

In Search of a Fortune.

A STORY OF THE AUCKLAND MINING BOOM.

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Illustrated by Trevor Lloyd.

CHAPTER VI.

I RETURNED to Auckland in a curious frame of mind. Hitherto I had dreamt of golden leaders and rich reefs giving me sudden wealth, and now, instead of being thrilled by visions of gleaming metal, I saw a girl's face showing white in the gloom of a summer night.

I realized that I had searched for gold and precious gems through many years and in many wild places, and had won—well, at least experience and endurance, but little else. I realized also that I was deeply in love with Nina, and that rich reefs and mines of gems were nothing except as steps toward her; and in my heart I knew that gold or gems counted but little in her eyes. Yes; I knew this of a surety, and loved her the more because of her pride and the strength of her goodness. I was thinking of these things when I was brought up suddenly by the call, "Hey, Mr Pick!" It was the assayer. He drew me aside with an air of secrecy.

"Look here," he said, "I think you and I can do a stroke of business. You sent in some samples of pyrites, and said there was any amount of the same material. I'm in touch with an English syndicate, and if what you say about quantities is all right, we can make you an offer. Come along and I'll in-

roduce you to the head of the syndicate."

I followed the assayer into a very gorgeous office, and made the acquaintance of one of those men who contributed very largely to the Auckland mining boom. He was very shrewd and business-like, and seemed to think any man who held mining property was an unmitigated rascal.

He questioned me about the claim at Taihararu, and I told him straight all about it. I had the grant of the claim in my pocket, and sketched him a rough plan of the locality and the position of the big slip.

"Well," he said, in conclusion, "If you like to put the claim under offer to us, we will send our mining expert out to look at it, and if his views accord with yours, we may come to terms." Thinking that English capital might find the golden reef which I had so vainly sought in the Maitaiterangi, I told him of the claim I had there, and, as the assayer backed up my statement regarding the richness of the samples, the syndicate manager asked me to put this claim under offer too.

"I suppose," said the manager just as I was leaving, "that you are not inclined to take a sporting offer for your two claims. Aucklanders are asking very large sums for untried properties, and they