

friendliness. "After Melbourne I had a fancy for a little idling, and I came back here. But I found 'The Whare' was not to let, so Polly took me in."

She did not look at him as she spoke; she had taken in that first impression of his appearance, the tired, wild expression of his eyes, and while she sought for a solution in any knowledge she had of him, he gave her, as she believed, a clue.

"I am afraid," he said, thanking her in his heart for the ordinary tone she had taken, while he struggled back from the void and darkness in which she had appeared to him, "I am afraid that I am to blame—indirectly—for the cause of your disappointment—if you were disappointed—in not being able to get possession of 'The Whare.' The cottage belongs to my wife, and as I had asked her to join me here with her brother, it was not to let."

"You are not alone then?"

"At present I am; they have not yet arrived. Did Frank Osmond tell you that this was the scene of his first literary efforts?"

"No," she replied. "I understood he wrote his play in Melbourne."

"His play—yes."

A short silence ensued. Instinctively they had left the river bank and taken to the open. She wished him to take it for granted that she accepted his presence—as she desired him to accept hers—as a casual and natural incident. The gaps he had left unfilled in their past intercourse she had filled, if not satisfactorily, at least understandably to herself. His wife—that cold plain woman with prim stiff manners, whose strange eyes had something uncanny in their light—had failed him to-day as she had doubtless failed him all their married life. But she, Geraldine Ward, who had refused the absolute adoration of men, whose love had been hers in its completeness, was not the one to fill the gaps left by another woman.

The question, "Why are you here?" she had not answered herself. She was not humble-minded; she had worshipped this

man from afar. She had acknowledged him her intellectual superior—he had acknowledged himself a blunderer. And what was of more significance—he had proved himself one. That wife of his put him beyond comprehension! She could understand his moods; they were permissible to the artist his fiercest self-denunciation did but go to prove consciousness that he had fallen short of his ideal—but a commonplace wife? It made the situation difficult of solution, unless he were at heart what he had protested—a commonplace man.

As such she addressed him. She talked the topics of the day, political, artistic, social. A sort of panic seized Howard. He had earnestly desired to bury the thought of her, with an inscription sacred to the memory of what she had signified to him—but a tawdry resurrection? He rose up in arms against it.

"Geraldine!"

His tone was stern, peremptory. In their intercourse, intimate as its short converse had been, he had not called her by her name before.

She realised in every tingling nerve that she had hurt him, touched roughly some fibre of the temperament she did not understand.

"Geraldine!"

His tone was intercession now. It called to her from man's humility, cut right through the reasons and unreasons, distinctions, etiquette, ethics, honours, which divided them. It was the cry of manhood to womanhood.

"Geraldine!"

She turned her head with proud reluctance, fighting all the time for those reserves which he had ignored. Her clear-cut profile, with its proud and tender curves, was turned to him, but she withheld her eyes.

They had come now to the bend of the river, that doubling which shut in the pool among the briar roses and fern, where he had first seen her. Instinctively they both had sought the spot, and the little physical difficulty with which she had to push through