



By HUNTER MURDOCH.

Illustrated by Harry West.

CHAPTER I.

A PICNIC.

TING! The curtain rises on a lovely New Zealand gully zig-zagging between limestone hills. Under the shade of native bush, a brook runs, jumping, gurgling, and tinkling among the mossy boulders. Here and there the sun's rays force their way through the foliage, casting chequered shadows on the rough path, and lighting up into vivid green the ferns which bound it. Over all, there is an atmosphere of calm, rest, and peace.

On this hot January afternoon, a young man and a girl are busy building a fire on a level bit of sward. She, on her knees, takes the sticks which he has collected, puts them on the fire, and blows the flickering flame. A few paces off a cloth is spread, with every requisite for a good tea. She is about to rise, and he raises her by the hand.

"You need not squeeze my hand so hard, Mr. Herbert."

"Attribute it to involuntary muscular

action, Miss Raymond," replies the swain, beneath whose ardent gaze the girl casts down her eyes.

Madge Raymond had volunteered to prepare the meal, and Eastace Herbert was only too glad to stay and help her. The rest of the picnickers had paired off after the manner of their kind.

All but one, a young girl who sat by the stream in a secluded nook, silently weeping. From time to time, she looked wistfully in the direction of the column of blue smoke which rose from the fire. Presently, she dipped her handkerchief in the water, and bathed her hot eyes. Then she rose, and wandered sadly and aimlessly under the trees.

Madge had spoiled the day to which Eva Trowbridge had looked forward with so much pleasure.

"Where have you been, dear?" asked the former, as the laggard at last put in an appearance amongst the rest of the party, who were doing full justice to the tea.

"I have been resting in the shade. I was tired."