

Another Woman's Territory.

BY ALIEN

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CHAPTER X.

ANOTHER WOMAN.

MATAMATA - HARAKEKE was bathed in sunshine; "the tips of flax leaves" glistened in the light, and as Howard Grey went down the great valley he saw it as Caroline had just pictured it to him, the waters of the rivers glancing under the sun, its rapids white as foam drifts, and on the green downs the still brown pools reflecting the rushes on their rim.

For weeks Howard had journeyed like one in a circle, which narrowed till he reached its centre.

When first he wandered here he was embittered by impending failure. The curious instinct which brings a murderer back to the scene of his crime, had brought Howard back to the scene of his success. He persistently reiterated to himself that if he had never seen Matamata, he never should have won. He wandered on in dreamy retrospection—if it could be said he had got away from the old time at all—the past was echoing in his ears; he was defenceless against the emotions recalled at sight of "The Whare." The bond he had entered into there which he had vowed to keep, Caroline lying helpless in the room under the roof, his mind went from one thing to another; but in its recess he saw, heard, felt one individuality he would not acknowledge—Frank Osmond.

He crushed the idea of him. To get away from him he thought persistently of Caroline. It had not struck him that the windows of "The Whare" were fresh with

muslin as when she lived there. He had last seen it so, and it did not occur to him that after long vacation the cottage would not look so fresh and sweet. It would have appeared quite natural had the slight, grey-clad figure come over the downs to meet him. He could not divest the scene of her; she maintained her mastery of him, although he had left her miles away.

Howard avoided the river, and set off across the downs to Sawyer Thomas' Mill, but his eyes were attracted by the clump of bush, behind which Caroline said there was a bend of the river, "an exquisite clear pool," set in a frame of fern and briar roses. He made for the dark line of bush direct. Why he did not know, except that he seemed to be obeying instinctively the suggestion of his wife's thought. At every step larks rose from their nests singing joyously; the busy insects hummed importantly; the chirp of the grasshopper sounded loud in the silence, a silence that emphasised the feeling of loneliness which had driven Howard from the crowd and home. At last he came to the shelter of the fern trees, and sitting down on a moss-covered trunk at the margin of the pool, gave himself up to the physical enjoyment of rest in the cool shade. Somewhere among the tangled shrubs late briar roses still blossomed, for their perfume was fragrant on the still air. The water was clear as a looking-glass, and reflected every object that threw a shadow on its surface with a mirror's faithfulness, and while Howard sat on the projecting branch with his feet dangling over the stream, the white shadowy form of a woman appeared in the still depths.