

passage, and a door banged. Tony sprang up.

"Great Scott! Where's she off to? It's freezing hard!" He dragged the heavy table-cloth away with him; and ran out with it into the night. From the uncurtained window Crandeck saw him overtake a dark shape that blotted the starshine on the tussock hill, and increase its bulk by the winding of it in many folds of cloth.

"You didn't give her time to light the lantern," he said; "and she's gone to do it now. Wonder she can think of such things to-night. But, of course, Jamison wasn't such a tremendously good father to her."

Payne had lit a candle that he might read the "Field;" Harton looked at Crandeck in the light of it.

"If you want to break her heart you'll say that to her. The lantern was Jamison's idea. Isn't that enough for you?"

But it was given to Tony to possess clearer insight, and Our Lady, understanding, spoke to him out of her full heart.

"I mustn't forget the plain, Tony; not even for Dad. It would know, you see; and it's always been so good to me—and I love it so. Go away, Tony dear, and leave me just by myself. I can't understand better up here, and—and—oh, Tony, Tony, please go away."

There was a solemn purity in the cold, still night, where the dried scrub cracked under the smiting frost, and in the soft, direct blaze of the Southern stars that drew the eye up from the world's rim to the mighty hithermost dome of the seventh heaven. It oppressed Tony and gave him fear, but he had the wisdom to know that it was best for Our Lady.

"Harton will come for you directly—he's going to stay a few days to see about—er—things, you know, and Crandeck is to do his work at Balclutha. He thought

you'd rather not see him first, dear; but if—"

Our Lady lay face down among the frozen spines of the tussock, and she gave him to understand that she did not desire the presence of Crandeck, nor of any other man in all the world.

So the slow days dragged themselves into the past, and closed down the week with a cold, ink-black night and a mad lashing of rain on the roof.

Harton and Crandeck had sifted patiently through the seeds of Jamison's sowing, and had found many things that were ill therein. Therefore, Harton had called a meeting at Balclutha, and he told Our Lady's "boys" all that was necessary for them to know.

"There's not a dashed penny left, and the station and stock will have to go to pay part of the debts. I thought—I suppose we can make up the rest between us, eh, you fellows?"

"You bet," said Verenin, stolidly; "but what about Our Lady?"

"Don't believe she's a relative in the world. I don't know, unless—unless we send her to a boarding-school. She's only eighteen."

There was a groan of mixed derision and pain.

"Our Lady! Harton, you cruel beast! Fancy ruling her into a dame-school. Besides, we can't manage without her."

"I think you'll have to—now; can't you see that things must be different?"

"Suppose you'll marry her to some one—or to yourself," said Payne with a sneer, and Harton got to his feet.

"Suppose you'd better shut up," he said sharply. Then he looked at the others. "We'll keep the home-block and Mrs Rooney, and Our Lady shall live there till we see how things turn out. And no man shall say a word of marriage to her or bother her in any way unless he gets the consent of the rest. We're all in this, and we're all answerable for her, eh?"