

deep shadow, its abandonment of blossom and perfume, all at once became the loneliest place on earth to Caroline. The dull ache at her heart intensified itself to a passion of longing: was he coming home? Oh, if he might only come through the wicket-gate from the shrubbery! She longed with heart-sick longing that he might throw off his yoke—a yoke of the senses and the mind, and forsaking all other, return to his best self—and to her.

Still the letter lay unopened in her hand. Her fingers shook as she broke the seal; she felt faint with apprehension and anticipated disappointment. The first words were blurred.

“Wahine, are you not lonely there? Often of late I seem to see you lonely. Would you come to me? I have been wandering about from place to place tramping off a fit of the blue devils, devils too ugly for your acquaintance, child. It's been pretty rough on both of us—but roughest on y'u.

“I am going to Matamata, and have a fancy—a sentimental one, perhaps, but you must excuse that, as I am not often sentimental—that if Frank would bring you over, we three might there renew our acquaintance with the place and with one another, and perhaps get clearer understanding of some things unexplained, and of one another. But, child, I have no right to ask a sacrifice. I advance no claim. Should you come, you will find your little cottage ready for you.

“HOWARD.”

Her heart throbbed, her face grew radiant. He had called her at last. Was the memory of that first time with him when he asked her to meet him there, “and perhaps get clearer understanding of some things unexplained?” She knew those things, but was he about to tell her? Once partner of his thoughts, his hidden self, his acknowledged dishonour, she would defy any other to oust her from her place.

When Frank came he found her young. “Of course you will go—we shall both go,” he said, eagerly. Howard's estrangement from them both had been wormwood to him.

\* \* \* \* \*

The fresh breeze blew gently over the downs of Matamata, rustling the rushes and flax. Among the grass little blue and red wild flowers opened their eyes to the purple sky, which was flecked on the horizon and above the snow peaks with white clouds, one of which occasionally took wing and sailed over the dazzling expanse. The great foam tipped river swept majestically between its barriers to the fuller, nobler life of the sea. At every step Howard disturbed a nested lark, which rose with carolling protest into the still air.

Did Nature lie with its promise of renewal? Was human life the only cruelty with its denial of regeneration? To-day Howard's mood was bitter; the spirit that had stirred him to appeal had been saddened by Caroline's silence. Allowing for reasonable delay, this morning should have brought her answer, and none had come.

With man's exactitude he had hoped for good tidings—it is born in men, weak and strong alike, outcome of generations of submission, expectation of woman's pardon. She had always been sympathetic to him; her finely tempered strength had propped him many a time. Just now Howard Grey wanted a prop sadly. He had barely found the feet of his new impulses. His impression of Caroline had been strong in this place on two occasions, first when he met her here, and afterwards when the thought of her had held him to fealty. Could she the third time not only hold her place, but eradicate from it the haunting memory of another woman?

Well, she had not come, had not even answered, and in his loneliness he renewed his mistaken thought of her—he was to her but a figurehead. In her brother she had stored her treasures. Well, it was just, quite just! But the worst of justice is that it is usually meted out to the man in the dock, and finds him in the mood to receive it. Howard was not disposed to smile on the sentence of alienation passed upon him. He was harrassed by fears that he had mistaken his vocation. He had volunteered