

"I'll chance that. Dear, you'll tell me, I have to go back to-morrow, there are sheep and things—and, tell me *now*."

The deep roll of music was like a restless prayerful sea, and the light was gone from the sky. Miss Derring broke up Teddy's world with a sudden pulling apart of the curtains, and looked at him over her shoulder.

"Next time," she said, "and, shrive me beforehand, Teddy, if I do you harm."

"You'll never do that," said Teddy, with faith, "and next time will be Sunday—Sunday morning."

The wire fences that held Cressiton's block in place between Teddy's land and the hills, dripped with dew when the sun pushed above the edge of the plain on Sunday morning, and made Teddy black as several demons against the blue mist of the hill line. And it was still disgracefully early when the grey pony halted before the blank stare of the Big House, and Teddy learnt from a stableman that the house was empty again.

Power heard the grey pony coming up the steep cutting through the half-cleared bush, and flung down the week-old paper thankfully.

"What was it brought you this early, Teddy, and Keene away and all? My faith, but it's smoking hot this day! And don't talk to Joss, he has the devil of toothache on him."

Teddy had the devil of sudden fear on him, and shied from direct questioning.

"Any news?" he asked, and backed against the canvas doorway, where the clearing gave out on dim muddled distance of bush.

"Plenty," said Power, sucking his pipe, "plenty. Rettau has bought a new horse, and—what d'you think o' this, Ted? Keene is to marry that black-headed Derring girl with the long neck. Fact! He went to town with the lot of 'em last night. "When," Power cut a fresh pipeful meditatively, "the last trumpet calls us, Keene'll be there with a cock to his hat and a joke in the mouth of him. He's mad!

And you'd say it yourself if you'd heard him. 'Twas that gave old Joss the toothache. Sure, it's only he of all of us could afford these luxuries, for a wife's a necessity to no man."

"Of course," said Teddy vaguely. He got himself to the back of the grey pony, and out with his face to the clean East where the sea was, but he took no interest in the doing of it.

"That's another foolish man," said Power, mildly surprised, and going back to his paper. "Confound these mosquitoes."

There is an ordinary law for a yoke on each man's shoulders. He must work lest greater pains come upon him. For this reason only Teddy worked through a yellow autumn that sunk to a dun-coloured winter with no rain in it, and it began to be understood by the adjacent universe that a drought was on the earth.

The grass withered up, the dry-throated wind blew it away, and stock-sales died out in the small townships. And the drought smote the six each in their separate places, with Teddy watering his sheep from the snaky green streams that shrunk in the bleak shingle river-bed, and Keene in town, happy as a man may be only once in his life, and reading none of the letters sent him by his overseer.

The Plains are not a very good place for a man in trouble, and there was a special loneliness dogging Teddy on the afternoon when the Nor'-wester tried to catch its tail round the whare, and nearly took the roof off.

"It's a holy terror," said Teddy, as he tied the sheet-iron down with flax ropes and boulders. Then he sat open-mouthed on the spouting to stare at Keene and the lather of his horse.

"Come down," said Keene, "I want to speak to you."

Teddy swung himself to the level of the other man, and knew, by some occult reasoning, that it behoved him to be careful. "What's up, old man? Come along inside."

"No," said Keene, and straight way called