

“Our find,’ as we still termed Ralph, became quite a hero among us. My uncle declared there was grit in the lad, and employed him as clerk in his office, thus insuring him against the vicissitudes of prospecting, of which he was entirely weary. Jim Frith presented him with a handsome cheque, which little ‘karakā blossom’ brought in an envelope as a token of gratitude for saving ‘daddy.’

“We all loved that child. We had her portrait taken, and I tried to paint her picture; but no one could do justice to that sweet little face, with its pathetic eyes, which seemed always to be mutely asking for love and sympathy.

“Her father, as we called him, never seemed quite so strong after his tragic experience. He never actively engaged in mining again, but would watch the workmen erecting buildings and batteries, as the months rolled on, bringing a golden harvest from many a rich claim. He visited the scene of his night’s adventure, and indications induced him to peg it out as a claim, calling it the ‘Karakā Blossom.’ He employed hands to put in a drive and test its value, and, strange to say, a good find was the result. Of his dastardly mates he never heard more; doubtless they escaped to America or England.

“My brother and I returned to our Auckland home, and saw no more of them for some time, but when Ralph came to town on business, he always visited us.

“‘Blossom,’ or Hilda, that was her real name, was about twelve years old when ‘daddy’ died. We all spoke of him so, because Ralph did, and we all sorrowed for his loss. He had built a pretty cottage, and Blossom had her heart’s desire, a garden full of flowers to love and tend.

“It was winter time, and the creeks were much swollen; a new bridge had been erected near his dwelling, but ‘daddy,’ with a strange perversity common to him since his trouble, persisted in striving to cross the narrow plank that was only a few yards nearer, and hardly safe in rough weather. A strange swimming in the

eyes, a giddy reel, and he lost his hold.

“The torrent was fierce; the boulders against which he was dashed ruggedly cruel. A man who saw him fall rushed to his aid, and found him, bruised and bleeding from a terrible gash in his head. He was carried home, and Ralph, sent for in haste, stood by his bed.

“‘It’s all over, my lad,’ said he, ‘and like many other things in my life, it’s my own fault; look to Blossom, lad, I leave her to you,’ and taking the child’s hand, he laid it in Ralph’s. ‘There’s gold, my lad, for her, in the old—waterhole.’

“Then he fell back, and never spoke again.

“Blossom grieved bitterly for him, as did Ralph, for there had sprung up a genuine affection between them, and he determined to carry out ‘daddy’s’ wishes to the letter. On searching the place described, Ralph found a small iron box containing valuable papers, and a considerable amount of gold, together with his written statement concerning Blossom.

“Herein lay the story of a life. A bundle of old letters revealed the fact that some twenty years previous he had been engaged to a young girl named Hilda Swan. For her sake he had toiled hard, and at length secured a position of trust in Australia. Her portrait lay among the letters, showing the face of a lovely girl; but, alas! not so noble as her fond lover believed her. She had evidently listened to the addresses of a young gentleman far above her in social rank, and trusted his promises, writing Jim a curt little note which, crumpled, yellow, and soiled, lay there now, stating that she was sorry to disappoint him, but that she had never really loved him, and was about to wed the only one she could ever love.

“Thus by a broken troth, another life was wrecked, and the evil did not end here. To her sorrow, poor Hilda found out too soon the fickle nature of her handsome lover, who having inveigled her into what proved an illegal marriage, deserted her and returned to England. All this she had told in a sorrowful, repentant letter to Jim, declaring her intention of leaving Melbourne with her