor for bedding. Then as a sound of hissing and spluttering announced that the

billy was boiling, we gathered about the cheerful blaze of the fire, and set to work on our stock of provisions with appetites such as only those know who have trodden the out trail, and smelt the reek of the camp fire.

Long before our hunger was appeased the shadows had marshalled their forces close about our little circle, and darkness, thick and impenetrable, had cast its mantle over the bush. A belated tui, perched high in the branches of a giant rata that towered above us, gave voice to a few sweet bell notes, and fell suddenly silent as the harsh, grating cries of a flock of kakas flying high overhead broke in upon his melody. A mopoke hooted eerily from the shadows behind the tent, and then as if his voice were a signal, a perfect chorus of wailing cries rose from the gully below, where the wekas, now wide awake, were starting out on their marauding excursions.

We needed no rocking to send us to sleep that first night in camp. We dropped off into the land of dreams the moment we rolled ourselves in our blankets, and snored soundly until awakened by the sweet voices of the tuis at daylight the following morning. It was a positive delight to draw aside the tent-flap and step out into the cool fresh air of the bush, the rich, damp smell of the fern was sweet as in-