

For the speech of these men ran up and down the land as they hammered out the power of this strong country to be, and told of lawless deeds and the summary justice that came after, in straight words and very forcible.

A clean-faced boy, who owned some forty thousand acres of freehold, commanded the attention of the thickening smoke-reek.

"A dashed cattle-puncher, I tell you. He nailed forty of my calves, and banged 'em along with his own mob 'fore I could get on his trail. What? Certainly I'd know them, bang or no bang, though he swore they were his by all his gods, the brute! So I swore—"

"I'll be bound you did, Tony," murmured Verenin, opening an eye.

"Tony, Tony! come out—quick. I've chased that weka into the koromiko bush by the tin fence, and you've got to catch him. Tony—is he asleep in there, boys?"

Jamison pulled out his pipe.

"Lassie, come here. Harton and Crandeck have—"

Our Lady came to the window with darkness behind her, and smiled on Crandeck.

"Did they give you any tea? Whisky and pipes? Oh, how silly! You'll have a head in the morning, you know. Vic always has a head when he comes back from Christchurch. You do, Vic, and it makes you shockingly cross, too. Wasn't he cross coming up, Crandeck?"

"There's never any sense in telling too much truth," said Payne; "has no one taught you that, my Lady?"

"You learnt instead," said Our Lady, underbreath. "I heard of it—no, it wasn't Tony or Dad. But I'm going to speak to you in the morning. Letters? Oh, who for? Wish some one would write me a letter!"

"I will, if you like," said Verenin. "You shouldn't laugh; I can. I won an essay prize at school once."

"I 'spects they judged by weight 'stead of reading that year," said Our Lady, with demure eyes on the bulky one. "Hurry up, Tony. No, you shan't have a gun. You shot three chickens last time. Wait till I call for him. We-ka-a!"

The night where the young moon walked took them both, and later, Crandeck went to his bed and was mystified. For the wide frank plains that had cradled Our Lady in freedom belonged to no world in which he had part, and the shadow of its silence lay on him with a horrible familiarity.

But in the grey-domed eternity of his dreams, swathed cabbage-trees stood in ranks behind a girl's figure that ran through the night, and called on a name that was his own. And he followed her unswervingly until Harton came and threw brushes at him and three boots, because it was breakfast-time.

Jamison's acres lay bare to the welter of sunlight and to all the winds that blew. For fences were not, neither crops nor trees; and kennelled boundary-dogs strung off the invisible line that severed the runs throughout the plains.

Our Lady made this matter clear to Crandeck when she came out to watch him sinking a post-hole, and to explain the uses of a "bar" in clayey soil. Crandeck grew speedily blistered about the hands and the nape of the neck, and Our Lady sat under a sparse manuka bush, and laughed at him with clear, unabashed eyes.

"You'll learn; and everything worth learning hurts a bit—or it's not worth it.—Q.E.D. Tony taught me that."

"The logic or the fact?" Then Crandeck struck a stone that knocked a corner off the spade, and swore under breath.

"I think I found out the fact myself. Had to, you know. Dad won't let me ride with a saddle, and I had awful croppers before I could sit a young 'un. And Vic taught me to shoot with swan-