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THE
CURSE OF THE
GREENSTONE
TIKI

BY
KITTY O'SULLIVAN

New Zealand's Modern Grandmother



Auckland Service Printers, 15, Victoria Street, Auckland, C.I.



Katherine Morgan at the age of 10 years when kidnapped by Kowhai, at
Taradale, Hawkes Bay



The Author as she appeared at Auckland Cinemas in Costume of a grandmother of 100 years ago

Dedicated to
My Sister
HELEN

All names of persons outside my own family, in this book are purely fictitious, although the characters portrayed were real persons. Any possible likeness to individuals now living is unintentional and purely accidental.

INTRODUCTION

AO-TEA-ROA, the Land of the Long White Cloud, was the name by which New Zealand was known to the Maori long before the white man came to its shores.

Brave indeed were the early white pioneers, who travelled from the other end of the world, spending many weary months at sea in sailing ships, in order to found new homes in this strange land, so far from, and so different from their own country. A land inhabited by a race of fierce, untutored savages, with cannibal tendencies and for ever warring, tribe with tribe; who could now bury the hatchet and join together in fierce and bloody battle against the hated "pakeha" (white man), whom, by the power of the Maori war gods, they swore to drive into the sea.

But, in spite of this threat the white population steadily increased, more emigrants arrived, and towns and small settlements sprang up in various parts of both islands, mostly along the coast, whose numerous bays and harbours provided natural havens for ships.

At the time my story opens this threat had commenced to act, and a prolonged struggle between the two races, punctuated by massacres and disasters, was in full swing in various parts of the islands. But as the history of these wars has already been written by the pens of men who fought in them, I shall endeavour to keep strictly to events relating to my own experiences, remembered from childhood, and stories told by my father, who fought willingly, if inconspicuously, along with other settlers, to

help to quell the Maori uprisings. Some part has also been related to me by a dear old English lady who is still living in a North Island town. To her I am indebted for much of the early part of my story relating to my parents. She lived next door to my home, nursed me many times as a baby, and had an intimate knowledge of our affairs. This lady was present at my birth and actually heard the old Maori chieftainess utter the curse on me during the incident of my mother's rejection of her gift of the greenstone tiki, a curse which the superstitious will believe has hung over most of my rather tragic life.

(Signed): Kitty O'Sullivan.

The Curse of the Greenstone Tiki

CHAPTER I.

Ship Ahoy!

RIDING at anchor in the roadstead of the bay, awaiting a pilot to tow her into the Iron-pot Spit, Napier—as the port of Hawke's Bay province is called—lay the good ship "Merry Maid," her sails billowing in the summer breeze, and her human freight crowding the decks. Eager eyes were turned shorewards, and all was bustle and excitement. After the long voyage of four months it was a heartening sight to be at land and know that before long they would see faces near and dear to them, for were they not coming to friends and relatives. A wife to join her husband, or a mother to her sons, or perhaps a sweetheart to her betrothed.

At last the anchor is up, and the "Merry Maid" begins to move in the wake of the tug. The excitement of the passengers reaches fever pitch, as they call to one another and collect their belongings ready for disembarkation.

All this time a young couple stood by the taffrail, beside a neat pile of luggage. They seemed to stand apart from the rest of their shipmates, and made a striking picture as the sun shone on the golden red hair of the slim lassie, who held both hands locked around the arm of the tall, dark, handsome man beside her. Now a sailor places another trunk beside them, and on the label we read: James Morgan, Wales. Wanted on voyage, N.Z. These two were my parents.

Here is a sketch of my mother's girlhood before she met my father, who was a scholar and a gentleman of high standing in Wales, but who gave up his career to start life afresh with his girl bride in this young and beautiful country of New Zealand. She was born in Southern Ireland in a part of the country where superstition, amounting even to the practice of witchcraft, had held sway for centuries, being handed down from generation to generation. Her earliest recollections, as a child, were of hearing the wail of a Banshee (Irish fairy) in the small hours of a cold winter's morning, of climbing from her cot to peep through a chink in the wooden shutters of the one small window of her attic room, close beneath the thatched roof, and how, in the pale light of dawn she had beheld the diminutive figure of the Banshee—a tiny woman with a shawl over her head and held fast beneath her chin.

In Ireland the Banshee came as a warning of death—this being an accepted fact among the peasantry, so no surprise was felt at the news that my grandmother had gone on the journey we all must take, leaving my mother—an only child—to the care of an aunt on my grandmother's side. It so happened that this aunt had a large family of young children of her own, and looked with little favour on this new addition to the family board.

Dear little mother! My eyes grow moist as I pen these lines. I scarcely remember you except as a shadowy being who vanished from my young life, leaving a void that even now seems to ache for want of you, so closely was my life allied to yours—indeed at periods almost repeating your own. My mother soon became the Cinderella of her aunt's family, a drudge by day and night, keeping watch over the younger children, and woe betide her if she were discovered asleep while some of her young cousins lay uncovered.

I will draw a veil over the intervening years of unhappiness, and tell of the meeting between herself and my father.

If ever Cupid smote a man at first sight, James Morgan was hit when he beheld this frail fair girl with the red hair and skin like alabaster. He had arrived from Wales only that morning, and now at noon, his business transactions having been satisfactorily completed, he idled away the time on the front porch of the village inn until such time as the jaunting car that was to convey him to the station, some miles distant, should put in an appearance. Children played in the wide street, barefoot, rosy-cheeked children, with music in their voices, and the blue of heaven in their Irish eyes. Across the way, a woman wearing a large white apron stood, with arms akimbo, at the door of her thatched cottage, while round the corner came a sow with her litter and leisurely paraded the middle of the road.

Idly James Morgan watched the picture before him, comparing Irish customs with those of his own country. His tall Welsh hat had caused quite a stir in the village, and many a sly glance from some passing colleen was cast in his direction.

The jovial landlord of the inn now appeared. "I'm afraid, sir," and he bowed with deference to his guest, "I'm very much afraid no car will be available until to-morrow; but you can have a horse, sir."

"Very well," replied James, "but see that it is a good one. When will it be ready?"

"Not until nightfall, sir; only you shall have the best," and the landlord shuffled off down the long passage.

Unperturbed, the young gentleman donned his tall hat and started off down the road, much to the delight of the children, to whom he gave silver pieces; and now every cottage door held some smiling villager, who curtsied to the handsome stranger.

On reaching the outskirts of the village, he paused to rest, on top of a stile leading from the lane he had just traversed to the fields beyond. Peasants were still working in these fields, their bright kerchiefs round their heads making splashes of colour in the setting sun against a background of distant hills, all purple and golden. The

sweet clover smell in the breeze, and the light through the leaves of the overhanging boughs lent enchantment to the scene. Beauty, poetry and romance everywhere.

He spoke aloud, "Surely God himself must walk abroad in a land so fair!"

"If you please, sir, I would cross over the stile."

Turning at the sound of the sweet voice that matched the sweetest face he had ever beheld, James thought for a moment that he was looking at some spirit of his dreams, only such a depth of sadness looked out of the violet-blue eyes that met his, that he could not resist the impulse to question her. "Just a slip of a girl," he soliloquised, as he removed his hat and held out a hand to help her over the stile. A bloom of roses on her cheeks showed beneath the clear skin as she curtseyed, but refused the proffered help.

"Do you live here?" he questioned, scarcely knowing what he said, only he must detain her. Such loveliness.

"Yes, sir, I live with my aunt in the white house with green shutters over there across the fields," indicating the direction with a wave of her hand.

"Would you tell me your name?"

"Mary Ross, sir," and again she curtseyed in such a gracefully quaint manner that the young man was literally carried off his feet. A few more eager questions and he was in possession of the sad history of Mary's young life. James Morgan thought quickly. There was no time to be lost, for already the long shadows were falling across the grass, and soon he must depart. Breathlessly he asked whether she would consent to become his wife and give him the right to protect her. As in a dream she placed her small hands in his strong ones and promised.

CHAPTER II.

The Elopement

IN THE weird light of the rising moon, a young man mounted on a black charger cautiously makes his way out of the village, and, after skirting the fields, halts beside a high wall surrounding a farmhouse. Silently he waits in the shadows, his heart thumping wildly, and the sound of his restless horse champing the bit seemed to fill all space. Beads of moisture dampen his brow, as the hours creep slowly by. Full well he knows the penalty should he be found here at this hour—a bullet through the heart and no questions asked—the Irish are a wild race.

Suddenly the horse pricked his ears; James' heart stood still, then pounded on again.

"At last," he murmured, as for a moment he held Mary in a fond embrace, "at last."

Tenderly he folded a warm wrap around her and, mounting his restless steed, drew the slight form up beside him. Once on the highway, James Morgan gave his horse its head, for much had yet to be done before daybreak, and he must also obtain a fresh mount further on. The distance was great, and the roads in part rough, with mountain streams to cross.

Flying hoof-beats rang out on the clear night air as they clattered over the cobbled streets of some hamlet, causing the peasants to start from their sleep at the unusual sound. On they flew, scarce a word had been spoken, only the tight pressure of her lover's strong arm, and the beating of their hearts told of the intense strain, as the man urged his horse forward to still greater effort.

The moon was waning, and the darkness that heralds the new-born day covered their flight. Now the way led across wild country and the tired horse began to stumble as it picked its way amongst boulders and tangled shrubs, sparks from his steel-shod hoofs striking on stone illuminating the darkness.

Pausing to make certain that they were not followed, and to give a spell to the noble animal which had served them so faithfully, for by this time both man and beast were sorely tried, James was amazed to find that his precious charge was sleeping peacefully in his arms like a little child. "Little darling!" he breathed softly, "such confidence and trust." And there in the darkness, beneath the stars, he vowed before God never to betray that sacred trust.

The sky was rosy with the effulgence of the dawn when Mary awoke and gazed in wonderment at her surroundings. At first she thought it must be a dream, but the voice at her side says: "Good morning, Princess, or I should say, 'The top o' the morning to you!'" For answer Mary held up her face to be kissed.

"James," she said in a sweet musical whisper, "surely heaven sent you to deliver me, but is there not still danger?"

"Look!" said James, "there ahead is the tavern for which we are making, and now for some good warm food and a fresh horse, and then we shall be on our way again." But he spoke with a confidence he was far from feeling.

At the tavern door they dismounted, their limbs cramped after their long ride. James, pulling on the bell-handle, sent peal after peal ringing through the silent house. In answer a sliding panel in the door opened and the bovine countenance of the landlord appeared. Seeing a woman, he hastily unfastened the latch, and James lost no time in bargaining for a fresh mount and ordering some much-needed food.

With feverish haste they partook of the generous meal placed before them. The landlord asked no questions, but the glint in his eyes told a great deal. "Lovers they be," he whispered to himself as he made up a neat parcel of bread and meat and tucked it into the saddlebag on the waiting horse.

"God be wid ye!" said the old fellow as he assisted Mary up in front of the saddle. "And the same to you,

sir!" And once more they were flying across the country.

James had decided what course he would take. A sailing ship bound for New Zealand would be leaving a certain port, and if he could reach the coast before dark he would be able to board her, and all would be well. His was a brave and daring spirit, and the world was well lost to have won such a prize as Mary. They discussed his plans as they rode on through the spring morning, with all the glory of a fresh world around them, and the love of two hearts beating as one. Intrepid youth that passes all too soon on the fleeting wings of time. 'Tis a taste of heaven, thought this son of Wales, as he slackened rein to view some beauteous landscape away in the distance, where the mountains were clothed in misty purple, and as they skirted some stream whose every turn was fringed with waving fronds of fern he involuntarily broke into snatches of song, so happy was he.

Mid-day found them in more open country, where they decided to halt and refresh themselves beside the clear water of a sparkling brook, shaded by vines and creepers and boughs of trees, while on its banks jonquils and daffodils breathed their fragrance into the air. All about them was the sweetness which is of the springtime, and a gaudy butterfly fluttered in and out through the patches of light and shade.

"What a sweet spot," said Mary, "all like a heavenly vision!"

Yes, dear reader, it comes truly only once in a lifetime—Love's young dream! No premonition of the tragic life ahead lurked in that Garden of Eden, only the unseen presence of the God of Love, and that morning was long remembered by them both.

Nothing untoward happened during the rest of the day, and twilight had almost departed ere they topped the last rise overlooking the bay, where lay the "Merry Maid" riding at anchor. Lights began to appear in cottage windows, and thin spirals of blue smoke from peat fires curled upwards as the fugitives made their way through the village. and on to the pier. They found that all was

in readiness to set sail. They were only just in time, and after arranging about the passage money they went on board. Nobody questioned them, as passports to the colonies were unheard of in those days. With his arm around her, they stood by the rail and watched the land gradually fade out of sight.

Early next morning the womenfolk were all agog with excitement. There was to be a wedding, and everyone wanted to help to prepare the bride. Such a child she looked, and was there ever such a shade of red hair! And what a handsome sweetheart she had! The story of their flight only added glamour to the scene, and, as the captain pronounced them man and wife, there was not a dry eye amongst the loyal-hearted women on board the "Merry Maid." The bride looked like a vestal virgin, thought the captain, and he added as a benediction: "May Vesta, the goddess of the altar sanctuary of peace and happiness, look down on you my child."

During the voyage James spent several hours each day teaching his young bride the art of letters, for Mary could neither read nor write. Education was a rarity in the land of her birth. However, she proved an apt pupil, and to her devoted teacher it was a labour of love. But what she lacked in letters was more than atoned for in poetic imagery. The skies were a blackboard, and a mighty hand wrote thereon, and she learned to tell the time by the stars. The setting of the sun in blood-tinged clouds foretold high winds for the morrow. The fleecy clouds were the cattle of the sun, pasturing the meadows of heaven, from whence came rain upon the earth, if not blown away by the winds or storm demons.

"Eternal things are God's thoughts as they exist in the spirit-land," she would inform James, much to his amazement, at the end of a lesson in which she had found difficulty in spelling some simple word. "Where did you learn such things?" he would ask. "From the heavens," she would smilingly affirm, "in the stillness of the night. When I leaned from my window, voices used to whisper of other worlds, and I used to ask the stars to send some-

one like you, and, you see, my request was granted"—and two arms stole around James' neck, and the heart within him beat wildly as the soft cheek caressed his own.

CHAPTER III.

Settlers

FROM the time of their disembarkation at the Spit, Napier, to the date, eight years later, of my own arrival on the scene, I have very little to recount. My parents lived at Napier, where my father owned considerable property; also that my sister Helen, who was six years my senior, was born in that town.

Long before my parents arrived in New Zealand continuous warfare was being waged between the pakehas (white men) and the Maoris. In the Hawke's Bay and other districts the name of the rebel chief Te Kooti struck terror into the hearts of the female white settlers. But there were also a great number of friendly natives, who traded their lands with the white man for tobacco, blankets, knives and other commodities.

About three years after the Morgans settled in Napier the Government called upon every able-bodied white man to take up arms against the Maori rebels. Te Kooti had for years eluded capture, but when he descended upon Poverty Bay and massacred whites and Maoris alike in cold blood, the Government decided to take drastic measures to drive the marauder from his mountain fastnesses in the difficult Urewera country.

Te Kooti was a wild, untutored savage who had risen into power as a leader by his iron force of character, even to the domination of chiefs of higher rank in his own tribe, the Rongorakaata. At one time he owned a schooner, and traded between Napier, Poverty Bay and Auckland, thus learning much of the ways of the pakeha.

But he became such a crafty and dangerous man that the Government of the day deported him and his followers to the Chatham Islands, which are situated some four hundred miles from the mainland. After some two years of imprisonment, he took advantage of some negligence on the part of his warders, made them prisoners in turn, released his followers and looted the township. They took all the arms and ammunition, as well as a large sum of money; and when the Government schooner which brought stores to the Islands arrived they boarded the vessel, and compelled the captain and crew, under pain of death, to sail back to Napier.

For two whole days and nights they were buffeted by head winds and made very little progress, until the Maoris began to lose faith in Te Kooti, who had declared himself to be a great prophet and the chosen of the gods. They called upon him to stay the winds. This remarkable man rose to the occasion by declaring that one of them had offended the god of the winds, and must be thrown overboard to appease this deity. Great was their surprise when he ordered his own uncle, with whom he had quarrelled, to be cast into the sea. The screams of the old man, pleading for his life, fell on deaf ears, and after struggling in the water for some little time, he sank out of sight. Shortly afterwards the wind fell and the sea grew calm.

The news of Te Kooti's return and landing at Napier spread like wildfire throughout the Hawke's Bay and Poverty Bay districts, causing panic among the white settlers, as well as among the friendly natives. He, however, escaped with his followers into the wild and almost inaccessible mountainous country of the Urewera.

Te Kooti gave out to his tribe that a new god had given them the arms and ammunition which would deliver them from the pakeha. The pakehas would all be destroyed. He refused to surrender to the Queen of England, whose Government of New Zealand had called upon him to lay down his arms and become a loyal citizen of the Dominion. On his march inland he was joined by

many other natives, so that he soon had a large number of followers, and a good supply of weapons and ammunition.

A detachment of volunteers under Captain Westrup was sent to intercept Te Kooti, and my father was a member of this party. After travelling through wild and mountainous country for two or three days they pitched camp to await reinforcements of friendly natives and guides who were supposed to join them at this spot. Te Kooti was believed to be in the neighbourhood, and the smoke from his camp fires could be plainly seen along the ranges. But, alas, the friendly natives for whom they were waiting had gone over to the enemy, taking their guns and ammunition with them. Feeling sure that an attack would be made upon them at once, the white men advanced to a ridge that seemed to afford a good position for defence.

Hardly had this movement been accomplished and some sort of shelter been improvised than a crowd of Maoris started out from the bush. In front of them was Te Kooti, clad in white robe, and holding his hands above his head as though calling down curses on the pakehas. Then he gave the signal for his men to fire, and showers of bullets came pinging into the trees and flax bushes which covered the ridge. The pakehas kept well down, hidden by the dense flax bushes and returned the fire for some hours. A few casualties occurred among the party, but nothing serious, but not having bayonets with which to charge, and as the reinforced enemy were growing bolder every minute, they decided to retreat. The party fell back from spur to spur, checking any attempt on the part of Te Kooti's men to rush them—which they seemed inclined to do. But at this time the natives had not the spirit to come within actual striking range of the white men; and, as the darkness fell over the ranges, the party found cover, amidst showers of bullets, in an old Maori fortification, a relic of previous struggles. From their new position they could see fires and hear firing and shouting from the ridge they had occupied in the morning.

Te Kooti and his men had found their camp, shot their pack-horses and looted their stores.

Fortunately the pakehas had with them one faithful native guide, and by his help they were enabled during the night to escape from the clutches of this murderous gang.

Meanwhile, in Napier, pakehas and friendly natives were thrown together in a common bond of brotherhood by a very lively fear of the cannibal chief; all setting to work to build fortifications against his onslaughts.

My mother became fretful and dissatisfied at this time, and pleaded with my father to take her into the country to live, but as the times were so unsettled and the war with the Maoris still being carried on, he kept putting off the day of departure. Once he almost decided on a property at Hastings, a then rising neighbourhood; but was immediately recalled to rejoin his regiment, and so the opportunity was lost.

Some years after this my father acquired a property in a small settlement called Taradale, some ten miles from Napier. Here he built a house and came to reside with my mother and my sister Helen, then about five years of age.

Let me describe the cottage, for it was here that I first saw the light. It holds memories that are very dear to me, and others that are poignant with sorrow. These memories taking me along a road thronged with the ghosts of those who lie mouldering in the silent dust, I shall unlock the doors of the storehouse of memory. I shall uncover the faces of my dead, but I shall uncover them with love and reverence.

This dwelling was only a small wooden cottage, with plain front door, single windows on either side and minus porch or verandah. So new that the front step was not yet in place; but once over the threshold you forgot the effort it cost to climb up in the cheery welcome you received. Nevertheless, it was considered quite a "house" among the row of newly-erected buildings in the "street"

then being formed, and visitors were shown over it with as much decorum as though it were a palace.

My father was a contractor, and engineered the forming of new roads. Horses harnessed to scoops cleared the earth away which had first been loosened by ploughs, metal was carted in drays from the nearest river bed, and gradually the gangs opened up by good roads the new country where the white population was steadily increasing.

New Zealanders have a proud heritage, bequeathed to them by brave men and women who pioneered this land, "God's Own Country" as it was soon called. They suffered great hardships, went in fear of their lives from tribes of savage, cannibal natives, who long after the white man arrived held mystic feasts at which human hearts and other organs were roasted in the sacred fire and offered to their gods. To-day 90 per cent of the Maoris are Christian and cannibalism is unknown.

From now on my father's work necessitated long periods of absence from home, for as the highway progressed inland, they continually moved camp and worked their way through the interior of the North Island.

At this time my mother was in delicate health and terrified of the Maoris who used to squat about the yard, and even entered the house and helped themselves to the food cooking on the stove. My father engaged a midwife, Ann Cornish, to take charge of the home. Ann was of the Cyclopean type, but pleasant and capable, a woman in whom they both had implicit confidence.

The new nurse lost no time in conveying the idea to the Maoris that she would have none of them on her doorstep, as she brandished the broom in their direction. Only one old tattooed woman, known by the name of Kowhai, "the Witch Doctor," would she allow to enter. Kowhai brought kumaras (sweet potatoes) and water-melons, and traded them for bits of cloth, lace, beads, and such like, and was contented to squat on a flax mat at a respectful distance from the back door.

CHAPTER IV.

My Debut

THE WIND shrieked up the chimney and hailstones spluttered on to the fire. "Was there ever such a night," muttered Ann as she busied herself about the small sitting room, setting out an array of baby clothes, powder puffs, safety pins and other toilet articles. A knock at the door, and she hastens to admit a neighbour, Eliza Jen Trow, a close friend of the Morgans.

How is she?" she enquired breathlessly, putting off her cloak and holding out her hands to the fire.

"She's a brave little woman," answered Ann, "only I had hoped the husband would be here."

Outside the storm raged with unabated fury, while within the chamber angels recorded the great mystery of life.

"It's another baby girl, Mary," said Ann, "and bonny at that. Here you are!" and she tucked my tiny red-faced personage in beside my mother.

"God be with you, Ann," answered my mother, "you are a great comfort to me."

Ann smiled tolerantly. "It was a labour of love," she said, shading the lights; "and now you must get some sleep."

The bedquilt was of patchwork, and antimacassars decorated the chairs in that humble home, but Ann Cornish thought she had never gazed on a picture more fair than this golden-haired mother with her baby at her breast.

The Curse

Old Kowhai had just arrived, all bedraggled and wet after having crossed the manuka swamps that separated Taradale from her own pah (village) some two miles distant.

"Haeremai" (Welcome) she greeted, "Pai wahine, haeremai," (welcome, good wife), and she held out a

greenstone Tiki (a breast ornament, representing a Maori god, used by all Maori women as a sacred emblem of fertility) and placed the Tiki on my breast. At the same time she called out "Pataka, pataka (treasure house), Kowhai, pataka!" meaning that she had brought the Tiki from the treasure house as a gift to the white woman's child.

Ann, who had just completed my infant toilet, was deeply touched by the Maori woman's evident good wishes, and allowed Kowhai to follow her into my mother's room, showing the jade ornament and explaining its meaning. But my mother shrank away in an agony of fear, as, uttering a sharp cry of pain, she dashed the Tiki to the floor. "Holy Virgin in heaven!" she moaned, "the witch has cast an evil spell on my baby."

"Hush! hush!" soothed Ann as she handed me across to Mummie Trow, who had picked up the Tiki and hidden it in her apron pocket.

The effect of all this upon Kowhai was awesome. Drawing herself up to her full height, and with arms raised above her head, and her old tattooed face distorted with hatred and rage, she screamed, "Uto! (vengeance), tapu' (she shall be infected by spirits)."

Ann drove the old Maori woman down the passage as if she were shooin' a flock of geese. "Begone out of here you old black devil! Shoo! Shoo!"

My mother was in a state of collapse, and I am told that I yelled lustily, to add to the excitement, so the two women had their hands full. "I tell you, Mary, it's all rubbish. No possible harm can come to the baby," said Ann, who was not so full of superstitions as are the Irish.

But my mother brooded. To her the curse took on a deeper significance. What did it portend? Undoubtedly a curse had fallen on my innocent head, and was held there. That it was done in ignorance made it none the less tragic. Living in a more enlightened age, and knowing that for that generation life and death were in the power of the tongue, it will readily be understood how

my mother's superstition, sombre with tragedy, was inbred in my nature.

Oh, mothers of the world, think for your children! Think for them before they are born! It is a divine work entrusted to you to mould their young lives. Keep before your minds only thoughts of good for them, and teach them from the cradle how to attract only good to themselves, all that is noble and beautiful in life. Only in this way will the world win real happiness. Mothers! this God-given task is yours.

To-day science teaches that the universe is sustained by laws of energy. The planets whirl at terrific rates of speed incessantly. Like attracts like, so if we send out thoughts of good, these will invariably attract good to us; and if our thoughts are evil, evil will as surely come to us, even if done in ignorance.

From the curse apparently there was no way of escape. It was the subject of village gossip. The Maoris called me "tapu." Something evil must befall me; constant guard was kept over my life; asleep or awake there was constant fear. I drank it in with my mother's milk. Since then I have learned that fear, needless fear, was the one and only evil which ever came or could come to me as the result of an ignorant savage's fury.

An increase in the white population was a cause for rejoicing, and in spite of the dark shadow of the curse, neighbours from far and near were invited to the christening.

My mother spent much time and thought in selecting my name; nothing seemed good enough for her baby. At length Katherine was decided upon. The next question was god-parents. Eventually this honour was conferred upon a couple named Conway, the husband being the village cobbler. All was in readiness for the event. My father, in the front seat, held the reins of the high-stepping bay horse, harnessed to a smart dog cart hired for the occasion. The horse became restless at the delay caused by Ann Cornish's difficulties in negotiating the small step so close beside the wheel. The god-parents

were already up, and sat with their backs towards the horse and their feet resting on the tailboard. Then the infant, arrayed in an elaborate long robe, billowing with frills and real lace, and a ruffled bonnet tied under the chin, was handed up to Ann, whose portly figure left scant room for the driver on the front seat. The scene was illuminated with beautiful sincerity and humour which characterised the gathering. A flick of the whip and the horse set off at a smart pace down the country lane on its way to the church. Two rows of poplars led up to the doors of the small Roman Catholic church, where stood the French pere awaiting the arrival of the christening party. Here again Ann caused delay as she fumbled with her foot trying to find the narrow step by which to descend.

Long years afterwards I had occasion to see the register at this little church; it was like breaking the gossamer web of some dream. I could in fancy picture it all as I gazed at the bold handwriting of my father's signature.

Ann declared that I behaved better than most babies, and she had handled many children of the white settlers. Back home again the celebrations were at their height—toasts and the wetting of the baby's head followed each other in rapid succession. There never was such a christening, thought Mummie Trow, as she set out fresh dishes of dainty cakes for the womenfolk, and ale and cold chicken and ham for the men.

"One last toast!" cried my father. "Gentlemen, fill your glasses." And, raising his own, he called, "Ship-mates for ever!" Much clinking of glasses, and then Jack Conway spoke. "Some skim along scarcely touching life, while other taste the dregs," said he, "but may Fortune ever strew roses on the pathway of my god-daughter!" Again the glasses clinked.

Suddenly a shout broke upon the night air. A shout that sent terror into the hearts of all that heard it. "Te Kooti! Te Kooti!" Rushing to the front door, they beheld in the spreading light of the purple dawn a native

mounted on a foam-flecked horse. He shouted that Te Kooti was on the warpath again, and with a wild wave of the arm, sped on to warn other settlements.

For a hundred miles along the East Coast the settlers were in a most excited state, for they knew not when or where the savages might fall upon them. Scouts were sent out, and the settlers commenced to build strong redoubts as refuges for the friendly natives and themselves, but, in spite of all their vigilance, this blood-thirsty Maori tyrant and his band of fanatic followers suddenly swooped down upon a settlement at Matawhero, near Gisborne, and massacred the inhabitants.

News of the massacre spread through the islands. Only a handful of settlers who had escaped into the bush had survived. They told how, in the early hours of the morning, when the settlement lay wrapped in sleep, and no sound save the cry of the swamp hen, or the barking of a dog, broke the silence, the Maoris suddenly rushed upon them. With much shouting and hallooing they ran in and out of the houses, killing men, women and children and terribly mutilated the bodies—some being cut in pieces; others lay with their heads battered in. Some had been burnt, the natives devouring the human flesh as well as any food they could find in the houses. They then set the village alight, the glare from the burning dwellings lighting up the countryside for miles.

The few who escaped made their way under cover of the scrub to a village about six miles distant. The sound of firing and shooting and the glare from the fires behind them made a night of horror not easily forgotten.

The pakehas were quite outnumbered by the Maoris, and could not really rely upon the friendly natives because they knew that they would desert them as soon as the fighting began, not daring to fight their own people. Once again Te Kooti escaped. Other tribes, seeing his success, joined him on the trail as he marched inland to his mountain stronghold at Puketapu.

A burial party was sent to the scene of the massacre. The victims were found to be nearly all mutilated, the

savages having carried away baskets full of human flesh to be cooked in their ovens, while the remains of others had been devoured by wild pigs. One woman was found alive and taken to the Napier Hospital, but she succumbed to the dreadful wounds she had received. Before she died she told the following story: Her husband was awakened by a loud knocking on the door. Peering through the window, he saw a number of Maoris and suspected mischief. Then the natives began to fire into the house, and her husband returned the fire with his gun. Next the house was set on fire, and smoke and flames soon drove his wife and himself and five children out. The Maoris said they would not kill them. Very little clothing they had, as they had to leave the house so quickly. They had only gone a little way when the Maoris attacked them with bayonets. . . . When she regained consciousness it was daylight. She saw her husband and her children lying dead around her, and she lay in the same place all day. What an ordeal! When the rescue party found her she was almost too weak to speak. No wonder the white women lived in fear and dread after hearing such terrible tales. They never knew when it might be their own turn.

Repeated failures to capture Te Kooti roused the whole island. Such horrible deeds were perpetrated that a gloom settled upon the people. There was no European military force available, as the soldiers were engaged on the West Coast putting down risings there, and, besides, they were very short of ammunition, for Te Kooti had ambushed them and taken all their baggage. Several times he had raided them, and so the fight went on.

Then, for a time, Te Kooti left Hawke's Bay and Poverty Bay districts, and the friendly natives returned to their settlements along the coast, and peace reigned once more. But Te Kooti was still at large, roaming the Urewera mountains, and might make his appearance any day at some secluded spot. But as time went on and there was no sign of the wily chief, people began to grow hopeful that he had got tired of fighting.

It is strange how the cultured Maori of to-day recoils

from the grossness which appeared quite natural to his ancestors in their savage state.

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My father was away from home a great deal at this time, and in the lull of peace after Te Kooti's raids he pushed on with the completion of the roads for which he had contracted. Mummie Trow came to sleep at our home because her man, David, was working with my father, and no woman dared stay in a house alone after nightfall.

I shall endeavour to outline sketchily the story of the tiny community of Taradale, told to me by Mummie Trow, as it existed in those early days.

We do not live as picturesquely now as our forefathers did; we have developed rapidly in the last half century, but we are proud of our own country, with its romantic history, its brave and resourceful men and women, of both races, whose patriotic fervour and tenacity are reflected in the moral quality of its human material, and its potential effectiveness as a factor in world progress.

Taradale had sprung up at the crossroads on the main highway from Napier. Other roads connected with Napier by a long wooden bridge spanning the Tutaekuri River at a place called Redcliffs, and just beyond the bridge lay Waiohiki Pah, where a tribe of friendly natives had settled in a well-fortified stronghold, and here also dwelt Kowhai, the old Maori witch doctor. The main building at the crossroads was the Taradale Hotel, a two-storeyed wooden structure, surrounded by a wide verandah, on which were several forms on which men were wont to sit smoking and discussing the events of the day. At the edge of the footpath stood a row of stout posts, each with a ring attached for tethering horses, while clear artesian water flowed through a drinking trough to empty itself into a concrete channel that ran the whole length of the village street. In this channel barefoot children loved to paddle and sail their toy ships. The

people who owned the hotel led society—as known in Taradale—and drove to church in a four-wheeled buggy, the wheels glitteringly painted red and yellow. Next in order came the local butcher and his wife, a union blessed by a large family of girls. They also drove in a four-wheeler. A family of the name of Jenkins held most of the other trades in the village, from bakers to undertakers. They were old pioneers; the grandmother Jenkins was only two years off a century, and several great-grandchildren bore her honoured name. The village dress-makers were three spinsters, the Misses Harris, whose artistic fingers stitched from morning to night, making wedding gowns, christening gowns and other clothes. They were a retiring, modest family, who kept aloof from the gay assembly of the fashionable set. Content to discuss gossip brought to them by their customers, they chatted and stitched, and drank numerous cups of tea. Their mode of conveyance was a large spring trap with back seat and tailboard, drawn by a heavy horse with jingling harness—on week-days the horse worked the plough.

A stage coach drawn by six spanking horses, owned by Rymers and Company, and driven by a man named Hartz, left the livery stables twice daily for Napier, calling at Greenmeadows Hotel, the half-way house. Later a smaller coach connected with Napier by way of a large circle, including Mission and Meanee, skirting the vast swamps south of Napier.

At the top of our street, at the opposite side of the road, separated by the main highway to Redcliffs, stood the imposing home of the Barton family, surrounded by orchards and flower-gardens and sheltered by thick clumps of pines. Thrushes and blackbirds hopped on the lawn, while forest-belted hills at the rear of the estate provided a sanctuary where tuis and bellbirds sang rich morning choruses. The Bartons had amassed wealth from the making of bricks, long before I was born. Now the moss-covered brick kilns were covered by a dense tangle of weeds, and the old mill wheel no longer churned the lazy

stream. A lotus-land atmosphere hung over everything, and this spot was always excitingly interesting to me in my childhood days. So much for the social side of the community, whose status was measured generally by the vehicles that conveyed them to church.

A religious order of Marist Fathers conducted mission services, and nuns of St. Joseph's order took up their abode in a long rambling building that at one time was intended for a Maori mission school, but was later converted into a convent.

In the early days of Hawke's Bay an old French nun, Mother Mary Joseph Aubert, spent her life tramping alone and unarmed through the country, sleeping in the pahi, and conforming with ancient Maori customs. She gathered herbs, from which she made medicine for the natives. She was said to be of royal lineage in France, but chose to serve Him who came with a message of love to the world. Her name is honoured in New Zealand to-day, by all classes, as a woman who laboured for the good of mankind regardless of creed or colour. In the long years of her useful life she founded homes of compassion for incurables, and trained bands of young nuns to carry on the work. She died at Wellington at the age of ninety-six.

CHAPTER V.

Childhood Days

AT WHAT age may a child remember? Mummie Trow avows that I was but three when the event about which I write happened, but I can well remember it, and to this day have a dread of being crushed or of going down a mine.

Mummie Trow tells me that my mother had been to Mass and was removing her bonnet and dolman, when

piercing yells from under the house froze the blood in her veins.

"Holy Mother of God! It's Katherine!" she cried.

Around the house she flew, kneeling to gaze underneath at different angles. The house was built low at the back, but at last she caught a glimpse of a red frock, and came to the conclusion that I had crawled in and got wedged beneath a beam. The shrieks grew in volume, and by this time a crowd of villagers had collected, amongst whom was Mummie Trow's man David, armed with a crowbar and a saw. Lying on the ground, he tried to ascertain my whereabouts, while my mother, with her ear to the kitchen floor, called frantically that help was at hand. Suddenly the cries ceased as David Trow looked under, and he declared that I poked out my tongue at him in defiance; but no sooner had he moved away than the din began again. After removing several floorboards in the kitchen and digging the earth from beneath me, I was rescued—but David Trow never forgot the grimaces.

The Tarawera eruption, in which the famous pink and white terraces were destroyed, is also photographed on my memory. The glare from the burning mountain, lighting up the countryside like day, and my mother hurrying with her children to escape from the house, slid back down the passage, which had a slant on it like a pitching vessel at sea.

Other things, too, I remember. Ann Cornish paid long visits to our home; my mother was not very strong, so Ann practically took charge of everything, much to my disgust. As a bribe for not sending me to bed early she would get me to scratch her back, for her bulk prevented her doing this office for herself.

My sister Helen now attended the convent school, and I was my mother's constant companion. The Maoris still squatted about the yard and traded kumeras and watermelons. The yard was inviting on a hot summer's day, as a huge willow tree drooped its boughs at the back door, half the branches resting on the shingled roof, the

rest covering the outhouses and a small dairy. Red bricks covered the floor of the yard, and from an artesian well clear sparkling water flowed beneath the dairy, keeping it cool in the very hottest weather. My mother kept a cow and was justly proud of her butter-making. Her dairy was spotless; the shelves held wide milk pans, from which thick cream was skimmed, and on churning day the Maoris brought vessels to receive the buttermilk.

One day my mother gave an old Maori man a bull calf for which she had no use; another member of the tribe placed it on his back with the front legs around his neck and the back legs hanging down. Proudly he marched off to the pah, a crowd following at his heels.

The Maoris taught me to do a "haka" (ceremonial dance) and to speak their language, in which latter I became quite proficient, much to the delight of Mummie Trow, at whose place I spent a great deal of time, she always carrying me home on her back.

News that old Kowhai had departed to a distant pah eased my mother's anxiety; time went on, and the little village of Taradale settled down to its quiet routine and amazing contrasts in life—its joys and moods, its ecstasies and despairs.

From my earliest recollections I was a dreamer of dreams, and a builder of castles in the air. I walked in a world of dreams, seeing the trivial things of life through the medium of a vivid imagination; wistful and affectionate. This in later life provided me with an escape from lonely surroundings. But to-day my dreams have found wings, and I am left with the empty shell of the chrysalis. They have faded like morning dew which vanishes beneath the sun's hot breath, and leaves no trace behind. But at the age of five I would delight to weave the most extraordinary and highly-coloured tales, about a sheep that I would ride, completely hidden in his long wool, and Shetland ponies drawing my chariot. At other times the moon was harnessed to my carriage, and I was transported to the heavens, where I played with the stars.

I had a childish inborn taste for the marvellous, and would attract the attention of my elders, who encouraged my poetical tendencies. Years afterwards, when reading Greek mythology, I could almost fancy the gods were some of my childish dreams, and was never tired of reading the classical myths of Greece and Rome.

Maori legends and traditions were also of the deepest interest, and soon I became a great favourite with the natives. I loved to hear about the Maori Spirit land, Te Reinga, little dreaming that half a century later it would play a big part in my life. Beautifully the Maori folk-beliefs link up with those of Gaelic lands—of the Scottish Highlands and the West of Ireland, with their poetical traditions.

Cape Maria Van Dieman, the very northern end of New Zealand, is a place rich in romance, and the interest of remoteness. There are many captivating bays, but the main feature is the thundering crash of the unbroken ocean as it beats round this narrow outpost. On the west a thousand miles of unbroken sea separate it from Australia, and on the east it is six thousand miles to the South American coast.

This weird and wonderful extreme North is where, according to Maori legend, the souls of the departed leave the world and vanish into the ocean. Cape Reinga is the place of departure, and here they weep in high, thin, wailing voices, like the whistling wind, as they pluck green leaves of shrubs to weave into death chaplets for their heads. The streams that here and there in this long peninsula ripple from the hills, cease their low music as the ghosts pass by. Te Reinga is sacred to the countless army of the dead. Here grows a great pohutukawa tree, the blossoms of which were called in legend "Te-Pua-O-te Reinga" (the flowers of the spirits' flight). The branches bent over the dark, restless ocean, and by these boughs the spirits descended. One after another they dropped into the tide, where large masses of seaweed swirled. The wailing of the innumerable dead greeted their coming,

to the Tatau-o-te-Po (the gateway of the hereafter); so with seafowl screaming their requiem, and the ocean murmuring in a thousand voices, the Wairua Maori departed from the land of Aotearoa.

In keeping with the ghostly traditions of the place, another visible migration takes place at this end of our little world of New Zealand. Flocks of godwits assemble here every autumn for their long flight to Siberia, whence they return again in the spring. It is a marvellous working of instinct that guides them across many thousands of miles of ocean.

For hours I would sit and listen to such stories. I remember one old Maori woman in particular. She had a pleasant face, although tattooed; and how I would thrill as she paused on a reminiscent note to give dramatic effect to her narrative.

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"Where's Katherine?" enquired my mother, as she entered the kitchen, where Ann was engaged setting out the tea things.

"She's the weirdest child!" complained Ann, as she lifted a large scone-loaf out of the camp oven. Then, going to the back door, she called, "Katherine! Come in to your tea!" and as I appeared, she continued, "Well, I won't invite misfortune by being pessimistic, but one of these days the Maori witch will make off with you!"

"I'm not afraid of old Rakiura," I replied, as I climbed up beside my mother, who was already seated at the table. "Rakiura says she loves Mummie and me. She calls Mummie 'The Golden Wahine,' and when I say Tena Koe (good day) she rubs noses." The rubbing of noses being the Maori equivalent of our civilised kissing.

"What's that?" shouted Ann. "You let those dirty black devils rub their noses on you!" and, turning to my mother, said: "See here, Mary, you must put a stop to all this! Rub noses! What next will you be telling me? Go, wash your face this minute, Katherine!"

"That's not all," I hastened to inform them. "Rakiura says old witch Kowhai holds a belief in Makutu (the power of working evil on a person from a distance), and she saw her hiding at the top of the orchard only yesterday."

"I thought as much." Ann darted from the room to fetch Rakiura.

"Don't go outside, Katherine," pleaded my mother, and she made a gesture of despair. "I have a curious sensation, as if something is being brought about by witchcraft."

Ann returned with the old native woman.

"Give Rakiura some tea, Ann." Mother wanted to feed everybody, much to Ann's disgust. The old woman gave mother a beaming smile, and worship looked out of her jet black eyes as she squatted on the mat inside the kitchen door.

"The thing's preposterous," quoth Ann in a loud, reassuring voice, "you're just a sentimental ninny, Mary!"

Mother never resented the implication. "There's plenty of food, Ann, and Rakiura is a good woman," she remarked in justification.

Eagerly she questioned Rakiura, who told how rumours had reached the pah that Te Kooti was making preparations for a long march, and a long talk ensued between Rakiura and the white women, for Mummie Trow and another neighbour had by this time arrived. Rakiura was sure that Kowhai was a spy for Te Kooti, and the friendly natives at Waiohiki Pah were in much fear of her. Mother was plunged into a state of torturing uncertainty, and as my father had not been home for two months, and was expected daily, her fear increased with the thought that he might be ambushed by natives on his journey through wild country. Long hours she lay awake each night listening for the sound of hoof-beats on the bridge at Redcliffs; she could tell those of father's horse miles away.

I slept in my mother's bed and shared her vigils. She was getting more frail every day, and, child though I was in years, my heart and instincts were those of a woman grown. I tried to ward off all care, and was ever on the alert to anticipate her slightest wish. I mothered her, in fact.

My sister Helen was robust, and loved the companionship of girls of her own age; she was blind and deaf to the things which made poetry and romance out of life for me. Ann declared that we were as unlike as chalk and cheese. Helen was afraid of her own shadow, so to speak, whilst to me haunted places became shrines of fantasy.

"You're my great treasure, Katherine," my mother would remark smilingly, as I climbed in at the foot of her bed, wrapped a shawl round her chilly feet and cuddled them as if they were a baby; at the same time coaxing her to tell me about the Irish fairies.

"Do you think we could find a Will-o'the-Wisp out here Mummie?" My mother had been chasing that luminary all her life, but it still had its thrill in her Irish heart, in spite of her dread of the Maoris and pioneering hardships.

"It's more than likely," she mused, and I noted the sudden influx of hope and happiness as she warmed to her theme. The midnight hours passed quickly, and she forgot to harken for the hoof-beats on the bridge, as she lived her own childhood over again. Telling of quaint fairy folk in Ireland who dwelt in old forts and in peat bogs. How little men wearing red coats and cocked hats would climb over the mounds of earthwork and throw balls of fire after the peasants. "No one cares to be out after dark in Ireland," said mother.

"Did you ever see them, Mummie?" I asked breathlessly, as I hung on every word.

"Yes, one night when I was sent upon some errand. The moon was not yet risen, and not a breath of air stirred the sultry atmosphere. "Soft music came stealing across the bog, and I stood still to listen. I was very tired

after my long day's work in the house, and out in the fields helping with the crops. I had to rise before dawn to churn butter and scald milk pans, and bake bread before the family were astir. But the music coming across the bog breathed life into my sagging soul; it breathed an appeal to my emotions. . . . " Even the recollection of it seemed to give a fillip to her senses, and she continued: "I knew my aunt would be furious if I loitered, but I still stood listening to the sweet strains as their cadence filled the night. Presently the edge of the moon appeared above a belt of dark fir trees, and as its full globe came into view it appeared to rest on the tree tops, and its silver light turned the bog into a shimmering fairyland. My aunt was forgotten! I would extract every bit of sweetness from the joy of the moment, and I seated myself on the top of a mound of peat that had been cut and stacked to dry. No sooner was I seated than out from behind the mound trooped the strangest band of little folk I'd ever seen. They moved in a Dantean circle, gazing at me with large, round eyes; but no sound came from their marching feet, which were shod with some kind of boot with long toes that curled back over the foot. I lost count of time as I watched, but at length I noticed that the moon was high overhead, her lamp casting a mystic radiance over the strange scene. The music grew in volume; it sounded familiar, like "Erin-go-brah!" (a war cry of the ancient Irish). I drew back with a startled gesture and slid to the ground. My feet were heavy as if weighed with lead, but I struggled to lift them in the endeavour to run. Then I made the sign of the Cross and my feet became free; but as soon as I moved off a shower of tiny fire balls were hurled after me by the little men."

"Did they have on red coats, Mummie?"

"Yes, child, they were the little red men! Hush now, Katherine, you must get to sleep. How you do lead me on; and you must know them all off by heart yourself."

"Not as well as I know the Maori fairy folk; but Rakiura says there are no black bats in New Zealand forests."

"Do you know what o'clock it is?" called Ann from the back room. "Mary, you're worse than the child; filling her head with such rubbish as black bats. Who ever heard the likes? You won't be able to rise in the morning."

"Hush," said mother, "go to sleep now. Have you forgotten that we go to Napier in the morning by the first stage coach?"

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It was a great joy to spend a day shopping in town, and to have a paddle in the breakers of Marine Parade, as they reared their foaming crests, and chashed wildly up the long shingle beach. Helen never could see any fun in it, and spent her time with a girl friend who lived in Hastings Street. They did the shops. Perhaps they considered me too young; but Helen never wanted to be "saddled with be," as she termed it. I was quite content to stay on the beach. How I loved the sound of the sea. I would sit and gaze at the vast expanse of restless water, and on rough days my heart was up in my throat as the waves rose swirling and seething to hurl their green mountains over the stone parapet and actually penetrate to the houses on the other side of the promenade.

It would be my turn to keep Rakiura hanging on my words when I returned home. She had never seen the ocean, and as soon as my best clothes were removed I lost no time in seeking her out. Her big eyes would grow wider as, imitating her own dramatic gestures, I told my tale. Perhaps it had been a fine day, so I described the coast across the dreamy bay—Cape Kidnappers, where the gannets nested; you could see the sky dark with them as they circled the white face of the cliff. The rocks which formed the breakwater were fringed with foam; boats rocked on the sea below where I sat; and billowing sails passed far out at sea, all crimson in the sunset glow. . . . Rakiura, who was steeped in legend and poetry, drank in every word. "One day you must come and see it all," I told her.

"Oh!" and she gave me a dazzling smile, showing a perfect set of pearly teeth. "Do you mean it? What the Golden Wahine say, eh?"

Mummie, of course, had other views on the matter; but I loved Rakiura, and, as you will see later, it was not misplaced affection.

CHAPTER VI.

Characteristics

IN SPITE of the rumours about Kowhai and Te Kooti, the days passed into months, and nothing untoward happened. Taradale dropped back into its old routine, inert and uninteresting.

My father came home more frequently now, and on several Sundays we had driven to Hastings in a hired four-wheel buggy, to spend the day with my god-parents, the Conways, who had moved to that town. We would drive by way of Redcliffs Bridge, past the Waiohiki Pah, and return through Clive and Meanee.

Those were halcyon days long to be remembered, and mother got back the girlish bloom to her cheeks.

My father would have me sing "Little Brown Jug," and would join in the chorus: "Ha, ha, ha, you and me, little brown jug, 'tis I love thee."

Other Sundays the Conways would return the visit, arriving in a spring trap. They had several small children and one set of twins. I hated all these youngsters; they would pull the flowers out of my garden and cry for my toys. One Sunday my mother had even allowed them to take my best doll because the girl cried so bitterly. These visits were almost like a christening—such feasting and killing of the fattest roosters. Most of the pioneers kept a pig or two, and fat hams and sides of bacon hung from the rafters.

The visitors were shown to the best bedroom and removed their bonnets and dolmans. Then they were shown over the house; no matter that they had seen it dozens of times before, there was always some new thing added, and the visitors must see it, and the last lot of purchases from town—new dress stuffs, and hats, and sheeting, etc. Once, I remember mother bought a picture, on time payment (oh, yes, there were time payments even in those early days), from a traveller going from house to house. It cost £2/10/-, and was really worth at the most 10/-. The credulous housewife of to-day is not much better than her sisters of bygone days when they take a sudden liking for something, and its value is only a secondary consideration. However, this picture was considered a masterpiece. It was a statue of the Virgin and Child done in a blue setting, under glass, with a gold frame, and by winding with a small key that fitted into the base of the frame, a weak tune trickled forth. Poor Mummie! She was so proud as she showed it to the visitors. I dare say it was unique, and mother was very pious, but I am afraid my views, even at that early age, were quite different.

My worship was a queer mixture of Christian faith and pagan imagination, and I was quite unable to convey the wonderful impressions which came to me. I studied the phenomena of the sunshine, the clouds, rain, wind, moon, etc. There was a wild something within my breast that I could not give expression to, except for my love of Nature and the elements. How I would fly before a gale, running barefoot and hatless, with the wind blowing my hair. Only mother understood my moods; Ann gave me up in despair.

"Mary, the child is a wildcat, and you encourage her," she would say.

"Oh, the poor darling! Ann, you are too hard on her. Let her be happy while she may. There's plenty of time for her to take the hard knocks of life, and I mind my own sad childhood."

"Anyway, she'll have all that nonsense knocked out of her when she starts school after the summer holidays," said Ann with evident relish at the thought of the good nuns taking me in hand. "Why, she'll be seven come June."

"Yes, Ann, but she is very forward for her age. Father is very proud of her reading and writing. He says she's an apt pupil. You know he spends hours teaching her when he's home. Why, she mimics everything like a parrot," and mother beamed with pride. "Of course, I must let the child go to school, but it will be a wrench."

"Oh, fiddlesticks!" said Ann in brusque tones. "Sure you have got over your fear of old Kowhai by this time? She's not been seen about Taradale for ages—a lot of twaddle, anyway. And as for Katherine, why she'd be a match for the devil himself, I'm thinking," and Ann laughed heartily. "She's utterly spoilt, utterly!" and she held up two large well-shaped hands to give emphasis to her words. "Once let that damsel get an idea into her head and nothing would knock it out. Where, I wonder, did she get her determination from? Not from James or yourself. Her knowledge of life's adventures would stagger Shakespeare himself; and the long words she uses," and Ann laughed so heartily that mother joined her. "Oh," gasped Ann, "it's good to have a good laugh," and she wiped the moisture from her good-natured face and continued: "Do you know she has a book of her father's, 'a book of myths,' I think she calls it. Well, she walked into the kitchen yesterday with her hands behind her back, and in her most pleasing manner enquired, 'Oh, I see, you're cooking a currant loaf, Ann?'"

"I suppose you smelt it outside?" said I.

"'Do you like cooking, Ann,' she made reply, ignoring my question."

"Now what is all this leading up to? Come on! Let's have it. You want some currant loaf?"

"'Not exactly,' she began, edging up to the table and eyeing the hot loaf expectantly, 'but I have a book of

father's and it's most disconcerting the way some of the characters in the book seem to live without eating food.'

"What was that big word you said? Dis— what?"

"Disconcerting,' she replied.

"How do you spell it?"

"Its in the book, Ann. Shall I go and get it?"

"Not just now, but I should like to see the book when I'm not busy.

"You don't care for book-learning,' she insisted. 'Father says it's a real and tangible asset, and when I grow up I'm going to write stories and make books of my own.'

"I tell you, Mary, she talks like an oracle. . . Well, here's your piece of currant loaf, anyway. I knew you would smell it, and I expected you," says I.

"Thanks, Ann, you know you can be pleasant when you want to. Mummie said your bark was worse than your bite.'"

"Tell me some more about the people in your father's book, I said, for truth to tell, Mary, she astounded me."

"Oh, I don't know all of it,' she beamed back at me delighted to see me interested, 'but you might be able to tell me about the oysters.'

"Yes, go on," I said.

"You know pearls are found in oysters, don't you?"

"Yes, I've heard that," I answered.

"Then can you tell me why a pearl should be the result of a disease of the oyster?"

"No, Katherine, I'm afraid I am at a loss to tell you that, and inwardly I crossed myself and thought it was high time the nuns had a chance to teach, or rather unteach, your baby, Mary."

"You had better make the most of your time this summer weather, because you are going to the convent school after Christmas," said I.

"And what will Mummie do while I'm away. I don't care very much for the nuns, Ann. I like the kind

old priest, Father Jardin, that calls to see Mummie, and Mother Joseph Aubert, who works among the Maoris, but I don't like the nuns.'

"Your mother is very fond of them, Katherine, and it grieves her that you are such a pagan."

" 'Why am I a pagan, Ann?'

"Well, perhaps you're not exactly a pagan, but you say the queerest things, and your mother is a devout Catholic, you know.

" 'And what creed do you follow, Ann?'

"Really, the child is as sharp as a needle, I thought, as she nearly cornered me, and I did not wish to be called a pagan. I'm the same church as your mother, but, you see, I have the work to do, and therefore say my prayers at home. Now, be off with you, I'm too busy to chatter any more. Your father will be home on Saturday and I have his white shirts to starch and iron."

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How different were a wife's duties in those far-off days to her more fortunate sister of to-day. Then menfolk wore expansive shirtfronts, and these took careful ironing. Mother had a box iron that Ann filled with hot coals and added charcoal, then blew into the flame with small wooden bellows. A chimney on the box iron belched forth smoke and flame, and I loved to lean my arms on the table, at a safe distance, of course, and watch the ironing of father's shirts.

Other wifely duties were to see that the husband's clothes were spread out on the bed ready for him when he dressed for state occasions or went to church. His boots were polished also, then the wife superintended his dressing like a valet, doing his studs and fixing his tie. It was always a labour of love to my mother; she was so proud of father. As I have said, he was tall, dark and handsome, wore side whiskers and a small beard on his chin, as was the custom.

Helen was the image of my mother, and I was like mother, except for the red hair. Mother's hair fell around

her shoulders like Danae's shower of gold. It was my delight to brush this golden fleece that caught a million lights and held them on golden threads.

CHAPTER VII.

Rakiura's Story

TARADALE was growing; many new settlers had arrived from overseas, and the Maoris were becoming more civilized. Rumours from the West Coast, however, told how Te Kooti had again swooped down on a native village, had looted, murdered and burned pahs of friendly natives, and escaped back to the ranges. Te Kooti had a gift of strategy and generalship that was the wonder and despair of his enemies.

I well remember one day; it was near Christmas, and the whole house was undergoing a process of spring cleaning in readiness for the Christmas festival. I had been engaged in my favourite occupation of brushing my mother's hair. "Your shower of gold is dry, Mummie," I said. "Shall I pile it on top of your head?"

"No, Katherine, my head is a bit heavy to-day. I suppose it is the heat."

"Here comes Helen with the tea; that will make your head better."

"Put some cream in mine," called Ann, who was busy at the washtubs. "I'm famished for the want of my tea. It's terribly hot." And she dried her soapy arms on her apron and seated herself on a bench by the dairy. "The new neighbours have a large family of grown-ups, so Helen was telling me. The youngest is a girl her own age, and they are already friends. Her name is Maggie Quirk, and she says her mother was married before, and they left a blind sister at home in a convent in Ireland." Ann rattled all this off like artillery firing.

Then silence fell as she poured the hot tea into her saucer, and with gentle blows with her mouth pursed up,

drank the contents, while the moisture gathered on her brow.

"Oh!" said mother, "so they come from Ireland! God help the poor mother, leaving the blind daughter after her. Ann, we must ask them to sup with us as soon as the house is cleaned. They must feel lonesome." They gossiped for a few minutes, and then Rakiura appeared round the corner of the house.

"Haeremai," greeted my mother, for she was always pleased to see the Maori woman.

"Tena koe, everybody," smiled Rakiura, as she placed her flat kit along with a fine water melon on the stoup by the door, at the same time shaking her head knowingly in my direction.

"It's for you, Katherine," said mother. Then, to Rakiura, "What news to-day? We've missed you, where have you been?" and, calling my sister, she ordered some fresh tea and cakes for the native woman.

"Golden Wahine always good to Rakiura," she said as she took the tea from Helen. 'Kai pai' (good food), and again she smiled and nodded to mother.

She was seated on the ground at the base of the large willow tree that lent its grateful shade over the yard. As she sat she made a striking picture in her black skirt and red blouse; two thick, blue-black plaits of hair fell to her waist, and on her head she wore a brightly-coloured handkerchief, while her feet were encased in sandals.

"You look worried, Rakiura," I ventured. "Is anything troubling you to-day?"

She held up her hands piously, as her large black eyes fastened on mother.

"Ngha! ngha!" she hissed between her teeth. "The earth is old, and the cursing power of the Tohunga (medicine man) is old also. I have but now returned from a long journey, far into the mountains I journey; Rakiura knows the trail of the serpent Kowhai." She spat on the ground, and her eyes flashed hatred. "I trail her for the safety of my tribe, and for you also, Golden Wahine, and the white baby."

Mother shuddered at this and placed her arms about me. I could feel her trembling.

"Have no fear," continued Rakiura, "I shall keep watch. I know the way of the crafty spider Kowhai. For two days I follow her. Her step is slow and it is not difficult. She is so vile that when she passed beneath the trees the birds flew rapidly away, uttering cries of terror."

Ann left the washtubs and came closer, listening intently. "Yes, go on, Rakiura," she urged.

"Darkness falls quickly in the forest," she said. "and I know Kowhai will camp soon, so I am patient. She stops to gather dry wood, and moves off the trail. Soon the smell of burning tea-tree is in the air, and I steal near to where she sits, wrapped in her blanket, smoking her pipe and staring into the fire. Her lips mutter curses, the terrible Maori curses, concerning which the bravest do not speak—only in whispers." Here Rakiura passed her hand across her forehead, and her face wore a puzzled expression, as she tried to recall the details of her strange experience.

"I covered her matakite (second sight) with my own power as a Tapairu (High Priestess) for I am the first-born female of an exalted lineage. Only a pukako (swamp hen) would follow the evil Kowhai, and I say 'Nga! I have her now,' as I lay on a bed of fern and watch the vile face. I keep one eye open and with the other I sleep, but the gods are kind, and the cracking of twigs wakes me. Both eyes are open now to see the crafty spider-witch stealing away in the shadows, for it is not yet light.

"Much of the trail is covered before the sun is too fierce, I ate berries as I went along, and a little food from my kit; I must save some food for the return journey. How far Kowhai would lead I do not know. Once she sat down beside a clear pool. Long she sat. I think she must sleep* she is so still, and I wanted to drink from the pool, but I am patient, while the sun falls down behind the tall trees but still she does not move.

"Keeping close in the shadows, I venture to approach, but twigs crack in the undergrowth, and the sound stirs the witch. I do not breathe as she peers through the thick bushes. Has she seen me? Her red-rimmed eyes pierce my hiding place. No! she turns back to the pool, stirs the waters with the short spear she carries, then waves it over her head, and turns again to the trail.

"I hurry to the pool. Has she stirred the mud so I won't drink? Yes, but I go to the far side and drink, and then on after the slow-moving, bent figure of Kowhai."

Ann had completely forgotten her washing, and mother was listening with bated breath as Rakiura proceeded with her story, telling it with poetic imagery, as only an old-time Maori could.

"I keep on her trail, a feeling of tapu within my breast, so", and Rakiura held her hands over her heart. "The spider began to climb a steep cliff, holding on by the crags. It was the way to the Tapu hut, a place sacred to the Tohunga." The speaker's voice betrayed the strong emotion which she felt. "Celestial fires flash through the gloom, and echoes that sound like following footsteps, make the blood go cold. I wait and listen, and soon hear voices coming from the other side of the trail. The hoot of an owl is answered from the crags above, and the wizened face of Kowhai peers over the rocks. The voices grow louder as dark shapes emerge from the bushes and begin the ascent of the cliffs. Now it is still again, only the wind whispering and footsteps echoing.

"I do not wait but make haste to climb after the ghostly train. I must hear their plans if I am to help my tribe. So I crouch behind a crag near the top. I can see the whare-puni (sleeping-house) and outside the entrance sits Kowhai, while around her squat the braves. I count a dozen. A long korero (talk) is held. The newcomers tell of cannibalistic feasts after victory, and of loot carried away to the mountains, and they gloat over their revenge on the pakehas and the friendly Maoris.

I caught the deep meaning of the message spoken by Kowhai, and the talk was ended. The Pah at Waohiki is no longer safe. "We are far from your settlement at Taradale, and Te Kooti has cursed the tribes that are friendly with the pakehas."

On hearing this my mother lost no time in sending a brief message to Napier, where troops made ready to march on Te Kooti; but he, hearing that his plans were known, retreated to the ranges and Kowhai with him, while scouts kept a sharp look-out for spies. And now that they had gone the quiet fell gratefully on my mother's nerves, as she rested beneath an old macrocarpa tree at the end of my flower garden, wherein grew great velvet pansies with petals of brown and gold, and sweet-scented stocks perfumed the air.

"We are going to visit at Greenmeadows tomorrow Katherine," said my mother as she watched me at work in my garden. "The Rooney's have a new baby girl, Ann tells me, and we must go and take the little stranger some clothes."

"Oh! I'll love to go with you," said I. "We'll walk by the way of the creek, through the fields of daisies. Shall we have time to make daisy-chains?"

"Surely we shall, only it means an early start."

Alongside my flower beds I had set a path of bricks, and had edged them with violets. Mother loved violets better than any other flower; they matched her violet blue eyes. As I returned with my watering can to drench the soil around them, I paused to have a good look at my mother as she sat there in the somnolent warmth of the summer afternoon. She seemed, to me, to be as though painted with celestial fires. Something seemed to touch the secret springs of my being, and revealed an inner self. Were coming events casting their shadows? My mother appeared ethereal, and, as I gazed, her hair formed a halo over her head. The garden vanished! This was a world of space, lit by a mystic light, we were wandering in sun-checked glades, the trees a blaze of colour—then

by a smoothly flowing river moving in unison with the languorous afternoon. The water is warm, and we go to bathe. Mother finds a shallow place where the stream gurgles over the stones, and tadpoles swim lazily around.

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"Now, what's the matter?" demanded Ann as she appeared with a basin of broth for mother—mother was not strong, and Ann did her best to keep up her material strength. "Whatever was Katherine gazing at?"

Her voice startled me and the can dropped from my hand, crushing the flowers.

"She's up in the clouds half the time," laughed Ann. "Never mind, they will grow again, and, inside, on the kitchen table, you'll find something to your likng."

I seemed to waken from a trance as I gazed down at the crushed flowers, and picked up the watering can—but the vision of my mother and her halo of gold remained locked within my heart. Ann was saved the tortures suffered by the imaginative. She was deeply interested in the family next door. "I would keep Helen away if I were you, Mary," she said. "That's a house divided against itself."

"My motto is 'judge not and ye shall not be judged,'" quoth mother.

"Oh! you're far too gentle, Mary; it's well you have Ann Cornish to fight your battles for you."

"Yes, Ann dear. I appear to get no stronger, and the doctor told James I was affected by some obscure nervous ailment."

"Well, take things easy on your way to Greenmeadows to-morrow and come back on the coach. The outing will do you a world of good."

"Yóu can surely make broth," replied mother, smiling, as she handed back the empty bowl. "Oh! how do you do, Father Jardin?" called mother, as the kindly old French priest alighted from his buggy and turned in at the front gate.

"La! La! It is much too warm. Like the south of France!" he replied to my mother's greeting. "And how

are you to-day, my child?" He called everybody "my child," much to my delight.

"I'll box your ears if I catch you laughing at the priest," warned Ann. "You're an impertinent little minx, far too clever."

"I'm not laughing disrespectfully, Ann," I declared with an air of ill-usage. "I'm very fond of Father Jardin, only the way he takes snuff is so amusing." And I opened an imaginary snuff-box, took a large pinch of snuff with finger and thumb, and, holding one nostril with the forefinger of my left hand, sniffed copiously. "There! he's doing it now, look, Ann!" I cried, jumping with glee. Ann was forced to smile as the Reverend Father produced a large red-checkered handkerchief and blew his nose violently.

"Come here, Katherine, and shake hands with Father Jardin," called mother.

"Oh, the little baby Katherine; how she grows," and the kindly old priest placed his hands on my head and asked God's blessing. "Growing in wisdom and the fear of God, I trust." And he drew me beside him. But I could smell the horrid snuff, and I wanted to sneeze too, but, catching Ann's eye, and not daring to displease mother, tried my hardest to look pleasant.

"Now, Katherine, I wonder if you can tell me who it was said: 'Suffer the little children to come unto me and forbid them not?'"

Ann's eyes said plainly: "Now then, my fine lady, see how clever you are!" And my mother looked at me with pride.

"It was the Christ," I answered promptly. "He is no respecter of persons, men, women or children. He gives lovingly to everybody—to all living things," and I paused for breath. "He gives freely when we have faith and an open mind to receive—like my mummy."

"Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings comes wisdom," said Father Jardin. "Where did you learn all that, Katherine?"

I looked at mother, and she answered for me.

"Katherine is far ahead of children of her own age. She knows Irish folk-lore and Maori legends, and, of course, I teach her my own blessed creed. But living in this strange country, how could she be otherwise?"

"'Tis certainly a strange childhood of joy and wonder woven into the fabrics of adult cares and dread fears," said the good Father.

And now Ann brought out her tea tray and hot scones. Helen came shyly up to greet the Father, and Mummie Trow and Rakiura came through the back gate together. The conversation became general, everybody chatting and laughing, and mother looking extremely happy. My father would be coming home for Christmas, she told the priest; he had finished a long contract and was looking forward to a happy time with his family. David Trow would be home, too, and Ann and Mummie Trow discussed the housekeeping arrangements—cakes, plum puddings, etc., all weeks ahead. Thus the afternoon passed quickly. The sun was setting in a framework of flaming crimson clouds as the priest drove away along the green lanes back to the Mission.

"How lovely are the clouds in the sunset," remarked mother.

"Are you sure you are not tired, mother dear?" I enquired. "Shall I bring your shawl? It gets chilly when the sun is gone."

"How thoughtful you are, child. God bless you and keep you for your mother. Yes, bring the shawl. This is the best part of the day. I always feel grateful for the cool of the evening."

I hurried away and returned with the shawl which I placed around mother's shoulders. I was afraid I might miss any gossip Rakiura should bring.

"All is peaceful," she was saying, as she settled down for a korero (talk). "The blood-red sunset is a sign of peace over the land. It is well," she mused, and then launched off into her rich store of Maori fairy legend and wonder tales, of folk-talk about the supernatural and spirits of the woods, and mysterious wild men of the

mountains. Not even mother's Irish fairies could keep pace with Rakiura's folk memories and primitive beliefs of this kind. Rakiura believed in unseen presences and fairy folk that haunted the mountains and dense woods. She called them "Iwi-atua"; they were little people, much lighter-skinned than the Maori, and they had golden hair. That was why she loved mother so much.

My most exquisite moments were spent in listening to mother and Rakiura comparing the legends of their respective countries. All Irish fairies had their counterpart in the New Zealand fairies. For instance, the rumbling death-coach of Ireland had its parallel in the ghost-cance, the appearance of which was a sign of death to the Maori. They had much in common, these two poetic women—Pakeha and Maori.

The long shadows were stealing across the paddock to where the earthworks of an old-time Maori fortification showed dark in the gathering twilight. I could almost fancy I saw strange shapes moving along the top of the wall, when Ann's loud voice calling us in to supper broke the spell.

Rakiura had brought a kit of tuna (eels), and Ann declared that it was impossible to kill them, for, after skinning them and cutting them into pieces, they jumped out of the frying pan—not for worlds would she eat such devil-fish.

CHAPTER VIII.

A Tangi

THE wooded hills beyond the village were bathed in the first crimson flush of sunlight. "Mother," I whispered, "are you awake? Remember, we are to be up early, for we go to visit at Greenmeadows."

"Yes, dear, but it is far too early to rise. You'll have Ann on to you if you wake her."

"Why is Ann so stupid, Mummy? Why does she say 'rubbish' and 'fiddlesticks' when I tell her about beautiful things? Gazing at the moon won't cook food to put in your mouth when you're hungry, she says and just laughs at me."

"Oh, people have different natures, Katherine, it would never do for everybody to be alike." I dozed again. . . .

"Are you awake, Mary?" called Ann. "It's a fine day for your outing, and if you make an early start you won't feel the heat."

"We're up, Ann," I thrilled. "Is Helen awake?"

"No, the sleepy-head; she stays up too late nights. I'm thinking Helen will let other people do the worrying for her through life."

We did not take long over breakfast, and with sundry instructions from Ann about mother's resting, we set off across the fields.

The early morning was entrancing. It was cool and still; the birds were filling the place with their chorus, while a bellbird trilled a reply in liquid melody as he busied himself among the flowering shrubs; the water in the creek mirrored the overhanging trees; the sun was lighting up the Christmas blossoming, and, best of all, the fields were white with daisies. While mother rested on the velvet turf, I made daisy-chains to hang around her neck. At the far end of the field a scrub fire was burning, the tang of the tea-tree smoke adding to the sweet scents. Lying on the ground beside my mother, I stretched my arms luxuriously above my head.

"You look beautiful," I said, "are you happy, Mummy?"

"Yes, Katherine. It reminds me of the day when your father and myself travelled through Ireland to the coast to take ship to New Zealand. We rested beside a stream like this." There was a vague, dreamy look in her eyes; how blue they were to-day, and the sun glinted golden shafts through her hair.

Leaving the daisy fields, we passed on through

paddocks of bleached stubble and freshly-turned brown earth, under winding hawthorn hedges, and past clumps of blackberry bushes.

Arriving at Rooney's house, we were met by the children, who had been watching for us since early morning, and it was now noon. To my eyes this house of seven rooms was an immense and beautiful place; and its lovely orchard, where apples, russet, red and yellow, hung on drooping boughs—a veritable Garden of Eden.

Lunch was spread beneath the trees, and a very happy party sat down at table. Later, seated on the ground, I was permitted to hold the new baby in my lap. I felt envious of the Rooney girls owning such a treasure of a baby sister.

The day passed all too quickly, as pleasant things have a way of doing, and as mother and I returned to Taradale by stage coach in the cool of the evening, we carried happy memories of a lovely day.

Ann was waiting at the gate and came forward to assist mother from the coach, as the spanking team of six horses pulled up with a jingle of harness, to the accompaniment of "Woa! Woa!" from the driver.

Seated in the pleasant kitchen, mother related the day's happenings to Ann while that good lady prepared the evening meal; then the latest news, the question of the christening, the guests invited and the gifts already received, whom the baby resembled, etc. Ann kept up a constant fire of questions, during the meal, and later when the dishes were washed. Mother retired early, rather tired, but vowing that it had been the most pleasant day she could remember for a long time.

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"The old order changeth." Hawke's Bay was growing rapidly, for trading vessels came frequently to its shores. New settlers meant new homes, and many new roads were formed about Taradale. Horse-drawn drays were used to cart shingle from the river-bed, and, wonder-

ful to behold, the first tractor steamroller, which was used to crush the metal into the roads. Everyone turned out to see the innovation. The rapidly increasing white population bid fair to outnumber the Maoris, and it was wholly due to their energy and ingenuity that the young country was making such rapid strides. Already the Europeans had lost much of their fear of the natives, and the Waiohiki Pah became a favourite resort on Sunday afternoons when the Taradale folk were welcomed by the friendly Maoris. They proudly displayed their gardens of kumeras and watermelons, at the same time doing a brisk trade with their white visitors. On the homeward walk each pakeha invariably carried a green flax plaited kit containing his purchases.

One memorable Sunday a tangi was held at the pah. A Rangatira (great chief), I cannot recall his name, was dead. The whole scene was vividly impressed upon my mind. Helen was to take me there, and Rakiura had given her word to mother that she would safeguard us at the pah. Helen objected to being saddled with a small sister. However, mother's word was law, and Helen had either to take me or stay at home herself. Maggie Quirk called to see if Helen was ready. "What do you think, Maggie, I've got to take my kid sister, or stay at home," I heard Helen whisper to her friend. Maggie looked daggers at me, but I just shrugged my shoulders at her. "Any sister should be proud to take you out," said mother to clinch the matter, as she tied my bonnet strings.

My reflection in the looking glass thrilled my vain young heart. The starched crochet lace on my drawers showed several inches below my blue velvet frock—this being the fashion in those days. White socks topped elastic-sided black kid boots, made to order by my godfather, and a pink straw poke-bonnet with ribbons completed the picture. I was so proud I could hardly speak. Mother stood by the gate waving till we rounded the bend in the road.

Once out of mother's sight, Helen showed her resentment by jerking my arm and in taking long strides that

taxed my short legs to the utmost. In this she was materially aided by her friend, who took hold of my other hand to speed things along. Did I mind? On the contrary, I was thrilled at the thought of seeing a Maori tangi, no matter how I got there. Rakiura had explained so much about it, and had promised to show me the pataka (treasure house) of the pah. Also I was longing to show her my new frock and bonnet.

The road to the pah this Sunday afternoon was thronged with traffic, four-wheelers, dog-carts, spring traps, men and girls on horseback (the girls side-saddle), and pedestrians everywhere. It was like a fair. Clouds of dust floated over the hedgerows on either side, clothing them with a grey mantle, and the sun shone fiercely overhead.

"Isn't it wonderful?" I ejaculated.

"Yes, you've got your way, you young cat!" asserted Helen, and I had not the courage to refute it.

"Wonderful," she continued, "how can you say such a thing. It's not wonderful at all." And she jerked me along faster than ever.

"Helen, I know why you dislike me," I ventured to reply (thinking to myself that it was not nice to be a pendulum for two big girls to swing my arms out of their sockets). "I know! You want to talk with boys, and you're afraid I'll tell mother. Well, I will tell, so there."

I certainly succeeded in stirring up a hornets' nest, though I thought my remarks were very temperate in the circumstances.

"Surely you've more nerve and cheek than any child I ever knew," said Maggie. "Why don't you write a book?"

"Yes, I would," I replied, fascinated, "only I'd hate to write about big girls who bullied a little one."

"Very well," soothed Helen, "if I give you a shilling you won't tell mother, will you?"

"I took the shilling—I would give that to Rakiura. Several coppers rested in my purse, to be thrown into the river for the Maori children to dive for.

After that the two girls chattered away about a young man named Tom Brown. Seemingly they were rivals for this curly, red-headed youth, whom they nicknamed among themselves "Pepper Brown." They were at great pains to impress upon me that I must call him "Mr. Brown" if they should meet him. "Mind, now," said my sister, "it's your last chance to come out with me." I promised to be careful.

Mr. Brown lived with his people in a large house on the hill overlooking the pah. They were considered a bit above the ordinary colonists inasmuch as they owned vast acres; most of the hills above Redcliffs belonged to Tom Brown's father.

As I walked along the crowded road, drinking in the beauty of the picturesque country, I cared nothing for the dust. Gorse and broom painted the hills with gold, while berried briar and manuka waved in the wind, and every here and there sheep grazed on the hillsides and in the gullies.

The approach to Redcliffs Bridge spanning the waters of the Tutaekuri led along a shady gorge. Precipitous red rock-studded cliffs towered overhead; tufts of silver toi-toi and clumps of flax with sword-like leaves and big branched seed-pods glistening in the sunlight grew amongst the rocks on the cliff face. On our left we passed beneath groves of silver birch on the river bank, where tangled undergrowth, crowned with flowers and berries, bloomed in profusion. The flowers were for the most part surprisingly brightly coloured, and on occasions, when the sun penetrated the thick foliage, and the usual haze, the scene was indescribably beautiful. And now we reach the bridge. The traffic had formed a block, so Helen decided to wait in the shade. We could see the pah on the opposite side of the swiftly-flowing river. The tumultuous waters boiled and lapped against the cliff, which formed a natural fortification for the redoubt from the river side.

Ditches and palisades—one within the other—surrounded the pah, while mounted at the gates, carved

wooden images, hands on stomach, and with lolling tongues, looked from their paua shell eyes upon the surging throng. A creepy feeling tickled along my spine every time the blood-curdling cries of the haka smote the air; yet, nevertheless, I chafed at the delay. "How much longer must we wait?" I asked impatiently, but the attention of the two girls was rivetted on the high cliff in front of them, and they paid no heed to my question. Following their gaze, I was amazed to see a youth climbing dexterously amongst the tangle of flax and silver toi-toi descending from the heights above. Gaining the roadway, he crossed to our side and raised his cap. That he was proud of his feat was evident from the way he screwed his heel into the ground when Helen and Maggie, both talking at once, praised his achievement. "We had to bring my sister," Helen apologised.

I looked at him brightly, but he was either unobservant or did not wish to talk; he asked no questions, and there was an odd charm about his reticence. He seemed most simple and well-bred to me.

"You're 'Pepper Brown,' aren't you?" I queried, quite forgetful of my instructions as to the proper way in which to address him. My question might have been a thunderbolt. What had I done now? Consternation spread over the faces of the two girls. Maggie declared afterwards that she had never felt so uncomfortable in her life. "You're an ungrateful little monkey!" cried my sister, almost in tears.

As for Mr. Brown, he became a mass of nerves and staccato in his talk. He mumbled his words and shook his head in a most disinterested manner, his face the colour of his hair. Had I done something wrong? Somehow I seemed to have struck a jarring note.

"I am grateful," I faltered.

"Grateful!" spluttered Helen with blazing eyes. She was always a victim of moods, and longed to do wild, passionate things. I began to be afraid that I had committed a grievous fault.

"There! I don't want your shilling!" and I threw

the money she had given me as a bribe on the ground. "Helen, you are without a heart," and I drew myself up to my full height.

"Oh!" cried Helen, "I could kill you."

But the tragedy of the story is that, in spite of my sister's excuses for me and Maggie's captivating looks, Mr. Brown turned on his heel and without another word walked away. Maggie turned on me with the sarcastic remark that when I wrote my book it would be thrilling to the last full stop. Little did she dream that her remark would live in a book after more than half a century had passed. Helen called me a Voodoo, a limb of Satan, and other unsavoury names, and, the bridge now being clear, hustled me across to the pah.

Rakiura stood within the gates, and I flew to her, burying my face in her best black skirt to hide my tears.

"Come, baby, you have no time to cry," she crooned. "I have so much for you to see." The dear old native woman sensed that the girls did not want to be bothered with me, and was getting anxious at our late arrival. Soon my troubles were forgotten, when, standing on the shelving board of the palisade, I threw my pennies for the Maori children diving in the deep waters of the river. On a strip of sandy foreshore others played in the bright sunlight, the music of their laughter floating up to the pah perched on the edge of the cliff. Further inshore a tall youth in loincloth was working among fishing canoes. He waved a salutation to Rakiura with a gesture of foreign grace. "He is my nephew," she informed me. "One day he will be a great rangitira."

"But the wailing, Rakiura?" It grew louder and louder as the hours went by. "Yes, we are nearing the whare-puni (sacred sleeping house)," she whispered.

This was my first visit to the pah, and although I had heard much about a tangi, I was not prepared for what lay before me. As Rakiura led me forward to gaze on the face of the honoured dead rangatira I clutched desperately at her hand and stood rooted to the spot. Heavily tattooed, as befitted his rank, the chief's face held

a strange air of tranquility as he lay in state, surrounded by his twelve wives, who kept up a continual wailing. The faces of these women, who were mostly old, were covered with tattoo marks; their red-rimmed eyes were swollen and bloodshot, and as they squatted round the bier of their departed lord they swayed to and fro to the accompaniment of their wailings.

How I longed to know just a little of the why and wherefore of it all. Rakiura promised that she would explain next day when she came to visit my home; "only to-day we have much to see," she exclaimed.

Next we sat on the ground in a clearing between, the native whares (huts). In an adjoining square huge stone ovens had been operating incessantly during the week. Whole carcasses of dressed sheep, pigs, and even bullocks, were cooked to feed the visiting natives, and to-day Europeans were invited to join in the feast.

Rakiura brought two green plaited flax baskets containing hot meat, kumaras and pumpkin, to be eaten out of the fingers. Everybody seemed to be enjoying the food, and as we partook of the beautifully cooked viands, Rakiura told how the ovens were got ready. Holes dug in the ground were filled with large stones, over which wood fires were kindled until the stones became red-hot. The fire was then removed and wet sacks were placed on the hot stones, upon them the food was laid and covered up with more wet sacks; then earth was shovelled on the whole and the food was cooked by steam.

Before the pakeha brought sheep and cattle to New Zealand the Maoris made perilous journeys to procure food; sometimes they pushed their canoes to the mouth of the river near Clive right out to the open sea, where huge writhing masses of brown kelp whisper and murmur their tales of stormy seas. They made up their daily diet by various species of fish, shellfish, tuna (eels), cockles, crayfish and smaller crustacea and sea urchins. After a tempest the Maoris would busy themselves on the beach collecting clumps of kaeo (seaweed) from the tangled

masses of kelp. This kaeo was decidedly animal, being a stalked sea-squirt or tunicata, with a body three inches long, and was greatly relished by the natives as an article of food.

I will not fatigue you with details of all I saw that day at the pah, the Maori mothers carrying their babies pikau fashion, and the children clad in odd articles of European clothing, fascinated me as we strolled about. Rakiura proudly showed me the pataka—a small carved whare standing upon a tall post—or so it appeared to me. The great surprise, however, which she had for me was serving tea in European style in her own quarters. What a surprise it was! Even Helen and Maggie showed their appreciation of the lovable native woman. It did something to soothe their hurts occasioned by my blundering.

The dust and heat of the crowded highway had given place to the cool of evening, reflecting the gathering hues of sunset, as the good-humoured crowd returned to the little settlement of Taradale, nestling at the foot of the hills. I can see again in retrospect the purple outlines changing colour, hazed by the smoke from bush fires, as the sun sank out of sight behind bleak spurs and bushed gullies.

CHAPTER IX.

Sickness

In order to present events in their proper sequence, it is necessary to refer to a series of incidents which were happening at Taradale. In all small communities it is the trivial scandal and resulting gossip which gives a zest to life, and, of course, everyone knows everyone else's business.

Once a year gypsies camped on the outskirts of the village. This camp provided an imaginative child with plenty of pleasurable excitement—to ride on the merry-

go-round and visit the sideshows; to think of the gypsies roaming the wide world over, free and untrammelled—I could visualize it all, under both summer and winter skies. A racecourse and grandstand had been established at Taradale. Part of the course skirted the top of our orchard, the opposite side being flanked with a high earth wall, erected to keep back the dangerous flood waters of the Tutaekuri; and this bank provided a natural grandstand on race days.

Good old-fashioned Taradale. Those were happy days. At race meetings, like a great fair, the roads from Napier and surrounding settlements would be thick with traffic. The gypsies placed their show inside the racecourse by the grandstand. Maoris squatted everywhere, feasting on crayfish and throwing the shells about—much to everyone's disgust. The top of our orchard being a point of vantage, brought us many visitors. The bright colours of the jockeys and the thudding hoof-beats of the horses I can remember clearly, and once, during a hurdle race, a jockey came flying over our fence. . . .

It wanted only ten days till Christmas, and my father and David Trow were expected home any day. The Napier summer was almost tropical, but Taradale did not seem to mind, as its perspiring community toiled to make the festive season a success. On this particular stifling afternoon villagers traversed the racecourse in order to bathe in the river. There was no mixed bathing, and the bathers were attired in long gowns. The water was warm and limpid. Youthful, happy voices floated musically along the river, and under the shady, drooping willows, where hampers of dainty food were opened, and billy-tea was handed round. Heavenly days! How I loved them. Mother, too, was so much brighter on days like these. Standing on the bank, she would throw me into the pool—I have only to close my eyes to bring the scene before me. Almost every day throughout the summer crowds visited the bathing pool, and settlers became better acquainted with the great outdoors.

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"That reminds me," I heard mother say to Mummie Trow one day, "I was going to ask you to accompany me to Napier to-morrow—I have to pay a visit to the hospital."

Mother had made several visits to the hospital of late, and had always taken me with her. This entailed a journey by coach up the steep, long, winding Shakespeare Hill. The hospital stood on the summit commanding a magnificent view of the open sea, and the inner harbour and spit. Waiting in the wide, polished hall of the hospital, while mother was in consultation with the doctor, I would gaze over the mighty expanse of ocean—to-day wind-tossed and the beach covered with storm-wrack. Tales of the wild Cornish coast told by my father flashed up before me as I watched hundreds of shrieking gulls wheeling overhead. Down in the harbour fishing boats rolled gently at their moorings, although a gale raged outside the Iron Pot, and mountainous waves whipped with broken foam crashed over the breakwater. But to-day . . . why should mother ask Mummie Trow to accompany her?

Suddenly the light faded from the summer's day as if giant wings obscured it. The laughing voices of the joyous bathers sounded afar off; an eerie feeling assailed me, resting like a weight upon my soul. I crept closer to my mother. A great cold fear crept into my heart. I was too young to understand that I was in communion with the unseen; but from that hour—as if I had beheld my mother's wraith—dark clouds, heavy with grim tragedy, settled over our hitherto happy home.

"Why are you fussing me so, Katherine?" asked mother. "Do you think I am going to leave you home to-morrow? No, I'd be lost without you, child."

"Such a great big baby to be cuddling," chuckled Mummie Trow.

"I'm ever afraid that something will take you from me," I replied, hugging closer still, and gazing into the bluest eyes I have ever seen.

In the cool of the evening the happy crowd of

villagers trooped across the paddock homewards. Mummie left us at our gate, promising to call early in the morning. It was arranged that we should take the first stage, leaving at nine-thirty, for Napier. Consequently we retired early. But on no account could I induce the genii of sleep to come to my pillow. Something tugged at my heart-strings—a nameless fear; something I could not understand. Mother was breathing softly; she seemed peaceful, and I knew she was happy that my father was coming home for a long stay this time. She was so much in love with her husband. She lived for nothing beyond her children and him. No wonder, for he was without doubt the gentlest man I knew, and the most popular in the community. These thoughts, which take so long to write, passed through my mind while I tossed and turned on my pillow.

The half-awakened birds began to twitter, feeling the breath of dawn as the leaves rustled in the slight wind, ere I dropped off to sleep. When my eyes opened again it was to find Ann shaking me and crying loudly that I'd be left behind. No second bidding was required to get me up. I could dress myself, bar the tying of ribbon bows and such-like.

We made a hasty breakfast, and soon my fears of yesterday were banished, as I watched the driver of the coach handling his prancing team that carried us swiftly to the city of Napier ten miles distant. There, after changing coaches, we began the long drive up Shakespeare Hill to the hospital. The horses soon became foam-flecked, although a walking pace was all the steep and tortuous hill would allow. The sun shone fiercely from an azure sky on to the white road; the heat was stifling. The well-kept flower beds surrounding the hospital were a mass of blooms. I had to wait outside while mother and Mummie interviewed the medical man, or, rather, several doctors were to hold a consultation.

How could anyone feel afraid or sick amongst such loveliness, I thought. Overhead white clouds were dumped in the heavens; below in the mirrored surface

of the harbour they were reflected, dumped between the fishing craft. As far as the eye could see across the placid ocean, the water was a shimmer of silver, with a speck on the horizon—like as not a steamer coming to Napier. I found a garden seat in the shade. The pine branches swayed slightly, sending forth a wild perfume. The soft, sweet air fanned my burning cheeks.

Looking south, I could see miles of low-lying swamps that extended right from the foot of hospital hill, where swamp hens, gulls and other water fowl fed amongst tall raupo reeds—away in the distance to Greenmeadows, Taradale, Clive and Meanee. (The Napier earthquake of 1931 has raised all this swamp land and converted it into valuable country.)

What a long time my mother was! What could be keeping her? Again that deadly fear tugged at my heart. I entered the main door of the hospital and waited in the hall. A nurse to whom I had spoken on previous visits came and talked with me.

"I'm anxious about my mother," I told her. "How much longer will she be?" She promised to enquire, then passed through a door at the end of the hall, and I still waited. . . . The hours dragged terribly. Surely mother would not forget me! What could be happening to her? I was in an agony of fear. I walked along the hall till I came to an open door, and looked into what was evidently a reception room. French folding doors opened on the garden. I had noticed them from the outside. I entered. The room was dark and cool. A walnut tree pushed green boughs against the window. A wide armchair beside the window invited me to coil up in its soft depths and view the panoramic landscape. Gradually my tired lids—heavy from the previous night's vigil—closed, and I fell into a dreamless sleep. . . .

An animated discussion between the nurse and Mummie Trow standing outside in the hall woke me. It was almost dark. Mummie's voice was anxious. "I quite forgot the child, nurse," she was saying. "I was so worried about the mother."

In a bound I was beside her. "What have you done with my mother?" I cried fearfully.

"Oh! there you are, Katherine. What a fright you gave me! I thought you were lost. You must be famished, poor child." I clutched at her frantically. "But my mother, where is she? Quick, tell me! Tell me!"

"There, there, it's all right," said Mummie Trow. "I was with her all the time; only she must remain in hospital till Saturday for observation. She's asleep now, so we'll go home and come back on Saturday to fetch her."

"Leave my mother here! No! No! She would not want me to leave her! Oh, please take me to her!" I pleaded. "Do take me, please!"

Then suddenly the fear that my mother was dead froze my heart. Flatly I refused to leave, working myself into a frenzy. As you can well imagine, the two women were in a quandary.

At length the nurse spoke. "Very well, if you promise to keep quite quiet, I'll take you. No harm can come by allowing the child to see her mother. You are much older than your years. Come along!"

"Oh, thank you, nurse, I'll be quite quiet." And together we set off along seemingly endless passages and corridors. Fearfully I glimpsed the wards with rows of white quilted beds, each holding some helpless patient. Then almost my heart seemed to stop, for we stood beside my mother's bed.

My mother had only been away from me for a few hours, and it seemed that all that had happened since she left me was just a dream. I felt as though I were the victim of nightmare, as I waited in silence expressive of human impotence against the blows of Fate. At length her eyes opened and I felt reassured, but she had altered strangely. Even to me she was different. She looked at me as if there were something she did not understand. She did not know me! Her eyes closed again and she muttered something about a witch. The nurse, with her finger to her lips, led me from the ward. "We have given

your mother a sleeping draught," she whispered. "When she awakens she will look different. The doctors hope to cure her by blood transfusions, because she has not sufficient red corpuscles in her blood. I'm telling you this because you are a very sensible little girl, and so fond of your mother, and I don't want you to fret. You must look bright and keep your mother happy when she returns home. She is not very strong, and you will be a big help towards her recovery."

Reassured by the nurse, I thanked her, saying stoutly, "I'll come to fetch my mother."

Nevertheless I felt like Atlas with the world on my shoulders when we drove down the hill. My eulogies of the morning about Nature's plentitude, her manifold gifts and unmatched scenic splendour had vanished. My world had tumbled down.

Mummie Trow drew my attention to the moonlight on the water. The moon made a path of silver across the bay; but, to-night, its beauty hurt me. I was confused. Could it be only this morning when we had left Taradale? It was the first time that I had been parted from my mother, and the journey seemed long and wearisome. I huddled close to Mummie, shaken by dry sobs.

"There, there, Katherine," she said, and her arms were around me.

"Oh," I moaned, "I'm like Job; the very thing I feared has come upon me. Something in my heart hurts, terribly."

"I am sure God will spare your mother," she soothed. "But, Katherine, you do say such funny things; a child like you, like Job!"

Ann and Helen stood at the front door awaiting the arrival of the coach which was overdue. Ann's face was a study when she discovered mother's absence. As usual, she exploded with questions, but Mummie Trow was dumb until she reached the kitchen. Ann looked grave when she heard the sorrowful news. "It's a sad home-coming for James Morgan," she said.

"Katherine, will you come home with me to-night?" coaxed Mummie Trow.

"No, I'm going to sleep in my mother's bed; nothing could induce me to be away from home to-night."

Ann, with unusual kindness, tucked me into bed. But as soon as the house had grown quiet, I slipped out of bed to stand by the window in the moonlight. Far into the night I leaned my elbows on the window-sill, gazing at the stars, and vainly trying to solve some of the problems of life. The air was scented with the perfume of flowers in my garden; it stole up to greet me. The night wind stirred in the bluegums across the road as I gazed at their mighty branches; here and there a twig snapped, and long, loose strips of bark flapped against the white boles. In the distance I could see the lights of Napier as they outlined the Hospital Hill. I pictured the rolling expanse of ocean which lay on the farther side, the beach glistening wet in the moonlight as each crested wave receded. The muffled roar of the breakers came very faintly to my ear, and, as I listened, it seemed to change to a mournful dirge. With a shudder I closed the window to shut it out and crept back to bed.

Next morning, before I was awake, David Trow and my father arrived. As soon as he heard that mother was in hospital, father lost no time in setting out for Napier, although he had been all night in the saddle.

"I wish you had called me," I complained to Ann.

"You must know mortals cannot do without sleep," answered Ann; "isn't that in your myth book? Come now, and show Ann how sensible you are, and have your breakfast. I don't want you on my hands to nurse as well as Mary."

"You're just the kindest Ann," I replied. "What would we do without you?" "That's spoken just like your mother would say it. You grow more like her every day."

Mother's favourite seat in the cool of the evening was under the macrocarpa tree in the garden. How

desolate it looked as I sat there alone awaiting father's return. I never knew life could be so hard.

The day lengthened, and a chill breeze rustled the dry leaves. Carlo, our little white dog, whimpered to be taken up on my lap. So absorbed was I that the crunching of carriage wheels on the gravel did not disturb me when a cab stopped at the gate. The latch clicked. It was my mother being helped inside, leaning on my father's arm. With a happy cry I bounded forward, Carlo at my heels uttering short, sharp barks of delight. This sudden transition from fear to joy almost unnerved me. Ann fussed about mother, putting her to bed and making her hot drinks.

I was pleased to see my father, but my chief emotion was of supreme relief that mother was home and safe in her own bed again.

CHAPTER X.

Clouding Over

A WINDLESS day of bright sunshine saw Christmas Eve drawing to a close. Father had just arrived from Napier in a smart dog-cart, driving a sleek black horse. This was his surprise gift to mother.

On Christmas morning we drove to church, and afterwards to Hastings to spend the day with the Conways.

Our home held the charm of simplicity. Mother had the gift of peaceful and sweet, reflective thought, while my father was full of little courteous observances. He had no patience with people who quarrelled in their homes. "Most people have no soul sense," he would declare; "take for instance the Quirk family, who bicker continuously. They haven't the illumination of a mutual spiritual understanding which makes towards a happy hearth."

Anyone knowing my father's noble sentiments, coupled with his great gentleness and kindness, would find it difficult to reconcile these with the horrors by which he was enmeshed during the following year. Mercifully the future was hidden, and happiness "pressed down and running over" dwelt in the Morgans' home at that blessed festive season.

As we drove to church in the fresh morning the air was like a tonic with the scent of aromatic herbs. The bell was ringing for Mass as we turned in at the gates and drove up the avenue of poplars.

"I'm so happy this morning," said mother, "it's so beautiful." And her eyes filled with tears and her thoughts ran something like this: "In my silly imaginings I feared my time on earth was short, and now it is difficult to believe that I ever had such fears. . . . I'm never going to lose sight of God again," she murmured to herself.

I was seeing in "large eyefuls." The Nelson's buggy did not glitter half as brightly as our new dog-cart, and Flighty pawed and capered just as if he knew that Taradale society was measured mainly by the vehicles which conveyed them to church. Friends greeted us on all sides, and congratulations deep and sincere passed between those simple people as they trooped into the little church.

The Christ-child in his crib was a source of delight to me, as also were the figures of the saints sharply silhouetted on the windows. I am afraid that I was never very pious in my young days, for my eyes wandered away from Father Jardin at the altar to the study of the hats worn by the ladies of the congregation. The bald pates of the elder men puzzled me—why should beards grow on their faces and yet no hair on their heads?

Had I known how to pray I should have given thanks for my happiness that day, but I had still to learn how the education of our higher nature will teach us life's sweeter harmonies.

After the service Helen declared she was horribly bored. Pepper Brown sat in church with his parents in the pew opposite, and never so much as once glanced in

our direction. "I'm awfully sorry if I caused the trouble, Helen," said I as we bowled along the country lanes through Meanee and Clive. The outlook was lovely, but I knew that Helen cared nothing for landscapes, so I talked on subjects she liked. We spoke in low tones, and I was happy to have her confidence. Helen was nicer to me on that occasion than I can ever remember. Parts of the way were fringed with pohutukawa trees which, at Christmas time, were one mass of crimson bloom. Then we caught glimpses of the sea and the white-faced cliffs of Cape Kidnappers, ere we crossed the bridge over the Ngaruaoro River and entered Clive. From here the road crossed wide sheep-dotted paddocks, tussock-grassed, away over gently-swelling uplands to the foothills.

The day at Conways' was a happy one—a day of feasting and many toasts; Christmas called for extra tankards of ale, so that father, driving home in the moonlight, was merrier than usual. "Come on, Katherine, sing us the haka," he would call, and kept me repeating it over and over. Here are the actual words:

"Komate, komate, kaora, kaora,
Tenei te, tangata;
Puhuru huru na ana,
Koe i te ki mai i
Whaka whi ti te ra."

We were supremely happy that Christmas. Alas! it was the last Christmas that the Morgans would ever know together.

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Hawke's Bay sweltered under one of the hottest summers the pioneers could remember. Cattle on the parched lands were dying everywhere from drought. Creeks and rivers held little or no water, so that harassed settlers were compelled to bore artesian wells and form irrigation schemes. Father worked at home ploughing the ground in the orchard, planting new fruit trees and making trenches to be filled with water from the well.

Much of my time was spent in following my father around in the orchard and sailing paper boats in the miniature canals. A new interest was created by the Quirks boring a well on their property. The loud thud, thud of the heavy iron weight, called a "monkey," falling on steel pipes sang a metallic song as imperceptibly the steel was driven into the very bowels of the earth. Father explained to me that an artesian well was formed by boring, often to great depths, through strata which permit of the accumulation of water which when tapped rises by pressure in the pipe to the surface. At last the earth's crust is pierced, and water gushes forth—pure crystal and delightfully cold. With the first rush millions of tiny shells, curiously shaped and beautifully coloured, were swept down the flooded gutters, much to the delight of the village children.

Christmas holidays were over. It was the morning of Friday the thirteenth day of January. The air was motionless, the sun looked down upon a blistering day.

Mother commenced the day by telling Ann that she had had a vivid dream in which her mother and old Kowhai were the central figures. "My dream was a warning," she said. "I have a premonition that something evil is about to happen."

Ann, standing before the stove, mopped her face with her apron and pooh-poohed the idea. "Nonsense," she chuckled, "you always make a mountain out of a molehill. Hurry with your breakfast and get out of this hot kitchen."

"You may laugh," said mother solemnly, "but I have a dread fear hanging over me—something I can't explain."

Ann, to humour the invalid, sat down, saying: "Well, let me hear the dream, it's too hot to work anyway."

"I was in Ireland," began my mother, "in my own old home, before my mother died. I noted every detail; the warm smell of clods of peat burning on the open hearth; my mother asleep in the rocking chair, her shawl fastened by a large bogwood brooch of petrified peat, the

fire reflected in its shiny surface; her knitting had fallen to the floor, and the kitten rolled and tangled the ball of wool. Then my eyes came to rest on the image of Kowhai, the witch, standing behind my mother's chair. There was a sinister suggestiveness in the glance of the piercing dark eyes of this fearsome, uncanny old Maori woman, who could read the soul's secrets. I was so stricken with horror that my tongue clave to the roof of my mouth. 'Mother! Mother!' I cried, but no sound came from my palsied throat. Kowhai's tattooed lips twisted with an ugly smile as, pointing to my mother, she hissed: 'Life has been cruel to her, and she has fallen asleep in the middle of unsuccessful attempts to solve it!' Her gaze seemed to sting me. 'You, too, golden one, shall soon fall asleep! You spurned the charm that would have kept you and your baby from harm. When the violets lift their blue eyes once again to greet the early spring, and the winds that hold the sea secrets whisper of the rolling of great waters; of phantom ships filled with misty, departing figures, sailing magic seas towards the great Reinga. Then shall Patu-paiarehe (the mountain fairy) call the mists down on your home.' Kowhai's body painted in weird designs with kokowai (coloured earth mixed with shark oil) swayed as she uttered these words in a tone of lamentation. A shudder passed through me, and I felt cold although the room was warm. . . . And when I opened my eyes to the golden sun streaming through my window, it was hard to realise that I was on my own bed, my dream just a mirage, making me see and hear people and places which did not exist."

"And you still believe that harm can come to you through the wandering wits of poor crazed Kowhai?" said Ann, "and despite the fact that she has been away for over a year?"

"I have tried to banish the old Maori from my mind," declared mother, "and thought I had succeeded, but suddenly all sorts of doubts began to creep in to annihilate my peace."

Recognising the futility of argument, Ann walked

slowly to the back door and looked out with unseeing eyes. Her thoughts chased one another like snowflakes and drifted to the ground. Mary must never know that she also had dreamt of Kowhai that night; but she had. Ann was much disturbed as she stood meditating on the strange things she had just heard. To her it seemed Mary Morgan was not long for this world, and this was the warning. Mary had become enthroned in her heart. Fidelity was one of Ann's strong points. Her nature could be charming and sympathetic with those she loved, and Mary seemed so dependent upon her now. Yes, she decided, Mary's life was full of high ideals and disappointments. And, although she could not follow her in her fantastic flights into the realm of unseen things, for Ann was very much on the material plane of thought; she, nevertheless, respected the beliefs of her frail charge. She returned to the kitchen, and the anxiety caused by this discussion seemed already to be bearing fruit. She looked at my mother with renewed concentration, fear grew in her consciousness. Was the dreaded reaper already casting the shadow of his sickle? But she hid all this carefully in her heart and busied herself at the wood-box.

"My pagan beliefs yield to a more spiritual idea when I look at you, Mary," said she. "I feel I'm no longer an outlaw in my soul."

"It is a long and difficult road to the understanding of God," replied mother. "We live in two worlds, the world of the physical senses and the world of the unseen. In this physical life we build bridges to cross into eternity. There are some who content themselves wholly with the things of this world, and others who live in a mystical, spiritual world. Their home is in heaven."

Mother was a mystic, full of poetry and symbolism. To her unseen things were as real as the things we see and touch. Everything on earth was symbolic of something beyond it, for was not life's weaving between God and man? Love, or God, weaving the upper, but discordant man viewing only the underside of the pattern? As I recall these old world tales, with their poetic imagery,

the years seem to fall away, and I live back in the past. Try to bear with me awhile, dear reader, for I would fain only write of the beautiful things.

Outside the garden quivered in a blaze of heat, for the sun rose high in his "gilded shallop," making the golden marigolds glitter like flame. Stretched at full length, I lay breast to breast with mother earth, and conjured the sky into a blue sea, and the clouds as ships sailing over it. Away on the horizon the mists looked like Alpine ranges which I had seen in pictures. Dragonflies circled overhead, a bird sang in the plum tree, his heavenly notes set me thinking of angels and wondering just what they were.

Ann's voice calling loudly from the back door rudely broke the spell of my dreams. . . "Katherine, come take these peelings to the pigs."

"Oh, bother the pigs. It's too hot. Can't they wait?"

"No," came the reply. "You will go this minute, and be careful of the sow when you throw the stuff over."

I made my way lazily along the back path to where the old sow stood, uttering sundry grunts as she rooted in unpleasant odours, and the litter of little black pigs scrounged the soil outside for food, scattering the fowls that followed in their wake. What cute little things pigs were, to be sure, with their curly tails, and how they fought, grunting and squealing to get back under the railings to their mother!

Quite forgetful of Ann's warning, I leaned on the sty to look over, when, with a vicious snap, the sow caught my hand in her mouth, lacerating it severely. To this day the scars are plainly visible. In response to my screams Ann came running, at incredible speed for one of her size and bulk, making a grotesque figure as she puffed and panted along the path. Loudly she blamed herself for sending me to feed the pigs.

"It's well your mother's asleep, or the shock would kill her," she gasped in short puffs. "Try and not make so much noise, Katherine," she begged as she wrapped

her apron round my hand to staunch the bleeding. She hurried me to the house. "There, don't look while I bathe it and see what damage is done."

"Are my fingers all there, Ann?" "Yes, thank heaven, but they're in a fearful mess."

There was no doctor nearer than Napier. Ann was, however, a most capable nurse. She stitched the hanging skin and stopped the flow of blood, so that when mother awoke from her sleep no undue alarm was caused her by seeing my hand bandaged.

"Just a scratch, Mary," lied Ann, "only it has given Katherine a fright."

I was feeling sick and dizzy, but tried to be brave.

"Is that Carlo whining?" asked mother. "See what ails the little fellow, Ann."

Scarcely had she finished speaking when Carlo, dragging his hind legs, crawled to her feet, his white, curly coat dyed scarlet with his own blood. He lay moaning and gazing up at mother, his doggie eyes full of mute appeal. Mother burst into tears, while Ann bent over the stricken little animal.

"Who could have done such a cruel thing to my innocent wee pet?" sobbed mother, and I joined in her sorrow, forgetting my own suffering.

"It's that eldest young man Quirk, I'll be bound," said Ann as she gathered the dead Carlo off the floor. "Looks as if the fiend had tried to chop the animal in two with a spade. Mary, he's a bad lot. I didn't want to upset you last week, but he stuck a pitchfork into your cow when she broke through into their paddock. And last Friday he turned his stepfather out; the poor old man is living in one of Barton's cottages!" Ann was hotly angry. "If James Morgan won't redress your wrongs, Ann Cornish will. I'll let that young man feel the weight of my hand," she concluded.

"Calm yourself, Ann," pleaded mother. "That's not the way—not in anger." "Fiddlesticks," snorted Ann. Then, calming herself, she said, "I'm sorry, Mary, but my blood boiled, and I never did like the Quirks."

"Let us not discuss them, but pray for them instead," coaxed mother. Then, turning to me, she said: "Katherine, you look pale, child. Tell me, does your hand hurt so much, or was it Carlo that upset you?"

Ann hastened to change the subject, but the day's tragic happenings were not yet over.

"I wonder what's keeping James?" Mother's voice was anxious, and she added, "I pray God he is not at that drinking house again!"

Oh! How can I write it? How can I write this vile thing about my father? I pray, as Paul prayed, that God will open to me a door of utterance to express in charitable words something that has lain hidden in the grave for more than half a century. He is my own father. Have I any right to bring him back to live in the pages of my book? In the silent watches of the night, I have asked, "Father, must I lay bare your sin? Must I write it?" Clear came the answer, as though a voice spoke out of the stillness. "Yes, write it down. Write truthfully. It is my atonement. I have already paid the price. Therefore write plainly that I may reach a helping hand from the unseen to men and women of to-day. To husbands and wives who think so little of home ties, and value so slightly the sacredness of the family hearth. Tell them, that a happy home is the nearest approach to God's heaven on this earth."

Life is what we make it, and God never changes. Our mortal bodies are but myths which pass into dust, but our spirit reflects God, the eternal. Human sufferings reveal often the birth of soul, rising towards the light of truth—in other words, man rising towards his Maker, thus gaining a knowledge which will bless the human race.

CHAPTER XI.

Evil Days

SEVERAL times of late father had arrived home much the worse for liquor. In those early days drinking houses

kept open till after midnight, and mother would wait up anxiously listening for his step coming down the road, as she had been wont to listen for the clatter of his horse's hoofs over the Redcliffs bridge. Only now his home-coming was so different—her idol had fallen from its pedestal—his feet were of clay, and, alas, often unsteady. Under the stimulus of alcohol he became quarrelsome and filled her with terror. In the place of her James she beheld a beast. Yet he would be so full of contrition afterwards, always, that it seemed to tear his heart out. Time after time he promised never to touch another drink—but, alas, the chains of habit are too weak to be felt until they are too strong to be broken.

How he deteriorated. Poor father! Or is it that each of us has two natures, a lower and a higher, a baser and a nobler, over which we must keep constant guard? There are those who see only beauty in all things, as did Mary Morgan, and their souls respond to the joy of its influence. To my mother the word home would immediately suggest perfume and flowers; yet, with her imaginative instinct she became a prey to tormenting thoughts—truly, in my father's case under stress of great provocation.

On the other hand, James Morgan was a very tired, sick man, in need of real understanding sympathy. Always considerate of the feelings of others, he now felt his neighbours' scorn and became moody and depressed. His home no longer held him. Mother, like most invalids, was exacting and fretful about small things. She demanded to know where James spent his time, and during his absences filled in the blanks with imaginative forebodings. In its vividness jealousy saw with green-eyed clearness her husband bestowing his affections elsewhere. When my father was home her fears vanished, only, however, to rush back with added terror as soon as he was out of sight. No pain is so cruel as the torture of a jealous heart; its fearful contemplation sees slights and neglect where they do not exist. The breach grows wider

and wider, until it becomes a gulf that perhaps death alone can span.

Urged on by unrelenting fate, the weft of cross threads in the weaving of mother's life had tangled; she herself had knotted the woof by the power of thought—her own thought—which is the most penetrating and explosive agency in the universe. She was convinced that there was another woman, that her James, whom she idolised, had become deceitful and fraudulent. Actually he spent his money instead of bringing it home, and in consequence his family was reduced to poverty. Ann Cornish, noble creature, refused to leave Mary now that her fortunes had declined, and I heard her whisper to Mummie Trow that Mary would soon be past earthly worries if James did not mend his ways.

"He's becoming common gossip in the village," said she, "and it's not an inherited trait, for I've heard him tell how his people prided themselves on their straight living."

"Doubtless in this time of unrest and uncertainty he feels he must have some outlet," excused Mummy Trow, "but it's not like James Morgan."

The conversation was interrupted by the shrill voice of Tom Lawton, the fishman, as he drove past in his ramshackle cart. Ann ran off and returned with a fine schnapper. She took it in to show mother, saying that she would boil it with parsley sauce.

"Oh, Ann, I'm so worried about James! I wanted Helen to call at the hotel to fetch her father, but the poor child is too proud to be seen in a drinking house."

"Well, Mary, all I can say is that something must be done to get him away from the company he's keeping, and especially from that drinking hell. I'm not telling you this with any desire to hurt you—you know me well enough for that? But last night I called to have a chat with the woman cook at the hotel, and if half she says is true, it's time Jim Morgan was brought to book."

Rumours had already begun to circulate in the

community, the hydra-headed monster of scandal had appeared, and would continue to grow.

"What made you think of calling on the cook?" said mother.

"Mainly out of curiosity. I wanted, if possible, to set your mind at rest, Mary."

"Are you quite sure about the Rouse woman?" mother demanded, but even as she asked she knew that Ann was right.

"Absolutely sure!"

There was a pause, the wind whispered softly, and the birds sang on in the plum tree. . . Mary Morgan had entered her Garden of Gethsemane! A great fear struggled in her breast.

"I had to tell you the truth," Ann spoke softly, alarmed at mother's pallor.

"To be haunted by the thought of lonely years ahead," she murmured more to herself than to Ann, and added, "How can I have failed in my wifely duties?"

Ann's voice sounded a new note of command. "Mary, I must be firm with you. Listen to what I have to say and forget all those beautiful high-sounding things which you are always thinking of. What good can they do? We have to face life's difficulties and needs, so come back to earth." The suddenness of Ann's outburst diffused a tense, unreal atmosphere in the room. Mary replied in liquid tones: "Ann, you are my great comfort—but your soul has never lived. Anyone who has never had the experience of motherhood has never lived—to bear a child is to be a partaker of the creative power of God—to share with Blessed Mary the same pangs that produced a Christ."

Ann was silent. She thought of the tares and the wheat, and felt rebuked. She never really understood this earth-angel.

"Until I met James," continued mother, "my life was full of sadness; my heart empty; in the solitude I learned to see and know much that is hidden from materialistic eyes. Then, with a new-born understanding,

I began to ascend the ladder of life . . . and now? But my dream of loneliness may have been only a coincidence and my feelings of being deserted just silly imaginings."

"I'd like to know what's keeping that James," complained Ann as she deftly flipped a pancake from the pan on to a plate and poured in more batter.

"Mother sat gazing with vague, unseeing eyes, lost in a haze of thought. She saw things after the manner of the ancients—in dreams. She was just a dreamer, I decided in my childish wisdom, while I looked at her with a new interest. She seemed to be listening, always listening. At this time I was of a most impressionable age, and remembered these events for many long years afterwards. I, too, felt that something must be done about my father, but what? Well, if my sister would not go to fetch him, I would. If he could not make up his own mind to go back to work, somebody else must do it for him. It is scarcely possible to over-estimate the potency of mind and the practical results which follow its application, even through a child.

Although my injured hand throbbed painfully, for the time I forgot my own hurt in thinking of my mother and how she was hurt—mortally so. I did not understand what had caused it, only that in some terrible way my father was to blame, but I could read the effects in my mother's face. The suggestion of spying on my father was repugnant, but I felt that my mother's life was in danger and nothing else mattered.

Unnoticed in the gathering dusk, I slipped from the house, determined I would find my father. Fearfully I hurried past the brick kiln at the top of the road where it showed dark and gloomy in the half-light. Smoky shadows filled the hollows, and ghostly-looking sheep criss-crossed their tracks over the foothills.

A few minutes' walk brought me to the tavern door. I did not relish going into the hotel any more than Helen did, and I had no plan as to what I would say or do when I got there. The reek of beer floated out to greet me, the clatter of glasses and the rumble of gruff voices struck

a note of fear into my child's mind. However, once inside, I felt my courage returning.

The woman behind the bar, known as the leader of Taradale society, was busy filling glass mugs from a barrel on the counter, the while she joked with the rough-looking men who lazed on the bar. All this I took in at a glance when I entered.

"Is my father here?" I asked timidly, feeling as if I were committing a heinous crime. The landlady looked in astonishment.

"And who might your father be?"

"James Morgan," I replied, bracing myself at the cold look in her eyes.

"Why, it's Jim's kid!" cried the man nearest the door. "Come on, lassie, come on in and have some lemonade."

The men crowded round; most of them had worked for my father; their intentions were of the best, for James Morgan was very popular with his men—here was a chance to express their feelings.

"We hear you can dance the Maori haka? Come on, let's have it." And they showered handfuls of money upon me; one man put a gold piece in my hand. Hastily stowing the money in my handkerchief, I thought how glad Ann would be to see such wealth, for of late she had found it difficult to make both ends meet, and I knew she often dipped into her own purse to keep the house supplied with food. I was innocently happy to dance for the men. This was unexpected kindness, and my fears turned to joy. The landlady glared disapproval, but she was powerless to interfere. The men clamoured, and I was hoisted on to the bar counter. A moment I stood contemplating the motley audience, then began the Maori war dance. My grimaces and stamping caused the men to rock with mirth. A shout of applause, accompanied by another shower of coins, and cries of "Let's have it again, lassie!" made the glasses rattle on the shelf. . . . Suddenly the din ceased; the men fell back in hushed wonder. Nemesis, swift and terrible in the person of James Morgan

strode into the saloon. Towering head and shoulders above the crowd of half-drunken men, his hair dishevelled and his eyes bloodshot, he struck fiercely to right and left, while a cry like a wounded animal escaped from his cracked lips.

"How dare you, you dogs?" he shouted. "How dare you? And do you call yourself a woman?" he snarled at the terrified landlady, "to allow my child to entertain this scum! Thank God I've still the remnants of a man left in me. It's the last time you'll see me in here, sleeping like a drunken sot in your dirty back room while my baby dances for money!"

His lips quivered pitifully as he held out his arms to me.

"Don't shrink from me, Katherine!" he pleaded. "I've been a fool, child, and I've paid the price."

"Oh, Daddy," I sobbed, "what have I done?"

"Come along, let's go home to mother; you're like her, child; small, and yet so capable." Turning to the men, he said impulsively, "I swear before you all that it's the last time I'll take a drink. So help me God!"

James Morgan kept his solemn promise, but alas, it came too late. His worship of Bacchus had broken the heart of a gentle woman, one of the best that ever lived, and fate demanded "a life for a life."

The blow to my father's pride had been a severe one, and had partly sobered him. Hand in hand we left the hotel. I was grateful for the darkness that hid us from prying eyes, for over the last few days rumour had grown increasingly rife in Taradale, and relations had become more and more strained between my parents. With dramatic suddenness the crisis came.

My father's previous lukewarm efforts at reform, and his innumerable failures, were largely due to his lack of earnest feeling. He said now that it would be different. He realized that it takes all of a man to do big things. But he never supposed, poor man, that he was about to reap the immediate fruitage of his sin, and that death was

about to intervene. . . . As he had sowed so he must reap.

Tenaciously he clung to the belief that mother would get well. He must have time to atone to her for what he had done. (For the guidance of those who may have had similar experiences I would say there is nothing that cannot be done, given time and patience—but will the necessary time always be given to us?)

When a drunkard's sense yields to his higher nature, and he awakens like a startled dreamer from a nightmare, to find no pleasure in his besottedness or in wrong doing, only disappointment and unhappiness, then, and then only, can he hear the "still small voice" uttering itself and calling him back to God.

It would appear as if sheer cussedness had led James Morgan away from the path of virtue, for his real affections were centred on his own wife. Theirs had been the sort of love which rules the universe, but he had broken that law, and he must atone. His was a complex personality of grim determination and emotional tenderness. On the other hand, Mary Morgan's jealousy was a mixture of pride, selfishness and suspicion, and love could not rule in a house where such an antithesis reigned.

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My sudden disappearance from the house and prolonged absence had caused great anxiety, and mother was in a state of collapse when we entered.

"Here we are!" I called cheerfully. "Mother, you don't have to be unhappy any more; father says so!"

But father made a false step coming in at the door and measured his full length before her.

"Hallo, Mary!" he said with an apologetic air.

Mother stared at him in horrified fascination, but without saying a word. Oh, the whole thing was hellish! The thought raced and rang in my ears as father struggled up from his undignified position.

"Mary, I am mean and despicable! What a beast I am ever to have left you."

Mother's voice, always so gentle, now had a chill, hard ring in it. "That I should have tasted this bitterness," was all she said.

I felt a lump in my throat, a terrible sadness in my heart which a moment before had been filled with satisfaction over a task accomplished. If father had not stumbled—had not been so obviously drunk.

Unsophisticated and warm-hearted as she was, mother's joy was shadowed over by her wounded affections. She was too ill to understand that her husband was in earnest, and, besides, the scandal about the other woman had entered her heart like cold steel. Her foreboding theories hung around her like a cloak of dense, black gloom.

Helen wept over the disgrace brought upon our home more than the hurt to mother, while I removed father's collar and unlaced his shoes and helped the faithful Ann to get him on the couch in the sitting room. And so ended the memorable day of Friday, the 13th of January.

Yet from that day James Morgan was a changed man. He had had his lesson and was full of humility. The image of the beast he had become was now hell's torment, only to be effaced by the sweat of agony. His desire to atone was as a burning fire in his heart. He showed his genuine repentance in every way, his reverence for mother was unfeigned; but it was too late, though he knew it not. Mother was already heavenly homesick—looking away from earth; and had he but known it, that knowledge would have done much towards healing her broken heart.

CHAPTER XII.

Bereavement

IN THE grey, mysterious hour when dawn was breaking on the world, I woke. The wind was sighing and sobbing around the house; the ancients believed that the winds bore the souls of the dead being wafted away to the Elysian fields.

Suddenly I sat up in bed and looked at my mother's face. To me it was like the pale face of the Madonna in the blue-satin-lined picture above the bed. A terrible lonesome feeling crept over me and gripped my heart with clammy clutch. As objects in the room became clearer, I could not see any movement of breathing, and I could fancy the cold body of a corpse beneath the clothes. I was so excited and terrified that instinctively I called out, "Mother! Mother! Wake up! You look so strange! I can't bear it! Wake up!"

"What's the matter, child?" cried mother, startled from her sleep. All my doubts faded when I heard her voice, and I tried to laugh it off.

"I thought something dreadful had happened to you. I must have been dreaming," I said.

"Nonsense, Katherine, what could have happened to me?" And again she laughed, a queer little forced laugh.

When the full daylight flooded the room I noticed that her eyes were unusually bright and her face flushed.

I could hear Ann poking the kitchen fire, and presently my sister stood beside the bed with a cup of tea in her hand.

"You're very hard to wake this morning, mother. You look tired," and she gazed at mother curiously.

"Am I as bad as that?" she answered. "I was dreaming of heaven, only I'm afraid that time is still a long way off."

"Poor dad," said Helen, "he's got such a sore head. He's going to Napier to apply for the biggest contract there is. I heard him ask Ann to stay on." And Ann, from sheer good nature, stayed.

Outside, the sunlit beauty almost took one's breath away. The land was alight with God, the steep hills were blue and purple and gold.

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The events of the next few days were rather vague, and when I try to remember them, only a confused jumble of impressions come to my memory. Time lost all count for me; the weeks sped by as if on wings. Father placed a successful tender for work with Robjohns, of Napier. Roads had to be made through the wild interior reaching as far as Patea. He hated to leave mother; she looked so frail and sad, but he realized that she must have every comfort, and he must earn the money. The day before he left we drove with him into Napier. What a treat it was. While he transacted business we idled away the time on the beach, watching the promenaders along Marine Parade, or walked among the flowers and looked out on the loveliness of sea and hills. To-day, looking on the new Napier, which has arisen on the ruins left by the earthquake, all is changed, the buildings being so different from those so well remembered from my childhood. Yet the beautiful panoramas of sea and sky and hills changes not, and makes one realize that man's contribution to the landscape is only a waking dream shadow.

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Several months had passed. The gloom which mantles the earth in the cheerless days of winter, even the gentle winter of New Zealand, is again changing, giving place to returning spring. Gentle zephyrs stirred the tender green leaves, and the violets began to lift their blue eyes.

During the winter, which for Hawke's Bay was a severe one, my mother was practically confined to the house the whole time. The nuns were constant visitors at our home. One sister in particular was for ever urging mother to send me to school, and it was finally decided that I was to commence in the spring.

Father Jardin, too, paid frequent calls to the invalid. His singular piety and unshakeable belief in Providence held a store of comfort for the sick one.

"How truly he serves his Master," she was wont to

say, "never sparing himself or placing any value on worldly things."

He was also a man of considerable learning, and possessed a valuable library. He loaned mother some delightful books, which proved a source of deep interest to us both. I loved books, and would sit for hours poring over their contents. The world has much to thank writers for; they create books much as does the silkworm his silk cocoon—out of himself; a precious gift of producing what the world desires to possess. By means of delving into so many books I acquired facts and ideas beyond my years; in fact, I felt no longer a child.

The last visitor had departed. Mother dozed in her rocking chair drawn up before the fire burning brightly in the grate and shedding a cheerful lustre over the tiny, low-ceiled parlour. Outside the air was chilly. It was one of those "still grey days" of spring, with smoke rising straight from the chimney pots, and dark trees looked thickly green against far grey skies. Gradually the light faded. I closed my book, and, going to the window, gazed out into the gathering dusk. A thick mist came rolling down from the hillsides, enveloping hedges and buildings. The garden looked neglected; chrysanthemums that had adorned it earlier still hung, tied to stakes in the ground.

The fire burnt low and fell in with a gentle crash; the room grew colder, but mother slept on. I moved about softly, fearing to disturb her.

Then someone entered in at the gate and walked up the path. "Father!" I cried out in joyful surprise. A moment and he was in the room.

"Mary! Are you all right?" he enquired anxiously as he knelt beside her chair and took both her hands in his own. Mother opened startled blue eyes to look at him wonderingly.

"James! Has anything gone wrong? Why have you come home to-day?"

"Nothing to do with my work, if that's what you mean; only I couldn't rest; something tugged at my heart,

for all the world as if you were calling me. . . . Oh, Mary, if you could see within my soul," he cried in anguish, "see how truly I worship you and the children. I swear before my Maker that there was never any other woman but you. Won't you believe me, Mary? Gladly would I give my life to see you strong and happy!"

Mary Morgan looked lovingly down on the pleading face of the only man she had ever loved. "James"—and her voice sounded almost like a caress—"I forgive you, as I hope to be forgiven."

"God bless you, Mary. I wanted to hear you say it again. I was afraid you might change your mind."

Quietly I tip-toed from the room; somewhere I had read a poetical interpretation of a beautiful allegory of the soul—"the Union of Faith and Love." Always I had been my mother's constant companion; to me her soul was an open book; she would never grow old, and, although her heart was broken because she believed that my father had been unfaithful, she was loyal to him, regardless of the scandal caused by idle tongues.

To-night she insisted on staying up for tea instead of retiring early, as was her usual custom, and the house that had been absolutely quiet an hour earlier now resounded to merry chatter and laughter. In the midst of our mirth a visitor was announced; it was Rakiura, the native woman whom we had not seen since the previous summer. She had journeyed from Gisborne, and had much news to impart. Great was our joy to see her again.

"Rakiura, you're ever so welcome," was mother's greeting. "Come to the fire while Katherine makes fresh tea."

So many happy surprises in one day were almost too much for the invalid. Ann insisted on mother going to bed, which she did after obtaining a promise from Rakiura to return on the morrow.

Very early I awoke and watched the moon grow pale against the approach of dawn. Scarcely could I wait for the sunrise; I longed to be up. I felt suffocated in the

house. I felt I must be out among the flowers and hear the sigh of the wind in the pine trees. Now that father was home mother would not miss me. Therefore, as soon as it was light I crept out of bed and dressed, then made my way to the deserted brick kiln. Wrapt in an atmosphere far removed from the cares of the world, I found myself in a moss-covered silent retreat where Nature dwelt in eternal reverie; dead leaves made a thick, rustling carpet; the perfume of early spring, "waiting in silent woodlands," poured forth sweet incense upon the air—a fairy kingdom. Yes, the forest at the rear of the brick kiln was wonderfully beautiful at this time of the year. Mist still clung to the tall treetops, but was dispersing before the light breeze. There was a suggestion of remoteness and peace about it that led me on.

At length I reached the mill pond with the wind ruffling the stream like little ripples on the sand; yellow leaves floated on the surface of the water, while others rustled down upon the grass. Polished acorns rattled down through the branches of lichen-covered oaks, and an azure kingfisher sat solitary on a half-submerged log. It was a place of enchantment. The verdure-clothed ruins held me spellbound. Peering within a cavern, I called aloud, "Open, sesame! I'm one of the forty thieves!" In a flash Rakiura appeared. "Oh, how you frightened me!" I laughed, but the Maori woman looked grave; her face alive with conflicting emotions.

"You must not come here alone, pakeha baby. It is no longer safe. Far have I travelled and seen and heard much. The melody of the winds which have power to awaken feelings of joy and sorrow, of yearning and regret, also send warnings of danger and death. For although Te Kooti has been pardoned by the white Government, and has retired to Ohope for the rest of his days, there remains Kowhai, and I have good reason to believe that she seeks vengeance on the Golden Wahine."

Rakiura told of savage tribes who lurked among the mountains and untracked forests. They tilled the ground,

planted corn and kumara, and built huts surrounded by protective palisades. Kowhai gladly availed herself of their hospitality when travelling through their country.

A feeling of awe crept over me as I listened to this strange tale, and I promised to be careful for my mother's sake. But all the same the brick kiln seemed more than ever haunted by the ghosts that filled the gloaming.

Our conversation was broken by the clang of the blacksmith's anvil in the nearby village. "Come, Rakiura, we must go. My mother will be anxious, and Ann will be mad if she has to wait breakfast."

As we emerged on the road, it became evident that something unusual had happened at home, for a cab waited before the door, and as we approached my father appeared with rugs and pillows, which he deposited in the waiting vehicle. "Hurry, Katherine," he called. "Your mother is going to the hospital."

With a tightening of the heart I felt that something tragic was about to happen as I dashed into the house. Ann was helping mother to dress, and signalled me to be still. Helen and Mummie Trow stood quietly by, and occasionally passed her some article of clothing. All were silent. Mother's eyes looked past me with a vacant stare.

"Do you see anyone coming up the road?" she enquired.

"No," I said after a moment, "I don't."

"Sure you don't see anybody coming round the bend?"

"No, there's nobody," I repeated, going to the door. "Were you expecting anybody?"

"After all . . . James wasn't much more than a boy, not a day over twenty-one, but he had such a grand way with him. . . ."

It was evident that mother's mind was wandering. At that moment father came in. He tenderly placed his arms around the frail figure.

"Lean on me, Mary; don't be afraid."

"I keep thinking I hear footsteps coming down the road," she explained as her pallor suddenly increased and

a shiver ran through her. Then, all at once she seemed to understand that she was going away from home. She gazed about the room, and then paused before the mirror on the dressing table.

"This is death printed on my cheek," she whispered to herself. . . .

Tears started to Ann's eyes as she watched the departure.

"Do you remember the witch's warning in my dream, James? 'When the violets raise their heads once again in the spring you shall depart.' "

"Hush, my love, do not think such things, Mary. It cuts my heart to hear you speak so."

The morning air was thick with the scent of jonquils and violets, and the breeze seemed to blow the perfume into my soul. Then she said: "James, do you remember the day we rode through Ireland on the black charger?" Her voice vibrated with pathos. "It's wonderful." She paused to inhale the scent of the flowers, and I quickly gathered a little bunch, and as father propped her among the cushions she appeared to be crushing the petals between hands that were as frail as the new-blown blossoms. She looked like a beautiful bride as she drove away, her husband's arm around her and her fair hair against his shoulder.

We stood gazing up the road long after the cab had disappeared, and only then did it occur to me that my mother had not wished us good-bye; mother, who never went anywhere without me, had left without a word. She was like a sleep-walker; had the same vague look in her eyes. The picture of that day will never fade from my memory.

The womenfolk waited up to hear the doctor's report. It was close on midnight ere father returned. His haggard face gave little, if any, hope. Ann set before him some supper. He must, he said, take horse and ride all night to reach camp; his men would be anxious at his absence. Nothing would have induced him to leave mother, but the doctor's emphatic declaration that she was in no

immediate danger. While waiting for his horse he paced the floor, talking agitatedly, brokenly, like a man distraught. . . . The thing he had most dreaded was an actual fact, and he had caused it; his was the blame. . . . Fiercely he clasped Helen and me to his heart, then went out into the night.

My heart was sick with fear; my feet went stumblingly out through the passage to my mother's room. I threw myself on the bed and lay quite still in the darkness.

There could be no doubt but that my mother was dying; she looked almost transparent. But it was very hard to associate one so beautiful with death—a life full of charming wistfulness, steeped in fantasies, combined with fearless courage—my mother to me might well have been listed in the categories of the saints.

Suddenly beside my bed some strange magic brought a vision, a spectre, a form etherial and unfamiliar. The spectre bid me rise and come, and an overpowering impulse came to me, a super-abundant energy triumphed over me. I rose and accompanied the spectre through dimpled fields stained scarlet with poppies, splashed with massed patches of vivid blue cornflowers. A path led beside a winding silver stream, where big purple thistles nodded on thick, spiked stalks. The fresh air seemed to act on my tired body like some subtle charm; my feet scarcely touched the ground. I was happily excited to be free, free like the birds to go hither and thither; freer, in fact, for there was no burdensome flesh to hamper me. The thing was to keep on, to forget the wounds of the flesh and the human mind.

Presently my mother was beside me; her gown smelt of lavender and old rose leaves. I viewed her with some misgivings which deepened into fear, for her face shone with a soft white light and her eyes were brilliant. Although her lips moved not, her voice penetrated my consciousness. . . . "I am here that you may be reminded, yet once again, that it is not for the things of this world only that we wait. Spirit has no beginning, and no end; and man is immortal. After bitter struggles between the

spirit and the flesh I find myself upon higher levels, where the light of truth has rolled back the clouds to show me clearly that no evil can happen to man, unless it come through his own mind." Her words seemed to be echoing far beyond the fields, and they remain with me yet. I tried to cling to her, but clutched only empty air. I called her name, but she had vanished.

With a dull feeling that my blood had frozen, and that an icy hand clutched my heart, I became conscious that I was lying on my mother's bed. I wished to weep but could not. The house held that atmosphere of stillness and suspense which is supposed to accompany the presence of death. With a shudder I crept beneath the bedclothes. Through the open window the heavens were ablaze with stars, and frogs filled the night with their croaking.

I dozed fitfully in a kind of feverish unrest; confused, disjointed visions chased each other through my brain. With a start I woke before dawn. I climbed out of bed and stood beside the window to watch the new day break to the world. Almost imperceptibly the stars silently disappeared, the sky lightened, only one southern star remained of all the constellations, the last to fade. The moon lay on her back, a slender sickle, virginal and remote. "Until the day breaks, and the shadows flee away. . . ." Was I still dreaming, or did someone speak those words? I felt terribly afraid; what did they mean? I was long to remember that promise! Mournfully I got back into bed.

One may well wonder, after all these years, how it is that I can remember these things, but they were photographed on the subconscious mind of a particularly alert and sensitive child. Their impression can never be effaced—although it has taken a lifetime to fully understand their deeper meanings.

The sun was streaming on my face when I again became conscious. It must be late; had I overslept? Something unusual must have happened. Sounds of

many feet mingled with the scraping of furniture being removed, and strange voices, came to my ears.

"Ann! Helen! What has happened? What is it?" I cried frantically.

Then they came hurrying into the room, followed by Mummie Trow and the Quirk girls. I knew before they spoke.

"Mother is dead," sobbed Helen, with her arms about me. Ann's tears fell silently.

Mummie Trow spoke brokenly, "Your mother is in heaven, Katherine, and we can't wish her back."

Dry-eyed, I looked at the women standing at the foot of the bed.

"Yes," I said. "I know. She went out at dawn."

"Who told you that?" asked Ann.

"She came to me last night. I saw her. I can't think just what she said now, but I heard her quite plainly, as I stood by the window. It was meant to be good-bye."

"That is the tragedy of it," sobbed Ann. "The end was so sudden. It will kill your father. He should never have left her."

I inwardly shuddered at the thought of my mother's spirit newly released from the torment of the body, going out alone into the unknown. Vaguely I wondered whether she had said farewell to my father in passing as she had to me. I dreaded the thought of his grief.

"Ann, who was with my mother at the last. . ." The words choked in my throat. "She wasn't alone, was she, Ann?"

"No, dear, the nurse had just finished sponging her, for her temperature had increased during the night."

"Nurse, is it daylight yet?" she asked.

"Dawn is just breaking, Mrs. Morgan. Would you like a drink before I give you another tablet?"

"I shan't need any more tablets, nurse. My time is up; soon I shall sleep beneath the blessed waters of Lethe, in the lotusland of peace—for great is the charm of the place."

The nurse smiled, trying to humour her patient, thinking her words the outcome of a fevered brain.

"It has been a long night, and it grows darker instead of lighter, nurse. How long did you say before the dawn breaks?"

"It's just breaking now. Look!" And she drew aside the curtain.

"Tell my husband, when he comes back, nurse, tell him, 'All things work together for good to them that love God,' and that suffering is oft the agent to bring us to Him. Tell him I'll love him 'until the day breaks . . . and the shadows . . .'" Her voice faded away, and Mary Morgan had gone to her God.

Hastily the nurse rang for assistance, but all was over. The end had been so sudden—all was confusion.

"That's what the voice said to me," I whispered to Ann. "'Until the day breaks.' I remember it now," and I crumpled up all limp on the bed.

CHAPTER XIII.

The Funeral

In the midst of their own grief and confusion Ann and Mummie Trow tried to think how they could soften the blow for James Morgan. In his absence there was much to be done, as he could not possibly return before the next day. Consequently they left an order with the undertaker for a coffin in which to bring mother's remains from the hospital to Taradale.

One of the Miss Harris's came to take measurements for our mourning clothes, which were heavily trimmed with crepe. Crepe flowers also adorned the hats, making the wearers ghastly in their grief. All very absurd to our modern ideas, but customary at that time as showing deep respect for the departed.

Two nuns arrived to prepare the front bedroom for

mother's home-coming. They covered the furniture with sheets, and placed unlighted candles and a crucifix on a table beside the bed. Silent and dry-eyed I watched them.

The air was charged with dread expectancy. Neighbours began to arrive with wreaths. The house appeared full of people; tearful women filled the parlour and overflowed into the kitchen. Some of them were actually old shipmates of Mary Morgan; now all waiting for the hearse to bring home the bride whom they had helped to dress for her wedding on board the "Merry Maid."

Sadly I waited under the macrocarpa tree to catch the first glimpse of the funeral carriage. I pictured it leaving the mortuary chapel at the hospital, for I had witnessed a similar scene once when accompanying my mother on a visit to the doctor. A hearse stood on the flower-bordered path before the open door of the chapel; a pale, wintry sun shone over it, lighting up the window panes and glinting on the silver fittings; the sound of breakers boomed angrily on the beach; white spray tossed against the breakwater, and fishing smacks rose and fell on the tide, while over all a brilliant crescent rainbow curved the sky. . . . I tried to shut the picture from my mind, and in spirit accompany my mother's lonely journey down the hill and along the dusty highway to Taradale.

At last the hearse came in view. Dear God! Oh, no, it couldn't be my mother coming home like that! Why, it was only yesterday morning that she had sat in the cab crushing flowers in her hands!

Reverently the bearers carried the coffin inside and placed it on trestles beside the bed. The undertaker unscrewed the lid and stood it against the wall. Flickering rays from the now lighted candles shone on the name-plate, "Mary Morgan, aged 36 years." The nuns commenced the litany for the dead; the room was heavy with the perfume of flowers . . . and ever must the scent of violets bring back the scene in that death chamber.

Involuntarily I crept to the head of the bier—then stopped. It was my first contact with death. My mother

appeared asleep; the blue-lined casket made her look like the Madonna in the picture above her head. Vaguely I wondered if others had noticed it. A spot of dark blood, like a rosary bead, had oozed at the corner of her mouth, caused most likely by the rough journey to Napier, for a body so pure and beautiful in life could not be otherwise in death. I stared wonderingly at the other occupants of the room—Ann with swollen eyes, Mummie Trow choked with sobs, and an elderly lady who knelt silently telling her beads. Helen wept bitterly, and kept repeating over and over again: "If father were only home; why did he leave us?"

I edged my way round the coffin, and took my mother's cold, ringless fingers in my own; they were limp, and showed a deep groove from her wedding ring. I reached her feet. Instinct bid me warm them. I wanted to cry aloud in my fear and anguish—how could God allow this thing to happen. Words of prayer uttered by my mother came back to me: "Lord, how great are the mysteries of life, the stupendous issues of death, and the loneliness of the valley of shadows." But, standing there beside her lifeless body, I too felt dead; impotent, hopeless; my heart full of savage contempt for a God that appeared to me such a baffling complex. I decided I would stick to my own pagan beliefs—yet a deep yearning for sympathy welled up in my soul. My eyes ached with holding back the tears, as I scornfully blinked away the moisture.

The simple folk in the room could not understand my strange behaviour; why no amount of coaxing would induce me to leave my mother's corpse.

Irish custom provided a wake; the neighbours stayed up all night, taking it in turns to sit by the dead. The heat from the candles and the perfume of the flowers soon made me drowsy. As the night wore on Mummie Trow placed me on the bed beside the bier, while Helen, overcome with grief, crept in beside me.

My mind was in a confused jumble of the day's

happenings. As I lay staring at the tall candles with their heads of flame, I seemed to see the hideous form of Kowhai hovering near. Then she passed before the candles; their flame went out, the room was in darkness—I slept.

It was all so horrible, Ann . . . and then my eyes came to rest on the dead face of my mother, and in a dim sort of way it was comforting to know that she was beyond all earthly pain.

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David Trow rode to meet my father and break the sad news. Shortly before noon the two horsemen arrived. Father lifted me from the ground and carried me into the house. No word of mine can adequately describe his sorrow, for there is something terrible in a strong man's grief. Helen clung to him, and Mrs. Callaghan tried to console him by saying it was the will of God. His despair was painful to witness, and would have melted a stone. He knelt beside the coffin, his strong face convulsed with sobs, while tears rained down his face. Vainly he pleaded for mother to come back to us. "I'll soon be with you, Mary, for I can't go on living without you. . . ."

"But you have your children to live for, Mr. Morgan," broke in that sympathetic old lady Mrs. Callaghan.

Piteously he looked at Helen and me. "Yes, yes, for their sakes. Try and forgive me, children, if you can. My punishment is bitter, for I killed your mother."

"I regret, now, that I did not remain with her," he explained to the women. "She was so gentle and sweet to me when I left her at the hospital; sweeter than she had been for a long while. She never spoke when she kissed me, and yet, somehow, I felt it was a last 'good-bye.' She was the sunshine of my existence. . . ." And he bowed his head on the coffin in silent agony.

The nuns had returned to prepare the room for the burial service. On the heart of the corpse they placed a brown scapular, in the limp fingers a rosary was entwined.

More than ever mother looked as though she slept; almost it seemed that colour stole into the cheeks. Others said the same, and I found myself waiting expectantly for the lids to lift from the blue eyes. Absently I wondered why someone had not removed the little bead of blood from her mouth.

The neighbours came to look a last farewell on one whom they loved and respected, one of whom it might be truly said that she walked in the footsteps of the great Nazarine, "as meek as he was mighty."

The small room became a bower of flowers, Ann placed a posy of violets in the absurdly small hands. "Here's your flowers, Mary," faltered the crushed and tearful Ann, who had so often coaxed the invalid's failing appetite with similar words: "Here's your broth, Mary."

It struck sharply on my mind, and I marvelled at the continued faithfulness of this wonderful woman who had been Mary Morgan's best friend.

Then another woman walked into the room—"Golden Wahine, haerera!" (farewell) lamented Rakiura as she placed a chaplet of green leaves (the Maori symbol of mourning) on the coffin. "She has descended by the sacred pohutukawa trees into the tide, leaving your world desolate," wept the faithful old native.

"That is Rakiura's imagination," said I to Helen. "More likely mother has gone up to the blue dome of heaven. Her God was above, not under, the sea. "Hush," said Helen, her arm about me, as we stood clad in our sombre mourning clothes at the foot of the bed. With dry, burning eyes I watched mother's face, soon to be hidden forever.

Father had not moved from beside the casket; there he knelt, a stricken man, quite heedless of his surroundings.

Wearing the long cassock of his order, Father Jardin entered. People crowded the passage, the sitting room, and outside the open window. It was a beautiful sunny afternoon. A lark soaring heavenwards sent back to earth

the cadence of his melody. From the garden sounded the drone of bees.

The priest's voice vibrated with emotion as he uttered the simple soul-stirring words of the "office for the dead." Afterwards he spoke to this effect to the sorrowing family: "Behold your house is left desolate, dear brethren, who are gathered here in sympathetic brotherhood. I would exhort you, 'Choose ye this day, for in the midst of life we are in death.' Mortals waken from this dream of death with spiritual bodies unseen by those who bury the earthly body, to dwell eternally with their Creator, whereunto they are garnered by the Great Reaper into the barns of God. Never in the long term of my priesthood—and I am now an old man—have I met anyone more certain that she would soon be with her Maker than Mary Morgan. Let her blameless life be an example to us all. Her's was a heart full of love for her family and her neighbours; and every heart that beats with kindly impulse must leave a hopeful lesson to the world for the betterment of mankind." Then, sprinkling the casket, he repeated the words of St. Paul: "The wisdom of this world is foolishness with God." "Let us think with the great apostle."

And now came the most terrible moment of all, when the undertaker screwed down the lid. The kindly priest led James Morgan to the waiting cab behind the hearse. There was something in the statuesque simplicity of my father's giant figure that in after years I was unable to forget. He sat like a man looking at a distant vision, while the cortege moved slowly along the metalled highway to the sole accompaniment of the crunching wheels.

At the foot of the hill was the cottage of the woman Rouse. To-day the blinds were drawn—what must her thoughts have been?

Passing this house recalled to me a most painful happening. One Sunday my mother had sent me to Mrs. Rouse to enquire if father were there. I found him reclining on the lawn, the woman beside him, beguiling

him with her smiles. "Daddy, mother is waiting dinner," I announced sharply, suddenly appearing round the corner of the house. Without so much as a look in the woman's direction, he rose, and, taking my hand, returned home. I remember that Sunday so well because Ann was angry that the meal was spoilt, and she said a lot of hard things to James Morgan. Mother was in tears. The day before the butcher had told a scandalous tale when he called, and by this time it would be common gossip in Taradale that her husband was a constant visitor at this woman's house. Mother said not a word, but the iron had gone into her heart, and she never really held up her head again.

Mute with tense sorrow, I squeezed father's hand, and he returned the pressure, bowing his head in wistful appeal. But any hopes Mrs. Rouse may have had ended with my mother's death, for James Morgan's heart was buried in his wife's untimely grave. Standing beside the newly-turned clay, his gaze rivetted on her small coffin; his soul full of bitter remorse. He must have suffered the agonies of the damned.

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Weeks passed. To-day summer was in the air, but in my little heart was only winter. The emptiness of the house without my mother was unbearable. I was tired with the weariness of thinking. Was I always to be alone, all these long, long days?

My greatest friends were my books, more intimate, and giving me more pleasure than human beings. I was always creeping away to return to my books. I did not want to make friends. Taradale was small and quiet and unprogressive. There were no girls of my age for companions, and each day I lived more and more within myself, and my soul began to expand. Every morning on rising I thought that perhaps to-day some magic carpet would enfold me and whisk me away, and then all life would be changed, for nobody seemed to care how lonesome I was. Ann Cornish had gone to nurse her sister. It was another wrench to let her go; almost she had

become part of our home. Helen was old enough to keep house, Ann declared. She was turned fourteen, and big and strong for her years. The neighbours offered to help, and Mummie Trow would look after me.

Father begged of her to guard me well. There were so many opportunities for trouble. His hands trembled while he fastened the straps of his saddle bags. He was about to leave for the interior, and hated the idea of leaving his two girls.

It was some months before I recovered my wonted spirits and took an interest in my surroundings.

CHAPTER XIV.

Kidnapped

MORE than ever I hated the idea of going to school. At the back of my mind I had a notion to roam the forests with Rakiura, and wondered when she would return to Taradale. Such a scheme was altogether inconsistent with real existence, but, nevertheless, the wish was to be granted much sooner than I expected.

It was decided that I must go to school, and this was my last day of freedom. Helen had given her word to the nuns that I should attend on the morrow. In vain I tried to view the proposition in a favourable light—it was impossible. Still I had one more day which was my very own.

After breakfast Helen sent me on an errand to the village. "And mind now, Katherine," she cautioned, "don't go near the brick kiln. When you return I'll be at Quirk's, so bring the things over there."

I loved to go shopping, and having made my purchase, stopped to watch a floating flotilla of paper boats sailing down the flooded gutter. Children were playing with skipping ropes, whip-tops and marbles—the things which belong to childhood—but they failed to interest me

for long. The earth looked washed after the previous night's storm, and the mill-stream glittered in the sunshine.

I was seized with an almost uncontrollable desire to discover the inexhaustible source of the spring that fed the mill-pond in the forbidden brick kiln, for I could hear the splashing water as I drew near. Now or never—the words sounded in my brain, as an invisible power drew me from the road into the gloomy enclosure. The feeling that I was forced against my will persisted, all recollection of sorrow faded. Words seemed to echo in my ears: "You must go forward!" "Now or never!" "Only memory's magic carpet can carry you back, but you will go forward!" "Forward! never to rest!"

Aimlessly I began to wander about the silent ruins, with a weird feeling that I was bewitched. I could see a thin curl of smoke ascending through the trees from the chimney stack of Barton's house. Other things became dim as if I walked in a dream. Visions of fields of daisies immediately brought heart-hungry longings for my mother. She would walk no more with me, for her path led to "the house built without hands." I must continue alone to dream my dreams and build my castles. . . .

I wandered on into the shadows of the forest, where, even in the mid-summer, the sunlight failed to penetrate. I gazed at the glorious vistas of natural loveliness. Here climbing rata and other forest vines trailed their foliage in the cool blue depths of the lagoon at the entrance to a mysterious cavern. A vagrant breeze stirred the leaves in gentle rhythm, then died away again. Within the forest Nature breathed softly; the voices of living things became subdued; my retreat was beautiful with the beauty of temple and colonnade. The straight columns of kauri trees had a cathedral-like effect, while the perfume of the tree fern (an integral part of the bush) rose like incense on the air. The rising wind playing through the giant trees made strange, weird chords as it swept the vibrating boughs as the strings of a harp, rising and moaning like a wailing human voice.

The further I penetrated the dense labyrinth the darker grew the gloom, until it was almost pitch black. I shuddered in the dank atmosphere, but pushed on. I must succeed in finding the hidden spring, or abandon my quest. This strange compulsion which sent me here was to have a meaning; fate was about to spin fresh threads into the warp and woof of my life.

I explored several small caves in passing. These dimly-lighted recesses were full of allurements to me. Perhaps some strange being lay hidden behind the nearest rock. I fancied something stirred within the tangle of weeds and bracken; leaves rustled, a twig snapped. I stood motionless. Surely something had moved beside that hoary, gnarled oak trunk. I began to feel afraid.

"Who's there?" I called. "Who's there?" came the echo. "What a silly ass you are," I said aloud. "What a silly ass you are," answered the echo in a softer tone. I laughed aloud, to be answered by another laugh.

It was not to be wondered at that the superstitious Taradale people never visited the brick kiln for fear of wandering natives, or Te Kooti's men. Anyway, it was certain that I had the place to myself. The kiln was within easy distance of the village, and, of course, there was no real danger. From where I stood I could hear water gurgling over the planks that formed the mill dam; and the bleating of sheep as they passed along the road to fresh pastures beyond Redcliffs. These familiar sounds chased fear from my mind, and with renewed determination I began the ascent of a steep hill. I noted how earthquakes (and these were frequent) had left cracks and fissures in the ground. As I continued climbing, making a track through the thick undergrowth, an owl passed close to my face on swift, noiseless wings. The reprobate bird who stays behind by day, revelled in the darkness which almost reproduced his night, called loudly to his mate. Then, guided by the glare of his own torch-like eyes, he set off to pursue some smaller bird to its death.

As I toiled up the bush became less dense, and the

golden splendour of the sunshine once more trellised gilded bars upon the moss-carpeted floor. Above and beyond great peaks reached to the skyline, or at least so it appeared to me. They were crowned with a rampart of granite boulders; stone piled on stone, in titanic grandeur that showed big and menacing in clear silhouette.

Gaining the summit, I gazed beyond to the far horizon. Here was something I had always wanted to see. All around were desolate hills rolling to where they seemed to merge with the clouds. How enormous was space! How vast the heavens that lay over everything. My soul seemed to bridge the gulf that separated me from this region of heavenly seclusion, beyond mundane pettiness. From this high threshold the fleeting clouds appeared to be within reach of my hands, and the vision held me fascinated. Forgotten was my quest for the spring. I was in another world. "God and Mother," I breathed into the stillness, and countless voices seemed to whisper, "God and Mother."

I had a vivid impression that I had lived all this before somewhere—it was like glimpses of a forgotten dream. Then I suddenly realised the long shafts of sunlight obliquely across the rocks, prognosticated the passing day . . . I had been absent from home all day. I paused to take one last look at the valleys lying in the shadow, and then hurried away. How anxious my sister would be. This thought, coupled with an empty void at the pit of my stomach, urged a speedy return.

Hurriedly I began the descent. The steep track looked blacker than ever; the air felt thick and heavy as it enveloped me. Again the silent wings of a morepork (owl) passed overhead, and a sharp cry of fear from a small bird told of sudden death to some feathered creature. Listening intently, another sound caught my ear—the rustle of leaves close beside me. At first I thought it was some small animal of the forest, but was speedily undeceived when I caught sight of the bent figure of Kowhai

coming up through the thickets. The sight of the witch drove the blood from my heart, and cold beads of moisture stood on my forehead. Her bare feet fell noiselessly on the moss, as with cat-like movements she advanced towards me. Her harsh, crackling laugh chilled my blood. I had heard it before, in my dreams, and it made my ears tingle. The hideous, tattooed face came close to mine; the evil eyes bored through me. . . . The thing my mother had dreaded most since my birth had happened—I was in the power of the ruthless old Maori prophetess. I brushed away my tears. I would meet the old hag unflinchingly. But other figures lurked in the shadows. What could I do? To be taken by the savages was too horrible to think about; to flee up the hill seemed hopeless, but, being the only alternative that I could see, I decided to make the attempt, and was on the point of turning and making a dash for it when a black, evil-smelling hand was placed over my mouth by a native who had crept up behind me. With brain whirling, I struggled; then a deadly nausea overcame me. Darkness blotted out the scene as I fainted.

When I regained consciousness I felt the contact of greasy flesh and knew that I was being borne swiftly away. I quivered in every nerve, wondering what was in store for me. A deep voice, speaking the Maori language, ordered the repulsive hand to be removed from my mouth, so that I could breathe freely, and a grateful wind cooled my brow. Hours passed.

In the starlight I could make out several figures walking in single file. They appeared to glide along; no word was spoken, and there was no sound save the breaking of branches in the thickets as we passed through. Travelling was easier as the country became more open and less hilly. Skirting a waste of swamp land, the natives made their way into the interior. They travelled all night without a halt, save twice to take a few mouthfuls of food.

I asked to be put on the ground. "That may not be,

pakeha," replied the giant who carried me. "We are bidden to deliver you in safety." Even in my terror I could not fail to catch a suggestion of fine manners, and the fact that he spoke English well made me less fearful. "Where are you taking me?" I asked. "That, pakeha, I dare not tell you." And he relapsed into silence.

On and on glided the ghostly-looking train. Everything had for me a fantastic meaning in the solitude of the great mountains, all bristling with ancient traditions of the terrible monsters that inhabited them. . . How long it seemed since I left home that morning. A strong longing for my sister and Mummie Trow welled up within me. How they would worry about me!

Dawn was stealing across the sky when we came in sight of a fortified pah. There was the usual high pallisade with the picturesque carved wooden gods of the Maoris, with their lolling tongues, three-fingered hands on their stomachs, and paua-shell eyes that glistened in the dim light.

This was Kowhai's stronghold—her own special tapu (sacred) possession. She herself was greatly feared by other tribes. Her will and magic was adamant, and the braves who now placed me before her gates must obey her at all times. Silently they withdrew, to be at once swallowed up in the early morning mist.

My captor led me to a whare (hut), evidently her own abode. There was a horrible stench of shark oil, and I shuddered at the thought that I might be smeared all over with the filthy stuff—or perhaps she had the power to change me into some wild creature of the woods! I had heard of such things, and somehow or other I felt bound to obey her.

As the light grew stronger in the hut, I became aware of her piercing eyes fastened upon me. They were the only part of her face which seemed to be alive. Matted hair hung over her bony cheeks, on which the skin was drawn tightly, like that of a mummy. The twisted lines

of tattoo added to her hideous appearance, and her clothes were torn and soiled with mud.

"You do not like Kowhai? You are afraid?" she asked.

"Why should I like you, if you are so cruel?" I replied defensively.

"The wahine mother think Kowhai not good enough for her. Why she hate me always?"

"Please do not talk like that about my mother; she is dead, and nothing will ever matter to me again."

"Kowhai know that hurt, too—when to part from the dead leaves a great pain," she answered. "Once Kowhai had a baby girl—she lies in the kauri forest—it was long long ago, how long do not know." To my surprise the black eyes were actually shedding tears.

"Perhaps nobody ever understood you, Kowhai. I'm sorry you're sad." She seemed pleased at my words, and immediately set about doing things for my comfort. She placed mats within a recess and spread food before me. At length I grew less fearful.

Human beings have a wonderful power of adjustment and endurance, exactly proportioned to the circumstances in which they may happen to find themselves, but this power often forsakes them the moment the difficulty is past, which called forth the effort. No sooner had the fear of immediate danger left me than I fell into a profound sleep.

When I awoke the sun was in mid-heaven. Through the open door of the hut my eyes beheld a wonderful landscape. How long I would have lain is hard to say, for I was too weary to think of moving, but I was recalled suddenly and painfully to the past, and present, by the sight of the witch sitting near my feet, with her head bent forward as if she slept. My slight movement caused her to start and look up.

"Your sleep was sound and long," she nodded. "You talked of escape—don't try it! It's no good, for

the mountain monsters would kill you.' With the sunlight my courage returned somewhat, and I asked,

"What kind of monsters are there? Not the giants who brought me here?"

"Nga! Evil spirits of the mountains—devil spirits."

"Oh, I'm not afraid of them," I said softly, though inwardly I quaked.

"Hgh!" she hissed fiercely. "I know the pakeha does not fear the Maori gods, because he has a white God in the sky."

"But why have you stolen me from my home?" I asked, trying to blink the tears back. She made no reply, and I continued questioning, in the hope that her eyes would tell me something.

"Do you always live here alone?" A head shake was the answer.

"Are you taking me to Te Kooti's oven?" Her eyes darted fire. At last I had struck a vibrant chord.

"The pakeha would see the great rangatira?" Eagerly she awaited my reply.

"Yes," I assented, "I would love to see the great prophet." Evidently my eagerness pleased her. Her head swayed about as she muttered incantations, the while she prepared food in her oven—food for the next day's journey.

Under a clear sky at sunrise the next morning we set out on what proved to be a tedious tramp lasting many days. How long we roamed I do not remember, but the sun rose and set more times than I cared to think about.

The native woman knew every turn and twist of that trail, and I marvelled how fast she could travel as we made our way through stately forests, forded streams and climbed over mountains, from whose summits stupendous panoramic views almost took my breath away. It was a wonderful experience to roam in that land of enchantment. Only at night would fear steal into my heart as I lay on my bed of fern listening to the night noises of the bush. But when my eyes opened to see clumps of toitoi

with their golden plumes waving in the sunlight, my fears faded, and gladly I sprang to help Kowhai gather wood for the fire.

As we advanced the character of the country gradually altered. Now we were crossing upland plains, with here and there a native hut standing isolated and looking very lonely. Once we called at a pah situated in a fertile valley. Here great deference was shown to the aged witch-doctor by the tribe, who sat in a circle on the ground listening intently to what appeared to be some sort of religious ceremony.

I walked about the pah, followed by wide-eyed native children, who had never before beheld a pakeha child; nor had many of their elders, unless perchance they had seen one served as food when the warriors returned with baskets of white flesh after some sanguinary victory.

In one quarter of the village was stored a remarkable selection of goods. Maize and kumeras were piled in sacks and placed in huge pits; sheepskins hung on fences; and hundreds of tuna (eels) were strung on lines to dry in the sun. Pigs scrounged for scraps of food amongst the whares, and sullen-eyed dogs with shaggy coats lay idly in the shade.

When we departed there was much nose-rubbing between the tribe and Kowhai, and some of the natives walked a little way to carry her kit. As the day wore on I enquired how much further we had to go before reaching Te Kooti's camp. "Soon you will see—soon you will see the great one," said Kowhai, nodding wisely as she spoke.

To my mind we seemed to have arrived at the very ends of the earth, as we paused to rest on a high cliff and gazed on the far horizon. Below stretched vast valleys, bathed in a golden haze of sunlight, while a singing stream and dense bush, alive with birds, made a spot of beauty that lulled the senses to repose. Sometimes I would lie on my back looking up through the branches at the blue dome of heaven flecked with pure white of floating clouds; and after a while my lids would drop and

my dreams be of birds, little streams, and the joyous small things in Nature which a child understands; or creatures of fairy lore, giants, goblins and gnomes. Invariably my eyes opened to find Kowhai dozing beside me. I ceased to worry over present happenings, and was content to dream along the misty roads, not knowing that an "All-wise Providence" must eventually find the right place for me in the aeons of time.

Meanwhile Kowhai had her moods, and visions, too. Within that savage old breast, love, rage or sorrow rushed like swirling tides to find an outlet. In her rage she stamped upon the ground; in her sorrow she beat herself upon the earth, wherein lay her dead; and to her, the growing light of dawn—"the poise of the stars"—was ecstasy. And falling showers and bubbling streams were the tears and laughter of the heart. Deep hidden beneath her outward ugliness of body was a soul endowed with random touches of rare beauty, and she encouraged me to the fullest in the game of make-believe, natural to most children—and the Maoris are but children of a larger growth—but she guarded me as fiercely as a tiger would its cub.

One day we were sitting on the banks of a stream, and Kowhai was wringing water from my garments, for I had recently fallen into the pool from which she had rescued me, when our attention was arrested by two objects which appeared in the distance.

"What are they, do you think?"

"I've noticed them a long while, and thought they were gulls walking, but they're too big for birds," replied Kowhai.

"They look to be coming this way," I said, my heart suddenly beating with excitement at the thought that it might be my father. I noticed that Kowhai was becoming restless as she gazed intently at the distant objects which, however, were approaching us rapidly.

"It's pakehas!" Her voice sounded full of alarm. "Come, we must hide!"

Greatly excited, I tried to wave my handkerchief in the hope of attracting the attention of what I now saw to be horsemen. However, I was no match for the wiry native woman, who seized and carried me, kicking and struggling, through the dense undergrowth.

"Ngh!" she hissed, "they shall not take you away from Kowhai!" And she stamped and spat on the ground, looking like a demon in her rage. My heart grew cold with fear and disappointment as the two horsemen disappeared over the ranges.

For the remainder of the day I was sad and downcast; saw no beauty in the stillness and grandeur of Nature which other times would have brought me calm. It was evident that Kowhai had had a fright, for during the remainder of the journey she spent much time scanning the surrounding country from high levels. While on one of these elevated points we beheld a mob of wild horses, led by a white stallion, crossing the plains.

"My race has always been free like the wild beasts until the pakeha came," quoth Kowhai, and once more she worked herself into such a frenzy that it frightened me. "Look!" she cried excitedly, pointing with bony finger to where craggy peaks, grey and rugged, stood clearly against the sky. "That is the haunted mountain of Huiarau. In winter snowstorms and ice slides cover the little-used track, and hundreds of our braves were entombed while trying to escape the troops of the hated pakeha who were advancing on their pah."

While she was speaking the sky had clouded over, blotting out the sun; the air became colder, and the landscape appeared to close in on one. The undulating country was restful to the eye, with the river like a broad sheet of silver winding through rich pasture lands. There was not one breath of wind, and so intense was the silence that there seemed to be no movement in the whole universe.

For a brief space Kowhai stood studying the heavens,

then, with a loud cry, she called: "Come, pakeha, we must find shelter ere the Storm God visits the land."

I was immensely relieved when we entered a cave at the foot of the boulder-strewn hillside, just as the first faint rumble of the storm sounded. I harkened to its reverberations as it crashed against the mountains and rolled away in sullen rumblings, echoing along the hills. Lightning flashes lit up the gloom of the cavern, and as suddenly faded away; the rain beat down mercilessly. When the din of the storm had passed the air grew lighter, so that I could discern objects in the cave. To my horror I beheld Kowhai's body prone upon the ground before the opening. With feelings of awe, I stared at the rigid form, while my mind raced over her past history—perhaps it was a spell, or something similar.

The whole scene savoured of the infernal regions. To be alone in a dark cave with a dead Maori woman blocking my escape. . . . No power on earth would have induced me to climb over that ghastly figure! Then the ground began to tremble. What was that? It sounded like the tramp of marching feet . . . nearer and nearer it drew . . . louder and louder! My teeth began to chatter; imagination ran riot in my brain. The phenomena of a phantom army (as Rakiura had so often recounted to me) was now an actual fact—before my very eyes. Maori braves in war paint and feathers, carrying long spears, began to march past, their faces turned towards the cave. On and on in seemingly endless procession. At length I grew weary of the monotony of marching feet and closed my eyes to shut out the offending spectacle.

A light noise behind me caused them to open quickly. With terror and disgust I saw several large rats crossing the floor. Their bodies were more than a foot in length from nose to tail, and their eyes shed a baneful gleam. Overcome with fear and fatigue, I must have lost consciousness, for when I opened my eyes again it was daylight. Beside me were vessels containing food

and water, but the body of Kowhai was nowhere to be seen. Instantly I scrambled to my feet and ran out into the blessed light of day.

Everywhere lay huge uprooted trees, hundreds of dead birds strewn over the ground, besides other mute evidence of a terrific hurricane. Eagerly I sought some sign of Kowhai—someone must have removed the body—and left food beside me. I decided to climb to the top of the hill and watch the entrance to the cave, until those who left the food returned. Sticky clay clung to my feet. Climbing was not easy, but the task, of scaling over boulders and fallen trees was trivial compared with the loss of Kowhai. I wanted to cry, but hope, the main-spring of human action, urged me forward. Kowhai had proved herself a seer, her witchcraft was powerful; but then, she also had vanished; it was all amazingly confusing.

Reaching the summit, I sat perched on a large boulder, with a terrible feeling that in some odd and explicable way the winds of fate, that so strangely blow, had placed me like a speck "on the top of the world." Desperately I craved for the sound of a human voice—for human companionship.

Shading my eyes with my hand, I looked out across the vast acres of wind-swept, barren swamp lands, where wild winds whistling shrilly, mixed with the cry of the swamp-hen. The sound of a waterfall, flooded by the storm, as it roared down a mighty chasm, echoed and re-echoed amongst the granite crags that showed through patches of densely-massed bush, and shone with obsidian (mica) caught by the rays of the sun. On every side mountains appeared to dominate the landscape, rising in their blue majesty through silent immensities.

I shrank with dismay from the thought of journeying alone, for I had neither bushman's instinct nor navigator's skill to pilot me. I still start in my sleep when dreams lead me back to the weird and terrifying scenes of the time I spent wandering with Kowhai in that far-

away. Is it any wonder, as I narrate my experiences which read like fairy-book tales in this enlightened age, that I still think it all a dream?

From the position of the sun overhead, and the cruel gnawing at the pit of my stomach, I knew that the sands in time's hour-glass must have run many times. Yet there seemed nothing that I could do but wait. Never before had I realised that hunger and a sense of being lost in the wilderness could be such a bitter experience. The thought of my helplessness brought a stinging moisture to my eyes.

So long had I remained motionless that a hawk, circling overhead, took the liberty of alighting on a nearby rock and eyed me intently. He looked such a repulsive, bedraggled old creature that I shuddered with fear. The glitter in his cruel eyes reminded me somehow of Kowhai. Perhaps he was her evil spirit returned to haunt me. She was so subtle and persistent in her methods of attaining her ends that anything might happen. I tried to banish the thought from my mind, and allowed my gaze to wander over the trackless reaches of bracken and scattered wilderness of rock that absorbed me in their silence. Little sighing, eerie breaths of wind from across the plain whispered of this great silence. Gradually it filled me with peace, and, laying my head against the cold stone, I slept. . . .

In sleep my spirit attained the great law of equilibrium; it soared over the forests and encompassing walls of mountains, to be held suspended above the universe—now pausing, now rushing on like the flow of waves, advancing on the shore. Now gathering force in a rhythmic sweep, till at the top of the curve it was still. Then to tremble and fall and rush to its finish, again pausing for a second before it receded. . . . I passed over fields and lanes filled with happy young people, who walked and laughed with a light in their eyes which only comes from the enjoyment of care-free juvenescence. In the light of rosy dawn I mingled with fair nymphs in

sylvan glades. They looked like soft and delicate wood anemones swaying in the breeze as they danced in the chequered sunlight. Then, with absolute clearness of vision, I saw my soul taking shape to become a glorious outpouring of everything beautiful and vital in life. "God moulding it to His will," when, lo! upon me fell the shadow of a cross. . . .

Long before my lids opened I became conscious of material things and happenings around me. The plaintive cry of a sea-fowl struck dully on my confused dreaming; the penetrating scent of the tree fern, and the smell of earth after rain. I felt lazy; it cost too much effort to open my eyes; besides, there seemed to be no need to fight. . . .

CHAPTER XV.

Te Kooti

A LOUD, cracked voice called "Pakeha!"

In an instant I was wide-eyed. "Kowhai!" I gasped, staring at the rock opposite, for there sat the witch in the exact spot which the hawk had occupied. She looked insane, an evil frown upon her face; when, suddenly, between us a shadow passed—the shadow of the hawk circling overhead. Her bony fingers pointed to the bird, the frown vanished and a look of benevolence took its place.

"Ngah! I've a surprise for the pakeha," she chuckled.

My head ached dully as I tried to piece together this jig-saw puzzle of events. It is, however, impossible to convey in words the sense of relief I felt at seeing the old native woman again.

With an excess of energy she almost threw herself off the boulder, and with eyes glittering, advanced towards me. If her manner was the indulgence of a whim to terrorise me, I took no notice. Besides being almost past registering any emotions, I was accustomed to her crazy moods now. I was so truly glad to see her again that

maybe my joy struck some chord of affection in her old dried-up heart, for her whole attitude changed instantly. In order to further emphasise the fact, she enquired: "Are you hungry, pakeha?"

"Yes, Kowhai, and I've missed you. Tell me what happened, for I thought you dead."

"The God of the Storm!" was all she would say, and she repeated it over and over again.

"Look, there's something moving along the bed of the river." I called her attention to a group of dark objects which presently appeared round a bend of the stream. Kowhai did not seem surprised.

"We shall be in Te Kooti's camp at daybreak," said she. "Come, it is time to depart."

At the foot of the hill we were greeted by a party of natives on foam-flecked horses. A long talk in Maori ensued, to the effect that they should accompany us for the remainder of the journey.

No time was lost in setting out. Kowhai sat astride a pack-horse, while a young brave took me before him on his mount. As we rode I ate some much-needed food.

Truly the ways of the witch doctor were wonderful; she was sure to find some ingenious way out of everything.

For several hours we travelled over territory which was fissured from earthquakes. Places probably never before trodden by civilised human feet. Bleached bones of wild things that had died in the solitudes lay plentifully around. Once, without a moment's warning, we found ourselves on the edge of a precipice, gazing into the impenetrable blackness of an abyss; our voices lost in the roar of the torrent in the depths below. The track dropped steeply at this point. The horses began to slip and slide down the steep sides. We were now facing the hills in earnest, for no sooner had we descended one than we started up the next. Towards dusk we came to a halt at an outpost settlement, consisting of several whares packed closely together on a small plateau. This afforded us com-

fortable quarters for the night, and, I learnt afterwards, was a sort of lookout for Te Kooti's stronghold.

I awakened to the sound of dogs baying at the moon, and found Kowhai already packed to begin the last stage of the journey. The moonlight lay like a silver mantle over the landscape. The hills round about were not so steep, and riding became easier. As dawn broke we found ourselves within the shadows of immense and silent peaks. Before us stretched the beautiful lake of Waikaremoana (the sea of Waikare), the most beautiful lake in New Zealand. Over 2000 feet above sea level, and situated some thirty miles inland from Te Wairoa, Hawke's Bay, it stretches its picturesque arms and fiords into the encircling forest-clad mountains. I could see the blue waters wimpling in the gentle morning breeze, and as we drew nearer the soft lap-lap of the wavelets on the gravel below struck my ears. Brilliant sunshine, scintillating with colour, shone over everything. To-day a good road leads from Te Wairoa to Waikaremoana, but at the date of which I write nothing but narrow bush tracks, known only to the natives, were available.

The Maoris had a fleet of canoes on the lake. Kowhai was expected, and received a warm welcome. We were rowed swiftly over the water to land at Te Kooti's stronghold in the Urewera. Again I noted that everywhere Kowhai was treated with the utmost deference, but whether from fear or affection it was hard to say.

Presently we entered the broad doorway of the most important whare within the fortified pah. It was the old woman's hour of triumph. Into the expectant silence came the great chief Te Kooti. He carried neither spear nor mere. In his hair he wore the white-tipped feathers of the huia. His dress was a long cloak of dog's hair, and he wore sandals on his feet. He was not tattooed, but his fierce black eyes and noble bearing proclaimed him a leader of men. All this I noticed while Kowhai held talk with him.

The great rangatira was frowning in evident dis-

approval of what Kowhai was telling him. "You must restore the pakeha child to her kiangé" (home), he said, "for no longer do I make war against the white runanga (parliament). You must restore her at once or your own blood will sink into the cold earth."

"That might be so, great rangatira," replied Kowhai, "only the wahine pakeha has departed to Te Reinga (the land of spirits), and the heart of Kowhai is desolate for the love of a child; therefore she would claim the white-face baby."

"Much as I would like to grant the desire of one so great and faithful as yourself, Tapairu (priestess), I must be sure that the pakeha is alone." Then, addressing me, he asked: "Where are your people, pakeha?"

"It is true, as Kowhai says, that my mother is dead, but my father and sister still live at Taradale, and I know my father will be seeking me." The fierce eyes of the dreaded chief, that had struck terror into the hearts of the white people for so many years, now looked at me with a kindly light in their depths.

"What are the wishes of the white baby? Do you long for the kiangé of your people, or would you roam the forests with Kowhai?"

"My wish is to return home, great chief," I answered brokenly, "for I am weary of the mountains and so much wandering."

"It shall be as you say, then, pakeha. You have nothing to fear. We do not make war on babes. My braves shall conduct you to safety."

When the witch doctor heard the chief's words, a terrible change settled on the grizzled old face, and, without a sound, her bony frame fell to the ground. My heart quailed as I looked across her body into the eyes of the indomitable chief. While his countenance was like granite, his heart was full of human tenderness for my loneliness. Feeling thoroughly dejected and homesick, I stood beside the prostrate form of old Kowhai. Outside the whare I caught glimpses of a group of inquisitive

native faces scanning me closely. The sight braced me; I became conscious of the life around me—fresh faces and new scenes.

At a sign from the chief a pleasant-looking woman came forward and beckoned me to follow her. She was a winsome creature with twinkling, good-humoured eyes. The other natives all seemed kindly and reassuring, but she stood out from the rest. My fear thawed beneath their smiles. Somehow I have always loved the Maori people, and I felt that they already loved me.

My new guide's name was Mawhi. She led me before the little, old, bent figure of a tattooed Maori. This one, she explained, was her father, a great prophet, holy man, and head of the bush tribe known as Piri-rakau (forest dwellers).

Several times daily the people marched round a red-painted pole of worship called Niu. It was a kind of war religion. They chanted invocations, and woe-betide the hated pakeha who chanced to fall into the savage warriors' hands when on the war-path. I was told they were tomahawked and their hearts cut out and roasted—an act of ceremonial cannibalism.

The wrinkled face of the prophet now beamed, his bright eyes sparkled, and his speech was one of welcome. Inwardly I shuddered, as the thought that he might want to roast my heart came to me. It was to me a great ordeal, in spite of his friendly greeting. But Mawhi dispelled all doubt and made me feel at home. She appeared to be the peacemaker in the village, and everybody trusted her.

The young people crowded round, their white teeth gleaming in broad smiles. Many of them had never seen a white child before. The older natives stood curious and interested. Altogether they looked a happy, well-cared-for tribe; but much of their goods had been plundered from the white settlers. When I enquired for Kowhai I was informed that she had departed.

With anxious trepidation I watched the ceremonial

departure of Te Kooti for the King Country. For several days parties of visiting tribes had been treated to much feasting and entertainment. Now the great man and his followers were about to embark in a fleet of canoes and to start their long trail before the rainy season set in. This was the only time I saw the "Maoriland Prophet," and when, years later, he died at the age of seventy-nine, at a settlement he had formed at Ohiwa, in the Bay of Plenty, I could picture the fierce eyes which must have grown tired with the unrhythmic kaleidoscope of modern life. Te Kooti was a savage. Nevertheless he was a great man, a clever leader with a magnetic personality. In the Maori legend engraved on his monument he is called "a god and a priest, a great general and minister." A sort of Moses.

I learned from Mawhi that the one overpowering dread of the Urewera tribes was that the Government might lure and destroy their chief, since they could not capture him. This dismal possibility showed on many countenances, as the Prophet stood, clothed in his white robes, his hands upraised in final blessing of his people. Now that he was actually about to depart their fear became more acute. With bated breath I gazed on the savage faces around me, noting how they hung upon his every word. . .

My recollection of his address is that it ran somewhat as follows: "My heart is full of tenderness as a father for his children. Should the gods, my forefathers, decree that I come no more to visit at Waikaremoana, it is well. . . Still, I leave with you wise and honourable chiefs who have your interests at heart. In this land of milk and honey you have rich pastures and many cattle. The exchequer is overflowing—no longer is there need to plunder the kiangas of the pakehas with murderous raids. The White Queen is too powerful. We are forced to surrender the fair lands of our ancestors to her

Runanga, but also they recompense us; therefore give up your arms; do not tempt them by offering defiance from this, my stronghold citadel of the mountains."

Again raising his arms high above his head, he uttered the words "Haerera! Haerera!" (farewell).

No one stirred till the canoes had glided out of sight, under the power of strokes from oars held in powerful hands, and brown backs bent to rhythmic chanting, till all was lost in silence.

When at last, tired out with so much excitement, I was put to bed by Mawhi in her own whare-puni (sleeping house), I was grateful to lay my head on the first pillow I had seen since my ruthless abduction. Long into the night I lay thinking, nor fell asleep till dawn was breaking. Scarcely could my eyes have closed before the barking of dogs and the voices of natives startled me. With a sigh of regret I sat up and gazed at my strange surroundings. It was a windy dawn, with clouds flying before the gale. The door of the hut stood open and Mawhi called softly from outside: "Are you awake, pakeha baby?" "Yes, Mawhi." "Then put on the warm clothes beside you for the weather is getting cold in the mountains. While you dress I shall make your food ready."

A complete outfit, and a pair of shoes that fitted me to a nicety, lay on the bed. Mawhi explained that the pah contained a large storehouse stocked to overflowing with merchandise gathered from settlements after successful raids.

While I ate the beautifully cooked fish, Mawhi ordered a native woman to pack food in a large flax kit. "She is to travel with you to take care of you," she explained, "but she does not speak any of the pakeha language, so you must speak what you know of Maori."

How impatiently I awaited the canoe which was to take me to freedom. How excitedly I took my place beside this new Maori guide after bidding Mawhi a fond

farewell. Only a few natives were astir to see us off, and soon the slumbering village was lost to sight.

On the farther shore a small company of native horsemen awaited us. To my great surprise I beheld the brave who had carried me off from Taradale at the bidding of Kowhai. My heart sank—could he be still in her service, I wondered. Then he spoke in a soft voice, "I am ordered to conduct the pakeha safely to a distant pah in the mountains. After that the pakeha is in the hands of the gods." This speech told me that danger lay ahead. There was a strange fascination about this warrior; he held me fascinated. His smile had a world of pathos in it. His eyes were wistful and indescribably sad, with a sort of fantastic tenderness. Taking me in front of him on the horse, we commenced a long, difficult trail into the interior, the six natives leading in single file and the woman riding behind.

"This journey holds much danger, but there is no other way—you have courage?" he asked.

"I'm not afraid with you."

"Bravo!" said he, and smiled.

"Bravo, yourself!" I returned, and we both laughed outright.

"When we enter the forest we must keep silence," he cautioned. "There is always danger from the wild men of the mountains, and we are but a handful of warriors."

He was alternately amazed and delighted at my knowledge of Maori legends as we chatted over these stirring events; but not one word would he say as to our destination.

Climbing slowly, we ascended the first steep pinch of hilly country, from whose summit glimpses of the lake could be seen, its smooth sea turned to liquid gold as the sun rose higher and higher.

"We must hurry," called the leader. Then for a moment he was silent. He appeared to be searching some

distant point far off on the skyline. Again he urged the braves to make haste and be silent.

It was a wild ride; I closed my eyes and held on desperately to the Maori. When I opened them I saw horses and riders scaling over rocks, up the sides of hills that were almost perpendicular, sliding on all fours down slippery inclines and leaping over seemingly impossible chasms. The natives rode without saddles, their brown bodies moving in unison with the animals they bestrode. Sunk in unhappy thoughts of going to still some other unknown Maori village, I was sure afraid.

It was past noon when we arrived at the end of the first stage of the journey. It was a wild and desolate spot, with no sign of life save the mournful call of the pukaka (swamp hen), so that the sight of several horses, tethered and partly concealed by the dense foliage not far from where we stood, surprised me.

"Here is food and change of horses," said our leader, "only we must not waste time." Quickly he issued his commands and in a short space of time we were off again travelling swiftly in more open country.

These vast, leafy solitudes seemed somehow familiar to me; those rugged, far-away peaks with patches of obsidian reflecting the sun's dying rays—I had seen them before when wandering with Kowhai. . . . Yes, I remembered now; the picture was stamped indelibly on my mind. It was the day after the storm that I had spent alone on the rock above the cave.

"You are taking me back to the Tapairu, Kowhai!" I cried despairingly, searching for an answer in the dark eyes of the leader. "Oh, do not let her take me! She is mad! I know she's mad!"

"An evil thing it is," replied the brave sadly, "but I must do her bidding ere I return to my people. It is the law of my tribe; I may not break it. But I shall keep my promise to you also, pakeha, even at the risk of my life. I shall find the Maori woman Rakiura, of whom you

spoke, and deliver your message. In the meantime you will be brave?"

"Go, then," I responded, "so that no harm come to you through me. Rakiura will know how to act."

The atmosphere now grew chilly and fine rain began to fall. The light was already fading when we came in sight of the tapu pah, where Kowhai stood awaiting us at the gates. Seen in the half-light, the dismal, uncanny place filled me with terror.

Placing me on the ground at the foot of the hill, my kind protector bade me farewell. "You will remember to seek out Rakiura?" I pleaded, a tremor in my voice and the tears ready to fall.

"I will remember," he said gravely, and, wheeling about, he joined the others, who seemed in a hurry to lengthen the distance between themselves and the haunted pah. I stood and watched them out of sight.

.

To-day I sit by my open window and direct my eyes into the west—I see, as one does in dreams of the past, the face of that handsome savage at the time of his departure. Before entering the vaulted avenues of cathedral naves of giant kauri trees he turned to wave farewell. A moment only he halted, his grey coat almost part of the slanting rainspears, as they swept over the glorious hillsides and wind-swept peaks, sombre, majestic, white, mantled with eternal snow. My heart stirs at these memories, romantic and colourful.

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With leaden footsteps I turned to climb the path up the hill to the old woman waiting above. A dull weight in my heart, I felt tired, both in body and soul.

"You have been long in coming," greeted she.

"There wasn't any hurry was there?" I replied in an off-handed way, trying to hide my fear.

"Come away in, then; come away in," she muttered, leading the way. There was a finality in her words

and manner which left me with nothing to say. Dark tragedy looked from her eyes, and a hopeless, doomed resignation took possession of me.

Night descended quickly on the pah. The wind blew forlornly across the plains and moaned through the pines, and I was lonely. Then something happened that changed the face of things and sent all Kowhai's plans all agley, for fate does not abide by any set rules; it is not moved or turned aside by prayers, nor is it made worse by curses. It is we ourselves who make the rules and try to hide behind fatalism, when destiny defies our rules, instead of putting our trust in the Infinite. In this instance Rakiura and my father represented the Infinite to my young mind. A strong faith told me that they would discover me. . . . Brokenly, hesitatingly, I tried to piece together prayers taught me by my mother, and while in search of an elusive word that would fit my dire distress of the moment, I fell asleep.

CHAPTER XVI.

The Rescue

AT MY home in Taradale Helen and my father were distracted. All attempts on their part and that of the neighbours to trace my whereabouts proved fruitless; the only clue was the package purchased at the store, which the storekeeper testified I had received, and which they found later beside the pond at the brick kiln.

In consequence of this discovery, coupled with a hurried message from Rakiura, David Trow and my father set off on horseback, having as their destination a deserted pah set on a spur of the mountain in the back country. But they arrived too late, Kowhai having already departed with me for the stronghold of Te Kooti. To their dismay they found the tapu village empty. After days and nights of weary searching they returned to Taradale to organise a more extensive search. Another

message from the faithful Rakiura awaited them, with instructions that David and father proceed alone by the secret trail she had mapped out. "Kowhai knows the way of the spider," came the warning message. "She sees those that are not present. Long has she waited to strike vengeance on the pakeha child. Over many trails has she wandered, but always to return to be near the home of the departed Golden Wahine. I too have watched the white child grow, and have nursed her in my lap. What the winds have whispered I have heard; I go to protect the Golden one's child against the evils of Kowhai. Rakiura is desolate also."

For many hours before daybreak the two men rode over roads that they had formed earlier in the year. Next they took a bridle track skirting flax swamps, and after crossing many streams led up along precipitous ridges and down through groves of palm fern. And now before them lay a wide valley devoid of shelter, so they decided to give their horses a spell beneath the spreading palms.

"We had better wait here till nightfall, David," said my father. "Rakiura's instructions were to proceed with caution; a false move now might mean certain death for Katherine." "That's true," said David, "anyway, it would be dangerous to cross the valley in daylight. To-night the moon will be full."

Slowly the hours passed for the two men. Father's heart was heavy, and David strove to offer comfort and make the best of things.

Meanwhile at the pah, when I again became conscious of my dismal surroundings, it was to find myself alone. The hut door was fastened on the outside; the only light entering the whare came through a small opening beside the door. To find that I was a prisoner within the haunted pah caused beads of cold moisture to dampen my brow. The dreadful place seemed saturated with Maori tradition. I was afraid to look over my shoulder for fear some horrible shape might rise before me. So gloomy

was the aspect of that pah that I felt I would soon succumb to fear. In the stillness I could hear every sound. . . .

What was that? Voices whispering outside the hut. With every caution I crept towards the opening and peered out. The moon was just rising from behind the mountains. When my eyes grew accustomed to the shadows I perceived a figure seated on the ground several paces to the right of the hut. Instinctively I knew it to be Kowhai; she was muttering to herself. The words "Te Kooti . . . murder" reached my ear, and my blood froze.

At length the moon appeared in full, and as if this were a signal, the bent figure of the witch rose from the ground, her garments swaying about her as she moved forward and then backward into the shadows. Louder and more fiercely she chanted, with terrible gestures. Advancing into the light, she brandished a greenstone mere (flat stone club) high above her head, in a rising fury of cursing which ended in a frenzy. I began to wonder how long she would take to kill me, or if she would torture me and cut out my heart to roast in her oven . . . when suddenly another figure glided from out the encircling gloom. It was Rakiura! I almost shouted with joy, but the cry died in my throat when she seized the mere. I saw it gleam in the moonlight as she rushed forward, more like a demon than a human being, her face distorted with rage and hate. With a savage snarl she hurled the weapon at Kowhai's head. A piercing scream rang out through the stillness, answered by strange echoes among the mountains. The body of the witch doctor lay motionless, the moonlight showing the glassy stare of her wide-open eyes.

Breathless, I stood watching Rakiura staring down at the face of her detested enemy.

"Ngah!" she hissed, the sound falling through space and whipping the air into a thousand mysterious sounds. "Ngah! but I had to do it." She spoke in a voice that drew my heart strangely towards her. The cursing mood

had fallen from this savage woman, and she seemed to be talking to herself—"The witch sleeps in darkness; I have slain her with her own weapon. . . Let her evil spirits weep and wail. I shall be accursed if they find me."

Rousing herself, she came quickly towards the hut and unfastened the door. "Rakiura, Rakiura!" I cried, choking back the sobs.

"Come, Katherine. Come, there is no time to waste. We have a long journey. I was just in time. She would have killed you rather than give you up. She shall spread no more evil over the land. Ngah! Ngah! It is over and done with. For the Golden Wahine I killed her."

Trembling so that I could scarcely walk, I clung desperately to Rakiura as together we made our perilous way down the face of the tapu cliff. It must have taken us two hours to gain the clearing near the pool, where long ago Rakiura had followed the trail of Kowhai to the haunted pah.

"Now," she whispered, "we have left those phantom footsteps behind."

"What footsteps?" I asked.

"You did not hear them because I covered their magic with my own. We must go in silence."

For a moment she stood looking up at the moon before entering the dark forest. To me it was a tangled wilderness, but the native woman made it feel as safe as though an angel guided me.

In our haste we paid no heed to the scratches made by the prickly bush-lawyer. Rakiura spoke no word, and her speed increased as the grey, misty light of dawn lengthened into day.

Emerging from the forest, we made our way along the banks of a stream to a shallow cave. Here Rakiura decided we must rest until nightfall; it was no longer safe in the open, and the sun's rays were getting too fierce.

"You need food and rest, pakeha," she said, smiling.

"And you?" I asked. "What about yourself? You must need it more than I do."

"No. I shall keep watch, pakeha baby. We are not out of the wood yet."

"You are almost a savage, Rakiura—I know you had to kill Kowhai—but are you safe yourself from the vengeance of her tribe?"

"Hush! Do not say that word," and she paused, listening intently.

"What was it, Rakiura?"

"You must not speak of it to anybody—never again. Promise!" A suspicion of the truth flashed through my mind—"Te Kooti?" I asked.

"Yes, how quick you are! He will have me followed to the end; but I would do it all over again. Ngah!" she hissed, "for the Golden Wahine, yes."

The expression of her face altered; the simple, kindly Maori woman was gone. In her place, towering to her full height, stood the priestess of noble lineage, majestic and queenly.

"Let the vile mountain monsters gather round to bury their dead! Ere the moon is full again, you, pakeha baby, will sleep in the house of your father!"

"As long as I live I shall love you, Rakiura. You have saved my life."

"Thank you, white baby." She smiled and came to sit beside me. . . .

Twilight had fallen over the bush when we again set out from the shelter of the cave to journey towards the foot of the mountains. I marvelled afresh at Rakiura's memory of outstanding landmarks. She was so very sure as to locality. All that night we walked, sometimes in open spaces, with the white light of the moon making our surroundings clear like noonday, the next minute to be plunged into darkness under a canopy of huge trees; then past pools of shimmering water, where wild fowl floated on the surface, still and silent.

As day broke we found a path down from a high

ridge, where it sloped off into rounded hills enclosing a broad valley. It was not long before we struck the trail again which led along the stream. This we followed until the sun became scorching, when Rakiura decided we must rest; and, truth to tell, I was exhausted, though I did my best not to complain.

"We must wait now for a sign from the pakeha father," she said, "so you rest on the mossy bank awhile."

"Don't you ever want to sleep, Rakiura?"

"I shall sleep plenty when you are safe home, so don't bother about me, honey," and she produced from her flax kit some cold chicken. "Now you eat your fill." But my eyes were heavy, almost closing, and my head dropped on the turf sheltered by the scattered bush. It was a strange spot, but restful. Toitoei plumes waved before my closing eyes—eyes that had witnessed lately many horrors in this land of mystery and legend, but I loved it. . . .

Rakiura roused me from my sleep with the news that she could see a wisp of smoke rising near the side of the lagoon. It might be my father! The thought sent my flying up the ridge in her wake. From the top of the hill we could see far and wide, over river, valley and mountain. Rakiura touched my shoulder and pointed north. Right enough, smoke from a camp fire issued thinly from the trees. Very clearly the Maori woman saw what was before us. We could not signal by making a fire ourselves, for fear it were not my father but some wandering natives, and we could not travel further in daylight, so there was nothing for it but to go back to our shelter in the angle of the river.

"You look troubled, Rakiura; has anything happened while I slept? What is it?" I asked.

"Not while you slept, no. But last night when we journeyed in the moonlight I saw a strange thing in the sky. It was a sure warning, and I am anxious for the white men."

"Tell me what you saw!"

"It was the pakeha father," she said, scarcely above a whisper. "He rode a black charger in the vault of the heavens, and the Golden Wahine was before him on the saddle, her face shining like obsidian. It is a terrible warning, pakeha!"

"What does it mean, Rakiura?"

For a long minute she was silent, then her hand came to rest gently on my head. "The pakeha father must soon join hands with the Golden Wahine in the great hereafter," was all she said.

"Does that mean that he has fallen into the hands of the savage tribes?"

"Oh, no. He will not go that way, but the Wahine calls him from the grave, and he will go there, for he is very sorrowful."

Skirting swamps and dense bush in the darkness before moonrise, we made in the direction of the lagoon. Very cautiously Rakiura picked her way to where a faint red glow showed through the trees. The camp fire was a red heap of glowing embers, and the two men sat side by side conversing in low tones.

We stood still for one hushed moment, then, with a cry of wild, unbounded joy, I flew into my father's arms.

Their amazement was even greater than our joy, for they had no idea we were so close. Overjoyed to see my father, we mingled tears of happiness as I hugged and embraced him. Yet even in those first moments of excitement I noticed how ill he looked, how his tall figure drooped. One had but to look at his face to see how he had suffered. His lips were tremulous with words of gratitude to Rakiura.

"I thank you from my heart, Rakiura. You shall never know want while I am alive, apart from our lifelong gratitude to a noble woman."

I was amazed by the apparent nonchalance with which the good Rakiura related her rescue of myself and

her encounter with Kowhai, but she very carefully concealed the fact of the murder. She warned father that he must depart at once. "I shall leave you here, for to come with you would bring trouble from Te Kooti's tribe."

I looked at her, and was puzzled to see her eyes full of tears—was this the brave priestess who had risked her life to save my own? Instantly I flew to her, and, clasping her convulsively, buried my face in the folds of her silk skirt, now torn and travel-stained.

"Rakiura, you must never leave me. I should be lost if you came no more to our home!" I looked imploringly at my father. "Do not let her go." Before my father could answer Rakiura held up her hands in silent protest.

"You don't understand," she cried at last. "You are pakehas; the Maori is different, she is free. I go to my own people in Gisborne, safe from the vengeance of Te Kooti. But you shall forget Rakiura now, for you are in grave danger from Kowhai's warriors. You must take the trail at once."

She looked at me sorrowfully, while tears came from the black depths of her wonderful eyes and glistened on her lashes—they trembled, and fell.

Then she turned in silence and passed out of my life forever.

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Long years have passed since those far-away Maori war days. The spirit of Rakiura has long since been gathered to the Golden Shore of the Peaceful Sea of Harmony, where God measures time according to the good we have done, and "there is no night there."

To you, my good friend Rakiura—Haerera! (Farewell).

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On the principle that the sooner you plunge into your troubles the sooner you will get them over, David Trow brought the horses. Clapsed in my father's arms, before him on the saddle, I was borne along as we set off

hurriedly on our flight. The men were naturally fearful lest we should be discovered by Kowhai's braves, who would not hesitate to murder us all to avenge their chieftainness. In a state of nervous anxiety which increased as they neared the ford, they journeyed on. On reaching the ford, they found that the river had become a swollen torrent, sweeping by like a mill-race, and threatening to overflow or burst its banks.

David Trow boasted that he had a panacea for every ill, and apparently his boast was not an empty one, when, after a short absence, he returned with the welcome news that he had discovered a narrow gorge, where centuries ago a mountain cataract had scoured its channel through rocky walls. This pass would also shorten the trail, so he declared. A most useful man was David.

Father led the way, his trusty mare picking her steps over the rough ground. About half-way through the gorge the intelligent beast became restive, and with pricked ears and limbs aquiver, she stopped suddenly, almost unseating her riders. "What is it, old lady?" soothed father, patting her glossy neck. "Steady, lass." With raised hand he signalled Davil to halt.

"Sh-s-sh! Listen to that," whispered David. Through the night sounds of the forest could be heard the snapping of twigs and the tread of padded footsteps.

"They're coming, I'm thinking," said David under his breath; "we're ambushed, James."

"There may be something in what you say," muttered father. "We should have kept to Rakiura's instructions. However, it's too late to think of that now." His hand reached for his six-shooter from the holster.

"Be ready, David, when they enter the gorge."

"What about Katherine, James?"

"I don't rightly know—let God guide us." He clasped me fiercely to his breast. "Katherine, don't be afraid, child; cling tightly and leave my hands free."

For a moment the moon sank beneath a dense bank of clouds, and we, sitting still below, in black shadow,

remained unseen, for the time at any rate. From our position we could see plainly the opening of the narrow gorge, and could make out the bulky figures of several Maori warriors as they passed through the clearing beyond. They carried something between them. It looked like a bier, and their whole attitude was one of solemn mourning.

"It's uncanny, James, that's what it is, uncanny!" burst from David when the last of the ghostly train had passed.

Father admitted that this was so; he was puzzled at the excessive fear manifested by the horses, both mounts being in a lather of sweat.

"That was a close call, David. Another minute and we should have met them in the open. Be thankful to God, for no other power could have saved us." Patting the neck of his faithful steed, he added: "Had you moved, old girl, we were undone. Katherine, my poor child, you must be sick from fright with what you have suffered lately."

Of a truth I was almost afraid to breathe. I had that feeling which most people have experienced at some time in their lives, namely, that what we are seeing and doing, we had seen and done before in some bygone age. David was for returning to the ford to await daylight.

"The road before us may be a long one, but we have hit the trail along which the Maoris passed. Do not let us delay our flight a moment longer than we can avoid. We should reach Taradale by to-morrow night, therefore let us get under way," said father.

.. "As you will, James," and David urged his horse in the wake of the mare as we made our way carefully through the gorge. Outside in the open was bright moonlight; great fleecy bands of white mist encircled the hills and bridged every hollow. Soon we were travelling across broad valleys heading away from the mountains, and when daylight broke father found that he had made a valuable discovery. This trail was Te Kooti's secret "get

away," a short cut to his stronghold at Puketapu—a thing that had puzzled the white settlers always, and had given the Maoris frequent victory. Beside this, the rich land could be opened up by new roads and would be a great boon for farming purposes. "The credit is yours, David; you found the pass," said father. David was a man who never indulged in flights into the realms of fancy, but that night he would long remember, for it had made a deep impression upon his nature.

"James," he said in a solemn voice, "my firm belief is that we beheld something unnatural in yonder ravine. Always I've joked about such tales when told by the natives, but after last night, well, seeing's believing."

In vain father tried to engage David in a discussion on the merits of the new-found tract of country. David said he was feeling a very sick man. He had an odd way of looking searchingly at one over his spectacles which would have been quite disconcerting to a nervous person. Now he looked over them at me. "Katherine, what do you think about it?"

A miserable foreboding oppressed me. I could not help it, and no wonder after what I had been through. Perhaps Rakiura's vision of my father riding on a black charger in the sky still held me. I was awed. "It was a gruesome thing," I answered, "and leaves me sore afraid."

After this we rode a long time in silence. Father made notes and sketches, from time to time, in a small book. Already he saw visions of a great country and the fulfilment of his dreams—the opening up of further new roads.

Alas for the plans of mortals! How truly God disposes. Meditating on these things years afterwards, when I was left sad and lonely in the world, far removed from the wild scenes and fancies of my earlier life, I have realised more and more that an all-seeing and wise Power controls His own universe.

Long before we reached Taradale darkness had fallen. A biting east wind, accompanied by drizzling rain,

made riding far from pleasant. Horses and riders were almost exhausted, and were more than thankful to see the lights of the village.

In the front room at home the fire roared and crackled, sending out showers of sparks. Mummie Trow sat silently in the big armchair, watching them and listening for the sound of hoof-beats from the road. Helen sat at the other side of the fire. She explained apologetically how the fire and the sound of the wind in the trees always made her disgracefully sleepy. She was dreading lest she fell asleep and so missed the possible arrival of the horse-men who had gone to find Katherine.

"Hark!" cried Helen, "there they are!"

Wild with excitement, they rushed to the door to greet us.

"Have you got her?" "Have you got her?" burst from them alternatively. Helen laughed and cried together, and Mummie Trow smothered me in her embraces.

How strange my home appeared, and how good to be there after my terrible ordeal in the forests.

Mummie Trow insisted on a hot bath, and tucked me into bed, where I fell asleep from sheer exhaustion, nor opened my eyes till noon the following day.

It would take a much abler pen than mine to describe the joy and relief expressed by the Taradale folk at my safe return, and my heart went out to them. I had learned a good lesson, and would never again run such a risk by wilful disobedience.

Father informed Mummie Trow that she was to consider herself my guardian during his absence. "I hate to leave home again so soon," said he, "but the men are awaiting my return. I shall try to get back by Sunday."

There had been some talk about my boarding at the Convent. Father agreed that this would be the safest plan, but nothing definite was done in the matter. He would talk it over with the nuns when he returned.

Hardly a night passed that I did not dream of my father; I could not forget his last farewell. He looked so

broken and pathetic; and at the thought of it a cold feeling made me shudder, and I strove to put it out of my thoughts.

CHAPTER XVII.

My Second Tragedy

SUNDAY morning saw me up with the lark. Scarcely could I contain myself—soon my father would be with me. I found myself looking wistfully up the road, although I knew it was far too early for him to arrive; yet something tugged at my heart, filling me with despondency, as if everything in my life were being wiped out. The thought nauseated me. A strange foreboding for a child of my years, you will say; yet it was just as I have narrated, and turned out to be correct. I stood leaning on the gate. People were on their way to early Mass, and chatted as they passed.

"Waiting for father, Katherine?" "Oh, it is easy to see who is father's girl!" and such like remarks.

Once more the road was empty, then a buggy turned the corner; it was driven by two men, and father's horse was fastened at the rear. The driver was Richard Norton, and he was bringing my father home. Father appeared to be mortally ill; his face was drawn in anguish. With difficulty the neighbour helped him inside. The story was soon told. In the course of his journeys into the interior my father had to pass the Taradale cemetery. Within the gates, only a short distance from the road, lay my mother's grave. It was here that Norton, returning from Puketapu, had found him lying upon the mound. He had been attracted by my father's horse tethered at the fence, where she stood pawing the ground and whinnying, as if to summon aid. . . .

Within the next five days events followed each other so quickly that it is difficult to write them in proper sequence.

From the outset it appeared evident that James Morgan was a doomed man. Chronic asthma brought on an attack of pneumonia due to exposure, was the doctor's verdict; but weariness of mind and intense grief over mother's death were the most potent causes. Ill news travels fast, and soon Taradale was in possession of the sad tidings of the stricken man. It was scarcely eight months since they had followed Mary Morgan to her last mortal resting place, and the discovery that father's life was only a matter of hours was staggering and painful. The shock almost unhinged Helen and me.

It was Tuesday. The rain fell steadily all day and confined us to the house. Again the nuns called, also Father Jardin. Before my father lost consciousness, he appointed the French priest as sole guardian of his children and trustee of his estate. It appeared that his last contract for road building was almost complete; therefore Father Jardin was to settle all accounts. This in due time the venerable old man did.

Calling Helen and me to his bedside, father bade us farewell. He spoke with difficulty, but I remember so distinctly what he said: "Children, I commit you to Almighty God . . . my time is up . . . soon I shall stand before my Maker . . . 'The wages of sin is death' . . . I have paid. . . . You will pray for your father . . . he needs your prayers."

Then, after a long pause, "Helen is old enough to fight for herself . . . but it's the thought of Katherine and her future which causes tumult in my mind."

"Don't worry about me, father. I won't take long to grow big . . ." and I sank my head beside him on the pillow, trying to comfort him.

"We must learn to rest in the everlasting arms," spoke Father Jardin confidently, "to turn away from the false and fleeting things of this life's dream shadows. . . ."

Slowly the day drew to a close. It was a wild, black night of storm; the thunder of the surf beating in from the great watery wastes on to the beach at Napier could be plainly heard. Usually I was unafraid of lightning and

hurricane, but the tempest seemed to me in some way to make contact between God and my father, God "who holds the winds in His fists."

Within the sick-chamber the only sound was the stertorous breathing of a dying man; the dew of death was upon his brow. While we gazed a shadow crossed his face, which passing swiftly left the features smooth and young. Every line of suffering vanished as if by magic; a smile settled upon his lips . . . all was over, a soul released from earthly bondage; James Morgan was asleep in death. . . .

Taradale was shocked to learn that he had passed away. Seldom was seen grief so general and so sincere. Deep in his heart each man felt that they were about to bury the leader of a heroic band of pioneers, one who had always been ready to lend a helping hand, and who, in spite of that unfortunate lapse, was at heart a good man and true—and the thought brought a new softness to their eyes.

For the second time within the period of a few months the small front bedroom was the scene of a funeral service, a coffin on trestles beside the bed; flickering rays from lighted candles across the name-plate on the coffin lid, "James Morgan, aged 40 years." Serenely the Madonna looked down from her satin-lined frame; the nuns recited the litany for the dead.

Father Jardin blew his nose vigorously, unashamed of his emotion. Then began, "Further generations must declare what the pioneer has accomplished, for so it has been since time immemorial. We are gathered here to-day in sorrowful brotherhood to pay a last tribute to the dead. Let us give thanks to Almighty God that He has deemed fit to unite two souls in His kingdom. James Morgan and his young wife were sorely tried in life and not found wanting. May their example help us to lead lives of gratitude to our Creator."

While the priest was speaking, the sun suddenly shone out. It blazed on the window-pane and touched the marble brow of my father. I crept closer to Helen;

we were both too dazed to realise what our terrible loss meant. . . . Again the house was crowded with people. Outside men waited about in little groups to escort the mortal remains to be laid in the damp and wormy earth.

In the mourning coach we sat with Mummie Trow. The long cortege of carriages crunched the metal road as we moved up the hill to the cemetery.

It was Sunday when father had been found on mother's grave—to-day was Thursday. Soon he would lie beside his beloved. . . . It is very painful to pen this passage, and my tears flow unchecked, although many years have passed since that sad, tragic day . . . the dull thud of the earth on the coffin; the priest's solemn "Dust to dust" . . . it brings back a pain which is poignant still.

But a far more painful shock awaited me; the nuns were going to take me back with them to the convent. I am afraid my conduct was terrible. I fought and struggled when a sister tried to place me in the buggy. Frantically I clung to my sister and the Quirk girls. "Do not let them take me!" I pleaded. It was worse than the kidnapping by Kowhai's braves, and to me at the time every whit as brutal. Afterwards I often wondered why they had not allowed me to go home first and thus save the scene at the graveside.

From the time I left home for my father's funeral until forty-five years later, I never crossed its threshold again; and, strange to relate, when I did enter its portals again Mummie Trow accompanied me. The dear soul had grown old in years, but she was as cheerful as ever. She knew the people living in the house, and they very graciously consented to show me inside. With a feeling of awe I walked through the tiny rooms—how small they appeared! The scenes of my childhood—both happy and sorrowful—rushed in fierce spate through my mind . . . but of that I shall write later.

From the graveside the old French pere led me at length by the hand through the wicket gate of the cemetery. Seated between two black-robed nuns in an old-fashioned four-wheel buggy drawn by an old bay horse,

I was taken to the convent. We entered a drive where great boles of giant Australian gum trees formed an avenue to the front steps. In fancy I beheld myself, a child, standing apart from the other girls, alone in all that great big world.

Standing there with tears on my face, tears born of a new emotion, suddenly tremulous, and so strange; while round about danced happy children, all laughing and bubbling over with the very joy of life and eagerness. . . .

CHAPTER XVIII.

The Cloister

OF MY life in the cloister I write with an unbiased mind. With greater experience, and with no wish to hurt any section of the community, I realise that fifty years ago education was far behind the times in that little outpost pioneer Catholic convent at Taradale. As time wreathes the shattered tree with vines to bind up its wounds, and covers the scarred earth with green, so do I look back with love and kindly remembrances for those simple women who tried to serve the Master who promised, "The meek shall inherit the earth." In simple language I shall write of this most trying period of my life, feeling that no intellectual proficiency is required to pen the truth. As Bulwar said, "One of the sublimest things in all the world is plain truth."

Ann Cornish had predicted that the nuns would have a difficult task in trying to train my heathen mind, and it was a fact that of gods and creeds I had many; but at no part of my life have I ever been an evil person masquerading under the cloak of religion, and I always scorned to tell a lie.

The nuns were conversant with the facts of my strange upbringing. They decided that this was the time to stress their point and introduce a rigid discipline. It is

a matter of no less regret than surprise that those who claim to spiritual wisdom do not refrain from harshness to the helpless orphan children in their care—children in whose conduct there is seldom wrong intention.

To the sisters doubtless I appeared a fickle, godless child, whereas my mind was absorbed in the contemplation of things outside the mundane sphere. Already in my childish philosophy, worldly things had ceased to attract my soul; if only they had understood me. I longed only for human affection, but, asking for bread, I received mostly a stone.

There was no splendour in the convent, but spotless cleanliness spread itself over everything. The floors were uncarpeted, the boards highly polished. Some hangings covered the walls, and here and there were some really fine pictures—mostly of the saints. There was neither comfort nor the freedom of my home, and my little heart shrank at the thought that my life must be spent behind its walls. My childish pride was crushed; my faith in God reeled and staggered. The discovery that I was as much a prisoner as if Kowhai still held me was like wormwood to me, and I wanted to be alone with this rankling sense of injustice.

Round the grottos the nuns sat or knelt in silent prayer, or walked to and fro telling their beads, which hung from a broad leather belt.

There were a number of sisters in the convent, but two of them were my especial favourites, Sister Claudine and Mother Baptiste. The latter was a lay nun, who reminded me of Ann, because she too made current loaf, secretly conveying large pieces of the coveted cake to my locker. Mother Baptiste had charge of the boarders. She was a French sister with a heart running over with the milk of human kindness, and I soon became a great favourite with her. Wholeheartedly I returned her affection, and thawed beneath her kindly rule. Had the moulding of my will been left to this gentle creature this story might never have been written. Other elements came into the picture, however, one in the person of a stern, harsh

nun, and under her treatment my will, as in the case with most humans, grew as stubborn as that of a recalcitrant mule. To my mind, even to-day, it is clear that reasonable restraint imposed gently on strong natural proclivities produces noble results, but deliberately to try to break a spirit is, to me, criminal.

Mother Baptiste had a quiet way of speaking, often using a phrase in the wrong place. She talked fast, tumbling her words out, and interrupting herself when excited with loud exclamations, "La! La! La!" expressed with much gesture. From the energy she displayed she apparently scorned the passage of years. She was here, there and everywhere; first out of bed in the morning and last to retire. At night she "went the rounds," as she called it, fastening doors and windows, and, lastly, tucking the children into bed. Perhaps the mother instinct hungered in her soul, who knows?

On my first night at school she led me to the chapel at the top of the stairs. "Katherine, my child," she said kindly, "we are going in to evening prayer—you must take up the thread of life anew, and prayer is your strongest weapon. Fix that firmly in your mind and do not waver. To-morrow you shall have definite instructions."

"I will try, Mother Baptiste."

Imagination ever an amazingly wonderful force within me, softened my grief in wonderment at the strange new life which began to unfold before me. My mind was in a vacillating state. It was impossible that everybody should understand the Catholic faith, so I thought, while earnestly I surveyed the faces of the nuns who knelt at quaint old prie-dieus along the wall. The long night prayers concluded. the candles were extinguished by snuffers; a small wick burning in a glass of oil hanging before the altar made a little tongue of flame, pricking the darkness.

In silence we walked along the hall, lit by a solitary night lamp, then ascended several steps to the dormitory,

which occupied a large portion of the upper storey. Architectually the convent was a large, rambling, wooden building, with a maze of passages and stairways.

Mother Francesca was in charge of the community at the time. She was a tiny, delicate nun, who spent a great deal of time walking up and down the halls, telling her beads, and quite content to leave the management of worldly affairs to others, principally to Mother Bernard. Other nuns were Mother Dupeire, Sister Cecile, Sister Philippe and Sister Marguerite.

I had to get acquainted with the girls, who were ten in number, and ranged from four to sixteen years of age. Agnes O'Brian was instructed to initiate me into the rules of the school. She was a tall girl, who appeared all legs and arms. Another girl, Mary Crosby, later became the bugbear of my life.

Mother Baptiste, on her round, duly arrived to tuck me in. "Mind to jump up at the first bell," she cautioned, "and come downstairs without noise, for Mass will be at the church instead of the oratory. . . Good-night, children, God bless you!" "Good-night, Mother Baptiste!"

Scarcely had my head touched the pillow ere an unfathomable and wonderfully soft sense sank me in a sea of peaceful sleep.

Very early next morning a bell rang for Mass. Outside heavy dew hung on the bushes and dripped coldly from the eaves; big drops, ready to fall trembled on tall bamboo stalks, and spider webs hanging from wire fences glistened with moisture. The other girls seemed not to notice these things as we walked in single file across the rustic bridge that spanned a swiftly-flowing stream. There was a splashing in the water. What was it? A dead fowl being devoured by eels—feathers, and a tangle of twisting, wriggling, slimy fish—ugh!

We entered by the side door into the little church that held so many memories, and where I had been christened on that far-away Sunday when Ann Cornish got tangled in the high step of the dog-cart.

The girls shivered and were blue with the cold. Never before had I attended service at so early an hour; I felt the need for more sleep, as though I had not been in bed at all. It seemed to me that scarcely had my eyes closed than the bell rang for us to rise. Henceforth my life would be ordered by the ringing of bells; the nuns called it discipline—inwardly I called it hell! Here again my imagination provided mental relaxation and recreation. I counted the statues and holy pictures, and gazed with a new interest at the painted figure of Christ that rested in a niche above the altar; then my eyes rested on the snow-white head of Father Jardin saying Mass.

There had been a disgraceful controversy connected with the gift of this beautifully coloured, life-sized statue of the Saviour. It happened that at the death of Mr. Tom Brown, father of "Pepper," his family presented the statue in his memory, with his name engraved in gold letters on the pedestal. Another family who hailed from the North of Ireland took exception to the fact that the name of Tom Brown should grace the figure of the Christ. The congregation took sides, and one Sunday assembled in large numbers beneath the poplars to thrash the matter out. It was decided to take a vote as to whether the statue should remain or be removed. The decision was that it remain, whereupon the man from the North turned his back on the Roman church and declared that never again would any of his numerous progeny enter its portals again. Squabbles over religion have an unfortunate effect; it was a bad example, and cast dreary shadows where only peace should dwell.

Returning from church, we trooped into a long, meagre dining room and sat on forms drawn up to the table. After grace we began a simple meal. After breakfast we were allowed an hour for recreation, and spent the time sunning ourselves on the front verandah, which also boasted a glass conservatory. On the shelves were many and varied pot plants, but flowering cactus predominated. The greenhouse belonged to Mother Bernard. She had a very sour face, and for the life of me I was

quite unable to forbear making a comparison with the cruel-looking, prickly cactus, with its bright scarlet flowers, and her complexion.

It was the same Mother Bernard who, later, on determined to break my will, and from our very first meeting we were mutually antagonistic. In a domineering manner she had bidden one of the girls fetch a can of water, with which she was about to drench the plants. In the interval she busied herself by collecting dead leaves and slugs. Looking about for a receptacle in which to place them, she called on me to pass a pail that hung from the railings. The handle was twisted, and for a moment I could not release it.

"You must learn to obey quickly," she said in sharp tones.

"It wouldn't come off the nail," I faltered, pained by her harsh manner.

"How dare you answer back, you young pagan!" she cried, her face lighting up scarlet. "I've a mind to cane you."

"I'm not a pagan," I defended stoutly. "I'm my father's daughter. Perhaps you are not aware that he was buried yesterday; also, I never wanted to come to your convent."

So taken aback was she at my words that her own speech failed her. It was several seconds before any sound came from her parted lips. "Well, of all the rare things, this is priceless—to be taken to account by a chit of a child!" Then she nodded her head with satisfaction. "We're going to get better acquainted, young lady! It's high time you were taught to respect your superiors."

I was about to defend myself further, but catching frantic signs from Agnes, who had come upon the scene from the opposite direction, to desist, I fell silent. Mother Bernard had, like the birds of the air, snatched away the good seed that Mother Baptiste had sown before it had sprouted.

Long since have I crossed the ocean of doubts and gained a clearer insight into the meaning of existence. I

try to forget my own small physical body; to live a simple life; to be strong enough to get rid of miserable environments, and forget the love of worldly things which do not satisfy the soul. At that age, however, I was highly strung and sensitive.

Pleasant in my ears was the sound of happy voices coming from boys and girls, who made the playground ring to joyous shouts. Some of the scholars came from humble homes, while others boasted parents who were at the top of local society. No distinction was shown at that house of learning which, although unpretentious, was at that time the best the district could afford.

The school bell over the porch now summoned the children from their play. In front of the classrooms they formed lines, then, with arms tightly folded behind their backs and heads upright, began to march into school. Mother Bernard was in command. She clapped her hands to mark time: "Left, right! Left, right!" Inside, a girl sat at the harmonium. I watched her hands struggling over the keyboard, while her feet worked energetically on the pedals. The children began to sing: "Tramp, tramp, tramp, the boys are marching! Cheer up, comrades, now we come," and so on. Then endless repetitions of Tramp, tramp, tramp—Round and round the desks we marched. The girl at the instrument was flushed with exertion. Mother Bernard's soft, pudgy hands clapped louder and louder to incite the marching feet to go faster. Suddenly the music stopped. Each child stood beside the desk allotted to him or her. They were long desks inset with inkwells, and attached to forms.

Mother Bernard moved to the rostrum, where she stood, keeping a severe eye on the room, her hand on the bell. "Kneel for prayer," she called loudly. "Non-Catholics please leave the room." I stood up to join several other children. "Katherine Morgan, return to your place!" Her voice was like a trumpet; her eyes glared.

After devotions a fearful din arose of scraping feet

and the clatter of slates. The children scrambled over the seats, and lessons for the day commenced.

Most folk have recollections of their first day at school—mine remain indelibly imprinted on my mind. My age was ten years. My childhood had been a most extraordinary one. On referring to my horoscope, I find that persons born in my month, with the sun in Gemini, "are possessed of wonderful powers of imagination, are mystically-minded, and are not bound to the usual manner of thinking. They have just and noble minds, and live in harmony with the Divine or universal law that is at the back of all things."

Seated at my desk, I gazed with grave and earnest interest on my surroundings; the distempered walls were hung with maps, while several blackboards on easels graced the floor of the large room. A glass door led to the infants' classes—I was glad that I had not been placed with them—thanks to my father's teaching, I was in Standard III. On the mantel rested a statue of the Virgin; crackling logs in the wide fireplace sent out a cheerful glow.

Slowly my eyes returned to the rostrum. Mother Bernard gave instruction to the advanced scholars. One could not help but see, as they passed before her, how fear marked her ruling. One plump hand held a pointer, while with the other she turned a revolving globe atlas of the world.

Suddenly the bell rang.

"Mary Crosby, come out on the floor and bring your slate with you." Out stalked the child with the stick-like legs that somehow reminded me of a sheep. On her slate was a drawing, evidently meant to be the likeness of the nun before her. Mother Bernard's face shaded to a deep purple.

"You are a disgrace to your class, Mary Crosby!" Rage caused the lady to stammer somewhat. "Sister Marguerite, please place the dunce's cap on her head." Mary looked the picture of misery. I shuddered at the

thought that such disgrace should ever overtake me . . . when! . . .

Earlier in the day I had been given a fine juicy pear by my classmate, and, thinking it a long interval since breakfast, I surreptitiously took a few nibbles at the luscious fruit. A sharp rapping on the rostrum caused me to look up quickly. The reverend Mother's gaze fixed upon me. "When you have stopped dribbling through that pear, Katherine Morgan, please step up here." With my hands behind my back, I walked to the raised platform. "Show the class what you have in your hand." Fearfully I looked at the half-devoured pear—such great bites they were, and I had appeared only to nibble. The entire school stopped work to stare at the new pupil. "You have scarcely been in class before you break the rules," came the cruel voice. "What have you to answer?"

Mother Baptiste interposed on my behalf: "The child was not aware of breaking any rule, Mother Bernard," she said gently. "I am to give her special instruction after luncheon recess."

But Mother Bernard was not to be appeased. "She has committed the sin of gluttony—a shameful thing! Have you anything to say?"

I did not know what reply to make, so said nothing.

"You belong to Satan," she continued, her face mottled with anger. "The devil is on your back right now!"

"Oh, not now! Not now!" I cried in terror, my lips quivering. "I can't bear it! Once I belonged to evil spirits, but not now."

"Oh, so you admit that you have plotted and planned with the Prince of Darkness?" she gasped, her voice dropping to an awed whisper.

"Yes, I gave myself up to Satan once, when I was terribly unhappy." The look of unfeigned horror on the faces of the nuns caused me to pause abruptly. . . . What had I said

"Poor child, she does not realise the enormity of her

offence," begged Mother Baptiste. "Let me explain our holy religion to her."

"I don't want religion," I broke in.

The sisters made the sign of the cross, and a fearful silence ensued. Mother Baptiste held up her hands. "I'm shocked, shocked and pained, Katherine." "It's rank blasphemy," came from Mother Bernard, who added: "Sisters and children, you have seen to-day an exhibition of the power of Satan. Here we have a child possessed of the devil—a daughter of Belial!" She shuddered visibly. "At least you are candid," she admitted, "so there may still be hope."

Then she gave us a lecture which I am sure went right over all our heads. "It is well that you have been guided by Providence to come to the cloister to learn that truth is the opposite of evil." She repeated, "It is well you are in a convent, for here dishonesty, falsehood, revenge, malice and animal passions are unknown."

Dumbfounded, I stood before this tribunal, like a criminal on whom sentence has been passed; my sin, like a millstone round my neck, weighing me down to the depths. God would surely punish me. I was doomed. It seemed vain to try and push against such a current of injustice.

"Take her away, Mother Baptiste," ordered the Reverend Mother. "Take her to the chapel first, and pray with her that she may be released from the bondage of sin."

These dreadful words fell upon me like sharp splinters of rock, as I left the room with Mother Baptiste. Outside in the clear atmosphere the distant hills looked blue on the horizon; an occasional hawk sailed across the sky, his eye trained earthward for what unwary prey he might pick up. . . .

Mother Baptiste had been reading to me, but I heard little of it. Presently she closed the book. "Katherine, I am striving to help you for your own sake; you understand that, don't you, my child?"

"You are very kind, dear Mother Baptiste, and I long

to please those I love, but it is impossible even to pretend to like Mother Bernard, because she fills me with fear."

"Hush, child, do not say such words. Try to curb your very outspoken speech. La! la! too outspoken."

"For your dear sake, I'll try, Mother."

"Not for my sake, Katherine, but for the sake of the Saviour of men. Now continue to read. Speak slowly; enunciate clearly, and allow the meaning of each word to sink into your heart." And so the lesson began:

"We should love what is simple, natural and healthful, as the essence of goodness in all ages. The Bible, Homer, Shakespeare and Greek art are stars by which we may direct our course over stormy seas, avoiding the pitfalls that lie about us. . . ."

Looking up from the book, I asked hesitatingly: "Please, Mother Baptiste, do not bid me to read aloud. I would much rather ask questions."

"Certainly you may, you strange little girl. What is it that you wish to know?"

"I'd like to have your explanations; they are not so difficult to understand."

"It's better to ask for information than to frighten yourself with possibilities," she suggested.

"You are so understanding, Mother Baptiste. You seem to see deep into my soul."

"Proceed," she said encouragingly.

"May I ask what means may be best employed to control my seeming fickleness of mind? For everything I do or say displeases Mother Bernard." I seemed to know what she would say; the words were forming on her lips.

She sat up stiffly on her chair, as though about to deliver a thesis. "Mother Bernard has immense qualities of character; fidelity, honesty, devotion and courage, but, unfortunately, she also has another side, a hard Quixotic nature that makes everybody around her unhappy. It is a cross we have to bear, child—try to remember that, Katherine; Mother Bernard is your cross."

While we talked, the dull hum of voices reached us

from the classroom, punctuated by the sharp ringing of the rostrum bell.

"Perhaps you could tell me something else that I am puzzled about?" I continued.

"Yes," she answered with kindly interest.

"Is it possible to prevent our thoughts from flowing to worldly things while still living in the world?" Before she could answer I had asked another question. "My father was a powerful man in life—why had this 'something' fled from his body?"

The good nun crossed herself. "Katherine," she gasped. "Oh, my dear, you must not ask deep questions like that. Such knowledge is not for children, but is only gained with advancing years." As she spoke she stood up to depart. "I shall leave you to continue your studies and so gain knowledge gradually," was her only answer.

Idly I gazed at the leaves that littered the lawn like the pattern on a carpet. Is there any answer to these questions? I thought.

CHAPTER XIX.

Rebellious

AFTER the first pangs of grief had softened somewhat, I was not altogether unhappy at the convent, but I was still homesick. I longed for freedom, and that intense longing never left me. And so it was that the days lengthened into weeks and months. Fortunately I was blessed with an inborn sense of humour and character that kept Mother Baptiste alternately laughing at what she described as my "so dreadful pagan sayings," and trembling at my pranks.

"What will the extraordinary child do next to discover an outlet for her energy and ingenuity? La! la! I fear for her safety . . . she should have been a boy. La! If she would not climb out of the window and up the plum trees! La! la! I am distrait! So!" And the lovable

old nun would hold up her arms as if expecting to catch something.

School was over for the day. The bell rattled. The sisters proceeded to the oratory—a band of women trying to find in a life of self-sacrifice and prayer sufficient to meet the demands of the human nature; to still the desires; to satisfy the aspirations; in short, they hoped to gain eternal life. Sometimes they walked beneath the trees to chant their office, and, looking at them from a distance, gowned as they were in black with white bands and gamps around faces and beneath chins, I could not help thinking that they looked remarkably like penguins.

Again, at certain periods of the year they performed “austerities,” or long periods of silence, during which they endeavoured to confine their minds within their bodies, with the object of securing worldly blessings. This silence is called a “retreat.”

While the religious were wrapped in prayerful meditation, the boarders took full advantage of the fact, and, to use the Mother Superior's own expression, “literally went wild,” even going to the extent of climbing on the roof of the building. But it was only exuberance of spirit, and most of the nuns were inclined to spoil us.

At table we were never allowed to have jam and butter on our bread at the same time; separate plates piled high with thick slices of bread and butter, or bread and jam adorned the tea table. It therefore became an obsession among the girls, if ever an opportunity occurred, to poach on Sister Claudine's store of preserves. They would help themselves to jars of jam, and carefully conceal them until meal time.

It happened on the last day of the sisters' retreat. Somehow it was one of my worst days for mischief—I just felt bubbling over with anxiety and imagination, qualities which until now I had always been afraid to let go in the convent.

As I passed by the pantry I espied the key in the lock, and, nipping inside, seized two pots of jam. Turning to retrace my steps, thinking how pleased the girls would

be—for of late we had rarely been successful in our raids—I was almost transfixed to behold the dread Mother Bernard blocking the doorway. For what appeared an eternity to me we stood and eyed each other.

"So you're a thief as well as a pagan!" The words rolled off her tongue in terse condemnation. "Come! I would like to hear your excuse."

Determined not to commit myself, I allowed no word to escape my lips.

"Very well, you won't speak? Stubborn, eh? Then come along and bring the proof of your crime with you."

Relentlessly she marched me to the nuns' community room. Filled with shame, I gazed at the stolen jars while the hot blood mounted to my temples. Inwardly I admitted that I was a thief. Well, I would take my punishment. It was a fair catch; still, it was unlucky for the girls not to have the jam for their tea.

I must have looked penitent, for Mother Baptiste nodded dolefully, and when I came nearer the light I saw something glisten in her eyes.

"I tried awfully hard to keep out of mischief," I cried imploringly, turning towards Mother Baptiste.

All she said was, "My child, I shall continue to pray for you."

"Place the jam on the table!" Mother Bernard's harsh voice caused me to jump, and a jar slipped to the floor, to break into many pieces.

Fearfully I watched the thick red strawberry conserve ooze over the polished floor, then my eyes sought the crimson face of the angry nun before me and remained riveted there.

"What are you going to do with me?" The words were forced from me in an agony of fear. For a while she appeared at a loss for an answer, so angry had she become.

At last she managed to articulate—"You shall be made an example to the rest of the school. To begin with you shall go supperless to bed. Go upstairs at once, and

on your way enter the oratory to pray God to change your wicked, infidel heart. On no account are you to converse with the other children; you are unfit to be among Christian people. To-morrow I shall arrange for further punishment."

When I began to ascend the stairs my heart quailed. At the top a dim oil lamp glimmered like sick hope's pale ray; it cast shadows over the walls, but failed to penetrate the gloom. At the chapel door I removed my shoes, and entering, knelt at the prie-dieu nearest the window. I made no attempt to pray; my soul rebelled; my stomach was hungry; and my thoughts reverted to a day when the girls had pilfered cakes and sweetmeats, and I had suggested that a safe place of concealment was behind the altar. The recollection of the feast we had had that night in the dormitory brought fresh pangs of hunger. The faint light from the red tongue of flame hanging before the tabernacle cast a mystical radiance, making myriads of red spear points to dance before my eyes. I turned to look through the window; the canopy of heaven was covered with stars; a waning moon shed a pale light over everything. There was no sound save the mournful wind whispering through the leaves of the giant gums.

As I listened, I remembered words spoken by my father: "You are exactly what you think you are." They seemed to ring in my ears. Up to the present I had made up my mind that I must be bad—everybody thought so except dear Mother Baptiste; still, if it were possible to reform, I would strive to do so for her sake.

Later in life, when I learned more of truth, I realised that the seemingly greatest power in the universe is suggestion. That mortals are governed every minute of their existence by suggestion of some sort or other. When we put off our mental swaddling clothes, examine and sift suggestions and their resultant thoughts, we shall dispel the discords and exchange it for the harmony of heaven.

Leaving the oratory, I walked along the top passage, my heart beating wildly. Rumour in Taradale said that the convent was haunted, and once when the building

was used temporarily as a Maori school, the schoolmaster had committed suicide by hanging himself in the office at the end of this passage. That the rumour was believed was evident, because the nuns themselves were in a state of scare, and no one cared to be upstairs alone after dark. One sister declared that she had seen the door of the haunted office open and close of its own accord, and had heard strange gurgling noises issue from within. Mother Bernard pooh-poohed the whole idea. It was nothing but a lot of twaddle, sheer babbling amongst village gossips, she declared. Nevertheless, in spite of the fact that the convent had since had ceremonial blessing, the weird phenomena was said to continue.

Trembling with nervous dread, I found myself abreast the fatal chamber. In vain I tried to keep my eyes looking straight ahead; strange noises within the room caused me to divert my gaze. My blood froze. The door beside me had opened and was slowly closing again! With limbs shaking and hair on end, I bounded up the steps to the dormitory and scrambled into bed without undressing. I lay there almost dead with fright, till the girls came upstairs. There was certainly something very strange about that old convent.

After Mother Baptiste had been her rounds, I confided my dreadful experience to my classmates, and we decided to move our beds together, we were so fearful.

The following day I was condemned to solitary confinement on bread and water in a small room off the dormitory. During the day I lay on my bed beside the window to watch for the children in the playground. I heard the tramping feet as they marched into school. I pictured Kitty Green at the harmonium; heard Mother Bernard and the rostrum bell—how that bell maddened me! It was not so lonesome while I could hear the muffled sounds below, but after school the place grew strangely still and silent. No one entered my cell except Sister Claudine, when once each day the kindly nun brought the prison fare. Without a word she placed the food beside me, but her eyes melted into tears as she closed the door.

I, too, wept, from loneliness and a terrible longing for the home that would know me no more. Then, weary with weeping, I would watch the long shadows fall across the grass, and knew that night's mantle was about to descend upon the world. Eagerly I awaited the girls slippered feet on the stairs, and their whispered voices outside my locked door—then silence.

Propped by my pillow, I watched the moon rise over a distant belt of bluegums. It was the same old moon that had fascinated me from earliest childhood. My eyes grew misty, my soul was full of most melancholy and pathetic complaint. How merciless were the fates who buffeted me to and fro, like a game of battledore and shuttlecock, my restless heart their sport. Why couldn't their strange influence weave my life in strong, happy threads of brightly-spun colours? Sleep at length shut out these morbid thoughts, and also the absurdity of Mother Bernard trying to annihilate my will by suppressing my individuality. My slumbers were, generally, filled with bright dreams, joy chasing away the fantastic shadows.

Starting, I awoke to my loneliness. It must have been the bell for early devotions that had aroused me. Faintly sounded the sisters' morning chant: "Kyrie eleison. Kyrie eleison."

The ghastly fact that I was imprisoned drank up all my joy. My dreams were but thin air; I beheld phantoms while anguish crushed my heart. Again that bell. My eyes opened into that inky blackness which precedes the dawn. A bustle and whispering, followed by a long silence from the next room, told me that the girls had departed for Mass. My heavy lids closed once more, again to open with bright sunlight shining through the spear-head leaves of a eucalyptus tree beside my window. I lay in a reverie and lost all count of time, when the door suddenly opened to admit the Rev. Mother Francesca. Thus summoned back to realities, my heart began to beat fast, but her kindly smile at once reassured me. It was easy to love this doll-faced little Mother.

"I want a long talk with you, Katherine," she said, drawing the one chair the room possessed alongside my bed. "But, first of all, let me hear that you repent of our unseemly conduct."

"For the theft I committed I burn with shame," I answered, the tears not far away, "but to demand that I pray as a punishment is ridiculous. I could not utter one prayer, for to pray one must love, and I hate everybody, and myself most of all."

Mother Francisca studied me a moment with philosophic pensiveness. "You're the strangest child," she smiled encouraging, "wise beyond your years, but, above all, you are candid! Try to tell me why it is so difficult for you to like being in the convent."

"Because I'm in the wrong place," I answered. Then I added, "How can I be otherwise than bad with a curse on my head?"

"Gracious, you alarm me, child—what do you mean by a curse on your head?"

"Hasn't anyone told you about Kowhai, the witch doctor; how she cursed me through my mother when I was born?" . . . I related the story. . . .

"You poor child," soothed the gentle nun. "Your former life is behind you, the door has closed on the outside world. A new life awaits you in the house of God. Try to forget the Maori race, and know that 'curses causeless' cannot go forth to settle on some poor unsuspecting human mind."

"But I do not wish to remain in a convent," I pleaded. "I cannot help an ever-increasing longing for my home."

"But you no longer possess a home, my poor child. Strangers have taken the house in Taradale. Won't you try not to consider the sisters as cruel despots who delight in making you unhappy?"

"Nobody seems to understand that I am hungry for love," I faltered, the tears in my eyes.

"The teachers and girls will love you if you'll let

them; only you must not be a little wild cat," she added playfully.

Smiling through my tears, I listened to the good mother's wise counsel. "There are many stages in life as we journey from the cradle to the grave, and you, dear child, are now passing through a state of mortal perception, or imagination, that present scenes of mental vision in fields of discovery and wonder, wherein all that is vast and grand is painted in the vivid colours of romance. To prove God," she concluded, "I draw from Nature. Look at the beautiful world around us, study it, Katherine! Then follow Nature, and resemble God."

Her words touched some chord in my lonely heart, and earnestly I asked her to tell me more. "Show me how to forget ghosts, to forget that Satan might claim me at any moment. I hate sermons about hell, they frighten me. Satan and hell belching forth streams of blazing, roaring fury. No! no! I don't want to remain here!" and I broke down in an outburst of weeping.

The Reverend Mother looked aghast. "Whatever are we going to do with you, child? You are more pagan than anything to be found in darkest Africa."

To all of which I cried, amidst sobs, that I did not want to remain in the convent.

"Let us not discuss it further then," her manner became affable and charming; "at least, not until the sisters have explained more fully the doctrines of Holy Church. Come, now, dry your tears, and perhaps you could walk to Meanee Post Office to mail a letter for me?"

I was overjoyed at the prospect of freedom. My sadness fell away from me. Hurriedly I dressed and was soon speeding along the road to the village which lay in the opposite direction from Taradale.

The murky clouds and drenching rain of the previous day had given place to bright sunshine and clear, blue skies. The smell of damp earth, the savour of leaves wet from rain; russet lanes with high hedges, and the wind blowing in my face—all these things filled my senses with

delight. I seemed to skim over the ground like a bird suddenly released from captivity.

The tiny township comprised a store, a post office, and a hotel built alongside a wooden bridge which spanned a tributary of the Tutaekuri River. Round about were fields of wheat already two feet high, and close beside the road a sturdy farmer worked among his crops. The familiar scene brought memories of days when, with my parents and Helen, we drove across that little bridge on our way to Clive. The Reverend Mother had expressly forbidden me to think of the past, but it was impossible to forget it, my heart clamouring, with the throb of youth, for all that was forbidden.

CHAPTER XX.

The Handsome Stranger

THE letter posted, I made my way to the banks of the stream, and sat lost in tender reminiscences. How much water would flow under the bridge before I would be grown up? I asked myself, not realising that the river of life could carry me ceaselessly on, but mercifully softening the sharp edges as it flowed.

Looking up from my contemplation of the water, I beheld a man regarding me critically. He was young and good looking.

"In heaven's name, child," said he, "why do you look so sad?"

I rose to my feet, considerably startled. Could my sorrow have written itself legibly on my face so quickly?

"You're the little Morgan girl, aren't you?" he questioned.

I nodded.

"But what are you doing here alone? Isn't there anybody to look after you?"

"I'm a prisoner in the convent," I enlightened him. A flicker of amusement crossed his face.

"You're really an escaped prisoner?" he asked, drawing me out. "How did you contrive it, and whither are you going?"

"I was sent to mail a letter . . ." I began.

"And forgot to return—was that it?"

I nodded an affirmative and, against my will, began to thaw towards this smiling man with the open countenance. With a sense of adventure, I drew a deep breath of satisfaction, as the cool breeze fanned my hot, rather tear-stained face. A bright idea formed itself in my mind.

"I shall never return!" I said defiantly. "Perhaps you could help me?"

He replied, "First, before we proceed further, I had better explain that I know Mother Baptiste—in fact, she is my aunt—and she asked me to look for you, so that no harm should befall you."

"My Mother Baptiste sent you" I asked, taken aback.

"Yes, I'm Paul Baptiste, and my horse is tethered nearby. I thought you might ride back with me."

"I'm glad you've told me," I explained, "for that alters everything. You see, I've always thought of her as *my* Mother Baptiste."

"Everybody thinks of her like that," he replied, adding—"She is very fond of you, too, Katherine; but at present she is greatly distressed at your long absence, so won't you return to her with me?"

I nodded wearily, for already in my short life I had learned the futility of protest against the powers ordained in this universe of which I was but an atom. As we rode along to the clapping of hoofs Paul Baptiste related tales of his home in the South Island, where his family had landed from France.

As I listened to his deep voice I felt soothed, with a delightful langour in my veins, making me realise that the day which had begun so strangely was ending rather satisfactorily—or was this just a momentary interlude? As if in answer to my thought, as we turned from the main road, I espied Mother Bernard standing on the front steps reading her breviary. If she waited from curiosity

to see me return there was small time for speculation, for Paul wheeled his mount with a gravelly crunch and swept through a side entrance.

"Whew!" he drew in his breath sharply. "How stupid of me to forget that I was not to enter by the front gate." Next moment he was calling to his aunt, "Here's your charge, Mother Baptiste!" With a choking sob I flew to her arms.

Paul Baptiste had but that day arrived to take up his abode as a lay brother at the Mission, a pile of high buildings that consisted of half monastery, half seminary. Within those walls young ecclesiastical students studied for the priesthood. The seminary was a self-supporting establishment, worked by a brotherhood of laymen, who tilled the ground and laboured in the carefully pruned vinyards, the wine from which had become famous throughout the land. Besides acres of vines, the estate also possessed many beautifully laid-out gardens and orchards—rare beauty spots, where clear, flowing streams rippled beneath picturesque, rustic bridges. Here in the golden evenings, when the angelus summoned the brethren from their labours in the fields to vespers in the cloisters, the distant bleating of sheep and lowing of cattle in the peaceful meadows mingled in harmonious chorus at the closing of the day. The parish church separated the monastery from the convent. The first notes of the angelus pealed from the belfry as Paul Baptiste mounted his horse.

"Haste thee, Paul," urged his aunt, "it would never do for a Baptiste to be unpunctual. What do you think of my nephew?" she asked me a little wistfully as she watched the lithe figure disappear through the gates.

"I love him already," I made reply.

"La! but you are a good judge of character for one so young. Only now we must use all our strategy to avoid the watchful eye of Mother Bernard," she said as we entered the convent by another door.

On Sundays and church feast days, the clergy, students and lay-brothers attended the parish church and

assisted by singing the services, which were especially beautiful during the Christmas and Easter seasons. Afterwards there were eucharistic processions through the lanes and round the grounds. Periodically ordination of the young priests took place, His Grace the Archbishop, assisted by other prelates and dignatories of the Church, officiating. These religious activities attracted many people from all parts of the country. Usually the mothers and sisters of the young men being ordained came to stay at the convent, and their presence made a bright splash of joy in the otherwise solemn life of the cloister.

At school each day brought its own special tasks. There was a place for everything, a time for everything, and woe betide the culprit who failed to observe the rules. The seasons, too, made a difference in routine. In the summer time we had our studies beneath the trees, or took long walks into the country. To-day however, Boreas blew his wintry blast; the earth was cloaked in white, and pools glistened with ice. Logs crackled up the wide school chimney. A ruddy glow tinted the faces of the happy girls who sat toasting their toes, for the hour was midday recess.

Mother Baptiste entered carrying what she called her "bag of rag," in other words a sewing basket. The rostrum bell rang with unusual emphasis.

"Come, girls," called Mother Bernard, "it's time for sewing class."

Hurriedly the desks were cleared of slates and books, and the class waited expectantly. This time it was Mother Baptiste who spoke: "Mary Crosby, please to get me out of the bag of rag. . ." Abjectly I watched the thin girl assemble all the paraphernalia for sewing.

"Mind, I want good work and no humbug," she cautioned. "If you have any story-telling (it was customary for one of the girls to read stories while the rest sewed) you must also show diligence."

I disliked needlework at all times, and to my disgust found that I had to unpick a double row of stitching the full length of a very grubby pillow slip. Suddenly I

remembered Paul Baptiste and the story he said his aunt could relate about their home in France and their coming to New Zealand.

"So Paul told you to ask?" said Mother Baptiste. "Very good, then, but you must go fast at your needles," and she started her story.

This was the story: When she lived in France her name was Jeanne Baptiste. Her father was a vigneron, but four poor vintages had altered their prospects, so that it became imperative to seek other fields for a livelihood. So the family decided to go to New Zealand—to Akaroa, where the French had started a colony. An advertisement in the daily press set forth terms that appeared tempting after the penury of their own rural districts, where peasants laboured for small pay and lived on homely fare: poverty caused by the Napoleonic wars. So, packing their bundles, the Baptistes left France in a pioneer ship. Later, Jeanne Baptiste, in company with several young women, took the veil; Bishop Pompallier having at the time founded a Roman Catholic Mission in the North Island.

At this part of her narrative Mother Baptiste was summoned from the room, promising to continue her story of how they had lived in deadly fear of the Maoris, especially Te Kooti and his cannibal tribes, another day.

Mention of the Maori chief's name sent my thoughts away to forbidden subjects. I craved the freedom of my childhood days' so much prayer and religious instruction had become very irksome, really an unjust persecution, so it seemed to me, that constantly fanned me into rebellious moods.

Night after night I lay awake while the dormitory slept, my eyes glued to the window at the foot of my bed, tracing shadowy landscapes, mysterious beneath a pale moon, and longing for those wonderful days of freedom which were now far away—gone forever. Mother Bernard would have scoffed at such ideas. Truly different individuals had a wide divergence of opinion, and I realised that the Reverend Mother was free to do her own thinking.

My musings were rudely interrupted at this moment by that good lady's voice calling to me: "Katherine Morgan, bring your work for inspection." A cold fear crept along my spine; a feeling of impending tragedy. Reluctantly I carried the pillow slip to the rotund figure seated on the rostrum and placed it before her. Words are inadequate to describe my fear of the fiery-tempered, red-faced nun as she glared down at me from her coign of vantage on the platform.

"I've unpicked, not sewn," I faltered.

"How much work have you done this afternoon?"

"Always it must be unpicked," she snapped back. "I've a mind to cane you, for I've watched you idle your time away since Mother Baptiste left the class. Your punishment will be no dessert at dinner any day till that slip is finished."

Summer vacation was almost at an end. February brought hot, dry days, the air thick with smoke from bush fires.

The sisters were in retreat. I was the only child at the convent, the other girls having gone to their homes. Most of the time I spent in the garden, or propped against the bole of a tree with a book. A feeling that I was a ghost, an onlooker at other people's lives, gradually stole over me. I tried to think of it without bitterness. I was alone in a world that seemingly had no place for me. Hidden away in a corner of the garden where no one was likely to disturb me, and where the perfume of the flowers seemed to enclose me in a scented silence, I gave way to burning tears, to an orgy of self-pity. Childish sorrows though terrible while they last, soon rebound, and gradually I recovered my calm and became absorbed in the life around me.

The dry spell had parched the grasses, cattle were dying from drought, the creek at the bottom of the garden held very little water, barely sufficient to carry the two black swans that glided in tranquil majesty. Dogs barking and the sounds of sheep being mustered in the neighbour-

ing Mission paddocks sent me post haste to the road. I climbed on the gate to watch them go pattering by, a huddled, woolly mass of mother sheep and baby lambs. The air was full of their bleating and of the dust of the road. Following on horseback rode Brother Basil, his small, shrivelled body bent forward as he sat in the saddle, for he was very old. Usually he dozed while the quiet old mare walked slowly in the wake of the sheepdog, which seemed to do all the thinking as he ran hither and thither. Brother Basil was not dozing now, however, but wide awake calling his dogs in a throaty language. What had once been a blue smock was now green and shiny with age; on his head he wore a Turkish fez, and before him on the saddle was stretched the tiniest lamb, too wee even to walk. The sheep ran forward and filled the space before the gate, bleating even louder than before. The old dog worked cautiously to avoid a steep bank which looked dangerous. Then his master rode close in beside the gate, and to my unbounded joy and utter amazement, handed me the lamb, saying: "A little lamb for you to take care of."

"Are you giving it to me, for my very own?"

"It has no mother," he made answer.

"Baa! baa!" The cry sounded an appeal to the very core of my being.

Carefully I climbed from the gate, my arms full of the stiff, crinkly, woolly lamb that Jesus had loved to symbolise. My heart was beating faster than that of the panting animal; my eyes were wet with pity. While hastily making my way in the direction of the back porch, I was halted by the sight of Mother Bernard coming through the wicket gate. In my excitement I had never given a thought to the fact that I might not be allowed to keep the lamb. I hoped, moreover, that the nun would not break the silence of the Retreat by speaking to me. But I was mistaken, for no sooner did she catch sight of me than she burst out, "Whatever are you doing with that lamb? And where did you get it?"

"You will allow me to keep it, Mother Bernard?" I

pleaded, clutching my treasure fiercely to my heart. "Baa! baa!"

"But where did you get it?" she questioned.

"Brother Basil gave it to me."

"You did not ask him for it?"

"No, Mother Bernard, he gave it to me."

Perhaps some note in my earnest pleading, coupled with the plaintive bleat of the motherless lamb, caused her to relent her previous harshness, for now she gave her consent, and, further, ordered the kitchen to supply milk for my charge. An improvised feeding bottle was made by placing cloth over the spout of a teapot; the orphan lamb had found a home, and was given the name of "Brit."

It proved a difficult task to rear a lamb at a convent. Fear that he might break loose and destroy the garden, and in consequence change hands to the butcher, kept me constantly on guard for my pet. None of these things happened, wherefor Brit grew and waxed strong on his stick-like legs.

The girls had returned to school after the holidays. An excited bevy crowded around Brit. "Lucky lamb!" chirped one. "Why didn't you give him a saint's name?" chimed another. "He's under the protection of Pan," I informed them. "But you don't consider yourself a shepherd, do you, with only one lamb?" and they laughed uproariously.

The blood mounted to my temples. How were they to know that the lamb was so precious to my lonely heart. Scornfully I replied that it might be wise to invoke the patron of all beginners for themselves. Their mirth faded, and for a moment they remained silent; then Mary Crosby, overcome by curiosity, asked: "Who's the patron?" "A cruel god with two faces, 'twould be wise to look him up." Turning to walk away, I came face to face with Mother Baptiste, who had been a witness to the little scene.

"La! la!" she exclaimed. "But you are riddled with conceit, Katherine; also, you have the sharp wit and the too sharp tongue. La! la!"

Oh! if they would only try to understand me. How my heart ached with useless longing for human love; for false pride was quite foreign to my nature. But nobody wanted to understand me, and in a fit of despair I fled to a secluded part of the garden. Throwing myself on the ground, I gazed long and earnestly at the blue dome of heaven until my soul wandered away into fairylands, to dwell in air castles built from fleecy cloudbanks piled high in ever-changing shape. The blue canopy of the sky was, to my child's mind, where God lived. Then the clouds separated, to form into beautiful ships that sailed away out of sight in a vast blue sea. This went on changing continuously until nothing was left but the glow of twilight.

The sound of a bell and repeated calls from girls sent to look for me recalled me to a world of immediate experiences and concrete things. It was almost dark. I hoped to steal indoors by way of the kitchen, where I might coax some supper from the smiling little Sister Claudine, for well I knew it was long past the tea hour.

"Oh, my dear, where have you been? We thought something dreadful had happened," cried the lay sister as I entered. Mother Bernard is very angry. . . Here, swallow this," she added, slicing cake and pouring milk, "be quick, before you are caught."

Between mouthfuls I explained that I had been up in the clouds. "Golden day dreams, Sister Claudine, that serve as an antidote to my loneliness."

Passing the nuns' community room, I was intercepted by Mother Bernard. In terse, hard terms she pronounced me an outlaw, who kept the school in a state of perpetual chaos. "You will find your punishment awaiting you down at the back yard fence," she said. "Go, see for yourself! Had you not played truant this afternoon it would not have happened."

Swiftly my thoughts went to my pet. "Not Brit," I

cried, and flew on pinions as fast as the wind. My eyes searched alike the spaces flooded with light from the windows, and the deeps of shadow. I sped on. Then my foot touched a woolly heap. It was my Brit—and he was dead! His wonderful coat all smeared with blood. "Why must everything I love be taken from me?" I cried, sobbing. Did some sinister motive lie behind it? Who would kill an innocent lamb? How did it happen?

Mother Francesca had followed me into the yard. "It's entirely your own fault," she admonished. "Had you not played truant the lamb would not have broken through the paddock fence and been worried to death by the St. Bernard dog. . . Brother Cyprian placed him over the fence."

I paid no heed to her words. My heart was too sore for my pet, and that night I sobbed restlessly, waking again and again to see Brit's face in the darkness, his brown eyes glazed in death.

CHAPTER XXI.

A New Life

THE sunshiny days of summer glided away only too quickly, when suddenly, out of a clear sky, came an unexpected tragedy.

Early on the afternoon of Good Friday, in the year 1894, Hawke's Bay was visited by a terrific thunderstorm that ended in a cloud burst, and it seemed as though the whole waters of heaven were emptied upon the earth in a downpour of rain. The Tutaekuri River, which looked so peaceful and smiling in summer, was now transformed into a rushing, foaming flood of maddened, surging waters. It rose as though swept by an immense tidal wave—caused by the banking up of the adjoining tributary, the Ngarurora River—and, overlapping its banks, it swirled across the countryside, carrying death and destruction with it. Soon a muddy, grey river was rushing

past the school, carrying with it furniture of all kinds and out-houses; while branches of trees, even whole trees, floated by, swirling along. A solitary hen, perched on a hen coop, looked a pathetic sight as it was borne past by the steadily increasing rush of the waters.

As night closed in black skies and a blinding down-pour blotted out the surrounding landscape. Settlers were appalled by the steady rise of the raging waters.

Meanwhile the small settlement at Clive was in grave danger of being wiped out, unless boats could be dispatched from Napier. Volunteers and boats were quickly transported by train to the danger zone, and soon the men were pulling in the direction of Clive. Through the thick night they slowly felt their way, sometimes rowing, sometimes drifting, while the railway engine sent a friendly floodlight over the murky waste. The journey proved hazardous from the outset, so they kept as close to the railway bank as they dared. New hope rose in the hearts of the watchers on the train when they saw the men gaining the opposite bank. Then, all at once, a great surging wall of water bore down upon them and swept them and all before it into the sea.

At the first break of dawn a terrifying spectacle met the gaze of the anxious watchers on the railway bank. The whole contour of the coast was changed. The Tutae-kuri River had decided to alter its course and force a new mouth for itself by a mighty wash-out, which swept the rail track to within a dozen yards of the stationary engine.

The lifeboats with their gallant crews had been swept out to sea—alas, never to be seen again. They had given their lives in an endeavour to save others, and deep sympathy was felt for the relatives of those noble men.

As it happened, the wash-out near Clive averted a much greater calamity inasmuch as it released the banked-up flood waters of the two rivers; otherwise every living thing must have perished in the inundated area.

When the waters subsided the land was silted to a depth of several feet, giving the appearance of a vast sea of mud, which later made the country fertile. At the time,

however, stark ruin faced the settlers. The New Zealand Government deemed it a national calamity, and rendered every assistance to make a fresh start possible. Doubtless there are pioneers still living who remember the terrible catastrophe of that great flood.

In spite of valiant efforts on the part of Government and people to prevent epidemics after the flood, diphtheria broke out and ravaged the district, leaving a trail of death in its wake. There were little green graves mourned over by the already stricken and sorrowful parents. Our school had closed indefinitely, the boarders having dispersed to their homes. Extremely empty the dormitory now looked with its row of neat cots. The silence chilled me when I stole upstairs to bed, to stand like a little wraith by the window.

I felt powerless to break my fetters in what appeared to me to be a living death. Yet the story of life went round and round like twisting flax round a distaff. It began to spin a portion of my life that I would fain forget, only the fact seems to prove that my mother's childhood was to some extent repeated in my own. During the hours of daylight I solaced myself with books, and thrilled to find that Faust and other great folks who had lived in the world had trafficked with Satan to drive a bargain for their souls—even going so far as to sign the contract with their own blood. This gave me food for deep thought. I was not so very unusual then? Only perhaps a little before my time. Imagining things does not make them real, as I found in the cold hopelessness of my world. I tried to school my will to get accustomed to face disagreeable tasks, and in this I had many opportunities every day. Finally I realised that if I succeeded in conquering myself I might hope one day to achieve great things.

About this time there came a visitor to the convent, one Mother Mary de Gruchy, a holy abbess, noted for her piety. She must have been a great age because her tall, spare figure was bent, and her face withered like a crab apple; this being accentuated by the white, starched gamp and bands. Notwithstanding her crabbed appear-

ance, however, she was kindly of heart and immediately took a warm interest in my humble self.

In order to relieve distress caused by the recent floods many kinds of entertainment were in progress at the time. The nuns worked ceaselessly, doing fancy work, carving, and numerous paintings to be sold at a forthcoming bazaar. The Abesse de Gruchy's extremely thin fingers threaded her needle with a delicate shade of crewel silk, while she bent about a green plush mantle drape. The drape measured some two and a half yards, and as the opening day of the bazaar was drawing near, the venerable abbess decided to set me to work the scalloped edge from the opposite end.

"Our blessed Lord will reward you for helping the poor," quoth she.

I was at a loss what conversation to engage in, if any, with this austere lady. Turning questioning eyes upon me, she enquired why I was silent. I replied by asking a question, "Don't you ever get tired with so much sewing?"

"Our blessed Lord was never tired."

I tried another way. "When your legs cramp from sitting, what do you do?"

"Our blessed Lord never cramped."

During a long pause, while I threaded my needle, I found myself counting the many times she had called on the Saviour of men. Feeling it imperative to say something, I asked blankly: "Did our blessed Lord ever get homesick when He was a child?" Once my tongue was loosened there was no end of questions, to all of which the good lady replied, "Our blessed Lord" did—or did not—do something. Once I had it in mind to ask her to stop bringing the Lord into it, but could not find the exact moment in which to say it. My courage flickered up for a moment, as it were, then of a sudden went out. Sitting there beside the holy abbess, I felt like the proverbial fish out of water; it was the weariest time I have ever known. When not employed on the drape, I seemed just to exist from day to day. Seated alone in the refectory, where my

meals were often left untouched, I wondered miserably what the end of it all would be. Then, after what seemed an eternity, the girls returned to school.

The green of spring had thinly covered the ravaged and devastated land. Once more life settled in its old routine; on the small eminence of life's little stage, where mortals clutch at the air—for what else has life to offer? Planning evasions for the day of doom, we eventually reach the centre of all wisdom by beginning to understand the "spark of divinity" within ourselves.

I am writing of days when men were not ashamed to speak of heaven. To-day men live at a pace which is fraying the nerves of the present and rising generation. Humanity must take care that the new god of machinery does not crush out its natural and true life.

When school assembled many of the old scholars were missing from their accustomed places, but soon these vacancies were filled, for the constant arrival of ships from the homeland brought numerous families to the district. As soon as school was in, Mother Bernard rang for the psychology class. If there was one thing we disliked more than another it was these lectures by the Reverend Mother. One could not help wondering why she did not practise some of the things herself; but for the most part it went over our heads, and the class grew tired at its considerable length. Mother Bernard faced us with the light of battle in her eyes; a curious smile upon her florid features, and the girls braced themselves. "It'll be a good fight," whispered bold Mary Crosby from the back of her hand. Nobody dared reply. The nun had a habit of speaking from between closed teeth. She began, something after this style:

"The acquisition of determination and perseverance spells success. To be able to start a proposition, and to finish it, are two different things. Most people start things, but as soon as an impediment or difficulty arises they grow cold. Why?" Her cold eye searched each face, as if to read the answer there. "Why?" she repeated in louder tones, striking the desk sharply with a ruler.

"Because they lack the quality so essential—stick-to-it-iveness!" a sharp hissing sound escaping with the words. With a quick intake of breath she continued: "People who allow themselves to be swayed by adverse suggestions from others will never finish a task. This is the reason why so many fail in anything they undertake. They leave things to chance; are for ever waiting for Dame Fortune to cause ripe fruit to fall into their laps, and they wait for ever. Things do not just happen in the world; only accidents happen. Real things, achievements worth while, do not happen. For them we must climb, struggle, fight and persevere. A magnetic personality is always sought after, and never lacks friends. My faith in my own ability," she concluded, "is unlimited, and I have implicit confidence in an unseen power."

At the conclusion of this lecture I was summoned to the Mother Superior's office, to find her in close consultation with Father Jardin. Soon I learned that a childless couple, named Coward, who lived at Palmerston North, wished to adopt me. To this Father Jardin stipulated as a condition that no adoption should take place until I had lived with them for one year.

Consternation filled my breast when I thought of parting from Mother Baptiste, who had become like a second mother to me, and my classmates had also found a way into my heart. Having no choice but to obey, I remembered that it was only for a year, and decided that I would not abandon hope, but by and by came the thought, the heart-gripping thought, that I would again be among strangers. The good priest naturally thought that I must receive benefits from the change.

When the day arrived for my departure my things were packed into a carpet bag. I wore a plain black frock tied with a broad sash, a poke bonnet, and mittens on my hands—somewhat after the picture "Cherry Ripe." The pitiful tears were raining down my face as I clung to Mother Baptiste as though never to let her go again.

"Oh, my poor lamb! How can I say farewell? La! la!" Her words sounded like a caress. "Whatever

happens, remember, Katherine, I love you like a mother, and shall continue to pray for you until I depart from this life."

The French padre was to drive me to the small railway siding near Clive, and motioned me to be seated. Soon we drove through the gates and the convent was lost to sight.

"You have your life before you, my child," said he cheerfully, trying to comfort me. "Believe me I am doing what I think best for your interest and happiness."

"Thank you, Father," I replied simply, "but in the hour of parting I cannot think of things that belong to the future. Oh, why must I always keep saying 'good-bye?'"

"I admit that for one so young in years you are old in sorrow," he said, "and none regrets more than I the untimely end of your parents, and, by the help of God, I hope to do my best for their children."

"Oh, I will try not to complain again," I answered, endeavouring to mop up my tears with the altogether inadequate white wisp of cambric that Mother Baptiste had tucked in my sash at the last moment.

Slowly trotted the old mare among the familiar road, past Meanee and over the bridge. An hour later saw us at the siding, where we sat awaiting the arrival of the Palmerston express. My guardian spent the time giving me fatherly advice, and as the train hove in sight handed me a purse with seventeen shillings in silver. "Just for pocket money," he smiled.

Once only had I ridden on a train, and then only to the next town. Hastings, ten miles away; so that my journey now took on the glamour of a grand adventure. I knelt on the seat by the open window to wave the padre farewell. "The guard will look after you," he called as the whistle sounded. To-day, as I write, these words ring in my ears, as, with other eyes now, I see the snow-white head of the old priest standing on the platform waving good-bye.

The guard certainly kept his eye on me, and the passengers were interested to see a small girl travelling

alone; for in those early days a trip from Napier to Palmerston was considered quite an undertaking. The train travelled mostly through virgin bush, with here and there a small township or sawmill. Though honoured by the name of "express," there appeared a great deal of shunting and filling of the boiler at sundry tanks, thereby making it nightfall ere we arrived at our destination.

A tall, rather good-looking woman, who stated she was Mrs. Coward, claimed me and led me to a waiting hansom cab, wherein sat another and much older woman. At first they seemed disposed to laugh at my quaint appearance, but, as I heard the elder one confide to Mrs. Coward afterwards, when she looked at my haughty face and snub nose, the laughter died away, for it appeared that I was quite a grown-up young miss.

In the cab Mrs. Coward relieved me of the seventeen shillings, presumably to purchase a more serviceable hat the next day. I still have a vision of that hat which sat on the top of my head like a collar box.

On arrival at the house of the Cowards, situated at the foot of Fitzherbert Street, near the Manawatu River bridge, I received my first shock. I beheld the man who was to become my father by adoption. Instinctively I recoiled from him; a violent dislike took hold of me—children and animals have this fine perception. The woman was frivolous, yet in a sense refined; but the man—how best can I describe him? Uncouth, coarse, gross, bestial flow from my pen, while disgust lingers in my soul at the thought of this human monster. Murtagh Coward hailed from the waybacks of County Galway, in Ireland. Far be it from me to disparage any son of the soil that gave birth to my own dear mother, but I must be pardoned if, in my childhood, I christened this Galway fiend "the Wild Man from Borneo," a coward by nature as well as by name.

The house that was to be my new home, though small (possessing only four rooms), had some pretensions to style. The sitting-room boasted a red plush suite, a Brussels carpet and a piano. The open fireplace was

painted in ochre, and a large jar of toitoi plumes stood on the hearth. For the rest there were two bedrooms and the kitchen-living-room. The building was situated on a rise, close to the road, which was built up with a high camber with wide spaces on either side.

Murtag Coward owned property on the opposite side, as well as the land surrounding the homestead. He tilled his own ground, his crops consisting chiefly of onions and potatoes, which latter he never failed to call "spuds." He was illiterate as well as ill-mannered, and though my heart was crushed in that home, I had fain to smile when listening to Murtag's efforts to read aloud from the daily newspaper. It was at this time when our great statesman Dick Seddon was fighting his way into power. Murtag's scrubby moustache, of no particular shade, stuck out fiercely as his thick lips puckered to pronounce the sentence: "How Dick Sheddin re-coco-in-ished fhat the fwarking man fwants"; meaning, "Dick Seddon recognised what the working man wants."

It was evident that Murtag had miserly instincts, for he kept a tight rein on the household expenditure. He considered onions and "spuds" a staple diet for any family. "Fwhat was good h'enough for him was good h'enough for the rest of us." Thus each day the menu consisted of "spuds" in jackets and onions, either boiled, baked, fried, and sometimes pickled or raw. On Sundays there was usually a joint, or perhaps some hapless old bird from the poultry yard that had outlived its keep found its way to the table. So much for the introduction to Murtag Coward. "It takes all kinds to make a world" is indeed a true saying, but each night I lay down to sleep I prayed God to remove this knave, saying: "Dear God, at least there will be one rogue less in Thy world!"

When I first became an inmate of this strange household I was made a great fuss over. A young girl was employed as maid-of-all-work, and it was in her room that I slept. The conditions agreed upon by my guardian provided that I should attend the convent school as a day scholar. Thus I duly found myself among strange class-

mates and nuns who were strangers, though they were of the same order as the Mission at Taradale.

For a while everything went as merry as marriage bells, and I gradually became accustomed to the change in my life. At all times I loved study, and in my class I engaged in keen competition to hold the top position. My chief competitor happened to be a girl of my own age named Annie Gordon, whose people kept a large store in the Square, and although we fought valiantly to head the class, we were the closest of friends.

Mrs. Coward's married sister and family of five lived on a dairy farm on the Rangitikei line, and often paid visits to the house in Fitzherbert Street. Mrs. Raird was justly proud of her family of girls and boys. They drove in a large spring trap. The children looked well nourished, and wore straw hats with elastic beneath their chin, making their already plum faces appear to bulge. They rode ponies to school, and on rare occasions it was my great pleasure to double-bank a ride home with them and stay the night.

Mrs. Coward called her sister "Dorcas"; and somehow it always reminded me of "Barkis" in David Copperfield; and, curiously, by a trick of speech she not infrequently used the phrase, "if Dorcas is willing." Dorcas was willing to take life mostly as she found it, with the exception of the culinary department. This easy-going housewife surpassed herself as a chef, making the family board fairly groan beneath the good fare provided. My joy was unbounded when I was told that I was to stay at the farm—for one whole week, and all too quickly the days of my holiday passed, until the morning of departure.

CHAPTER XXII.

The Drudge

ON REACHING the home in Fitzherbert Street, I was greeted by a buxom midwife holding a baby for my

surprised inspection. "See what the stork brought! A baby sister for you!" she chortled.

I scarcely knew what to think. I was neither sorry nor glad. Nothing could surprise me for long now, for was not my life just a jumble of strange happenings? How was I to foresee that the advent of this baby girl in the home would make my life a hell? But so much suffering was now to be crowded into this period that it appeared an eternity since I left the convent, whereas in reality it was less than two years.

I was no longer allowed to attend school; my clothes were in tatters; not one garment had been replaced. My letters to Father Jardin were dictated by Mr. Coward. I had not so much as a stamp, even had I dared to utter complaints against my tormentors. Moreover, I had lapsed into a stupid state. My one solace was the baby girl, who quickly found a place in my starved affections.

Little Rosie Coward was scarcely four months old when her mother decided to establish a dressmaking business in the Square. It therefore fell to me to manage the home, cook the meals, scrub floors and take sole charge of the infant, as since the extra expense attached to the baby the maid-of-all-work had been discharged. Carefully I bathed and fed my small charge, who seemed to repay my love as if she understood how lonesome we both were. I struggled gamely at my inequitable tasks, and the days and weeks dragged by on leaden wings. Then, for some reason or other, the shop in the Square failed, and the baby's mother stayed at home.

If I thought that Mrs. Coward's cancelled business venture was to lighten my burdens I was quickly disillusioned. The next day Murtag stumped into the kitchen, his boots muddy, his trousers tied below the knees with flax. He resembled a baboon; his small, shifty eyes peering from beneath shaggy brows; his shiny, round, marble-like nose was the only place on his face that did not grow hair. He had come straight from the furrows, planting "spuds." He exploded when an idea hit his thick skull, to wit, that I would be handy at setting the seed.

So across the road I followed in his wake. "False pride won't do here," he growled. "It wants crushing, and crushed it shall be." Arrived at the paddock, he fastened a bag containing the seed potatoes around my shoulders. With body bent forward and bare feet measuring the spaces, I toiled up and down the furrows after the plough until my tortured brain burned more than my bent back. "Fwhat in hell be you slackin' fur?" he roared, at the same time cracking his whip around my legs. I stumbled forward desperately; fear of this monster held me like a vice. He knew he had me cowed, for it was impossible to bid him defiance without some presumption of escape. There was no one I could call on for help. No, I was powerless, held in bondage like the black races when the white man trafficked in slaves.

It seemed impossible that such things could happen in New Zealand. Could my mother know that I was being tortured, made to labour in the fields, as she had done in Ireland at the other end of the world? Could she? I wondered, as day after day, week after week, month after month followed in succession around the calendar. I had fallen into an unhappy state of neglect, which I cannot look back upon without self-pity. At night I lay absorbed by my own thoughts, too tired to notice the gloom.

It seemed strange that neither my sister Helen, nor the nuns, nor Father Jardin should have made any attempt to see how I was faring. But nobody came to see me, and it was now close on two years since I came to the house of the Cowards.

The potato crop that I had helped to plant was well above the ground, and required banking up with soil on either side. Murtag drove the plough horse attached to a cultivator that turned the earth between the flowing tubers while I led "Dobbin" to keep him clear from the plants. No words can express the agony of my soul as I struggled to guide the beast along the rows. The sun's fierce rays blistered my sensitive skin. Murtag cursed me for being so small, for each time the horse threw up his head he either lifted me off the ground or pulled the strap

from my hand. My heart was bursting with shame and misery of my position. I was utterly without hope, and when I remembered how once my life was filled with golden day dreams, and I thought of the books I had studied and delighted in, my tears fell and mingled with the freshly-turned earth. . . . And then it happened! Quite suddenly I found myself lying in the furrow beneath Dobbin's feet.

"In God's name, stop!"

A man's voice rang out. Instantly the massive hoofs were still. Looking out from beneath the horse's belly, I saw an elderly man rushing towards me. On his face he wore a long, flowing beard, like the patriarchs of old, and on his head a square bowler hat.

"Would you have murder on your hands, Murtag Coward?" he cried in angry tones. Murtag looked dumb-founded at this sudden turn of events, while my kind, though strange-looking deliverer, rescued me from my perilous position. It was a situation from which I was happy to escape.

At last Murtag found his voice returning. "Well, Jeremiah," he spluttered, "when did you arrive?" Jeremiah, so that was his name. I was sure now that he was a Biblical character.

"You are not hurt, child?" He looked at me with concern in his kindly eyes; then, turning to Murtag, he said: "Come over to the house, I would speak to sister Susan and yourself; for the moment I cannot trust myself to say more."

Without more ado he led me from the field. Mrs. Coward was waiting at the front door.

"What's happened, Jerry? Has that young brat been up to mischief?" she questioned, looking me over with a hard stare.

"It's lucky for you and Murtag that I arrived when I did," said the patriarch.

"Why, Jerry, you look quite pale. Don't take any notice of that brat. But what happened? Tell me!"

Without answering any of her questions Jeremiah

Dooney pointed to me. "Susan," he said, "who is this child?"

"Oh, Jerry, dear, don't be so serious," laughed his sister. "We took her out of a convent before Rosie was born and gave her a home."

A shadow blotted out the sun from the doorway. Murtag Coward's heavy boots stumped up the steps.

"Fwhat's the big idea?" he snorted, but catching a look from Susan, he fell silent.

Then the kindly Jerry spoke. "Susan, my sister, before we proceed further, would you be so good as to allow this little girl, whom you have already twice called a 'brat,' to have a warm bath and cover herself in decent clothing?" His words fell on the room like a bomb. Murtag's bushy moustache moved as if he were preparing a speech, but no sound came. Susan first tried to laugh it off in her kittenish manner; then, as Jerry stood looking from one to the other with anger and disgust fighting for the mastery, she obeyed without a word.

It seemed brother Jerry had money, and was a bachelor. Some day he would depart this world, and the Cowards had long cherished a vision of his wealth coming to them. . . . Jerry must be appeased, that was evident.

While I was trying to scrub the grime from my starved little body, and searching among my carpet bag of rags for something to put on, Murtag tried to placate the angry patriarch by telling of crops that had failed or had been nipped by the frosts. "And then our own baby came, and you couldn't expect me to keep the orphan for nothing," he concluded. To all of which Jerry answered not a word.

The upshot of it all was that Uncle Jerry's coming to live on the farm changed my life once again. He was a pious as well as kindly man, and his presence seemed to shed a benediction over the house.

An improvised couch was made for me in a corner of the parlour, because Jerry now occupied the back bedroom. Furthermore, I was to attend school again. Jerry himself paid Susan money to buy the necessary clothes,

and she, who was ever short of cash, bought only of the cheapest, so that it took me many hours of mending and washing my few things to appear tidy in class. Before and after school hours I had Rosie to take out; but that was a labour of love. My life seemed like heaven after the months of cruel drudgery that had been my lot.

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It wanted but a week till Easter. Autumn flowers filled the gardens of the houses, and autumn leaves rustled beneath my feet as I walked home from school. Was it the sight of the golden brown leaves stirred by the breeze, or was it something in the atmosphere telling of the dying summer, that spoke to my heart and caused a lump to rise in my throat? For all at once I felt terribly lonely and homesick—lonely for a sight of my ain folk—Helen! I wondered if she ever remembered that she had a small sister.

Always, even as a child, I have had prevision of things before they actually eventuate, making me restless in manner and causing me to respond to the highest within me. Thoughts of Helen filled my mind for the rest of the way home. I longed so intensely to see her, the only one of our blood left.

Wiping my shoes at the back door, I entered. The next moment. . . . "Helen! Helen!" and I was in my sister's arms. I wept for sheer joy. Helen, too, shed tears when she viewed my wan appearance and poor clothes.

"I have come to take you home, Katherine," she said.

"Oh, Helen, I am glad to see you," I sobbed, while she held me close.

Mrs. Coward uttered one of her nervous little laughs; her manner became oily.

"When are you taking me, Helen? To-day?"

"Are you in so desperate a hurry to leave us then?" inquired Mrs. Coward, with well-feigned surprise.

"Helen, you must never leave me again! Never, never! I couldn't bear it. I would rather die."

"You ungrateful little monkey," sniffed Susan, "after all we've done for you, too."

"Don't you dare call my sister names," bridled Helen. "I should never have let you out of my sight. Come, let us get out of this place."

I rushed for my carpet bag. "Never mind bringing anything," called Helen. "Wait till you see the lots and lots of nice clothes I've made while staying with friends at Te Aute. We are to call there on our way back to Napier."

"Won't you wait to see Mr. Coward?" asked his spouse.

"No, thank you," said Helen, "we have a train to catch." But talk of the devil and he is sure to appear. Helen's eyes opened wide when she beheld Murtag Coward enter at the door. He offered a grimy paw which she refused to see; she just continued to stare at his uncouth appearance. "My poor little sister," was all she said, "how could I have left you? Come, Katherine, let us depart," and she led me to the door.

Before we reached it the baby toddled into the passage, and seeing me dressed for outdoors, held her hands to be taken up. I knelt with my arms about the wee mite, who had been my solace during so many lonely months. I hated to part with her. "I can't take you any more, Rosie; I'm not coming back," I faltered. Her cries reached us long after her mother had slammed the door on Helen and me.

Once again I must start life afresh and try to find someone or something to love.

On the way to the railway station I felt I was treading on air, and on the train the feeling was still with me, only now we were bounding through space. Freedom! I was free! Free after years of captivity.

At Te Aute we were met by Helen's friends, who heartily agreed with my sister that she had rescued me none to soon. "She looks like a little starved creature, Helen. Why didn't you let your sister know?" they asked me. Helen's remorse was deep when she stripped me to

put on the cosy things that her friends had helped her to make, and her tears flowed.

"Don't let us talk about it," I begged. "Only please write and thank Jerry, Helen! Thank him for all he did for me; not just for saving me from the horse's hoofs, but from a slow death at the hands of the Cowards."

A few days spent on the hills at Te Aute did much to revive me. Like a wild colt that scents the breeze, I sped wildly across paddocks in a mad frolic, much to the amusement of the kindly people who had befriended me. It was only when I dozed to sleep, and started up with a cry of terror, that warning was given of nerves sadly frayed. . . .

CHAPTER XXIII.

Back Again

NOW we are on the train once more on our way back to Napier, to the convent, which I entered for the second time at the age of thirteen. For weal or for woe I would endeavour to distrust my own judgment; to seek guidance from those who would not deceive me. When a young girl has had the misfortune to be deprived of her mother, the convent is the next best place for her upbringing, is the opinion of every Catholic.

While it is impossible to recall all the rules controlling the next five years of my life at the convent, it is quite possible to do so in the majority of cases. Before proceeding with my story I shall indulge in a few digressions which I feel sure will be found interesting to all alike—thoughtless or grave. For be it said that no individual is too ignorant, or too wise, to be free from the influence of love. The world is swayed by its irresistible power, and we are all either loving or being loved, or, better still, both. Love has been the theme of poets as well as the chief impulse in the human heart since the beginning of time. Moreover, it is only amongst the

shallow smatterers of advanced ideas that it has been spoken of as evil. In the convent, however, it was considered "a delusion and a snare." Love, or human attachment, between the sisters of the community was at once broken by the transfer of one of the parties to another cloister. It would seem to me that anyone possessing a spark of reason must know that to combat a great primal law of Nature is as impossible as would be fighting shadows with steel weapons. I shall therefore write quite frankly, being convinced that in the narration of facts there is no sense or object in clouding my thoughts in mistiness of expression.

As well as I remember it was almost tea hour when Helen and I alighted at the front gate of the convent. The driver deposited our things inside. Several of the boarders made a wild rush of greeting, and fought for possession of our luggage. The garden along the drive seemed to offer a welcome with its clusters of showy flowers.

"Mother Francesca awaits you in her office," the girls told Helen. As we mounted the staircase years of clogging memories fell away from me.

Everything about the place seemed to be impregnated by a delightful, subtle perfume of a most charming and delicate fragrance. It was heaven to be back in this spotlessly clean convent after my misery at Palmerston.

"Welcome home, children," said the good Mother as we entered. "I'm sure you must be weary with so much travel." Adding, "Helen, you will stay with us for a while?"

"Only a few days, Mother, thank you. I must return to Wellington next week."

The conversation was interrupted by a dear, familiar voice, and Mother Baptiste, radiant and smiling, came into the room, followed by Sister Claudine and another nun who was a stranger to me, but had good humour written all over her.

"Dear child, I am so glad to see you back! I'm glad

you're back home! La ! la! How you have grown? But where are your rosy cheeks?"

"You are all very sweet to me," I said as tears of joy trickled to the corners of my mouth. It had never occurred to me that it would be such happiness to get back.

Mother Baptiste put an arm around me. "Why are you crying, my little Katherine?"

"That I cannot account for, dear Mother Baptiste, when I am so happy." The nun smiled reminiscently. "Are you certain you will be happy here now?"

"Quite certain, Mother, and thank you all for being so good and patient with me."

No longer did resentful thoughts tumble about in my mind. A great change had taken place within myself.

Helen stayed on for a fortnight, although most of her time was divided amongst friends in and around Taradale.

Many changes had taken place during the two years. Several shiploads of immigrants had arrived; there was a decided increase in population in consequence, and Napier had grown into quite a city. Scarcely could I believe it to be the same town when I visited it with Father Jardin. As we drove through the streets in the old buggy the priest told me of a great surprise he had for Helen and me. He had obtained a good price for our home, and with that and the money he had received from my father's almost completed contract, the faithful father had placed a tidy sum in the bank for our joint benefit. The major portion was for my education, and each month I would journey to Napier to draw an allowance. Very often the kindly priest drove me in his buggy, the old horse jogging along, his trit-trot, trit-trot getting slower and slower each month until it was little more than a walk.

Then a day arrived when my guardian was too old to hold the post of parish priest any longer. His declining days would be spent patiently and peacefully, awaiting the call of the Master. His office in the parish was filled by the Reverend Father Lutz, an elderly German priest

who, from the outset, was most unpopular both with the parishioners and scholars at the convent, where he came to impart religious knowledge. His manner was that of a bully, and in harsh tones he called the children by their surnames, such as Reid, Ryan, O'Brian, etc. The girls in particular resented this form of address, from a foreigner, too, as they declared. In return they played a rather drastic trick upon him.

One day three of the senior girls decided to drive the reverend gentleman from the school. It happened that at the previous class instruction the three in question—one of whom was a convent boarder—had drawn upon themselves the wrath of Father Lutz. His rebuke was unusually severe, his voice staccato, his mouth twisted; it was terrifying. The poor gentleman had at an earlier period of his life suffered from yellow fever, which had left him jerky in his movements. Even during the celebration of Mass his arms jerked up and down like a bird about to fly. Still, the priest's grey hairs, as well as the girls' own modest decorum, should have deterred them from the dastardly act which they perpetrated on the old man.

It was customary for the Father to remain seated during class instruction, immediately on conclusion of the opening psalm. He was wont to lift his coat tails before sitting down. During recess the three girls had "fixed" his chair by inserting three stout pins in the cane bottom, but only a special few were "let into the know."

The bell summoned the classes to their seats. When Father Lutz walked briskly up the room it rang a second time. Standing, the children joined in a chorus of: "Good morning, Father!" Stammering slightly, he returned that it was a very bright morning. Next, a rather diminutive girl, whose name I cannot recall, sang a solo. She had a most delightful little voice and a sweet face that was spoilt by a cast in one eye. The singing concluded, the children resumed their seats. Father Lutz cleared his throat and read out as follows: "Christians turn naturally

from worldly things to spirit, as the flowers turn from darkness to light, and offer unto God thanksgiving."

All was over in a moment. Up went the coat tails of his broadcloth—when he sat down you could not have counted half a second ere he rose again. Traces of a deep-seated anguish appeared on his countenance; there was no pausing on the brink, no looking back; he was gone, headlong, before anyone could say a word to him.

Then the rostrum bell rang furiously. Mother Bernard was in charge in the space of a few seconds. The children by their silence expressed their entire ignorance of what had happened. Only Jenny O'Farrell, a big, bold-looking girl, who was "in the know," burst out laughing. Instantly suspicion fell upon her. Consternation looked forth from the faces of the nuns. A messenger was hastily dispatched for Father Jardin, and soon he entered.

"This heinous crime," his voice shook with emotion, "must be sifted to the bottom. Woe to the one who tells a lie—for I ask, in God's name, that the culprit come forward. . . ."

A great silence followed; you could have heard a pin drop. Frank O'Brien, a big, over-grown lad, burst into tears. Suspicion shifted to him, but no! he was just overwrought.

Again the priest spoke: "It is an outrage! I shall question each child separately." Before he had time to proceed, however, the three culprits stood up. Mother Bernard gasped audibly when she beheld Minnie Logan, a convent boarder, among them. The eldest of the three was Nellie Davis, who should have known better, inasmuch as her family were most pious. Already four of her sisters had taken the veil. The third girl, Mary Duggan, was the daughter of the proprietor of the local hotel.

Mother Bernard's voice now vibrated through the room. "This ghastly deed must be atoned. Each of the three girls will be expelled!"

There was a trembling upon all three culprits as

they shrank before the gaze of their classmates. Minnie was sent upstairs to the prison room and messengers were dispatched to the parents of the other girls. These messengers, however, never reached their destinations, because the guilty pair of day scholars lay in wait for them and threatened to skin them alive if they dared to deliver the notes. Consequently the messengers, who were boarders, told untruths when questioned and suffered the same fate as Minnie Logan.

Then stark tragedy took a hand before other scholars could be drawn into the horrible tangle.

It happened the following day, which happened to be Guy Fawkes' Day. This day has not altered much since I was a child, for to-day children are just as fond of bonfires and letting off crackers and squibs. I had been sent on an errand to Meanee, and tarried to watch the Duggan children make a funeral pyre for their guy. Although strictly forbidden to speak to Mary, I soon found myself engaged heartily helping to stack the fire. Higher and higher mounted the shower of sparks, with exploding rockets at intervals. Merrily we danced about the glowing heap. I could not tear myself away—everything was forgotten except the joy of watching the leaping flames. Just how it happened nobody seemed to know; piercing screams, and a tiny tot all alight from her toes to her head of golden curls, ran hither and thither. It was Mary's little sister, aged four. Swift as an arrow Mary reached the tottering baby and, reckless of burns inflicted on herself, endeavoured to smother the fire. . . .

It was over. The baby lay in a wee white coffin. School children marched behind the charred remains of one of God's little angels. The pall-bearers were Nellie Davis and Minnie Logan. In a solemn hush Father Lutz sprinkled the tiny casket, his eyes moist with feeling. "For of such is the kingdom of heaven. May this innocent's death be the means of healing our hearts and banish for ever all ill-feeling from our school!"

Mary Duggan, in trying to save her little sister,

received burns that disfigured her for life. A sad reminder of a dreadful tragedy.

Eventually all the culprits were taken back into the school, after having made due repentance for their offence.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A Spot Of Bother

EVERY month now saw emigrant ships arrive, providing a steady influx of new scholars. The Protestant section of the community erected a public school at Taradale, and before long the pupils of that school clashed with ours. Sorry spectacles of unseemly feuds, wherein parents also took part, have often made me ponder how it is that humans must quarrel about religion, but it was ever so.

The convent boarders, numbering fourteen, were closely watched and their behaviour noted when they were walking in the country lanes between Taradale and Meanee. Here again I was puzzled to know why we should be thought different from other girls. As a matter of fact this made us liable to go wild, and we did, and sometimes did many unladylike things. For instance, meeting Farmer Brown returning from market one day after delivering a load of hay, we begged a ride. Smilingly he packed us around the hay frame of his spring dray, usually allowing one of the girls to take the reins. Thus we drove for miles and had to walk back, oftentimes being late for school in consequence.

Then there was a crabbed old woman name Lack, who lived alone in a little white-washed cottage beside the road and close to the school. "Biddy Lack," as we used to call her, spent a great deal of time leaning over her gate. She complained so frequently to the "good seesters" about the convent "girrls" being rude to her that the nuns grew tired of the garrulous old woman's tales. Nevertheless we were severely punished.

There was, too, an orchard beside the roadway to

Meanee. The owner was a fearsome old Scotsman, Laddie Baird, who wore a tam o' shanter drooped over a canny eye, while with the other he watched the pears and quinces which hung temptingly over the fence. But no matter how keen his vigilance or how vigorous his threats, the fruit gradually disappeared. Then Laddie came with his complaint to the good Sisters. Theft being a more serious crime than rudeness to Biddy Lack, we were punished accordingly. Yet nothing seemed to act as a deterrent.

Frequent changes took place within the convent, for scarcely a month passed that did not bring a new boarder, or perchance a nun was transferred to a new cloister.

A day arrived when Mother Bernard sailed for Sydney. We were so overjoyed that we promptly celebrated the event by climbing through the gable windows on to the shingled roof of the school. The nuns, reciting their offices, walked beneath the trees at the far end of the grounds. Mary Crosby kept watch while several senior girls performed a kind of Blondin feat upon the roof. In the kitchen Minnie Logan and I were busy with a pan of toffee. Suddenly an alarm sounded, and a breathless "Here's someone coming" sent us scurrying like rats for shelter. We made a wild rush from the back door, with a pan of bubbling sugar before us, my comrade doing her best to outpace me as we made in the direction of the creek. No sooner had we reached safety than the flying feet of the roof climbers could be heard hard upon us. Alas! the toffee was settling back into its original form of sugar. "What a pity it hadn't a bit more cooking," someone remarked. Nevertheless we soon made short work of our toothsome booty. In the midst of this stickiness I was called to Mother Francesca's room.

"There is a new boarder arriving by train from Palmerston North," she said. "It will save two of the Sisters a journey if you will meet her, and I know you are capable."

I was delighted to go, and lost no time in setting out in the bus for the railway siding. A girl of about my own age alighted from the train. Her name I learned was

June Keefe. On the way to the convent she talked about her own comfortable home; how many sheep and cattle her father possessed; and, incidentally, the number of frocks she had in her trunk. I had never known one girl with so many fine dresses.

The nuns' fame as teachers of music, painting and singing brought many such daughters of wealthy parents to the school.

Before we reached home we were fast friends; June even planning that I should spend the next vacation at their farm. But one thing she flatly refused to do always, and that was to join in our wild pranks. If we took a ride in the farmer's trap, she waited on the roadside for our return, and no amount of coaxing would make her budge. Her coming had a balancing effect upon my own life, for, although totally different in every way (except that we both possessed a mutual love of study), we were the best of pals. We shared a small studio—actually the room used by Mother Bernard when she condemned us to bread and water diet. It was now hung with sketches in oils and water-colour, and resounded to the sounds of chisel and mallet as we toiled at relief carving.

Father Jardin came each day to teach us French, mythology, botany, astronomy, and suchlike subjects. The dear old priest cherished fond hopes that, at the conclusion of my schooling, I would take the veil. Thus I acquired an education of no mean order, and I possessed an imaginative mind which enabled me to store up the knowledge that my earlier studies and tragic experiences had garnered up.

There were times when I felt remarkably pious, at others as if the devil had taken possession of me—a sort of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde existence. After spending so many years in a convent one would have thought that I should have lost that nervous restlessness which haunted me so incessantly. Nature will, however, always find a way to circumvent man's stupidity and to cure human cussedness. One last incident may be of sufficient interest

to relate. Begun so innocently, yet it almost frightened Mother Francesca into her grave.

The little Mother was really fond of the children under her charge, and even went so far as to break convent rules and allow five senior girls to make a trip to Napier for the day. Plentifully supplied with pocket money and carefully instructed by Mother Baptiste, who fussed as though we were leaving for Canada. We were not to speak to strangers; we were to keep together, and, above all, not to be late home.

We started off. From where we waited for the coach at Taradale I could see the road that led past my home, a sight which for me would ever hold sad memories. How faded and pathetic the old house looked. It was not difficult for me to people the lanes with ghosts of far-away days.

"Well, now," said a brisk voice, "if it's not the little Katherine Morgan grown into a young woman! You're lucky, Ted, my boy, having a bevy of pretty girls for passengers." The sound of the man's voice made my eyes water. It was the driver, Ted, who had so often taken my mother and I to the hospital. The rest of the passengers joined in his jokes as the coach whirled along the old familiar highway.

Amongst our party was a girl named Bella Henderson, a new arrival who had an aunt who doted on her, and was as rich as King Midas. In appearance Bella was slim and wasp-waisted, of sallow complexion and brown-eyed; withal a sly young minx. The doting relative thought nothing too good for her niece; but it eventually transpired that Miss Bella had been expelled from two schools for one and the same reason—her fondness for boys. Had Mother Francesca been aware of this fact we should never have visited Napier in her company.

When we arrived in the city Bella informed us that she had a boy friend who worked at the port. His name was George Davy, and he loaded tenders with frozen mutton to be transhipped to a home cargo steamer anchored in the roadstead. The vessel was so immense,

she concluded, that it was impossible to approach the shore. At that time, by the way, the Napier breakwater was a failure; each time the foundations were laid the rough sea washed them away, until it became a joke to mention the word "breakwater." We had never been close to a large ship, and at the thought of this ocean monster our eyes grew wide. So we were guided by Bella to take another bus to the Spit. Right enough, there lay the massive vessel far out to sea, and between her and the shore plied a small fleet of tenders.

The new boarder seemed to know her way about very well; too well, perhaps, if we had been sophisticated enough to notice it; but, alas, we were all agog for the adventure. Mary Crosby hopped first on one leg and then on the other, eager to be afloat. Mabel Hogan, who was eighteen, and had lived all her life in the backblocks of Gisborne, was nothing but a big blob, for ever getting the rest of us into scrapes; she had a habit of giggling for nothing at all; and when endeavouring to restrain her mirth, ended in a succession of snorts.

Bella interviewed George Davy at the meat store, in consequence of which we were soon settled aboard a tender and heading out to sea. At the last moment June Keefe refused to join us, and remained standing on the pier. How long it took to reach the cargo-ship I have no idea; I only know the weather became extremely cold, and white-topped waves splashed aboard our flat-bottomed boat. Somehow our ardour began to cool; something besides my damp clothing seemed to sound a warning to my brain, that we were doing wrong. Indeed, I felt it was a most serious moment, and became grave and concentrated. Abruptly my worried train of thought came to an end, as our small boat bobbed recklessly against a mountain of riveted steel wall. Presently what looked like an exaggerated bundle descended from the decks above. It was a stout tarpaulin attached by rings to hooks and tackle, worked from a winch. It was used to hoist the frozen cargo from the tender to the ship's hold. Evidently the workmen wished to be rid of us human freight

first. George Davy had given instructions that the girls be taken aboard—that was all! Here we were, ready to be transhipped. The tarpaulin was spread on the deck. It was greasy, with bits of wool sticking to it, smeared with blood, and altogether evil-smelling. We were ordered to kneel in the middle of the canvas, and hold fast to each other. Scarcely had we arranged ourselves when the corners were caught up in the stout hook; our bodies doubled like a pudding in a cloth; our heels stuck in the small of our backs. We were swung upwards to dangle in mid-air; when plomp! we landed on the upper deck of the "tramp" steamer. The canvas fell from the hooks.

"My!" cried a fat sailorman who stood by the winch, "what have we here? The stork has been busy! Sure! Well, well, what a sight for an old salt! You be the store foreman's daughters, eh?"

While we scrambled up from our undignified position he removed his cap and scratched his head with a grimy hand. Not waiting to reply, Bella led the way along the deck. She had been on boats before and was getting a thrill out of it. We others were speechless with surprise. Her few days at the convent had bored her terribly, and she was ready for any kind of a break.

At that moment, a dashing and handsome young officer appeared: Bella's eyes sparkled; the look in them said plainly: What did I tell you? Now I'll show you life. And she who was given to this sort of thing began to smirk and squirm and give herself grand airs. The young man was very polite as he helped us over the high step into the officers' mess-room. Thinking we belonged to shore officials, he asked no questions.

"George Evans, at your service," he smiled. "Would you care to see over the ship?" Bella declared that we had come for that purpose.

"I don't see any passengers," I ventured timidly.

"Did you expect to find passengers on a cargo-boat? Gracious," he laughed, "where have you hailed from?"

Bella laughed it off and the matter dropped. Could I but forget Mother Baptiste's last warning: "Mind you,

Katherine, take care of the others. You're not the eldest, but you have been here so long, I can trust you." Dear Mother Baptiste! How I loved her. Remembering her words, I felt just a bit uneasy, a trifle beyond my depth. Getting close to Bella, I whispered to her that we had better get back to town.

"Don't be a fool, Katherine! We'll have a great time." We had descended the stairs to the level of the engine room. The brightly-polished steel rods and fittings; the mixed smells of grease and coal dust; the firemen naked to the waist, with sweat cloths round their necks, and backs bent to shovel coal from the bunkers to feed the roaring furnaces—all these things blotted out our fears. Still it was difficult to forget for long. Mary Crosby was nerve-racking; she was here, there and everywhere. Mabel giggled and snorted and poked me in the ribs.

The afternoon wore to a close. Finally I announced that we must be getting back; we had a long journey by coach to reach the convent at Meanee. "Convent!" gasped the officer. "Convent, did you say convent, youngster?" He had dared to call me a youngster. It was my turn to gasp. Weighed down with the responsibility of the others, I felt just cause to be indignant . . . and he had called me a "youngster!"

"Do you mean to say that you belong to a young ladies' seminary?" He was quite serious now. "I hadn't the remotest idea who you were." "Oh!" I burst forth, almost in tears, "Mother Francesca will be frantic! We had no right to come here." A ghost of a smile hovered round the corners of his mouth as his tongue rolled the name "Francesca," making it sound like another word.

"Have you a captain on board?" I asked. His smile grew wider. "You would have speech with the ship's master?" he laughed.

"Do you always laugh like that when you are asked a question?" I rapped back, biting my lip in an effort to keep my dignity. All at once he straightened, to touch his cap to somebody behind me. Turning, I beheld the cause of his sudden return to manners. It was the captain.

"Well, now, my little lady," said he kindly, "so you are slating an officer? Evans, what's it all about? How came we to have ladies aboard?" The officer explained that he was of the candid opinion that we had had permission to visit the ship.

"Well, well!" beamed the captain. "So you wish me to transport these young ladies back to their school, eh? I'm afraid the last boat has departed, but in the meantime allow me to invite you to our mess."

I tried hard not to appear ungrateful; besides, we were all terribly hungry; yet the fact that darkness had fallen over the ocean and lights twinkled on the foreshore helped to kill my appetite. It was a strange experience to be sitting at table with the captain and officers and being waited on by a smart steward.

Further questioning on the part of the ship's master elicited the fact that we still held our pocket money; that a bus left Napier for Taradale late every Saturday night, and, provided we could reach town in time, all would be well. The captain promised that he would see to it that we caught that bus, even if he had to row us ashore himself. "Calm your fears," he beamed kindly, "I have daughters of my own, home in London. No harm shall come to you on my ship."

At the conclusion of our sumptuous repast, we were startled to hear continuous loud blasts from a nearby whistle. The officers looked surprised until informed that the harbourmaster's tug was alongside. He had come to investigate the kidnapping of four young girls from a convent. Everyone rushed to the ship's side. Far below could be seen a small steamer rocking in the stiff breeze, her irate master shouting orders to those on the decks above. Consternation almost took away my breath when I beheld June Keefe standing on the poop beside the tug's master. We had completely forgotten her since the morning.

After watching our departure in what she considered a crazy tub tossed on the waves, June had stood for hours

on the pier awaiting our return. Then, when almost frozen with cold, and ready to cry, she was noticed by the harbourmaster. Upon hearing her story, he promised to help, and set about making enquiries. The last boats had returned without us, and nobody seemed to know anything about four young ladies who had travelled with the frozen mutton—George Davy had gone home. So the harbourmaster had decided to sift the matter for himself; hence his stentorian voice demanding that the captain of the tramp steamer release us a once.

When at length the matter was satisfactorily explained, the tarpaulin was once more spread on the deck, and with many hearty handshakes and hopes expressed that Mother Francesca would not give us a spanking, we were slung out over the ship's side, to land on the hatch of the harbour tug. Amidst cheers from the crew of the ship, we headed for the Spit and, once ashore, lost no time in making our way to the city. We discovered that the bus did not leave until ten-thirty, so we passed the time walking about the streets. The girls thoroughly enjoyed being in town by night, but an indefinable weight lay on my mind at the thought of the Reverend Mother's anxiety when we did not return. I tried to send a telegram, but the hour was too late.

"Don't fret yourself," said Bella soothingly, as she introduced me to a boy friend whom she happened to meet. "Come, let us spend our pocket money." The invitation offered an agreeable distraction to my anxiety, and I tried to smile; but the boy friend had a decidedly unhealthy appearance, and, furthermore, I could not close my ears to the remarks of the townspeople that the convent boarders seemed to be out late.

After what appeared to be an eternity of waiting, the coach drew up beside the kerb and we scrambled aboard, to find that it went no further than Greenmeadows, which meant that we had to walk several miles along lonely country roads. It was well past midnight when we reached home. Lights streamed from the windows and

some of the Sisters walked in the grounds. Without pause or remark I made my way into the hall and entered the community room. There sat Mother Francesca, wide-eyed with fear.

"Oh, Katherine, children. Thank God you are safe!" The words burst from her while her tears brimmed over. That was all. She blamed herself entirely. But when she learned that there were no passengers on board the ship she was terribly distressed. After an enquiry which was private, Bella Henderson was asked to leave at once. So ended our great adventure.

Such women as Mothers Francesca and Baptiste are rare. To the best of their ability they strove to instil into our young minds the pitfalls and dangers of youth. But their lectures lacked understanding, worldly experience; and the evils were so magnified as rather to create a magic spell that cast a haze of enchantment over the most trivial happenings.

CHAPTER XXV.

Life At School

MY NEXT year at school was one of close and earnest study. June had been called home on account of her mother's ill-health, and I was alone in the small studio. Instead of moon-gazing, as was my usual custom, I now secretly locked myself in this tiny haven. On and on I worked while the night hours rolled slowly by; often I had a few hours' sleep during a whole week.

About this time Mother Baptiste was notified of her transfer to Sydney. At the news my heart stood still. The world seemed to have fallen away from me. My Mother Baptiste to leave! It did not seem possible that I could go on living without her, the one human being whom I loved and who loved me; my life was bound up with hers. It would be like burying my own mother over again. In the first pangs of my grief I fled to the chapel.

Kneeling there, I tried to view things from a different angle. Would my heart never get over loving? Why couldn't I relinquish my emotions? How was it that peace never stayed in my soul; like the nuns who never seemed to care as I was caring, and consequently did not suffer. Their emotions seemed to have been left in the outside world. For a long while I remained with bowed head, writhing under the call to renounce all this and return to a worldly life. Solemnly and loudly ticked the old hall clock, while its hand went relentlessly round.

During the following days I felt as though the struggle must overcome me, and I prayed and prayed; prayed that right would prevail. For a time the great calamity of losing Mother Baptiste overtopped all other emotions. Always pressing upon me was this terrible decision which I had to make at the end of the twelve months. Why could I never live any life of my own? At last I ceased to pray. Instead, all manner of ridiculous thoughts came floating through my brain. Life was crowded with disappointments, anyway; full of miseries and vexations. I hated myself for my self-pity.

I had plenty of acquaintances, but no close friend in whom I could confide. To-day I felt lonelier and more dissatisfied than usual. Sometimes it was nice just being by one's self; I didn't mind it a bit—but to-day I was in the mood to bid defiance to all possible conventions. Man is an incorrigible optimist. Every day I just hoped that something would crop up to prevent Mother Baptiste being taken from me. My allotted tasks I did mechanically. I wanted every spare minute to be with her.

But relentless fate spun her pattern, regardless of my agonising tears; I was never to see that dear nun again, for she died a month later in Australia.

Sister Cecile took Mother Baptiste's place. She was a sickly creature, with a complacent look on her face that was most irritating, and at once I took a violent dislike to her. At the same time there arrived another lay nun who was as grotesquely fat as Sister Cecile was thin.

The Sisters ranked according to the status of their

various occupations. Sister Cecile was to teach music. She was an apple of discord, for she possessed a manner which usually rubbed one's fur the wrong way, so to speak. She appeared to be always slinking in and out of doorways, and to pop out upon you from the most unexpected places. In short, she soon created an atmosphere of ill-feeling which was quite foreign to the convent before she came. Apart from my music lessons, I avoided Sister Cecile on every possible occasion. Each day I became more detached from the life around me, caring nothing for the things the other girls cherished, and burying myself in my studies. My golden hours were my lonely hours of work, when I lived in another world—the world of books; shut away in my studio, yet within sound and touch of the school.

The church was celebrating Pentecost. A new student sang and played at the organ. His beautiful voice, pale face and wide, blue eyes thrilled me the first moment I saw him. Afterwards I learned his name was Eugene. To me he seemed angelic. All at once I had fallen in love.

That night I had a strange dream. One of those rare dreams that you remember clearly when you awaken and keep remembering through the next day. Somehow, although the actual Eugene seemed in another dim world apart, yet plain in my dream. It was summer vacation, only holidays that once were a lonely sort of nightmare, now became hours of pure joy. As I wandered among the flowers the combined atmosphere of sunshine, scents and smoke formed magical threads which linked me to every corner of that Eden; and, strangest of all, Eugene, the young postulant, walked beside me in the chequered sunlight. Tumultuous thoughts thronged my brain; but the clearest thought of all was that here was my absolute ideal depicted in the image of Eugene. . . .

I awoke to find the sun pouring in at my window. I dressed and, letting myself out of the back door, wandered in the garden in the freshness of early morning. The air was full of the whisper of leaves; the vineyards

laden with purple grapes; and the adjoining paddocks filled with sheep. It was so quiet at this time that I could hear the stream gurgling over the stones at the bottom of the grounds from where I stood. In a little time the bell would ring for Mass. Had I become more spiritual with the years? I had tried to turn away from conventional aspirations, but still the shadow of my own sacrifice was ever before me . . . that I was about to take the veil! Deeply I pondered over my strange dream of the night before, and wondered what it might portend. There was nobody in whom I could confide my newly-awakened love, so it lay hidden within my breast.

Not for long was the convent left in peace. Though to the lay mind it gave the impression of harmony and restfulness (that peace which was impossible in the work-a-day world), yet the nuns were just ordinary women, human beings of flesh and blood, and such a household could not be expected to live for ever in perfect harmony, otherwise there must be something wrong in the ordering of the universe. Sister Cecile kept the ball rolling. Even when she was found out in mischief-making she escaped the blame by shifting it adroitly on to someone else's shoulders. In spite of discord and petty tattling pin-pricks that often led to squabbles amongst nuns and girls alike, Sister Cecile held sway.

Then, when the winter came, a change upset all her plans. The Reverend Father Lutz suffered from asthma and was compelled for several months of the year to seek a warmer climate. In his place came a middle-aged priest, Father Louis Phillippe—a dashing Frenchman, who captivated the parishioners,—men women and children alike. Without a doubt he was the most popular man in the province. It is said that a serious mind is the native soil of every virtue; levity the source of all evil. Father Louis Phillippe was not of a serious mind, yet you could not call him evil. He breezed his way along; swept into the school room, and from the moment he entered kept the catechism class in a merry mood. The children looked

forward to his instructions. Very often he gave us nicknames, such as "Daddy Longlegs" for Mary Crosby, "Mommors boy" for Frank O'Brien, and, because I knew Bible history well, he called me "Moses." Nobody resented his manner—what he said or did—and certainly no one would have thought of sticking pins in Father Phillippe's chair.

On Sundays he waited outside the door of the church to welcome his flock. People were eager to have a word with His Reverence, and he, with smiling face, was ever ready to crack a joke, no matter at whose expense. One particular day a stout, maiden lady, who was in the habit of wearing a fur cape in season and out of season, walked up the path to the merry group that stood chatting with the Father. The weather was mild; Miss Connor had come a long distance and looked extremely warm.

"Aren't you hot in that big fur?" enquired the priest.

"Oh, no, Father," she replied in ample tones, "the cape's not hot, but I schweats." All joined in a hearty laugh at the lady's artlessness.

During a sermon his congregation had many occasions for smiling, for he twisted his texts about in such a manner that it made one feel glad to be in church. "God is one big laugh," he would declare. "He never intended his creatures to be unhappy. He never ordained sour faces or sad thoughts, whereby human beings lose sight of the importance of their soul's happiness; from whence arises. . . ."

Sister Cecile was a most unscrupulous person, and made up her shallow mind to captivate the good-natured, happy-go-lucky priest. She put herself in his way on every possible occasion. He was interested in music, and at once she seized on that fact to make excuses for various messages. Why she selected me to convey those messages I cannot say, unless Fate was still determined to play scurvy tricks on me.

To-day it was a portfolio of music she wished to send to Father Phillippe, who was practising on the church

organ. She also gave me a note for him. I was not to mention about the note to anybody, and she would give me a piece of music I had coveted for my next lesson. Taking these missives looked like a mild sort of flirtation to my mind, only I felt sure, although I may have been too young to judge, that the priest did not care one jot for the anaemic-looking Sister Cecile.

However, things came to a head at the school picnic, held on St. Patrick's day at the Western Spit, Napier. Three of Rymer's double-decker coaches were hired for the occasion. Mothers, children and nuns were crowded into the spacious buses, and packed like sardines on the roof. The weather broke fine, adding to the high spirits of the happy crowd. It was a picnic long to be remembered, for the way led across a three-mile long bridge spanning the swamps. (To-day the bridge and the swamp have both disappeared, having been destroyed in the earthquake.)

Father Phillippe was accompanied by a visiting clergyman, but nothing could damp the spirits of the lively French priest as he joined wholeheartedly in the sports.

It took very little, in those early days, to start a scandal in Taradale society, and what happened that day, though a simple accident, was so twisted and added to that it became a colossal scandal.

As the day wore on people began to relax from the games, and after lunch sat around, or lounged and rolled, as the mood took them. Only one game was in progress—rounders, that ever-popular game at picnics. Sister Cecile was enjoying herself to the full. Her hearty laugh rang out continuously, so much so that the Mother Superior rebuked the levity of her conduct. Why must religion always take such a serious view of life? Surely Father Phillippe was right. God did intend his creatures to be happy. Sister Cecile ran to pick up the ball. As she ducked suddenly she came into violent collision with Father Phillippe, who had sprinted down the field with

the same object in view. Well now, Mother Grundy, it might quite well have happened to yourself, that is, of course, if you could use your legs to play a game of rounders. Sprawled on the ground lay the two exponents of the Roman Catholic faith. That Sister Cecile was badly shaken and upset mattered not at all. It was unpardonable, scandalous, blasphemous, a disgrace to the Church. A host of suchlike denunciations burst from the other nuns. Forthwith Sister Cecile was banished for the rest of the afternoon, to retire within one of the coaches. How the world loves to blame the woman, especially her own sex. There was no word of censure for the priest—at least, I heard none expressed openly. Sister Cecile was in disgrace, and Father Phillippe made it worse by insisting, as any gentleman would, that he help the injured one to the bus. That was all; yet it set tongues wagging that were more deadly than fumes of hell. Scandal that ultimately sent Father Phillippe from the priesthood after serving it faithfully for so many years. The picnic was spoilt. A damper had fallen upon everything; except, perhaps, on the younger people, who did not understand or join in the stupidity of their elders.

An undercurrent of unpleasantness now simmered through the convent; one could feel its presence everywhere. A row of some sort was in the brewing. Everyone had a serious face. The Reverend Mother treated Father Phillippe with cold disdain when he came into school, but it was wholly inadequate to affect his merry chatter with the class.

I had been the bearer of several notes from Sister Cecile to the priest, consequently new pieces of music found their way into my music case. I could not "let up on her," and her bribes grew heavier and heavier each time. One day as I sat in the garden, dreaming my dreams, which recently had included the young Eugene, although I had never spoken to him, or for that matter was ever likely to, that I could see, when Sister Cecile came hurrying through the orchard, her face blanched,

her breath gasping. "Katherine, for God's sake, save me!" she panted. I had no idea she could be so emotional, never guessed she could be so roused out of herself. "If the Reverend Mother asks you did you tell Father Phillippe something that I told him—say you did! Say it was you, Katherine. Oh, Katherine, do save me! I would be expelled at once, and it would kill my pious old mother. If you own up to it they can't say anything to you, Katherine. . . . Will you help me? Please!"

"All right, I'll say I said it, whatever it is, but mind, you must give me that battle piece with the cannons next lesson."

"Yes! yes! I'll give you anything you ask, only save me!" She was gone. Scarcely had she disappeared ere the Reverend Mother stood before me. She looked fearfully upset.

"Katherine, I want to ask you something," she said. "I want the truth—you have never told me a lie—consider your answer well. Sister Cecile says you told Father Phillippe about a happening in the convent that you had accidentally overheard," she paused, "did you?"

"Yes, I told him," I answered calmly.

A terrible change came over the gentle nun; her eyes blazed. "You miserable little wretch! You deserve kicking," she hissed, and left me. What had I done. Her words still have the power to sting me even to-day as I write them down. I loved Mother Francesca next to Mother Baptiste. I bit my lip till the blood tasted in my mouth.

It took me a while to realise the horrible enormity of it all. It was insufferable. I had taken the blame for another's fault. To this day I am puzzled to think what the crime could have been. It must have been something very grave. A physical nausea crept over me, and with an ache in my heart I made my way to the chapel in an agony of impotent grief. In vain I tried to understand what was taking place. Sister Cecile had evidently used me as a catspaw to save herself. I had sold my honour

for a paltry piece of music. It burned its way into my soul. I buried my face in my hands and wept bitterly. Someone entered the oratory. A hand was placed on my shoulder.

"Don't cry, Katherine," said a voice that would forever be hateful to me. I felt like a tiger must when he is about to kill. Impulsively my hand shot out and struck the snivelling face above me.

"You pasty-faced devil!" I muttered as I hurried from the chapel; at the same time feeling that the devil himself was securely fastened on my own back. His Satanic Majesty was having a great innings. I would seek Father Phillippe. My rage mounted higher and higher with every step which carried me in the direction of the church.

Sounds from the organ halted my impetuous rush. So, he could play the organ while I suffered the blame for the trouble he had himself caused! My feet made no noise as I climbed the stairs to the choir. I would make it quite clear to the Reverend Father that no more would I bring him notes, no more would I be the bearer of clandestine messages. I stopped suddenly upon the last step. It was not the priest playing; it was Mother Francesca, and tears rained down her face.

Like a mouse I crept from the church; my anger had completely fallen from me. Had I only had the courage to go to her then and sob out my heart at her knee. But the thought that she would never more believe me sealed my lips. Perplexed and sad, I buried myself in my study and tried to cram my brain with work, to shut out the tragedy of my own and other people's wrongs.

CHAPTER XXVI.

Novitiate.

THESE happenings immeasurably increased my dislike for the cloister. I was slowly feeling my way to the

adjustment of my own bewildered mind with its amazing devices of self-deception. Words cannot express my feelings. However, through it all I contrived to hold a mind-picture of a love idyll. Secretly, at night, I laboured in my studio to put my dream upon canvas. Often the clock in the school room below struck two, reminding me that I must have sleep, else my heavy lids would tell a tale, and to be caught would end those silent night hours which had become part of my life. This painting was my secret. It was almost finished, all but a few finishing touches. By day I concealed it in a wooden trunk that had belonged to my mother containing trinkets and musty-smelling documents. Father Jardin had given me the key on my last birthday. It was the one spot in the whole world that was my very own. In this box I now placed the picture of my idol, the head and shoulders of Eugene. My brush had caught a life-like expression of his deep violet eyes. I had watched them so many times when he sang at Mass. To me he appeared like a being from another world; more ethereal than human. His presence filled me with rapture. I was quite content to worship at a distance. But now I had his picture and could gaze my fill. My secret was not without a certain solemn impressiveness. My love for him, although buried deep in the caverns of my heart, brought a heavenly comfort to me in my loneliness.

The wet paint on the canvas glistened in the flickering ray from the oil lamp, making it appear as though he raised half-incredulous eyes to look at me. Reverently I locked the box and hung the key on the Scapular cord round my neck. Somehow I was no longer feeling sleepy. I drew back the blind. It was a glittering, frosty night, but my world shone with the ruby glow of the fire of love. Surely I was in another world which might vanish at any moment into the more distant universe. Yet that we both belonged to religious orders was intoxicating; it cast a radiance of golden bloom over everything, like a surging tide of happiness. Nor could even the fear of incarceration

tion for life in the cloister entirely quell the fierce joy that surged over me—moods for which I could find no words.

So much for my love dreams. I fell asleep. When I awoke next morning I remembered at once. Alas! 'twas a dream. I got through the morning Mass with a fierce energy, alternately kindled by optimism and despair. Then came an order to appear before the Reverend Mother.

Although well aware that I was to take the veil, I was not prepared for the suddenness with which the news now fell upon me. Closeted with Mother Francesca was the Mother Superior of the Order visiting from Australia.

"Katherine," said Mother Francesca as soon as I appeared, "we have decided that you enter the novitiate at once. Of course, you understand that you will be on probation as a novice for one year before you take the vows?"

I answered, "Yes, Mother."

"You will pay for your novice's clothing out of your own money, then hand the rest over to the convent. But if at any time during the next twelve months you still wish to go out into the world, your money will be refunded—less expenses.

Again I answered, "Yes, Mother."

Inwardly I felt somewhat in awe of the nuns, and to contemplate sitting at table and constantly being in their presence gave me a twinge. Like one in a trance, I looked at them, but said nothing.

"Why are you so silent, my child?" asked the Mother Superior, who up till now had not spoken. "God offers those who take religious vows the inestimable privilege of becoming His chosen. But, on the other hand, a very real difficulty presents itself if we do not give ourselves with a free heart. Your year as a novice will be the best test."

"I shall strive to have an understanding heart, and know, as I have been taught so often, that in giving we ourselves receive," I replied.

"God bless you, my child," said the Reverend Mother. "We do not seek by fear, or force, to make you change your way of looking at existence. Nothing but the power of love can help you to find the true meaning of life."

While she spoke my heart was pounding ridiculously with yearnings and desires which I knew could never be realised. Perhaps the Mother read my heart as she sat there beside me and watched my face, and heard the words that escaped my lips in those moments of acute torment. There was only one answer to her questions, and that was that things must go on as they were decreed. I would strive to do my duty as far as I saw it, and await the end—whatever that might be.

With sorrowful heart and eyes smarting with unshed tears, I made my way upstairs to the study and locked myself in. To-day at least was my own, to do with as I pleased; to-morrow morning would begin my novitiate.

Had I chafed against the limitations of my life in the cloister before? Now I felt forgotten in the backwaters of experience. Like so many souls not having the understanding that He who planned all things will secure their ultimate fulfilment. It is certain that the world is full of lonely men and lonely women, hungry for friendship and understanding; thirsty souls in need of human sympathy and love, the things that make existence tolerable. But could there be anyone so lonely as I was? Prayers seemed vain. Yet again, man has had many experiences of God, in his earnest quest for reality, and the spirit never longs for love without the Creator knowing it.

Reverently I unlocked the trunk that held my treasure, and sat gazing intently at the painted likeness of Eugene. I felt a sense of sympathetic sadness, for in the same way he, too, was set aside from the world. But the terrible conflict in my soul was over. My love for the young student became a sacred thing—it was no longer material and could hurt me no more.

During the afternoon I secreted myself in the garden

and tried to concentrate on my sacrifice of the morrow. Try as I would, I could not banish the look of those eyes. Because of that young student priest my whole life had been affected. Because of him the garden was full of mystery and magic. I felt I could never again live the pure joy of that first burgeoning of pure love, although it were little more than a myth.

Critics may laugh at calf-love, at callow youth in its teens. Yet it is a pure passion, no matter whom the object of adoration may be. Out of these very pages leap the angelic features of Eugene and fragrant memories of my childhood's innocence.

I wanted to be alone on this my last day of freedom, and lingered on through the twilight, loath to go indoors. How quickly the time passed. I realised somewhat the feelings of the condemned waiting for the moment of doom.

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The air was heavy with incense within the convent chapel. Before the altar I knelt clad in the robes of a novice, clasping and unclasping my hands in nervous fearfulness, for it seemed inevitable that I must go on with it. My will was their will. At least they had promised me that it was only to be for one year. If at the end of that time I was still minded to leave I could do so. I endeavoured to calm my foolish fears.

The Reverend Mother read endless prayers while the rest of the nuns knelt in silence. There was still time for me to refuse, and I wanted to jump up and shout, yet I continued to kneel, as still as if I had been carved in stone. The Mother Abbess was speaking. I listened with a numb feeling stealing over me. "If you wish to become the bride of Christ," she said solemnly, "it must be in the way God appoints. For she who would find the Divine will cannot climb up by any other way, save through the sanctity of the cloister as appointed by Holy Church. You cannot love God with your whole affection while living in the outside world. Leaving earthly things behind, you

have started in the right way. Working and praying without ceasing, God will direct you. You shall be known by the name of 'Sister Katherine' during your novitiate."

My first ordeal began at breakfast. The long gown, cape and veil made me feel like a fish on dry land as we descended from the oratory to the refectory. While we were seated at table, one nun knelt to beg her food. It was a rule that each sister in turn do the begging. My sense of humour began to get the better of me; I struggled to control my mirth, but failed. Heavens! What now? Had I committed a mortal crime? No! The nuns were human, and they joined in the merriment. There was no reading of prayers at table that morning.

Prayers! prayers! always prayers! How could God listen to so much repetition. I had a faint recollection of having read this injunction of Jesus: "When ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do; for they think they shall be heard for their much speaking." Still here was I just uttering long strings of words? I couldn't really pray. I hadn't the vocation for a religious life. I was too matter-of-fact. The whole thing was preposterous. My heart ached for human love, and refused to be satisfied with self-surrender. If all my days were to be as tedious as this one had been—I wouldn't last a month!

Once more it was night. High above the giant gums the moon rose full, brightening all like day. Alone in my cell I lay watching the moon sparkling on the polished, grinning skull on the wall beside my bed, my mind full of irrelevant thoughts.

The next day was Sunday, and my heart throbbed with pleasure at the thought that Eugene would be in the sanctuary. I could gaze on his face, hear his voice. Perhaps he would notice a new novice in the nun's pew opposite! As a matter of fact, as I subsequently learned, the students did notice everything connected with the convent, just as we noted them, and they called me "the

tiny novice." I felt keenly that I had no right to love him as I did. Should he ever speak to me I'd die from shame.

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There were now no more opportunities for night vigils in my studio. My studies were redoubled. No more leisure hours in the garden. In fact, my life was no longer my own, except during the hours I was asleep. Consequently I began to pine from so much confinement. Literally speaking, I faded to a shadow. Father Jardin grew alarmed, thinking I might go into a decline like my mother—I grew more like her every day, so he said. Every human feeling was suppressed. Could this be the way to serve a God of Love? A hundred times each day I asked my inner self the same question.

About this time something happened which proved a feast for my tired and starved soul. Four young students were to be ordained, and Eugene was one of them. The church was packed to overflowing; people from all parts of the country were there.

The nuns had just entered; we sat quietly and waited. There was a rustling demonstration of expectancy in the congregation. Angels might have come down to serve at the altar of sacrifice. Tremblingly, in the stillness, one might fancy they heard the sound of wings.

A voice, clear and musical, began to sing "Ave Maria." It was Eugene. Sufficient it was for me just to sit and gaze at his face. My eyes never left his face for one instant. Did I only imagine that, just for a moment, his blue orbs looked into mine as his glorious notes lingered on the final words—"Maria, Maria!"

The service moved me strangely. I felt awed and hushed. More than ever I strove to realise that God had His own plan for each one of us. But, oh, how I loved him, this Eugene! For his sake I would strive to be more worthy of God. The service lasted several hours. The air was heavy with incense and the perfume of flowers. The newly-ordained priests had each to deliver an address, and eagerly I waited for Eugene to mount the pulpit. His

rich young voice trembled ever so slightly, as eloquently, and with carefully thought out words, he preached his first sermon. "Man's time on earth is as the grass. Soon it shall pass from sight." The words startled me. It was a beautiful sermon, dwelling upon the higher meaning of life, which could only be caught through spiritual apprehension. How proud I felt of "my" Eugene while I sat drinking in every word and noting each expressive gesture. Willingly would I have listened to him—for ever! But I was not prepared for the shock which followed. Father Eugene was immediately transferred to Wellington, and my world again became one of blank desolation.

CHAPTER XXVII.

Fresh Fields.

MY DECLINING health made it advisable that I should seek a colder climate, and the Temuka convent in the South Island was decided upon. At first I welcomed the idea. It would be an adventure to travel by steamer. Furthermore, it meant a whole day in Wellington—I might even contrive to see Eugene! Helen was to meet me, and maybe I could put some discreet questions to her as to his whereabouts.

As it was not advisable to travel alone in religious garb, I once again donned my school frock, and my long hair was let down and tied with ribbons. I travelled, as usual, by boat from Napier to Wellington, and thence to Lyttelton. My instructions were after leaving ports to remain in my cabin until such time as met either by my sister at Wellington or by a lady sent by the nuns to meet the boat at Lyttelton.

Alone on the steamer, I became afraid at the way fate was shaping the events of my life, so ruthlessly, it seemed to me, and without regard to my feelings or desires. No longer the voyage appeared in the light of a pleasurable adventure, but that I was in the clutches of

something very powerful which was carrying me away to the far south, to do with me as it willed. This brought over me a wave of intense loneliness. The memory of the gentle touch of Mother Francesca's kiss on my cheek when she bade me farewell, her eyes bigger than usual and glistening with tears, brought the moisture to my own. I lay down on my bunk, and, weary with weeping, dozed fitfully. When daylight broke I decided to dress and go on deck, regardless of the Reverend Mother's advice. Below it was comparatively dark, the pale, diffused light which came through the companionway was cold and eerie. Swiftly and lightly I made my way up the steps and gained the ship's side, to stand in breathless wonder as I watched a blood-red sun rise out of the sea.

The part of the ship where I stood was unoccupied, my conscience seemed imbued with a great fear of something supernatural. I began to look forward to the future with gloomy anticipation. One hope alone remained—I would beseech Helen not to let them force me into the cloister. I could leave the boat when we reached Wellington. And if she refused? I covered my face with my hands. For a time self-pity blotted out all memory, to be replaced eventually by a sort of bravery of despair and a strong determination to make a fight for my freedom at the coming port.

Nearing Wellington Heads the boat ran into bad weather; the sky grew overcast, and sleety rain beat the decks, forcing me to take shelter, so that on our arrival at the wharf I beheld the windy city through a porthole. My first impressions were not favourable. Rain fell in torrents; crowds of wharf labourers waited idly about in spite of the weather, and Helen had not yet put in an appearance. The time was 7.30 a.m. There was no sign of my sister, so I decided, as I watched the last of the passengers depart down the gangway, to wait no longer, and while my feeling of loneliness was especially keen, I was impatient to see Helen, to plead with her; the urge was imperative. In my pocket I carried a note of her

address in Kent Terrace. The steward directed me to take a tram which would drop me at her door.

Riding on a horse-drawn tram that ran on rails gave me a thrill. My excitement grew, my heart beat faster as we turned into streets where shopkeepers were opening their doors and taking down shutters and people were beginning to crowd the pavements on their way to work. The tram stopped and I alighted. On one side of the wide street, and standing well back from the main entrance, stood a pile of grey stone buildings—I had seen a photograph of it in Father Jardin's room—St. Patrick's College. Eugene had come from St. Pat's, and my eyes dwelt longingly on it, while my heart beat even faster than before. Presently I came to earth and began counting the numbers of the houses. Thirty-seven was almost next door to the college.

Imagine Helen's surprise when she beheld me. Scarcely had I greeted her before I started to plead with her that she would not allow this horrible nightmare of my going south to continue. I could see from the start that my pleading was in vain. At length I broke down utterly. Helen wept, too, but was adamant. She declared that I did not know when I was well off; had she had my chances she would have entered a convent years ago.

I saw nothing of Wellington that day; I had cried so terribly that I was not fit to be seen. When sailing time drew near I was mute with sorrow, but Helen bundled me brusquely, almost rudely, on board. That night I again cried myself to sleep. The stewardess woke me with a cup of tea, after which I rose and went on deck. We were sailing along the coast. Snow lay in deep clefts on the mountain sides, giving an impression of remote loneliness to the desolate, tumbled landscape. A lonely coast road, like a narrow white band, seemed to twist its way, oftentimes high in the granite cliff side. No living thing was in sight except a hawk wheeling in the sky. The keen edge of sorrow lessened as I grew more interested in my new surroundings. The vessel nosed its

way into Lyttelton Harbour. A quaint town perched on the hillside; a stationary train on the wharf; passengers collecting their luggage. Now we were alongside. Eagerly I scanned the sea of faces on the wharf. Who amongst them would claim me? An elderly lady and a young girl standing apart from the crowd waved to me. Yes, I was certain it was meant for me. When the crush lessened somewhat they hastened to greet me, and together we boarded the train for Christchurch, where I had to change for the South Express. The journey from Lyttelton began by a suffocating passage through what I was sure was the longest tunnel that ever existed; in these modern times the tunnel has been electrified, but even now it takes nearly five minutes for the train to negotiate it.

I was not to see anything of the Cathedral city of Christchurch, as I was escorted direct from one train to the other which was awaiting our arrival from Lyttelton. I felt a pitiable creature speeding through the vast plains of Canterbury, and although Temuka is less than one hundred miles from Christchurch, my inexperience made it appear that I had covered about half the globe ere I at length reached my destination. Two nuns met me at the station. They seemed to swoop down upon me and my small bag. Good-bye to the world, once more, to the days of love and hope. My heart felt faint and numb with anticipation.

The convent at Temuka was built of stone. It was a two-storied building surrounded by high walls and devoid of gardens and orchards. The parish school was a wooden structure in a bare, treeless playground, and some distance away. Across the road a beautiful stone cathedral reared its spire into the sky. Altogether the district looked prosperous, and the nuns seemed well provided for.

Several sisters waited inside the front entrance to receive me, and when I entered they knelt in prayer. Sister Pat, who was young, and had but recently arrived from Ireland, then accompanied me upstairs to my room

to change into my novice's frock and tuck my hair beneath my cap once more. "For," said she with a pleasant brogue, "you must visit the priest and receive his blessing." Returning to the hall, I had time to look about me and note the bare stone walls which sent a shiver through me. The season was mid-winter. Outside thick frost covered everything; within my heart all was frozen.

After crossing the road we entered the church by a side door. Our footsteps made a hollow sound on the stone floor. We found Father Lavaud in the vestry seated before a charcoal stove that toasted his legs and cast weird shadows over his wrinkled, leathery old face. There was something about his bent figure, some quality which instinctively suggested to me that his hope was to die before the altar, and he practically lived in the church. The vestry was warm and restful, and was lighted by a huge candelabrum, whose lighted tapers shed an uncertain light around. It all seemed very unreal, nor was my apprehension assuaged. Sister Pat informed him that I was Katherine, the ward of Father Jardin. At first he took no notice; his eyes looked past us, and he continued moving his lips as though in prayer; giving the impression that he communed with things unseen. Then, with an effort, he returned to realities.

"Oh! the little lamb, Sister!" he greeted. "God will bless you, Katherine," and he traced the outline of a cross on the air. "Your guardian is my very good friend. Father Jardin and myself attended the same school in France." While he spoke his face lit up with fervour. "So he has consecrated you to the church? You have chosen the better part, my child."

I felt this was my last chance to make an appeal for my release. "I regret I'm not here by my own choice," I faltered, "but at the behest of ecclesiastical authority."

Sister Pat looked startled at my words. The priest turned slowly in my direction. "But, I do not comprehend," he asked icily.

Excitement threatened to engulf me. It was some moments before I could bring myself to speak again. My sense of loneliness increased sevenfold. "This must be final," I heard myself speaking, "I am the victim of circumstances. I have not the faith to be religious. . . ." In the silence which followed one of the candles guttered and went out.

The priest actually smiled at me. "There is a happy naturalness about your speech. I like your candid spirit. You are truthful; that is much. Whatever else circumstance may have done, it has left you fearless to speak your mind. For such an one there are endless possibilities."

At his words a great peace filled my soul; he would surely release me now. I was glad I had unburdened my mind to the old man—he understood life. The thought of freedom made music in my heart. I began to picture a home of my own, and a cheery fire. . . .

Father Lavaud's voice brought me back to the present. "Your guardian has been like a real father to you," he said. "You must at least wait a year, as you've promised—then it will be time for you to decide."

A sharp pang of remorse shot through me as the thought that I might have been kinder to Father Jardin suggested itself to me.

"Thank you, Father Lavaud," I managed to reply. "As you say, he has been like my own father. I can never hope to repay him."

"Sister Pat will conduct you to the tower in the steeple, from which to view our beautiful country," said the priest; and, suddenly, his head nodded down on his breast; our presence was forgotten; he was back among the phantom forms which had held him so completely a short time before.

I felt relieved to be outside again. In a few minutes we were ascending the winding stair of the tower. From near the top could be seen vast tracts of country and frozen rivers. Sister Pat explained that in the summer

the valleys were filled with smiling fields of waving corn. Small farms spread to the foothills, beneath the ranges, whose peaks held perpetual snows. Inwardly I promised myself many visits to the tower.

The southern convent was conducted on entirely different lines from the Meanee establishment, where lay-nuns attended to the domestic duties. At Temuka everybody helped. There were five sisters, including Reverend Mother Pauline. Mother Pauline was in charge of two music rooms. Her pupils numbered fifty, for at that period piano playing was considered the height of every girl's ambition.

The widespread usage of most cloisters to rise at five every morning was carried out to the letter. I hated getting out of bed, for it was cold and dark as I fumbled into my doleful garb. Mirrors were unknown in the cloister, so I contrived to secrete the steel plate from off the shuttle of the sewing machine—much to the Reverend Mother's annoyance and endless enquiries as to its whereabouts.

A first bell rang to summon the Sisters to the oratory for prayer and meditation, the second bell for Mass. Muffled and shivery, we crossed to the church to freeze through the service. Once we were back home the convent became a hive of industry—mops, dustpans and dusters—everybody worked with a will. Sister Pat managed the kitchen, from which divine odours stole through the corridor. I loved to assist her because it was the warmest place in the house. Usually we had meals there, because it was cosy by the range; victuals got cold before they could reach the table in the dining room. There was a superabundance of food. Farmers were generous almost to a fault, and poultry, hams, eggs, cream and butter filled the larder to overflowing. No need to steal from this pantry! But, alas, I had not much appetite; I was too terribly homesick to eat. How fearful is the pain of loneliness, a longing to go home! Meanee was home to me, and perhaps had I been allowed to

complete my novitiate there all would have been well. Mother Pauline, however, proved to be another Bernard. It had been decided for me what my vocation in life should be. I was a rebel against such verdict; therefore she would break my will, until I was ready to conform—incidentally, that was what I was there for. So the war began. It is a true saying that “you can’t make a silk purse out of a sow’s ear.” I was not meant to be a nun. I was entirely unsuited for the calling. The other Sisters were inclined to spoil me. They were lovable, ladylike creatures. Far be it from me to disparage any religion. What was wrong was me; it was just myself that was out of place.

After breakfast the Sisters adjourned to the school, Sister Pat always returning first to set the lunch. At night she cooked a hot dinner, and what a dinner it was. My work was to assist in the music rooms. The breakfast dishes were washed by Mother Pauline, I think, to get her hands warm—and I did the drying. Not for a moment could she forget the piano. My heart had contracted a habit of sinking into my shoes when she fired some question at me regarding her favourite topic.

“How many sharps or flats in each scale?” I had to answer quickly.

“What’s a quaver? What scale has five flats?” And so on. One day, wiping her favourite Doulton plate, I paused to consider the theory.

“Don’t stop drying the dishes; answer at once! Why have you to pause?” she rapped out.

Lord! Her precious plate slipped to the stone floor and lay in smithereens. Now the Reverend Mother’s nose was the most annoying thing you ever saw. It was like a little bit of putty stuck between two bright, sharp eyes. It looked like a button holding her spectacles in place. First I looked at the broken fragments, then back at the button nose. I tried desperately to keep a straight face, but failed miserably.

“Aren’t you sorry?” she gasped.

Her glasses looked as though about to slip over the button. I laughed outright. I couldn't help it.

"Well," she cried ironically, "you certainly don't look unhappy." Then she added sharply, "Sister Katherine, go at once to the chapel—at once!" She stamped her small foot. "Say three decades of the rosary for punishment."

I was glad to escape. In the oratory I heaved a sigh of relief, the tea towel still on my arm. I looked around me. One of the sisters, who was a marvellous artist, had painted angels and cherubs on the white satin curtain before the tabernacle. Somehow they reminded me of Father Eugene, and soon I was lost in dreams. I wondered if I should ever meet him again. . . .

A sharp tap on the door summoned me to the music room. The pupils had arrived. Mother Pauline took a pupil for one quarter of an hour, then she changed over for the one I had. Almost every child came from her room in tears. She was a tiger-woman, I decided. A basin of hot water stood beside the piano, and pupils had to thaw their fingers before they could feel the keys. While waiting for a pupil I had to practise myself—not a moment for idleness was Mother Pauline's motto. . . .

The baker's boy shouted from the back door.

"Katherine," called Mother Pauline, "don't you hear the baker? Go and order the bread."

A stone passage separated the main building from the chapel. A door at either end, and shelves along both sides, made it an ideal storeroom. At the back entrance stood a youth with a basket on his arm.

"How many loaves?" he asked.

I gave the required number. His next question made me jump. It was so sudden, and, I thought, very unusual: "What do you want to be a nun for? Why don't you get married?"

His big, bold eyes appraised me from head to toe. Horrified, and fearful lest Mother Pauline should hear, I made a hasty retreat through the door by which I had

entered and stood trembling. The boy's words seemed to echo my own thoughts—thoughts that were hard to explain. . . .

The next day was Saturday. The back yard presented an animated appearance as the Sisters busied themselves with the laundry. The back gate clicked.

"How many to-day?" called the cheeky baker's boy.

"Take the bread, Katherine," ordered Sister Pat.

"Katherine, so that's your name. You're nice, you know," and the wretched lad deliberately winked at me.

Oh, dear! I gazed wildly round at the nuns, then hurried indoors. If Mother Pauline had caught him. My heart pounded. How dare he? I had never given him the least bit of encouragement. Perhaps love-hunger looked from my face; I must control my emotions. Homesick and sad at heart, I fled to the chapel, of my own accord this time, and burst into tears. Sister Pat came to look for me. "I'm just terribly lonesome. . . . I want to go back to Meanee," I sobbed.

"Come now, she coaxed, "I'm going to take you for an outing."

The Temuka convent had a branch school at Kerrytown, a small hamlet at the foot of the mountains some ten miles to the south. It was customary for the Sisters to visit the nuns at Kerrytown once a week, usually on Saturday or Sunday. While Sister Pat harnessed the fat mare to the buggy she chatted about the happy time we would have. "And, mind you, Katherine," she cautioned, pulling hard on the girth strap till her face grew red, "you've promised to eat your dinner every day for a week."

"Yes, I'll devour anything," I promised rashly in my eagerness to visit the country and lose sight of Mother Pauline.

If there were no Mother Bernards and no Mother Paulines, life in the cloister would not chill one's hopes of heaven. But such bugbears and killjoys exist in every walk of life—only, thank God, they are few.

My day in the country made me realise more than

ever how impossible it was to live within convent walls. Sister Pat held the reins and I sat beside her. I have only to close my eyes and enjoy it all over again—the keen air blowing in my face. The jolly sisters who were boisterously happy once away from the stern eye of Mother Pauline. Then the cheery meeting with the nuns at Kerrytown, who were young, too, and ready to join in the holiday spirit of the visitors. For one whole day I was utterly happy. It was almost dark when we returned to Temuka. With the clanging of the gate my happiness vanished, and once more the dark mantle of depression enfolded me. From this time my one thought was how to break free. Each night, lying awake, I formed plans, but these always faded with the vagueness of sleep stealing over me. For although my years numbered eighteen, and in many things I was advanced, still in the ways of the world I was very simple. A tug-of-war went on within my soul. While the nuns prayed I planned to escape. Hours and hours I spent plotting and planning till my head ached. I would have written secretly to my sister, but I had no stamp. It is strange how often happiness has been dependent upon a postage stamp. The baker's boy! Why hadn't I thought of him before? The next day I questioned him. He was delighted that I had asked him; anything to be of service to me would be done so far as he could help. On consideration, however, I decided not to trust him. Then he pestered me every day to allow him to plan my escape—he would obtain a ladder, and I could climb from my window. Again my thoughts reverted to Helen. Perhaps she would ignore my letter; in fact, I was certain she would. No, there was no hope in that direction.

Mother Pauline continued to follow me about like my shadow. If a door slammed she blamed me, and it meant several decades of the rosary in the oratory. She further declared that every time she addressed me I tossed my head defiantly. My novice's cap had a rakish angle, not at all in keeping with my calling. Could she have seen within my breast, seen the smouldering volcano, a seeth-

ing fiery mass, liable to go off at any minute, would she still have followed me? I wondered. And would she still have made it appear that I expressly wished to annoy her? It seemed impossible to please her; also I hated the way she pried into my affairs.

Mechanically the days passed, punctuated by gongs and bells that sounded morning, noon and night. They haunted my sleep; I heard them when they did not ring at all. Because of my convent life I shall always detest ringing bells, also beginners at music thumping out the five-finger exercise on the piano. Sister Pat was the one bright spot in my existence. Her soft Irish eyes and musical brogue did much to soothe me.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

The Explosion.

SUMMER had given place to hoary frosts and silent snows. The sisters held a retreat, and this was my first experience of its real nature as a nun; for at Meanee it meant a good time for the boarders to indulge in every known mischief. Thoughts of my late classmates set me pining for freedom.

Within the cloister all was silent as the tomb. Not a mouse stirred. Not a word was whispered. Hooded figures seemed to glide along the corridors, and for once the bells were silent. A missionary father, who was a stranger to the nuns, conducted the services in the oratory. All very beautiful for those having a vocation for that kind of life. Perhaps, like Mary at the feet of the Saviour, they had "chosen the right way," but I was too truly a Martha.

When not at service or meditation during retreat—which usually lasted two weeks—the nuns were allowed recreation in the form of reading the lives of the saints, or painting and fancy work. Seated before an easel in a room made cheerful by a log fire, I struggled over a sketch,

nor felt in any mood for work. Wearied of being alone, I rose and stirred the fire, more for something to do and that it needed attention. Then I went to the window and stood gazing outside.

The storm had lasted several days. Snow fell in goodly earnest. The world was covered with a mantle of frigid whiteness. It was enough to dampen the brightest spirit, but the weather could make no real difference to the situation, could not alter what I intended to say to Mother Pauline when retreat was over and I was free to break through her peaceful quietude. Pursuing this train of thought, I began to experience a dread that I might funk it at the last moment. When the Reverend Mother would fix me with her piercing eyes. That look which seemed to have power to chill my soul. Kowhai had had the same trick of boring through one with her gimlet eyes; indeed, had Mother Pauline been dark-skinned instead of fair, I could almost have fancied that the old Maori prophetess had come to life again. The Reverend Mother was also small, bent and wrinkled. Her very presence perturbed me, and I did so wish to live harmoniously.

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At this point a slight digression may not be out of place to explain certain rules practised in the cloister which to outsiders may seem to be shrouded in mystery.

We must admit that good and evil seem to exist in every walk of life, no matter where we journey. We all make mistakes, and while we are all striving for the ultimate goal of an eternity of heaven, many fall by the way, that is, fail to achieve their aim in the particular way they have chosen.

Perhaps some of my readers are already disappointed that I have not disclosed some dark plot to account for my situation outside the convent walls. What I am about to relate was the worst thing that happened to me. It was, actually, my own fault, but was the inevitable outcome of an unavailing effort to break me in to a system to which I am antithetic; in fact, with which I had nothing

in common. The incident which formed the climax to my probation, and which definitely blew the top off a human volcano, was simple, no doubt to many; to me, however, it represented a revolt in my soul against the practice of ordering the saying of prayers to God as a form of penance. I could not bring myself to pay homage to such a ridiculous doctrine, and I acted on impulse, prompted by reason.

It was the last evening of retreat. The sisters stole in soft-footed and took their places at the prie-dieus. Each night, before retiring, one of the nuns was commanded by the Reverend Mother to kneel at the altar steps and confess her shortcomings audibly. There was nothing unusual about such a rule, except when the culprit was compelled to exhibit pieces of broken crockery, or other damaged articles, and express her sorrow for the act. "Mortifying the flesh" was what Mother Pauline called it.

It would be difficult to explain to the ordinary individual the terrible awakening this trivial act brought to my young mind. It is even harder to conceive that an absurd custom and a piece of broken crockery could entirely change a human life for good or ill.

As a novice I had been excluded from this proceeding till now. Now Mother Pauline came towards me, her voice breaking the long silence of the retreat. "Sister Katherine, you will take this article and kneel at the altar," and she held out a piece of Douulton ware—the same plate that I had broken months before. Her eyes darted a fierce gleam over her spectacles. Mechanically I rose and extended a hand for the broken plate, but on the way to the altar a hot wave of indignation and determination surged through me. Instinctively I decided that it must be now or never. The Reverend Mother saw plainly that something desperate was about to happen. Her voice sounded afar off: "Repeat after me—or do you understand enough to say it yourself?" It was not quite easy to speak at once. "I understand it so well that I don't need forgiveness any more for that! I wonder you

can act such nonsense!" My own voice sounded like thunder; my heart pounded in my ears.

"Stop, at once!" cried the nun, horror in every line of her face, her glasses working rapidly on her nose—even in my distress they arrested my attention; "you don't realise what you are saying . . . it's blasphemy!"

"I couldn't bear to stay another day, I'll go this minute!" I cried in desperation. Her eyes narrowed with suspicion.

"What has decided you to leave, Sister Katherine?"

Then the part of me that was Mr. Hyde took a hand. Looking wildly around, I raised the offending plate high about my head. "Damnation!" I cried, and dashed the china to the ground. "I'm leaving now!" I almost shouted.

In my desperate haste I almost fell headlong through the door. It's all a horrible mistake, I kept telling myself as I tumbled up the stairs and slammed my cell door. I seemed to feel a wealth of satisfaction in making a noise—I'd let them see how meek I was—how they could smash my will! Then, throwing myself on my bed, I burst into a tempest of tears.

I am unfeignedly ashamed to have to write about this display of temper on my part, but it was inevitable, for I had reached the breaking point and could bear no more. When I grew calm it was to find Sister Pat bending over me.

"Oh, you poor child! Let me bathe your face and brush your hair." No word of reproach, just love and kindness. "Why didn't you tell us you were so unhappy, Katherine?"

"Sister Pat, if you've never suffered from loneliness you can never understand."

"Oh, indeed, but I have. I broke my heart leaving Ireland, but then, I'm older than you are; besides, I am happy to serve God in the cloister."

"But I don't want to serve Him in a cloister!" and the thought brought on another fit of sobbing.

"Won't you wait one more week, then, till the Mother Superior comes to visit us?" pleaded Sister Pat, with unusual softening in her voice. "Do promise me that, Katherine! Things will be different from now on. Mother Pauline was only trying you—we all have had to go through that test."

"Yes, but you came voluntarily into the religious life." I told her how I had pleaded with my sister, Helen, to let me stay in Wellington.

While I was speaking Mother Pauline entered bearing a tray with cakes and steaming chocolate. "I prepared it myself," she boasted while she fussed with my pillows. This was a new sidelight on the character of Mother Pauline. I was amazed that she could smile, actually smile. How could they suffer me after my fit of fury? But I had still to learn that blessing, not cursing, is the true nature of godliness; this I was to learn later.

My mind was firmly made up about leaving. My path diverged from theirs in the cloister; we could not be journeying together. What matter if I did steer a zig-zag course according to their ideas; we are all entitled to steer our own barque on life's troublous sea.

Mother Pauline was still anxious to keep me. What would I do out in the world? And I would answer quietly, "there must be ways and means."

Sister Pat tucked me in, but as soon as she left I slipped from my cot to watch the moonlight. It seemed an eternity since I had communed with the moon. With a tightening of the throat I pressed my burning cheek against the cold window-pane. Sparkling moonbeams danced and shimmered like myriad jewels over the frosted trees and fields. The sight left me sadder than before. I began to realise that life was ruled by forces, often beyond our control, and these forces seemed to be welded together for my undoing, making everlasting barriers to my peace.

Next morning nobody woke me, so I did not rise for class, and when at length I opened my eyes I knew it must be late. A few minutes saw me dressed and down-

stairs to seek Sister Pat in the kitchen, where she sat buttering hot scones. The warmth was most inviting.

"Come up to the fire," beamed Sister, "you look famished." While I drank my tea she crooned and petted, as if I were a very young child. "Poor lamb! Feel better now?"

"I'm sure you're the kindest person on earth," I told her, "and I'll be sorry to leave you."

Then a most unusual thing happened. Father Lavaud paid one of his rare visits to the convent. Apparently Father Jardin had written and begged him to exhort me to think seriously before I turned my back on the convent. Sitting beside me, the aged Father began to talk easily and naturally on other subjects, exactly as though nothing had happened to disturb the peace of the cloister. Indeed, so easily and naturally did he talk, that my emotions calmed down, and soon I was laughing and chatting with him. I remember one thing he mentioned was that a man thought no more of a girl's honour than he did of smoking his pipe. At the time it did not convey any special meaning to me, at least not in the sense he intended.

This kindly interest on the part of a pious old man had the effect of banishing my nervousness. I promised to remain one more week, while special prayers would be said for me. I gave my promise for one week, but was more than ever determined to get away.

The next day I received two letters. One from Helen to say that she would have nothing whatever to do with me if I left the convent, that was final. I was not to write or expect her to recognise me. The other was from my guardian; it was meant to be kind, all for my own good. How was it they all wanted to make me good? Nobody seemed to think that I had any right to be happy. Father Jardin told me that to leave the convent was a crime unforgivable. I would be cut off from the Church—an outcast. Furthermore, I would not be welcomed back at Meanee or Taradale. In spite of this I was more than

ever determined to be free. The same strong urge which sends salmon up-stream, hurtling over rocks and rapids, called to my soul. . . .

CHAPTER XXIX.

Freedom

THE railway station was close beside the convent. It wanted some twenty minutes till train time. Attired in my travelling frock, I stood with clasped, mittened hands while Sister Pat brushed and tied back my tresses. Her tears fell plentifully, while other nuns hovered around.

Mother Pauline pleaded with trembling voice: "Katherine, there's still time to turn back. Go into the chapel just for a moment. God may change your heart!"

I can picture these tearful women as I write, waiting and praying earnestly that I stay. Inside the oratory I stood before the altar, gazing helplessly at the painted angels. My heart beat wildly. Then, suddenly, a distant train whistle called: "Haste thee! Haste thee!" It was urgent, insistent. I darted from the sacred edifice, my own eyes full of tears. When I looked at the sisters, the words I would have uttered choked in my throat: "Good-bye . . . and thank you!" was all I could say, and I was running for the express.

Only those who have pined in bondage and suddenly found themselves free can know the happiness that was mine. For a time it gave me a curious thrill; then my senses became permeated with bewilderment. Life was certainly a mass of contradictions. My environment was completely changed—but could I change myself? Loneliness had become an ingrained thing in me; yet there must be a sun shining round the corner, if I could only find it.

While the train sped north I fell to pleasant musings. The moon was risen; through the windows I beheld magic landscapes. Canterbury plains were transformed into

rolling fairy seas. My jumbled thoughts leapt this way and that. Let me see—my years numbered just nineteen, but it had taken a long time to live them, so strange and magic, and withal so lonely had been my life. Sister Pat had said that I could pass for a schoolgirl of fourteen. Inwardly I felt as ancient as the pyramids.

My first change was at Christchurch. How wonderfully strange it all seemed to be travelling alone, and at night. Mother Pauline had given me a through ticket to Wellington, and a few shillings in silver. I possessed a bag with one change of linen, and the clothes I wore. Like Dick Whittington, minus the cat, I would seek my fortune. Financial matters did not enter my mind at that moment; I was blissfully ignorant of all such things. No mention of the money paid into the convent when I became a novice had been made, but it could not possibly have been used up on expenses.

It was not difficult to tranship at Lyttelton and board the mail packet, where I at once went to bed. When I awoke next morning the boat was alongside the wharf at Wellington.

My second visit was rewarded by the sight of a city literally bathed in sunshine, instead of a dismal downpour of rain. That strange, unreal feeling still possessed me; yet there was an intense excitement as well. Like the opening of a door after another had closed, I stepped on shore and entered a new life.

A mixed sensation of awe and exhilaration warned me that it was going to be more complicated than I had at first imagined. Maybe I was making a mistake, I mused. Still it was easy to forget disagreeable suggestions with so much to look at. Crowds on their way to work jostled each other in the narrow streets. Shop windows looked most attractive. Overhead arched the blue sky, while a hot sun beat down on the pavement. With a face expressive, I am sure, of joyful excitement and astonishment, I walked in the city, full of confidence and enthusiasm, not to be expected from one so recently emerged from the seclusion of a cloister.

I there and then decided that my life should no more be the sport of circumstance. Here in this busy world I would find something to do, something to love, something to hope for. My heart still held that hungry longing for sympathy, love and beauty.

Thus for a long time I walked, when suddenly I realised that I had not broken my fast since early morning. My eyes sought a suitable place to dine, and after traversing several blocks, I came to a likely-looking shop. It opened on the street. Many people were seated at small tables, and soon I made one of the number. Questioned by a smart waitress about various dishes, I suggested having a meat pie. At that precise moment a tall, stylishly-dressed lady passed my table. In a flash I was on my feet. "Maggie! Maggie Quirk?" I almost shouted with joy.

"Katherine! . . . Of course it is you?" She gave utterance to her astonishment. "But what are you doing here; when we all thought you were a nun?"

The story was soon told. Maggie listened with soothing sympathy. But she would scarcely believe that Helen would desert me.

"Yes, Maggie, but remember how you both hated me; how Helen never wanted to be saddled with me!"

"Well, I'm glad I've found you, anyway. You can't wander about the streets by yourself."

It transpired that Maggie was on holiday and was staying at a private hotel. Mrs. Garvie, the proprietress, was a friend. She was a large woman with a large heart, and, having no family of her own, hoped I would remain as a daughter. "I'd just love to have a girl like you," she begged. That night I shared Maggie Quirks' room, and, needless to say, we talked most of the night. There was so much to talk about. Maggie's own mother lay beside mine in the cemetery at Taradale, and her family were scattered. She herself was about to be married, hoping to settle at Napier. . . . A clock somewhere chimed two. "Let's get some sleep, Katherine. I'll take you places

to-morrow." Scarcely had we settled down when the sound of a fire alarm startled us out of bed. Through the window we beheld an enormous blaze. In no time we were dressed and out among the crowd of spectators watching a terrific fire. Half the business premises at this end of Willis Street were gutted. Tired and excited, we returned to the hotel as the cocks hailed the morn.

It felt good to be in the great big world, and this meeting with Maggie Quirk—was it fate, or was it chance?

Mrs. Garvie and Maggie procured suitable clothing for me. I was worth dressing, they decided. My mittens caused much mirth. Finally, standing before the mirror, I gazed at this stranger who was myself and who returned my whimsical scrutiny. The spell of life had broken conclusively. For ever had gone the trick of vivid dreams. The present filled every fibre of my being with the hope of fulfilment. No longer would I consult the fates in all that I did. I was done with a religion that was, to me, a mixture of gods and demons, the memory of which could not but be hateful to me because of years of unrest and bitterness.

Maggie had planned a round of gaiety. Up till now I had never attended anything bigger than a school concert, so that the front stalls at Fuller's Waxworks caused my eyes to open wide. The curtain rose. Several painted women and nigger minstrels sat in a half-circle on the stage.

"Are they real?" I asked in a loud voice, my eyes blinking hard. My question caused some of the audience to rock with mirth, and the minstrels blew kisses in our direction. Maggie whispered to me not to speak so loud. Her eyes never left my face. She enjoyed my reactions far more than she enjoyed the entertainment.

Next, two men appeared in a farce; but it was no farce to me. They began to sing two different songs at the same time. "It's my song," shouted one. "No!" cried the other, "the manager asked me to sing." The farce

continued. They quarrelled bitterly, their angry voices rising higher and higher. All at once, from the back of the hall, a pistol shot rang out and one of the contestants dropped dramatically to the floor. In a flash I was over the seat, clutching and shouting at Maggie: "Let's get out of here! Let's get out!"

The audience cheered—I was better than the play. My companion laughed till the tears streamed down. It was unbelievable that a girl of my years should be so "gauche." To myself it seemed pitiful. My convent training had left me so utterly in the dark—what chance had I in a practical world. But I would learn. . . .

CHAPTER XXX.

Engaged.

ACCORDING to Maggie Quirk, Leonard Lovell was as handsome as a Greek statue.

Seated at table, as the guest of one of Mrs. Garvie's boarders, was a young man with regular features, swarthy complexion, fine brown eyes. Hair blue-black like the raven's wing, disposed in a mass of wavy curls, that caused many a woman to have a second look. In fact, the opposite sex ran after him and spoiled him.

"Somehow you're different from the other girls I know," he confided to me when we were alone for a few minutes. Perhaps his own conceit had something to do with it, because I did not fuss him. I considered him good-looking from an artist's point of view. His name, too, suited his voice, which seemed to caress one. Further, Mrs. Garvie took a warm fancy to him. "This is Katherine's home," she explained. "You are welcome at all times."

Leonard was delighted, and each evening found him at our house. My life was transformed; I was beloved and unafraid, standing on the threshold of young womanhood. It was a love that thrilled me with hope for the future,

radiant and rosy, with golden dreams of a great romance. We had the same simple tastes, and lived in sweet enjoyment of each other's company; in tune with the universe in her happiest mood. I was happier than I had ever been before, for this love was something soft and lovely as the sunshine.

Leonard spoke caressingly: "You will give me the right to protect you always—to look after you? I want to marry you—Katherine, will you be my wife?" My heart was held captive by his wonderful eyes, which pleaded even more eloquently than his words. I looked around the cosy home which a benign Providence had produced like a scene from a fairy-tale, and my heart was too full to answer at once. Here was the blending of human love and creature comforts, and inwardly I expressed gratitude.

"But it is only a week since I left the convent," I faltered. It was all so frightfully sudden that it left me breathless and confused. He confided that he had a good position—that he worked for his brother, who had a business on the Quay.

"Say that you will marry me, sweetheart," he persisted, trying to imprison my hands. To-morrow you shall have a ring, an engagement ring of diamonds and sapphires. Oh, it was wonderful. The whole world was wonderful. I was afraid I would wake to find it all a dream. Of course, Helen must be told. I feared greatly that she would be shocked—still, I had no alternative. I consented.

At ten-thirty next morning Leonard called. A ring of diamonds and sapphires sparkled on my finger.

That afternoon I paid a visit to my sister. She sat with several girl friends having tea. "I wish to speak with you, Helen," I began timidly, feeling that what I had to impart was little short of criminal, for most of my sister's friends were unmarried.

"It's not a secret, is it? You may speak in front of these girls, they won't mind." For answer I held out my hand on which the stones glinted.

"It's a lucky packet ring!" said Helen with scorn.

I made no reply. One of the young women came across to where I stood and examined it. "By Jove! it's the real thing, Helen. It's diamonds and sapphires all right." Then she asked, "Who's the poor sap, kid?"

There was a stir and a flutter amongst them. My sister questioned me closely as to the young man's name, religion, occupation, etc., and then she harped back to his religion again. "Pity, with your education, you couldn't find someone who at least was a Christian," she snorted.

"Pity I came to tell you at all, Helen, for your religion seems to have distorted your human feelings. I'm tired of such narrow views, they sicken by soul."

"You seem to have highish notions," said a dark girl who was pouring the tea but failed to offer me any.

"Oh, I can manage my own affairs without troubling other folk—you needn't bother to fret about me," said I.

"For the present, yes," she smiled, "but after that?"

"It won't make it easier for me by telling you, anyway," and, without waiting to hear more, I made a hasty retreat.

On the way back my heart was in revolt. I hated God and His religion and vowed never to pray again. I was weary from always having to obey the will of others. By getting married I would have a chance to go my own way. I was a woman now, and those girls were only envious. In the future the very mention of religion would be taboo. . . .

For the next few months life was a golden sea of happiness. Love's young dream, pure as the springtime, calling bud and leaf, all life to wake and listen.

There was something very engaging about this lover of mine. On Sundays we hiked over the hills, and rested in shady dells, dimly green with cascades glinting through the chequered leaves. Sight-seeing from horse-drawn trams also held thrills, and in the evenings we visited the opera—the cinema had not yet arrived. Then came a rift. Our love was not to run smoothly after all.

Leonard's family belonged to the high Church of England, and were very much Protestant. Also Leonard's mother had in view a certain young woman whom she was sure would be the ideal wife for her Leonard.

The Lovell's house was in Blenheim, a small town in the South Island, some twenty miles inland from the Sounds. During the Easter holidays a steamer excursion visited the Sounds, and this, to Leonard, seemed a golden opportunity of introducing me to his people. As we sat on the deck of the steamer crossing Cook Strait, it all seemed so wonderful to have so much happiness at one time. My cup brimmed over. The fates were replacing the sorrow of earlier years with brightly-coloured love-scenes. From the boat we entrained for Blenheim. A short walk through the town and along shady lanes brought us to an old-fashioned homestead partly hidden among fruit trees. Here we were met by Leonard's mother, a stately-looking woman of dark complexion like her son.

"My Leonard," she greeted, "this is a happy surprise! And who is this young lady?"

"It's Katherine, mother, and we are engaged."

Mrs. Lovell's eyebrows lifted in surprise. "Leonard, you should have prepared your mother, you should have written and explained."

"What difference can it make? We are ever so happy, mother, so what else matters?" In silence we entered the house, and no more was said on the matter until we were seated in the parlour. Then Leonard related an account of my life. At mention of the convent his mother gasped.

"Brought up in one of those dreadful places! Oh, Leonard, my son, the deacon would never sanction such a union!"

"But we love each other, mother. You don't understand. Religion has nothing to do with love—it has no right to interfere!" cried he fiercely. Inwardly I squirmed while the battle of words raged between mother and son.

Now I spoke for the first time; the words were drawn from me involuntarily: "Why quarrel about religion, or the things cloaked under its name, for they have caused more trouble in the world than any other thing?" Mrs. Lovell bristled visibly.

"It makes all the difference," she retorted. "Besides, you are both too young to think of the responsibilities of marriage." Suddenly her stern manner dropped from her. "At least you must wait another year, Leonard, for you are not yet twenty-one."

There was no further reference to this conversation during the afternoon tea, which was presided over by one of Leonard's pretty sisters, but as soon as she had departed Mrs. Lovell returned to her attack on my religion. "I'm afraid you'll think me hard, and perhaps a little unkind, my dear," she confessed, edging closer to me, "but we Lovells are so very High Church, of that Leonard is aware, and besides we have other reasons to disapprove of the Roman Church."

"Let's not discuss it," said Leonard. "Mother, you're wasting all the afternoon, and we came to see you, not to talk about religion."

"Oh, I wish you could understand," I burst out, thinking of my kind guardian and others that I had loved. "They're not all bad. It was I who had no vocation for the cloister." I was conscious of a deep flush mounting to my brow; the atmosphere grew tense.

"Mother, why are you so bitter and distrustful? I had hoped you would be pleased with my choice. It's hardly fair when we have come to tell you of our plans."

"I'm glad you've come to tell me, son, very glad," she added in softer tones, a suspicion of tears in her voice. Still—it was a relief when the cab called to convey us to the station.

"Good-bye, my dear," she said, patting my hand. "It was really very nice to have you; and perhaps you might belong to our church some day."

"I suppose you'll never forgive my mother after what

she said," commented Leonard on our way back to the steamer.

"We have each other," I whispered. "Isn't that all?" "Sufficient for the present! The future can look after itself."

Maggie Quirk had returned to Napier, and Mrs. Garvie claimed our company most evenings. When she learned that Mrs. Lovell objected to our marriage on account of religion, she smiled knowingly. "Love will find a way, never fear. But I do agree with her very heartily on one point—you are both too young. There's plenty of time, and, besides, I don't want to part with Katherine so soon." Little she thought, as she sat there smiling on two happy lovers, that she herself was about to decide our future.

Wellington was en fête to receive royalty, the late King George and our beloved Queen Mary (then Duke and Duchess of York). The city was full of visitors, and the hotels were crowded. Mrs. Garvie was busy cake-making in the extremely hot kitchen, while I helped by mincing peel and seeding raisins.

"Katherine, I've forgotten to order the cherries," said she, searching the cupboard. "It won't take a minute to go to the store," I replied, and hurried off. But when I reached the shop it was full of customers, and I was delayed some forty minutes. On my return journey an ambulance passed me, and at the same time a familiar voice called from the opposite corner of the street; it was Leonard's friend the fireman.

"That was Mrs. Garvie in the ambulance," he said, "they've taken her to the hospital!"

"How you love to tease people, Mr. Hunt!" I said, laughing. "I left Mrs. Garvie busy in the kitchen; nothing could have happened in so short a time. Go on, tell it to somebody else!"

"But it's true," he insisted, "she's had a stroke!"

I waited to hear no more. In a few minutes I was

inside the house. Mrs. Garvie was dead. They had taken her to the morgue. Faint with grief, I sat fearful and afraid, a pitiful figure huddled in the corner of the lounge. It was difficult to think clearly. My world seemed to have contracted a habit of tumbling down about my ears. Eagerly I awaited Leonard. After the first shock, he decided that there was only one thing left for us to do, and that was to get married at once so that he could protect me.

"But, your mother, Leonard," I objected, a vision of her haughty face before me. "What would she say?"

"Never mind that now," he said resolutely, "you come first, we'll tell her afterwards."

And so it came about that after the funeral of my kind benefactress, there was a marriage. Two young people joined in holy wedlock at the registry office, for, as Leonard argued, our respective churches would have raised all sorts of barriers to the union, and it was imperative that I should have him to take care of me. Mrs. Garvie was right; love had found a way. The fates decreed it. An all-seeing God would bless those whom He had mated, as from the beginning of time.

What concerned us most was that it had taken the largest portion of my husband's savings to pay the marriage fee and one week's double board. "Never mind," he laughed, "we've got each other, and I've got my job."

His brother had given him a present of a bedroom suite and kitchen furniture, but, alas, we had no house in which to put them; so we were compelled to store them. However, it is not always the best beginning that makes the best end, and so it proved to be in our case. Naturally Mrs. Lovell would have to be told sooner or later, but there did not seem any need for haste. We lived happily and cosily in the best bedroom of a house near Leonard's work. The landlady, Mrs. Smith, was a funny little old woman with a cast in one eye, but she doted on the two young lovers, and was indefatigable in giving me motherly advice regarding young wives.

CHAPTER XXXI.

Motherhood.

TIME passed all too quickly. No amount of riches could have added to our happiness. At length my husband penned a letter to his mother, stating the facts and saying that we were ever so happy. Weeks and months followed each other without a reply, then one day, while I sat before the fire making baby clothes, Mrs. Smith showed my mother-in-law into the room.

"I'm sorry to break in on you like this, my dear, please forgive me." She spoke in a tone of gentle solicitude, at the same time bending forward to lightly kiss my cheek. It was in strong contrast to our previous meeting.

"I'm afraid you will have to get used to my being one of the family," I smiled. "It won't help anybody to be sorry about it."

"Oh, my dear, I've been a foolish woman," she confessed, and, drawing her chair closer to mine, again she stooped to kiss my cheek. "There now, you only look like a baby yourself, instead of an expectant mother. . . . Leonard won't dream of finding me here." Rather bewildered, I replied, "No." "Your husband doesn't know his own mother if he thinks I could forget you," she said. Thereafter she fell to discussing baby clothes and baby comforts till Leonard arrived. His eyes and cheeks took on a feverish brilliancy while he unfolded his plans.

Mrs. Lovell decided that no child of Leonard's should see the light of day in a boardinghouse. She would take me back to Blenheim, and my husband could come across most week-ends. Already she was planning to do up some baby clothes that had belonged to her son and had lain in lavender for years. It was all too wonderful to think that Leonard's baby would wear his father's gowns. She had her way, and we duly arrived at Blenheim. In theory this arrangement sounded all right, but when the time drew near for my husband to depart I begged him

to take me back with him. I had no idea that the parting would be so bitter. I broke down utterly. It was a fortnight before he could get over again, and those two weeks seemed like years. Desperately I clung to him. He must not leave me again. Gladly he would have acceded to my request, but travelling by steamer in my then state of health was not to be thought of. Again I wept and sobbed when the train bore my beloved away from me.

This state of affairs continued for three months, Leonard crossing and recrossing, and once he stayed for a week because of my fretfulness. It must have been a trying period for my mother-in-law, yet no mother could have done more, or been kinder, or more comforting.

Thinking back, it seems that in awaiting the birth of my baby, whilst parted from my husband, constituted one of the most desperate trials of my life; though, to many people, it may appear merely childish on my part.

At last the day arrived. Surrounded by every care that doctor's skill and good nursing could provide, my baby girl was born—blue-eyed like my mother—yes, the same deep blue. Oh, if Mary Morgan could but have seen her grandchild! Then followed weeks of the most wonderful part of every young mother's life—the joy of sustaining another life from her own body.

As soon as I felt strong again I became anxious to return home. Leonard had been unable to leave his work, and had not seen the baby. He spent many weary hours house-hunting. He was determined to make a home, but, alas, disaster overtook him, for no sooner had he secured a house than the place where the furniture was stored was burned down. A telegram arrived at Blenheim: "Secured house, furniture destroyed." His family thought it was a joke. Mrs. Lovell, however, sent to a firm in Wellington for the necessary goods, and soon everything was in readiness for our return.

Accompanied by Leonard's youngest sister, Bernice, and holding my precious baby, I eagerly waited for the boat to be made fast at the Wellington wharf. With a

bound Leonard was on board. The poor boy was so excited over the baby that he shed tears; then, in his haste to collect packages from the rack, he almost knelt on the precious bundle which I had placed on the lower berth. His eyes looked as though he had known many sleepless nights. Instinctively I knew that he had been worrying about us. He related how difficult it had been to secure a house and put it in some sort of order. He had scrubbed and polished and dusted; for the place had been shrouded in cobwebs. He was so anxious that I should like this new home, and afterwards I could arrange the furniture to suit myself.

The drive from the wharf to Wallace Street seemed endless. The cab rumbled over rough roads, uphill and down—my nerves were still a trifle shaky. "Did you say the house was on the outskirts of the city?" I ventured at last.

"Does it seem a long way to you, Katherine?" The light died out of his eyes. "You don't seem enthusiastic about it, but it was the best I could do."

"Anyway, I'll try to be enthusiastic," I answered convincingly. "I trust you implicitly, Leonard, and I'm ever so happy to be home."

The trials that beset most newly-weds fell plentifully around us; trials sent to teach humans that earthly happiness is fleeting, a fact most of us are apt to forget in the joy and sunshine of prosperity. Where each day is clothed in mystery as we advance, there is never a retrograde step. Let destiny do her uttermost, I was determined that we should sail the high seas of life undismayed by wind or weather.

The cottage, when we reached it, was comfortable. It looked even beautiful in my eyes—a home of our own. Besides, when two people are in love mundane things take on a roseate hue. My one regret was that sister Helen was parted from me. If only Helen had had an understanding heart—I soliloquised. . . . When baby's cry

recalled me to my present surroundings I brushed my thoughts away and began to prepare a meal.

Distance from Leonard's work and long hours prevented his coming home for meals. I had no friends in Wellington, therefore the time dragged for Bernice and me. We decided to purchase a perambulator, and then set off to do the shops. But a few trips up hilly roads soon cooled our ardour. It seemed imperative for us to move closer to the city. Eventually I found something suitable, and we were comfortably ensconced in a three-roomed flat in the heart of the metropolis.

At this time my baby, whom I called "Claire," was six months old; sweetly pretty she was, but inclined to be cross, perhaps because of my fretfulness before her birth.

At last Helen grew restive with curiosity to see the baby. There was nothing I could do but invite her to tea. She came, accompanied by another maiden-lady friend. I thought I had never seen such a remarkable pair, dressed as they were in the acme of fashion and almost arrogant of manner. On entering, my sister kissed me fondly and seemed eager and pleased to see her niece; also she brought a present for Claire.

After we had been in conversation for a while, Helen led in a roundabout way to the subject of christening. When was Claire baptised? No longer was I afraid of my sister. I spoke decisively: "Helen, I have a new truth. I've learned to rise into a new life by dropping human beliefs established by hierarchies. I do not conform to the Roman Church, or, for that matter, to any other church. It may be a painful subject to you, so why can't we forget it?"

Helen looked as though tears might not be far away, but Bernice entering with the tray interrupted our talk, otherwise there might have been a scene. While they sipped tea I thought it an opportune moment to feed Claire, nor felt it necessary to apologise.

"Dear me," burst from Helen, almost suffocated by embarrassment, "how badly the nuns have educated you

after all! Come!" she gasped, turning to her companion, "we must be going."

I was boiling with indignation. "What have I done to shock your modesty? Is there anything unchaste about being a natural mother? Helen, if I remember rightly, according to Ann Cornish, you were a breast-fed baby, and a very greedy one at that. . . ."

"Stop! Stop! You're an outlaw!" she cried, and the two friends bounced out of the room.

"There are other heavens besides the cloister," I whispered to Claire, my face pressed against her dimpled hand.

Poor Helen, her outlook on life was poles and poles apart from mine. Still I could not help feeling hurt by her conduct—what right had she to judge my life standards? Her talk about the christening had stirred up a past which I thought had been successfully put away for ever—I must not allow it to become entangled with the future. I remembered, too, that the deacon at Blenheim had pressed me to have Leonard's child baptised in her father's church. Thinking thus, I sat rocking my baby until Bernice roused me with some question about dinner. Somewhere I had read lines to the effect that one should beware of excessive virtue, for it is but another name for vice. But true love, redolent with unselfishness, sees only beauty everywhere.

Placing my girlie in her cot, I lingered to gaze on the beautiful picture; her silky, soft, golden locks against the pillow; dimpled hands on the coverlet. I fought back the unhappy thoughts that came tumbling through my mind; my long years spent in the convent, years that "the locusts had eaten."

How could religious people hope to humbug Nature with artificiality? The living soul must be in intimate contact with life as we knew it. Else why have we the channels of sense and desire bestowed upon us? Close up those channels, and we may injure the soul.

I decided not to tell Leonard about my sister's abrupt

departure. He was good-natured and easy-going to a fault, and I would not widen the breach between them. As I stooped to kiss my baby an influx of mother love illumined my heart. Why pray in words? Motherhood expressed the most beautiful prayer of all. In my child I beheld the reflection of the Christ child in his crib—beheld it in an etherial pale luminance.

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About this time soldiers returning from the South African war brought an epidemic of measles in a malignant form. Children were the worst sufferers, and each day tiny coffins were taken from many houses. With a grip of cold fear in my heart, I watched my baby stricken with the dread disease. Day and night I nursed her; tried to cool the fevered head; to bathe her eyes suffused with blood. In desperation I pressed her blackened lips to my breast. Her prattling ravings drew tears from my eyes. The overworked doctor shook his head. "It's hopeless," was his only comment.

Leonard was beside himself with grief. He went to seek another doctor. Left alone, I gazed at the glazing eyes of my baby, now lying still in my arms. A great determination swept over me. "God! You shall not take my child from me!" I cried in anguish. "You cannot force me to part with her. I command you, God, not to take her!" Suddenly Claire's eyes opened, the first time for days. "Oh, God, I thank You! She knows me, she knows me!" Tears of joy rained down my face.

When my husband returned I was feeding my precious one, and I thanked God again that she was breast-fed. The following week we removed to a larger house, with a sun porch; and there I nursed my baby back to health.

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When Claire was fifteen months old my second child was born—a boy. He was dark, like the Lovells; as dark as his sister was fair.

Meanwhile Helen had kept Father Jardin posted

about these happenings. She also sent him a photograph of Claire taken at twelve months. Her baby smile showed two teeth, top and bottom. It made me exceedingly happy to receive a letter from my guardian, saying that he thought Claire the sweetest, bonniest baby he had ever seen. It showed that I was forgiven for not taking the veil. But that was not all, for, although aged and feeble, the faithful priest travelled from Napier to see me. Leonard led the tottering old pere to my bedside.

"You are in your right place, Katherine. I was wrong in trying to force you to a life in the cloister. You are now doing God's work, and after the manner of His appointing." He also expressed a wish to be godfather to my small son. At this my heart melted, and I consented to a double christening there and then. I could not refuse a man who had done so much for me and mine.

Needless to state, from now on my hands were full. Two babies meant two cots and a double perambulator. How happy and full was life, and how swiftly the years fled by.

Leonard's brother had given his business over to my husband, and it was prospering. We bought a home of our own, and there was not a wish left ungratified. Everything that money could buy was mine.

The children were of school age now, and during the long vacations we lived at Blenheim. We had many friends. I entered into society and entertained on a large scale. Soon, however, I tired of social life. Fashionably-dressed women with empty heads bored me terribly. How I longed, at times, for solitude. Perhaps something was stirring me from my earlier life and training. When alone I was wont to wander through the silent rooms. There were moments when an unaccountable feeling came over me that I was still a nun; only whereas the convent lacked carpets and rich settings, my home breathed wealth—walls hung with tapestries and oil colours from my own brush. My friends declared that I was most fortunate in having such a wonderful home, husband and children. In

every sense of the term I should have been the happiest woman alive, but there was always that strange something which pressed me on with burning restlessness.

When my guests departed I felt relieved, and made my way to the trellised porch. This overlooked a well-kept lawn surrounded by thick hedges, covered by a wild tangle of honeysuckle. Soon I became lost in meditation . . . had a bell tinkled I could have imagined I heard the sound of the sisters' evening hymn. It was difficult to believe I was in my own house. Such is the deep impress which convent life makes upon the soul. The noisy entrance of the children returned from school put an abrupt end to my reverie, nor would I again indulge in this train of thought until once more alone. Nevertheless my early days had left an indelible trace in a characteristic love of solitude that remains with me to this day.

CHAPTER XXXII.

History Repeats Itself.

NINE years of married life, the pattern woven through with shining golden threads. Blue skies—not a cloud. Sunshine, comfort, nice friends, my children growing up. What more could a human being wish for? If anything, life had become too easy, almost meaningless. I felt rather lost; there wasn't anything particular for me to do. My restless nature needed something more constructive to live for, something more stable than operas, at-homes and suchlike things. I was a natural home-lover, with mother instincts. It had been heavenly while my children were babies and needed all my attention. Like an answer to my longing, my second son was born. Life, again, was no longer a blank. It was like making a fresh start. New baby clothes, new cot, new pram. His Majesty the Baby made a big difference in the house. He was a beautiful boy, fair and blue-eyed like his sister. How ardently and

often I wished that my own mother had lived to see her grandchildren.

At that time I never gave serious thought to the change of events—we scarcely ever do in real life. It is only as I write that the plan unfolds before me, for the advent of my third child altered everything. My life appears to run in cycles. Before my son's birth my sleep was constantly troubled by dreams of my mother. It seemed strange because at that time her dear picture had greatly faded. The kaleidoscopic years that intervened had dulled my recollections of her. These dreams were always a medley of discord. If the departed could be accepted as oracles my mother's spirit was sending a warning. Night after night she appeared. Perhaps she needed my prayers; I would ask the children to pray for grandmother Morgan. I had given my promise to Father Jardin that, for Mary Morgan's sake, her grandchildren should attend a convent school. The dear father had passed away soon after his visit to us, and more than ever I felt that I must keep my promise to him. Leonard had no objection, although his people had quite a lot to say on the matter. Still, I had my way, and to the convent high school they went. My husband was really too easy-going; he left everything to me.

Lately Leonard had fallen into flesh, and several times had arrived home in a cab suffering from fainting fits. Next he entered a private hospital for a major operation, and afterwards was always ailing. He grew peevish and sullen. Almost at the same time our eldest boy contracted chest trouble and was ordered to a sanatorium. I refused to let him go. I would nurse him myself. Soon the house was turned into a hospital, and some days two doctors called. Then Leonard's mother came to live with us, but proved more hindrance than help. Then Mr. Lovell was called home. The good old granddad passed away, and a few months later grandmother Lovell followed.

Looking back, the history of events at that time reads

scemewhat like the happenings which befell the Morgan menage, one fatal thirteenth of the month, when my mother had her strange dream. Bewildered somewhat by all these tragic happenings, my mind was in a fog. Only one thing stood out clearly—my son must not die! All the pent-up love of a life, of a hungry heart, was entwined in the lives of my children. Most mothers are like that, but somehow I was even more so. I was like a hen with her chicks; I guarded them and could not bear the winds of heaven to blow on them. There was not so much of cuddling and fussing; I could not express my feelings in that way. It was deep down in my heart, but concealed from view—doubtless the result of my suppressed love in my early days.

My husband and I began to drift apart. The process was gradual, but nevertheless certain. During the weary and anxious months of nursing my son and caring for a young baby there was little or no time left for Leonard, who was fast becoming a chronic invalid. He proved stubborn and selfish, like most men, and expected more of my time than I could give him. Bickerings and quarrels ensued. The stern fight for my son's life caused me to leave the father out of my mind. The doctor declared that my devoted attention to my boy had brought him through, and that he still needed great care. He was only a skeleton.

For a time life moved on again in smoother waters, but only for a time. Had I had but a grain of the understanding of mind-science which I have to-day, how different would have been the lives of those entrusted to my care! Oh, could we but turn back the hand of time! How often have human beings longed that it might be so. Still, it is amazing how everything straightens itself out in the course of time.

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The long summer was giving place to autumn, and the world shone golden in the sunset. My baby was now four years old, a picture to look upon, but a tyrant to manage. The elder boy had almost recovered. More and

more my life centred in my children. Their father was becoming remote, apart. It made our past happiness seem unreal and elusive. I did try to improve conditions, but I am afraid that I was not as kind as I might have been, for I could not neglect my children. Then, again, he was so often absent from home, on business, that he finally became estranged from his own family.

What strange creatures humans are! What is it that works such changes in us? But, although we had drifted so far apart, I still felt a deep sense of remorse for the loss of our earlier love. Not wantonly did I place the father of my children outside of my affections, or refuse his advances; perhaps we both hoped that time would adjust matters. Leonard's failing health and irritability made it rather difficult to bear with him. Nevertheless, we rubbed along fairly well, considering all things, and then an event occurred which put an end to further pretence or make-believe. Leonard was to find that the way of the transgressor is hard; sorrow and disappointment follow in the wake of deceit and subterfuge. A portion of the blame I tried to shoulder myself, thinking how weak a vessel is man, for I could not imagine that my husband was any worse than most men. It may have been that I was relenting towards him. Prompted by such kindly thoughts, I decided to call for him at the shop after business hours. How often had he asked me to inspect the premises, which he declared was the instrument that supplied our comfortable home. Yes, I would go and meet him. We could have a bite of supper in town then walk home; exercise was just the thing he needed for his health. Leonard was in the act of locking up when I arrived, but instead of being pleased, he looked aghast when he saw me. He stood speechless, dangling the keys in his hand.

"You don't appear very happy to see me," I ventured. "You're a bad actor, Leonard. What's the matter?"

Startled, he looked around. "Oh!" he ejaculated at last, "of course I'm glad to see you, dear, but let's go home by the side street."

It was my turn to ejaculate. Thoughts of supper were out of the question, for with unusual haste Leonard hailed a passing cab and we drove home in silence. When, later, I questioned him about his evident consternation, he kept quiet. In my anger I'm afraid I said some very bitter things.

"I've heard rumours about your fondness for other women," I complained, "and, knowing your passionate nature, I'm rather inclined to think that I may have blundered on something to-night."

He kept complete silence, and this silence maddened me. Never before had I questioned him, for I was still gauche in many worldly things; but from now on I would keep watch.

The next evening my husband arrived home early with gifts of candy, flowers and a ticket for the opera. It was a Clara Butt first night, would I care to hear her? My anger of the previous day vanished under a revival of our former happiness. I made a resolve, we would be happy in spite of anything; the rift could be mended; it was not too late. Leonard confessed to me that he was somewhat jealous because I allowed the children to take up so much of my time, and it did not seem natural to him that parents should drift apart because they had a family. I had to admit that the cares of a home had deadened my interest in his pursuits.

For the next few days our lives took on a new, brighter colour, and all might have been mended but for a stupid mistake Leonard made—one that is common to most men—that of leaving incriminating letters in his clothes. Pressing my husband's suit one day, I discovered such a missive. My eyes flashed over the illiterate scrawl as my heart grew cold: "Dear Len. . . ." The lines danced before me. "You might have met me when you said. I waited around. What's the big idea? Who do you think you are? . . ." and so on. The hateful letter dropped from my hand; the sting had entered my soul. Let me see. . . I must have time to think. Then a great calm came over

me. Although not madly in love with him, no wife likes to think that she shares her husband's affections with another woman. I shuddered at the thought of this common creature who had come between us.

The massive timepiece in the hall chimed 10 a.m. Instantly I made up my mind not to spend another night under the same roof with Leonard Lovell. Again I consulted the clock. Could I manage it—to be packed and aboard the steamer sailing that night for Dunedin? To my confused senses Dunedin, in the South Island of New Zealand, appeared to be at the very end of the earth, and nobody would know us there. I wanted to hide from the world; but the most important and pressing thing was to get away. My mind was a jumble of confused thoughts—I could see no other way.

The furniture must be packed; the house was in my own name, and could be sold later. The clock chimed the half-hour. I became obsessed with the idea that we must be on that steamer sailing south, and I worked feverishly that it might be so. Soon the spacious rooms were chaotic with packing cases and workmen removing furniture. For a few brief moments the thought of the years when I had been a weary searcher for a home flashed through my mind. . . . The pause was only momentary. "Hurry!" I cried to the packers. "We must not miss the boat."

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Once more I was on a steamer sailing south. How different it was from the journey when I was a novice. An agony of fear settled on my heart when I looked at my sleeping children. What had I done? Had I been too hasty? Had I done the best thing for them? The rhythmical throb of the ship's engines beat a tattoo in my brain. Everything seemed like a jig-saw puzzle. Yesterday my life had seemed so peaceful, no hitch or halt, no trace of confusion—yet scarcely twenty-four hours had passed since finding that fateful letter. A sudden, almost irresistible impulse prompted me to return by the next boat. It was as if a light had flashed out of the

darkness, and then went out. Was it some picture in my subconscious mind warning me not to go on? How was I to know? I was only a foolish young wife, distraught by the thought of her husband's infidelity. Then the words of that letter stood out clearly before me. Vividly I pictured the worst—there could be but one explanation of Leonard's conduct.

In the meantime Leonard Lovell was full of plans as he walked from the tram to his home. Ardently he longed for the old trysting times. He would win back his wife's love. We would all go on a long holiday; he could well afford it. He was sure that the trouble lay in our not taking relaxation and recreation together. He would see that all that was changed. The thought warmed him and he quickened his step. Strange the house was all in darkness. Katherine might be out? But then, again, she never took the children out at night. He had reached the gate by now. A large placard on the front door held his gaze as in a vice: "FOR SALE." . . . Bewildered, mechanically he pressed the door-bell. The hollow sound mocked his terror; beads of perspiration gathered on his brow; his heart almost stopped beating.

"Is that you, Mr. Lovell?" called the next door neighbour. "I'm sorry I missed you passing my gate. Your wife left your bags and this note."

"Don't you know where they have gone?" he asked brokenly.

"No, all I know is that the packers have been busy all day removing loads of furniture. Mrs. Lovell refused to say where she was going."

Leonard peered through the curtainless casements—the room was littered with straw used in the packing. At last he carried the letter beneath the street lamp and opened it. It was the same note I had taken from his pocket, the one addressed to "Dear Len."

It took two days for the steamer to reach Dunedin, where we drove to a hotel recommended by the ship's purser, until we could find a suitable house.

The day was Sunday. The weather was bitterly cold. Looking through the window at the blizzard, I was conscious of a curious mixture of pleasure and regret. Pleasure at being free from a man who could offer such a deadly insult to his wife, and regret for some indefinable loss. Could I have seen my husband at that moment, stricken with grief and shame, I would have been stabbed with remorse, but my hands were full attending to the children's needs, and I had no thought left for him.

Accompanied by an agent, I inspected innumerable houses, till at length, wearied by the search, I decided on a cottage that I thought would do temporarily, and we moved in. The carrier's face wore a puzzled look when he found we were alone. Perhaps my own eyes held a frightened expression, for I began to feel that I had taken a desperate step. He enquired whether he could be of any assistance. "You seem so handicapped with the children," he said. My voice was tremulous with tears as I thanked him.

"My wife and her mother live only a block away," he said at parting. "I'll tell them to call on you."

These new neighbours proved to be a Scotch family, the mother an old lady of comfortable proportions, the daughter a rosy-cheeked mother of two young children. I was more than glad to see them. I explained that I was a widow come south for the benefit of my boy's health; for I was determined to fight this thing out for myself. I decided that, with care, my money would last until the house in Wellington was sold. I was rather hazy about the price, and how long it would take to complete the sale.

Judging by the expressions on the faces of my new-found friends, I had succeeded in convincing them of my respectability. Wonderful were the evidences of peace and contentment in this little family group; quite content in their own little circle. It gave me a twinge that such happiness could never again belong to me. There was no time for repining, however; my hands were kept busy,

sewing, mending and cooking. Rearing a family leaves few idle moments, as every mother knows. The children attended a public school, because it was close to our home.

And so a year passed. To me, a bitterly cold, long year, a lonely year. I had cut myself off from my friends. I had not written to anybody for I wished to keep my whereabouts unknown.

Dunedin's long, weary winter was almost over, and the days were lengthening. The thought of spring stirred something within me. Unbidden, my fancy craved a return to the place of my birth, sunny Napier, where the sunshine was different, or at least it appeared so to my longing. Time and space were obliterated. I saw the green slopes of the hills at Taradale. They were spangled with daisies, with here and there patches of colour. The house suddenly seemed to suffocate me. I must get out into the open. I would take a tramp up the mountains and be home again before the children returned from school. A long climb over Mount Cargill took my breath away; the air, keen as a razor blade, braced me. The scene from the summit was a golden glow in the sunlight; vast rivers and turquoise lakes, pine-belted meadows and snow-capped mountains made a wonderful picture for my tired eyes; while below small craft plied to and fro in the channel to Port Chalmers. For a long time I stood gazing my fill at this ravishing scene, my heart still yearning as no human tongue or penned lines can hope to describe. What a contrast between this beauty of landscape and my own unhappy life! Slowly I retraced my steps down the twisting mountain road, memories haunting me every step. How cruel and relentless a thing was life!

I had remained longer than I had anticipated. With a start I realised that it was late, the children would be home from school. I tried to bring a smile to my lips for their sakes as I entered. To my dismay I discovered Gordon, my eldest boy, in bed. The others hovered round.

"Gordon! What is it, son?" I noted the angry flush

on his cheek, his pulse raced. "Tell mother where you feel bad."

Even while I asked I knew it was the dread enemy returned, and a terrific fear seized me. Voices seemed to fill the bedchamber, "We have come for your son!"

Claire was despatched for the nearest doctor, and returned accompanied by a small, shrivelled-looking man, who pronounced the malady double pneumonia. So rapid and severe was the attack that in the space of a few days my boy lay at death's door. The medico had paid his last visit; he was powerless to save him, he said. Mrs. Burns, the Scotch neighbour, had repeatedly counselled me to obtain the services of another practitioner. "Get a specialist from the university," she begged; "sure that doctor you have is useless." But it was too late now; I could see that my boy was dying. Dazed and sick at heart, I sat beside him—he was sinking fast. His pitiful, wasted form lay motionless, except for brief intervals of returning consciousness, when I moistened his lips. Alone I waited in anguished silence.

Then, from out of the past flashed a picture—my home at Taradale—my parents—each lying in a coffin. . . . I could almost fancy the outline of my child's coffin, for I knew he could not last till morning.

The house was perfectly still. The ticking of the clock sounded alarmingly clear—the time was 2 a.m. My nerves were at breaking point. I was about to call Claire to come and sit with me, when, turning, I beheld the horrifying spectacle of the Maori witch, Kowhai, coming through the door. Her weird, bent figure stooped to spread a mat—the action was quite familiar. The call for Claire died on my lips. I was frozen with terror.

Kowhai's piercing eyes were fastened on my son. She raised scraggy arms and made mystic signs; her bony finger pointing to the bed: "Have you forgotten the curse?" It sounded like a thin, whistling wind, yet I seemed to catch the meaning. I was wide awake, so fully awake, indeed, that I felt never more would I sleep. I

tried to close my eyes to shut out the terrible sight, but my eyelids refused to shut. . . Minutes seemed like hours. Instinctively I reached for my boy's pulse, listened for his breathing. A groan escaped him. I sprang to my feet. The sight of that black, tattooed hag had roused me at last. I turned to chase her from the room—she had vanished!

Doubtless the strange phenomenon had been caused by the excitement of imagination and impressions upon the senses, imagination being a very strong power; or it may have been the result of many causes. But of one thing I am certain, that is, that no thought of Kowhai, or of the Maori race was in my mind at the time.

Gazing wildly round the room, I began to beat the air with my hands. "God! You will not take my son from me!" The words were forced from me. Again and again I called on the Christ to save him, as I had done once before when Claire was dying. In my dire extremity I pleaded with the dying child: "Don't leave me, Gordon! Your mother won't allow God to take you!" . . . Someone had entered the room. It was Mrs. Burns, accompanied by a specialist. Without wasting words he walked to the bed, and uncovered the small sufferer. "He's very low, but seems to have just taken the crisis, and that with an effort little short of miraculous."

To-day I know that it was my desperate cry to God which brought him back—my call was answered. "The darkest hour precedes the dawn." When daylight came I could see that my boy had taken a change for the better. With renewed courage I continued the fight for his life. The doctor advised that we move to higher and sunnier levels, and before long the invalid was convalescent. But the extra expense had made serious inroads into our capital. Articles of furniture found their way to the auction. The sewing machine was traded in for six pounds, and another taken on weekly instalments. I obtained work as a seamstress—the one useful thing I could do to obtain money—and for a while I managed to keep things going.

No sooner was Gordon well than Claire became ill. I was almost beside myself with worry, overwork, lack of sleep and insufficient food. Somehow after the apparition of Kowhai I seemed to have lost confidence in myself. It did appear as though a curse pursued me. Principally I was concerned about my children, and therefore I decided to send to Helen for help. I knew she was proud of them, and I must not risk their lives for the sake of my own personal feelings, no matter how bitter the pill.

Several days had passed, when I was amazed to receive a letter from my husband: "I plead with you, dear wife, to return. I will study your wishes in everything—only say you forgive me, and allow me to see the children. Your penitent and loving husband, Len."

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The children were delighted at the idea of returning. They were my only care. For myself I felt disgruntled and doubtful of future happiness.

Helen and my husband were waiting on the wharf to greet us. I noticed that Leonard was much stouter—he had the appearance of a prosperous Jew. Helen was all for making peace between us, with a notion that affairs of the heart could be patched up like household linen. I kept silent. There are certain things that one tells to nobody. When seated in the cab, I had time to observe my husband more closely. Tears were on his cheeks. "It's because I am so happy to see you," he explained. "How the children have grown." Then, "Are you happy to be back, Katherine?"

"I'm not sure yet," I replied evasively.

By this time we had reached the house. Helen had decided to remain until the place was made straight. It was a memorable homecoming.

"Try to bear with Leonard, for the children's sake," said Helen. "Remember their future depends on you."

The gentler side of my nature bade me take my husband back to my heart; but pride kept me in a state of irritation—a frightful conflict within myself. I felt his

sin was unpardonable, and that we could never again know the frank, happy joy that had been ours. He winced when I imparted the information that, although sharing the same roof, we must live apart. So that sumptuous home, for it was a beautiful place, held all that money could buy—except love.

I cared nothing for society. I had a few favoured friends, amongst whom was June Keefe, my old school-mate. June was still unmarried. She arrived in her own motor car, then a rarity in New Zealand. She insisted that the children and I return with her to their farm, and I well remember the thrill of that first car ride. The change did everyone good.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

War.

NOW commenced a period of strange and varied events in my life, of which it is almost impossible to keep an orderly recollection.

The civilised world was in the throes of the Great War. One cold dawn we watched the main Expeditionary Force sail across Cook Strait; a long line of grey ships against the dim horizon.

The nation made sacrifices. There was plenty of work to be done. Wholeheartedly I threw myself into assisting charities, with the result that ministering to hapless humanity began to open my eyes, and my understanding. When I tended some twisted and tortured body, and caught a fervent "God bless you!" or words showing that my presence had brought to some sufferer a fragrance of days spent in the country, I felt that my days need no longer be wasted in vain repinings. I was happy in my work. God was quite as much in the slums as in the cloister.

Then came a rude awakening. A guild of so-called charity workers (whose creed I shall not disclose) approached me with a warning not to be too generous to

the poor. It came at a time when I was pathetically anxious to believe, trying to grasp the torch of real faith myself; yet these women with a denominational creed, for a time, extinguished the flame. My golden moment had passed—like so many of us who fail to grasp the Master's outstretched hand. . . .

During the remainder of the war I have little to recount, beyond the fact that the years were quiet and uninteresting compared with the subsequent years of toil, unrest and bitterness.

Towards the end of the war Leonard Lovell passed away. Our long estrangement, and his continued periods of absence from home, made it impossible that he should be greatly missed. With numbed feelings I followed his remains from the mortuary chapel to their last resting place. My sorrow, though containing many regrets, was tearless.

The final settlement of his business affairs, moreover, disclosed the fact that there was practically nothing left for his family. The war had taken toll of his business. A fierce pride rose within me. Fortunately we had a home, and work for women, both young and old, was plentiful while the war lasted. Claire secured a Government position, and once more I took work as a seamstress. By dint of hard work, long hours and fair dealing, I made enough capital to purchase a small business alongside a school; it comprised groceries, confectionery and school requisites. Seven days a week I worked in that shop—Sundays hardest of all, for it was the day for odd jobs, dressing windows, scrubbing floors, weighing up flour, sugar, onions, potatoes, etc., ready for the coming week. Most nights I had to darn and patch, and more than once I fell asleep over the sewing machine while putting a seat in the boy's pants. I never saw the light of day except through a window. To most people such a life would have been intolerable, but I was happy in the knowledge that I could maintain my family, if not in luxury, at least in comfort, and that they were healthy and content. The storms of life should not blow their

rude blasts upon them. Not that I coddled them; they were eager to help. Gordon, like most lads of his age, had ambitions for a paper round, and was also a big help in the store after school hours. Even baby Jan, now a sturdy chap of seven, played his part by delivering goods to nearby homes.

The business prospered and I banked money. The boys were growing apace; I must apprentice them to a trade. The Catholic clergy had objected strongly to my sending them to a public school, but made no attempt to assist me with their welfare, whereas the friendly schoolmaster offered kindly advice as to their future.

As I write thoughts come unbidden to my mind, and these particular ones bring with them a smile. Do my words appear rude to the priests; if so I offer them an apology; for to-day I have only love in my heart for the followers of all creeds, be they Jew or gentile. It seems to me a pity that religious people so often fail to understand the mysterious mental workings of their Master ("Who knoweth His own ideas"), unless they perceive them materially. For this reason alone I pen the following:—

As I have explained previously, my unpretentious little store was a beehive of industry, and not one minute did I loiter any day of the week. It is true that the shop nominally closed on the Sabbath, but that only made customers go to the back door, and although there was a private front entrance, rarely, if ever, did anyone ring there. Monday morning was the busiest of all mornings in my shop. School children clamoured for books, pens and pencils, and the majority had pennies for candy. Above the clatter and din of voices sounded a sharp peremptory ring on the front door bell. On opening it I beheld two clergymen, the local priest and a visiting missionary. As though it were a foregone conclusion that they would be welcome, they made as though to step inside.

"I'm sorry I can't ask you in," I apologised. "I'm far too busy now." The missionary father had a winning smile, but his voice had a note of authority. "You must attend the mission," he said firmly, "morning and night—bring your children as well." Then he added, "I hear you are bringing them up as heathens."

Thinking of my numerous duties, the little time I had to spare, and at the same moment my ear distracted by noises from the shop, where my little customers would probably be helping themselves, I again answered that I was too busy at the moment, that I had a family to keep, and only one pair of hands to do everything.

The pastor's gentle smile vanished. His voice took on a sterner note. "Do you never think of hell? When you lie down to sleep at night, are you not afraid that you might never wake again?"

My patience was exhausted. From the shop came the squabbling voices of children, followed by a crash of broken glass.

"I'm so very weary when I lie down at night," I replied desperately, "that I'd be glad never to wake up again." The local preacher nudged his companion. Hastily they withdrew to their waiting car. Already I felt condemned—a devil-possessed soul, damned, and ready for burning.

The incident left me rather ruffled, yet it surprises me to recollect how little of God there was in my life at that time, though I strove to be father and mother to my little family. Afterwards I realised that no more likely place in which to find the Christ than my shop could be found; His unseen presence coming in across the threshold, comforting a mother's loneliness, strengthening her hands, His own outstretched in blessing.

Soon, however, everything was forgotten in the maelstrom of horror which suddenly swept the world. I mean the influenza epidemic that spread rampant throughout our beautiful land.

Armistice day saw the city thronged with a joy-mad

populace, drunk with happiness at the news of peace after such a prolonged war. Almost immediately afterwards, a pestilence, as bad as the black death, and immeasurably more deadly than war, swept the Dominion. Whole families were wiped out. Bodies lay piled in heaps at the morgue and at the undertakers awaiting burial. The city was silent as the tomb, save for the rumbling of wagons carrying the dead. The gutters ran with disinfectants. A continuous procession of military vehicles passed my store at all hours of the day and night. Some were loaded with coffins, while others conveyed nurses and helpers to outlying districts.

Although right in the centre of a stricken area, the dread scourge never entered our home. My little shop was the only place open for miles round; consequently I became a depot for bread, milk, eggs and other things considered most potent in combating the plague. Trade was at a standstill. There was nobody available to deliver commodities. A baker, on discovering my shop open, brought loads of bread; likewise a milk vendor supplied large quantities of milk. My two boys brought fresh eggs from a nearby farm. Our combined efforts seemed to constitute the only life in that particular district. We tried to encourage each other, and our customers, never knowing but that that day might be our last.

"It is a relief to see the shop open," the baker greeted me.

"I'm glad to see you are still keeping on with the good work," I'd reply. Next the milkman arrived. "Lord! Mr. Brown, you've got the plague." His grin was hideous to behold; his teeth and mouth were positively black. "Only a strong gargle of Condyl's crystals," he explained; "but I've had a terrible shock . . ." and he related how, when calling at a house to deliver milk as usual, he thought it peculiar that the doors stood wide open, curtains flapping at the casements. A creepy, eerie atmosphere hung over the place, and his apprehension grew when his knock echoed with a hollow sound. Then he noticed a placard: "KEEP OUT! PLAGUE! IN-

MATES DEAD!" He needed no second warning, but fled.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

Struggling Alone.

AFTER another three years of shopkeeping I had an offer to sell. Besides which I had saved a considerable sum of money. I therefore decided to purchase a bungalow and set up housekeeping again.

We duly moved into a cottage overlooking Lyall Bay. It was like heaven after the confinement of a store. From my window I had an uninterrupted view of the ocean across Cook Strait; a scene particularly beautiful in moonlight, and magnificent in storm. Drinking in the beauty of the seascape, there lingered with me a gratefulness of spirit, born of the knowledge that my happiness was the fruit of my own labours, and therefore doubly sweet.

Since becoming a widow I had attracted the attention of several bachelors, men in search of a home and home comforts. Were this not so there would be something wrong with the laws of the universe, for was not man ever a hunter? Again it would be entirely to misrepresent human nature did I state that the opposite sex were of no interest to me whatever—at least some of them were; others were a source of amusement.

In this connection the figure of big Ginger David rises before me. Ginger was a commercial traveller, ruddy-complexioned, sandy-haired, well-groomed, polished in manner, and full of funny stories—some not too funny. I picture him when we first met, at the house of a mutual friend, who although blessed with a wonderful husband and three bonny children of her own, had become madly infatuated by Ginger. During the day he called at her house, and at night Tigue made the excuse to her husband that I needed her company, when, as a matter of fact, I

rarely ever saw her, for Ginger took her out in his car. By the way, all this incident happened before I purchased the store, and while I was supplementing my meagre income by contracting with a firm of manufacturers to make shirts—men's and boys' shirts, made in various styles, sizes and materials. In the summer months I would rise at 4 a.m., and continue cutting till breakfast time, which meal I spread on the corner of the table, the rest being covered with patterns, collarbands, scissors and an indescribable jumble of other things. The meal concluded, the children departed, and then the real business of the day began.

But withal I was not unhappy. I could earn sufficient to keep my loved ones in their own home, while out in the sunshine the birds twittered and sang. Placing the sewing machine before the open window where I could glimpse the sea, I paused to gaze at the Bay. Nowhere else had the water such a sparkling clarity. The sight stirred a certain subtle something, ethereal and elusive. My thoughts rambled about in a ridiculous fashion: Could I continue to live apart from the sophisticated world, with little more than my courage and zest to protect my offspring, although such instincts are as ancient as humanity? Again, life was sweet, and I was still young. Must I always live alone? So far I had never met anyone who mattered in the least to me. Perhaps I was too hard to please? I half wished Leonard had not died. In the haze outside the window I fancied the outline of my husband's face. Involuntarily I spoke his name—"Leonard!" He must be near me. I felt nervous and fearful, though it was broad daylight . . . seemingly life was full of currents. Like shifting sands. Who could tell what the end might be? Or the next day for that matter?

A knock on the back door startled me, coming as it did on the heels of my thought. Surely I did not expect to see Leonard's ghost when I opened the door. My heart fluttered wildly. My amazement was intense when I beheld no less a personage than Ginger David! At sight

of him my thoughts flew to my friend Tigie—once she had threatened to take her life. "Is anything the matter with Tigie?" I could think of no other reason why this man should call on me.

Instead of answering my question, he leaned forward and asked, with a smile, "Aren't you going to ask me in? I want to speak to you, to ask you something," adding, rather confusedly, "I knocked at the front entrance but could get no answer."

I remained quite still. The man must be crazy—or was it myself?

"May I?" He smiled an appeal.

"No! You may not," I said stiffly. "Say what's on your mind and hurry, because I'm fearfully busy."

"One is rather at a disadvantage speaking on the doorstep; it makes what I have to say difficult—but the truth is, I want to marry you."

I felt the blood mount to my cheeks, neck and brow. "How dare you come here to insult me?" My breath caught in my throat in anger. "You forget I'm Tigie's friend—that you are breaking up her home. I despise you for that, Ginger David, but now I hate you for yourself!"

His eyes gleamed with suppressed passion. "It's something even to have your hatred," and he tried to laugh it off, "but perhaps I've been too impulsive; should have waited to get better acquainted; but I'm in earnest about wanting to marry you, and you are the first woman who has drawn that confession from me."

I felt fearful and nervous, but tried to hide the fact from him. As though he read my thoughts, he said reassuringly: "I wouldn't harm you, or try to force you against your will. . . . I'm really very much in love, for the first time in my life. It's something I can't understand myself."

His words filled me with disgust, but before I realised what he was doing, he had caught my hand and kissed it. "Good-bye, little woman." Before I could speak he had disappeared through the gate.

I went back to the sewing machine shaking in every limb. Somehow the warmth had faded from the sunshine. Tigue's lover had asked me to marry him. In the first place I disliked ginger-headed people; then Tigue had confided to me that her unborn child was his. Rightly or wrongly she was mad about him. It was all very sordid. "The girl who marries David will be lucky," she was wont to say, "and the day he marries I'll not want to go on living."

I felt that I could not sit at the machine; the whirring treadle maddened me. Was fate trying to play some further scurvy trick upon me? The boys coming in from school made a welcome break. I looked with dismay at my work; it was only half-finished, and that meant working at night. While I set the tea and talked with the children, the thought of Ginger and his absurd proposition faded from my mind, and not until several hours later did it again obtrude itself.

At last the children were asleep, and I had been the rounds to tuck them in, the same as Mother Baptiste used to do when I was at school. Returning to the kitchen, I settled down once more to the sewing. The thought of Mother Baptiste brought flashes of the past, and I could fancy I heard her voice calling Mary Crosby "to get her something out of the bag of rag." Could she but look in at this minute, the dear soul? How ardently I had loved her! Leaving the machine, I returned to the table piled high with shirts. The most tedious part of the day's work was making button-holes and sewing on buttons. In the stillness the loud ticking of the kitchen clock seemed to fill the room. It was close to midnight. What a lot of precious time I had wasted. I was overtired and lonely, yet with renewed effort I plied my needle.

I rose to close the window; outside was bright moonlight, but I dared not loiter to admire it. Turning, I beheld, from out of the gloom of the hall, a man coming through the door into the beam of the lamp, carrying his boots in his hand, and himself evidently full of liquor. It was

Ginger David! For the space of a minute we stood and eyed each other.

"How did you get in? And what have you come for?" I managed to gasp at last.

"I don't know quite." He answered stupidly.

"But you must know," I insisted. Once I had read about a Salvation Army woman who had handled a drunken man so long as she hid her fear of him.

"Don't look so frightened. . . I know I'm a fool, but I'll be all right in a little while," he pleaded drunkenly, and seating himself at the machine, he sprawled his arms over the top. "I thought I was heading for home. Everything has got mixed up—wrong . . . Tigue and I have quarrelled about you." He made a desperate effort to control himself; then his head fell on his arms and he slept.

The loud tick-tock of the clock seemed an accompaniment to his snores. Anger was useless. Sudden tears began to start from my eyes, and I resumed my work. From time to time I glanced at the sprawled figure. My fear of the man vanished. He seemed terribly unhappy about something; besides, I knew that I could call upon the children if he grew violent. The last button was sewn on, and now to rid myself of this most unwelcome visitor! I would rouse him with some black coffee. I made the beverage. With a cup in one hand, I shook him roughly with the other.

"Here! Wake up! Ginger David! It's time you were on your way. The neighbours won't forget to talk about your car being outside my gate for half the night. He raised his head, sobered and puzzled. He looked at his boots on the floor. "I imagine I've blundered," he began. "Another time you can call and explain all that, but for the present, drink this coffee and get out of my house. I'm tired and need rest. You're a cad to upset me."

He gulped down the coffee, reached for his boots, which he did not even wait to fasten, but left without a word. Hastily I bolted the door, my heart in a tumult now that it was all over.

I decided to sleep with my daughter for company, and was preparing to retire when the front door bell pealed loudly. "Who is it?" I called. By this time the children were awake.

"Is my wife here?" asked Tigue's husband.

"No, I've not seen her to-day, Mr. Bond." My fear for Tigue's safety increased at his words. By this time I had reached the door.

"Come inside and tell me."

"I've been waiting outside ever since that scoundrel with the car arrived. I fancied my wife might have been with him."

"Oh, no! He's my friend, Mr. Bond." I lied for Tigue's sake. She must be shielded at any cost.

"Oh! . . . I'm sorry to have made such a silly mistake, but Tigue has caused me endless worry of late. You've noticed that she's been drinking heavily, I guess?"

"It's a great pity, Mr. Bond, but she blames you for most of it. She has told me how lonesome she was through the years when you were swotting for the Bar, and now it's just as bad. If men could only realise that a wife is not goods and chattels that he has purchased; that she is a partner, and human, there would be less need for divorce courts."

"Thank you. I've never looked at it in that light before." The poor chap went off with a bright look on his face. "I'll try and make good with Tigue. Good-night!" were his parting words.

For the second time in my life I had shouldered another's disgrace, only this time I knew the cause.

My next proposal of marriage was very different. Captain James Robb was master of an inter-colonial liner. In appearance he was dark, sleek, debonaire and altogether charming with the charm of those who follow the sea as a calling. When in port at Wellington he visited at the home of his niece, Esther Withers, and fell in love

with my picture hanging on the wall. Persistent invitations reached me through Esther that I be the captain's guest at afternoon tea. At first I refused; I was not interested in her uncle. She pleaded so well—or perhaps it was that I grew curious—and, then again, there was so very little pleasure in my life—all work and no play—that at length I agreed to pay the captain a visit.

Arrived on board, we were shown to the master's quarters. James Robb made a brave showing in his uniform and gold braid. He was all that Esther had said of him, and more. Literally I fell head over heels in love with him. I found it impossible to resist him. He whispered that I was adorable, much nicer than the photograph he had fallen in love with. To all of which I listened, wonderfully happy.

He said that he had asked for a transfer to the mail packet between Lyttelton and Wellington, so that he could have more time to be with me. Then he took me in his arms and kissed me.

Had anyone told me twenty hours earlier that such happiness could be possible I would have said it was ridiculous. Yes, Captain James was nice.

Then a thought flashed on me. "I hope you're not married?" I said breathlessly. He stood still, taken aback by my question.

"I want everything to be candid between us," he replied, "and I don't mind your asking; you've every right to ask. But not now; another time, for the whole story of my married life is very painful. A living death, if you could know what that means. I'd hoped that with you I might forget."

"Tell me about it, Captain Jim, if you think I'm a pal. I'll decide afterwards." For a time he seemed lost for words.

"Life can be very terrible," he said brokenly, "and I hope you won't despise me."

"No, I certainly won't do that. I understand, being married doesn't prevent people from falling in love with other people."

"How understanding you are!"

I nodded. Then he told me his story. He had no love for his wife, and yet for their two children's sake he wanted to treat her rightly. To speak about her was always painful. In fact, the whole thing was hellish. He had married a clergyman's daughter. Married her because she was the plainest woman he could find. He thought her ugliness would ensure her fidelity to him. But she had no real love for him. All she wanted was freedom from the vicarage and the position he gave her as a captain's wife. She had turned out an infernal nag. He was forced to leave her. She had gone back to her people, and Captain Jim's heart was sore over the loss of his little boy and girl. "It's for you to decide whether we shall meet again, Katherine"—the name slipped out unnoticed. His eyes sought mine passionately.

"Give me time to think," I pleaded, "for it's no small thing you ask, Captain Jim. When you return from your next trip I will give you my answer."

Before he came again fate had decided on other ways and means for each of us. For one thing, I with my family had moved to the store, where time flew so quickly that I had almost forgotten the captain. Then one day I read in the paper about a mail steamer which had replaced the ferry between the two islands of New Zealand. It had been piled on the rocks at the entrance to Wellington Harbour, and Captain James Robb was master! The captain's account read:

"On nearing the heads, we encountered a thick fog—so thick that I ordered soundings to be taken every few seconds. Slowly the ship nosed her way through the treacherous channels. . . ."

The company gave no quarter if their ships were not on time. It was Captain Robb's first trip on the coveted vessel. Imagine his feelings as, with a tearing, grating bump, she settled fast on the rocky bottom. It was all over as far as he was concerned. That he had served in the company from a small boy, or that no great damage was done to the ship, nor were any lives lost, all this

mattered not in the least. Captain Robb was disrated. The best the company could do was to offer him the command of a sailing tramp ship.

Late one afternoon while busy in the shop I was surprised to receive a visit from Captain Jim. He had called at our last address and was told of the change. He began at once to unfold his plans. It would be even better on the sailing ship, he said. "You shall have everything you want, and see the world."

"Please do not tempt me to leave my children, Jim. My heart aches to go with you, but my children have first place in my life."

In vain he pleaded. He would even consider taking the children rather than lose me. His ship sailed from Sydney, and he had made the trip to New Zealand to beg me to accompany him.

"No, Jim, it cannot be! Do you think I like working among groceries?"

"You don't love me then?" he asked in a hard tone.

"You know that's not the reason. It's my children, Jim; I can't desert them." But he little knew how near I was to breaking down under his pleading.

"The boat sails for Sydney at ten," he said finally. "I will 'phone you at nine. You will be ready to come with me—I won't take 'no' for an answer."

He little knew the sacrifice I made in letting him go. How I longed for the joy of belonging to a man like him. When the telephone bell rang I never answered. I tried to forget him; to put him out of my heart; but his words burned into my brain: "But I shall love you so well, Katherine. We shall be so happy. I shall not fail you ever. I love you! I love you!"

"Oh, God," I cried, trying to shut out his pleading, "never let me be parted from my babies! That's all I ask. Spare me till they are grown up and no longer need a mother's care." And God has kept His part of the bargain. To-day all my family are married and happy. What more has any mother the right to expect? My half of the

bargain with God was not to answer the telephone that night when Captain Jim rang.

Months later a sailing vessel was torpedoed on the high seas, and her master was Captain James Robb.

I had several other offers of marriage, but was never tempted by any of them; nor have I space to recount what might well be written in a few words, "for a widow's a woman who knows."

CHAPTER XXXV.

Peaceful Times.

A LAZY contentment and happiness enfolded me as I lay day-dreaming in the cushioned loveliness of a sunny window. Then in a flash it came to me—my former years of life had been spent like a groping Cyclops around his cave. My trials and struggles from babyhood had strengthened my will; and now I realised that there was only one directing Mind, and that man was the agent of this mighty power. I sat up quickly as though moved by electricity. There were so many things I was sure I could do in the world to help mankind; not merely working in a store. I found myself watching the clock. Soon the children would arrive. Finally I managed to concentrate on cooking the evening meal. At six o'clock we sat down to dinner. The boys told the day's happenings in loud voices. Claire had been promoted, her salary was now quite a comfortable one. My cup of happiness was full. How could I have thought for one moment of leaving them? Mother love is nearest to God's love. Yet how mercifully is hidden the cruel pang when the children leave us to make homes of their own.

We had only occupied our new home a few months when I sold it again at a big profit. Then began a search for another new home. Kelburn and a view of the harbour decided me in favour of a pretty bungalow—a veritable doll's house of a place. Here I spent several very happy

years, until the time came for me to part with my children. First Claire was married. It was a hard blow this parting from my only girl; I take it most mothers feel this way. Next, Gordon went to sea. The war had upset his plans for learning a trade. Still, a few years abroad would be quite equal to an equivalent time at college, at any rate as regards general knowledge. It made a man of my boy. There was only baby Jan left, and he was still at school. Just the two of us in the house, just a bit lonely.

I tried all sorts of hobbies—a car (which was then considered a luxury); tramping over the hills with my faithful collie dog, but eventually I settled down to making a garden. Every inch of ground I converted into flower beds. The fences were crowded with sweet peas; pansies bordered the walks; a miniature lawn sprang into existence, also rockeries—all the result of my own labour. I did everything myself except the concrete paths and terraced walls. It was amazing how quickly the time passed. Whole days I spent in that garden. There is something so companionable about the sweet scents and bright colours; they carried me back to my childhood. Had I been superstitious I might have thought it a coincidence that a giant macrocarpa tree grew beside the gate. In the evening I was wont to sit on the garden seat beneath its branches, inhaling the perfume of honeysuckle, violets, Sweet Williams, and feasting my eyes on my work. It was a garden to be proud of. It was so peaceful.

At times the evening stillness brought memories unbidden. As I viewed my pretty cottage, the light from within reflected through its tiny casements in rose-hued shades—before me rose another cottage, plain and unadorned, the simple home of a pioneer couple setting up housekeeping in a strange, wild country. Beside the door was a drooping willow showing the faint yellow of the turning leaf, when last I had seen it. I pictured myself going to revisit the home of my childhood. The sleepy little village of Taradale with the artesian water running in the concrete channel through the streets; the green lanes with the shady trees, where rested the brightly-

painted caravans of encamped gypsies. On past the brick kiln—in fancy I heard the burr of a millwheel and the call of a bellbird. . . .

"Mother! Are you coming in to tea or are you going to sit there all night?" Jan's voice roused me with a start from my reverie. "Yes, dear, I'm coming this minute," I replied, struggling to collect my thoughts. So completely had I gone back into those bygone days that I found it difficult, coming suddenly into the light, to realise that we used electricity and gas cookers instead of candles and a camp oven.

Gordon had been home on leave from his ship, and when he departed he took his brother with him. "It's a wonderful life for a boy, mother," he pleaded. "The sea will do your baby a world of good (Jan was nearly 18). Look how it's built me up! Let him go, mother, if only for one trip!"

And so the nest was empty, and I found myself alone, back to where I had started. With folded hands I sat beside the window, gazing down the harbour. Then I would wander through the silent house, as many another mother had doubtless done, and again back to the window. When I realised how modern I had become, in comparison with the girl who had landed in Wellington from the convent wearing mittens on her hands, the thought startled me. It appeared to me that I had reached the peak of my ambition, and now that my family was reared I must retire into obscurity, so to speak. Such thoughts as these made me restive, for I knew that my hands could never remain idle. The dainty home and my little car could not save me from the weary, dragging hours. It was all kind of lonesome without the children. We had been such close pals.

There were, of course, intervals when my sons' ships were in port, but these were treats few and far between. Proudly the boys brought home their companions; the house was alive with laughter and noise for a few days, only to feel more desolate than ever when they had gone.

It appeared that I had reached the crossroads of life, as every one of us must do at some period, and that in future I would have to eat many breakfasts alone. Through the long, weary winter I tried to think out some definite plan whereby I could have the boys at home with me. I had not yet reached the stage where we ask of God to supply our every longing, and our true desires; that was to come later. Only when driven to extremity, such as the fear of losing my children by death, had I cried out to Heaven. It was the longest winter I could remember. Most of my waking hours were spent in the bay window looking towards the docks. There seemed to be an everlasting ache in my heart, and I told myself that life was over for me—only self-pity, as I know now. Then something woke within my breast—was I a worm, or a woman, to be squirming thus? Something useless, encumbering the earth?

Looking round the room, its luxury struck me as foolishness when compared with the poverty of my soul. I would go out into the world again and live; get right back into the thick of things. Perhaps I might meet a real man, who could tell? In times of great dispiritedness I would long for a man's strong arm, someone of understanding to whom I could cry out in my loneliness, but I knew no one I could like well enough even to consider as a friend. I had not yet learned that the only real happiness is making others happy.

How time changes everything. Speaking of time, I might mention a little incident which proves this statement. One day while riding in a tramcar I caught sight of Father Eugene as he walked along the street. I looked for the angelic expression which had captivated my first innocent love, when I was a novice at Meanee—a love so pure that it befitted angels. Scarcely could I restrain my mirth at the thought of that far-off time, when I beheld the thin, wizzened features and painfully slim figure of the middle-aged priest. Truly *tempora mutantur nos*.

Perhaps it was the sight of Eugene that decided me to dispose of my property and go into business once more.

Instinctively I felt that my boys would love to be with me. After several consultations with them it was agreed between us. There was a boom in houses at this time, and from the sale of mine we were soon in possession of a sum in cash in excess of my greatest expectation.

It was like starting life all over again. First the boys and I purchased a licensed hotel, and held that for two years. But life as a hotel-keeper was most unpleasant to my mind, and I was glad to dispose of it. We next purchased a lounge and dining rooms. This was a big venture, necessitating a large staff to run it. There was no time for loneliness or day-dreaming now. It was a very happy period of my existence. We made money, too. However, the hours were long and the work heavy. After two years we again sold for cash, making a good profit.

Then the time arrived when Gordon wished to marry, and this ended our partnership. With my younger son I journeyed north to Auckland and made it the city of my adoption. We took a flat having a balcony with a fine view of the beautiful harbour. As I leaned from my window I told myself, for the twentieth time, that I could not settle down until I had made a trip to Napier. I had a deep longing to visit the place of my birth, also to place a tombstone on my dear parents' grave. To many people this may appear to be merely sentiment, but to me it was a most sacred duty.

As I have before mentioned, my life appears to go in cycles. How long it seemed since I left Taradale, and now I was returning. But, strangest of all, I was to be accompanied by no less a person than dear good Mummie Trow! While I was at the lounge in Palmerston North this real friend of my mother called to see me—my feelings can better be imagined than expressed. So it happened that we agreed to make a sort of pilgrimage to re-visit the scene of our earlier history.

We arrived at Napier in the afternoon. Mummie Trow was wearied after the long motor journey and decided to rest for the night at a friend's place at the Spit, saying she would join me at Taradale the following

morning. Meanwhile I continued my journey by way of Meanee, so as to call at the little church and obtain from the register the exact dates of my parents' deaths before placing the order for the tombstone.

How can I express my feelings as the car sped along roads once so familiar, then almost forgotten, but now leaping back at me as though I had only left yesterday. "Not so fast," I ordered the driver. "I want to pick up landmarks!"

Now we cross the Meanee bridge. As a child it had always appeared such a huge structure, yet now it looked like a culvert, and the river was silted from the floods. The hotel and the Post Office! Good gracious, how small they were! It gave me a sort of shock. My eyes searched the roadside for the sight of a familiar face, but saw not one.

A much greater shock awaited me further on. The seminary, monastery and convent had entirely disappeared. Only the little lonely parish church remained. It lay half-hidden by unkempt hedges, and behind the church stood the desolate old house of the resident priest. To say that I was transfixed would be to put it mildly. Always I had pictured the place as I had last seen it. When I became conscious of the driver's stare of surprise, I explained that I should be some time at the church, that he could drive on to Taradale and return for me in two hours' time.

Apparently the floods which had so badly affected the mission property had not the same effect in Taradale and Meanee; therefore the clergy and the nuns had resolved to remove the convent and seminary buildings to Maryvale, near Greenmeadows.

A storm had been threatening all day, and now, as I made my way along the well-remembered avenue of poplars, so gnarled and old, and with leaves beginning to golden into shades of pale yellow, a peal of thunder rumbled in the distance. As I listened to its ominous sound I had a feeling that I wandered in the world alone, for the people whom I had known were for ever at peace.

This was a totally different world, a new planet, or how could so great a change have been accomplished? The silence grew until I fancied I could hear myself think. The leaves on the poplars moved restlessly; the gloom deepened and seemed alive with watching eyes; ghostly arms reached out to stop me. The murmur of the leaves became more distinct—they whispered my name: "Katherine!—Bride of Christ! Come back! Katherine! The Bride of Christ!" My heart beat to suffocation. I dared not look round but hurried on and passed to the other side of the church, along the path that led across the rustic bridge to the convent. At last the spell was broken. Before me stretched open spaces where once stood the rambling buildings of the cloister—now sheep were grazing peacefully in the paddocks. The scenes of my childhood had completely vanished. I leaned on the broken railing of the bridge which I had so often crossed when it spanned a swiftly-flowing stream; now it was only a sluggish trickle among debris that had silted down with the flood waters.

I was recalled from my musings by another peal of thunder, this time much closer; a blinding flash lighted up the walls of the church, the door of which stood open. For one brief moment I fancied I heard a strain of sweetest music from within—then another crash rattled among the hills, and the first large drops of the thunder-shower splashed on my face. Hastily I retraced my steps in the direction of the church and stepped across the threshold. How many times had I entered by this side portal during my childhood? Was I dreaming? It all seemed so unreal.

Within, the gloom was intense and all was hushed. A lamp burned before the altar, the red wick flickered fitfully and shone on the tall brass candlesticks. My feet made no sound as I drew near the altar rail, and flash after flash of lightning periodically lighted up the place. When I calculated I was near enough I put out my hand and waited for the next flash, for in the darkness I could see nothing. The flash came, and I knelt down on the altar step. Thunder now followed the lightning with a

terrifying crash. Right over the church it seemed, and heavy rain rattled upon the shingled roof. After the crash came silence, then another flash that made my surroundings as clear as day. My glance was rivetted on the altar, and for a few seconds I ceased to breathe—for there stood Father Jardin, his hands raised in blessing. A white light shone from his vestments, and when he again raised his hands to trace the sign of the Cross there arose from the body of the church a rustle and a murmur as from a congregation of people. Swiftly I turned my head—the church was packed. Vaguely I tried to think why I was kneeling there at the altar alone. Then another vivid flash and crash of thunder, and the weird effect was gone. I was alone. At the same instant I could have taken oath that something brushed past me.

The next minute I had reached the door, and stepped outside, where I stood trembling in the rain and filled with wondering fear at the strange, unearthly thing which I had witnessed. A shudder ended my train of thought. A puff of wind had closed the church door behind me! I lost no time in reaching the gates of that haunted place. Phantom forms lurked behind each poplar bole as I dashed across the space which separated me from the waiting car.

"Anything the matter?" asked the driver. "You look as if you'd seen a ghost."

"I should have come in the daylight," I replied, "it's too dark to find anything."

The storm had passed and was rumbling away in the distance. Bright stars shone through the broken banks of clouds as we made our way back to Taradale. The car stopped before the old wooden hostel which I remembered so well; where, as a child, I had danced on the bar counter.

After ordering the car for eleven next morning, I booked a room and retired at once. But I could not woo sleep to my pillow until the early hours, for my brain was flooded by memories, and my heart was full of a nervous dread, after the vision in the church. There surely must

be a meaning in it all. But for divers reasons I decided to keep the experience to myself.

“Wake up, Katherine! I’m wondering if you are trying to sleep your head off!” It was a dream then, after all. I sat up and rubbed my eyes. Mummie Trow.

“Oh, I thought I was dreaming. I can’t believe half the strange things that are happening to me.” I looked at her with glistening eyes as I thought of the long-departed years. “Life is full of surprises, don’t you think? We are told not to look back, but do you think there’s any reason why we shouldn’t?”

“I only know how wonderful it is to be together again,” smiled dear Mummie Trow, adding, “but do you know how late we are, Katherine?”

“No, but it was late when I fell asleep, so I can’t be expected to rise early.”

“Did you find the parish priest?” was her next question.

“It was too dark to see anything, therefore I did not disturb him. We are going to call on him this morning.”

While I was speaking the toot of a motor horn announced that our car was waiting. I jumped out of bed and scrambled through my toilet, and soon we were speeding back to the church.

How different it looked in the sunlight. I realised the difference even more fully when we entered. The interior presented an unkempt, unattractive appearance; floor-boards had rotted with the flood waters; beside the door dangled a frayed bell-rope; the baptismal font, blackened with age, stood in an opposite corner. The only bright things were the flowers on the altar and the red flame in the hanging glass bowl. The sun filtered through stained glass windows, but barely outlined the figures of the saints through soft, waving cobweb draperies. I remembered the Sunday that the windows were consecrated—it had called for the ceremonial rites of a pontifical High Mass. I walked up the aisle and stood before the altar, looking

up at the statue of Christ, the one that had won my childish homage. Now its brightly-painted appearance was faded and tarnished with the passage of years.

Here my thoughts were interrupted by the entrance of Mummie Trow with the Rev. Father Dugan. Together we entered the vestry. The place smelt of stale incense, mould and decay. The priest turned the pages of the faded register. I saw my father's bold handwriting where he had entered the date of my own birth. My lips trembled when I replied to a question by Father Dugan. Then we were outside in the sunshine again. Thanking the good Father for his courtesy, we entered our car and drove through Taradale and on over the hill to the cemetery.

Mummie Trow talked volubly about the days of her own youth. "That's where David and me were married," she said as we passed the English church. "David was a good one, Katherine," she repeated several times; "a rare, good husband was my David." How could the dear soul understand that I wished to be quiet? As we neared the cemetery my heart was up in my throat. In a few minutes I would stand beside the graves of two who had always been enshrined within my soul.

At last we entered the gates. Yes, I remembered now. It all came back to me. How strange to be there beside my mother's grave! "Mother!" I uttered her name aloud. She seemed to caress me from the tomb. With a sob I went on my knees, and, kneeling thus, I found a great peace. The long, lonely, weary years were wiped out. Around me on the grasses and among the tombstones danced shadows of light, and wisps of lost clouds floated like bits of delicate white lace in the blue dome above. My vagrant thought and wayward fancies left me, and somehow I seemed to understand so much that before had been hidden. I had learned in life's hard school. Swiftly my past rose before me. The short years of my married life seemed almost a paradox, and yet I had no more to complain of than hundreds of other women; also, I had no regrets at leaving the cloister. Henceforth I would spurn human theories and timidities—I would walk

with God. It was as though someone spoke these things clearly to me.

"Come and see my mother's headstone," called Mummie Trow from the Church of England section. I got up in answer to her call, but I felt I wanted to remain on the sacred spot which once held the dust of that golden-haired, blue-eyed little mother of mine.

I had almost forgotten the errand which brought me there. To my surprise I discovered that the plot was surrounded by a wooden railing, and a small cross surmounted by a shield marked the double grave. The lettering on the shield was defaced and difficult to decipher, but my heart filled with gratitude to my dear guardian who had erected it there.

Looking around the ground, I noticed a tall shaft not many paces away. It marked the tomb of the pioneer priests. "Father Jardin," I read on one side, and again my eyes grew misty.

On the farther side of the Morgans' grave rested the remains of Mrs. Quirk; then, a little way to the left Mr. and Mrs. Norton—they were all there. Handsome stones marked their resting places, almost as if the society of Taradale, who had measured their social status by glittering buggy wheels in the early days, were still making them in death. These things made me doubly glad that I had come. My humble little mother should not remain neglected any longer. It was some hours before we returned to Taradale, but my order for the headstone must be placed in Napier.

Before leaving Taradale I went to see my old home. Mummie Trow knew the inmates, and asked if I might look through. Like one in a dream, I found myself before the door of that tiny house where I was born, and which held such wonderful memories, both tragic and heavenly. How small it looked. Before crossing the threshold I stood for a moment to gaze at the old macrocarpa tree. The old fellow seemed to speak to me. I looked hungrily at the gate, on which I was wont to swing when waiting for my father. The occupants of the house were talking

and laughing with Mummie Trow. I was secretly wishing that they would leave me for a while, till I had gazed my fill at every inch of that sacred shrine which had held her—"the Golden Wahine."

The smallness of the place gave me the greatest shock—it had appeared quite a mansion to me when a child. The tiny hall where I had romped; the sitting room with the two small cupboards on either side of the grated fireplace. I almost expected to see antimacassars on the chairs; the front bedroom with the trestles beside the bed, and the statue of the Virgin on the wall. We reached the kitchen. I closed my eyes—almost I believed I smelt Ann's currant loaf. I saw all these things which would be forever imprinted on my mind.

Outside in the back yard I went to lean against the trunk of the willow beside the door. Nothing had changed here. At the end of the flagged yard the artesian well sent out a small flow of clear, sparkling water. I stooped to cool my brow and throat.

"Thank you, Mrs. West, for your kindness in allowing me to see my old home," I said on leaving, but I whispered to Mummie Trow, as we returned to the car, "I hope to buy it back some day." In Napier that afternoon I ordered the fittings for my parents' grave, and I included a floral tribute enclosed in glass to be laid on Father Jardin's tomb. The card read, "Remembrance from Katherine."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

The Earthquake.

HOME again in Auckland, I tried to settle down, but without success. "Yet remorseless time moves on, to form and fashion our lives; sooner or later we must acknowledge the great mysteries of the universe."

Eventually I set about writing short stories, but my health began to give way, and my days and nights became

a horrible nightmare, scarcely was I ever free from pain. To my physical sufferings was added the horror of seeing my person become tremendously obese. I gained flesh so rapidly that I soon topped the scale at thirteen stone. As my height is only five feet, I was very unhappy over my condition. I had the advice of several specialists, and the last one ordered a surgical belt. I must be strapped inside a hoop, otherwise, he said, I would soon lose the use of my legs. Forthwith I returned to Wellington. The lady who made surgical belts was a personal friend, and I stayed with her. Madame Decazes was French, and she termed it "in a suit of harness." "Ha! ha!" she laughed, and lit a cigarette. "It's what your doctor ordered." I had to admit that I felt most comfortable. "Now for a cup of tea," she called to a small maid.

It was a beautiful morning in the month of February, 1931. The time was about 11 o'clock, and we sat chatting over the teacups. Presently the pictures on the wall began to swing in a most alarming fashion.

"It's an earthquake!" cried madame, as I followed her to the front entrance. Although the shock was severe, little damage was done, and we returned to the house. Almost immediately the telephone rang, and madame took up the receiver. I heard her cry in dismay.

"What is it?" I asked as she staggered back to her chair, her face ashen-white. "Napier and Hastings have been razed to the ground," she managed to gasp ere she fainted away.

With the help of the maid we brought her round. She had a mother and sister living in Hawke's Bay, and feared the worst. When she had recovered she explained how, in three minutes, both towns had been wrecked, and it was feared that hundreds of lives were lost. Fires were spreading among the wreckage, and sailors from a cruiser, then anchored at the breakwater, were organising relief work under the supervision of the commander.

Later news disclosed that it was the greatest disaster in New Zealand's history. There were fissures across the roads big enough to hold a motor car, bridges had col-

lapsed and roads were blocked. In spite of this madame was determined to set out for Napier. She must reach her mother and sister with as little delay as possible. She begged me to accompany her. If she thought I could be of any use to her, I promised readily.

It took some hours to obtain a pass to travel to the stricken area, but as madame was as well known as any medical doctor, a place was found for us in a van which conveyed press reporters to the scene of the tragedy. Leaving Wellington at 2 a.m. the next day, we arrived in Napier at noon.

The town presented scenes of devastation almost impossible to describe. Sorrow, terrible and indefinable, looked out from every face. "We thought the end of the world had come," said one of the male helpers. It was the end of the world for hundreds of poor creatures, some of whom were trapped in burning buildings.

To madame's great relief we found her people unharmed, though terribly shaken. Her brother-in-law was out in his car rendering what assistance he could to those of his neighbours who had fared badly. Madame's frail little mother told how it had started with a rumble and a tremor, when, before they could think what had happened, pictures and crockery had crashed to the floor. Timber rending and bricks falling added to the panic; people rushed into the streets, faces white with terror. The horror of that day will never be forgotten, nor will the exact number of persons who perished ever be known.

A sailor from the cruiser at the breakwater told us how the sea had left the beach and run back, leaving the vessel high and dry, and in imminent danger of capsizing; then it surged forward again as though lashed by a fury of strong winds. They saw the town crumbling before their eyes like a pack of cards. Thick clouds of dust covered the wreckage, and smoke and flames added to the destruction. The contours of the coast were twisted like a horrible nightmare, and pandemonium reigned everywhere. While he talked the earth was still trembling beneath our feet.

A few days later madame's brother-in-law took us round in his car to view the disaster and gain some idea of its magnitude. Everywhere was to be seen twisted and distorted buildings, giving one a queer sensation that only rightly belongs to a drunken person. Houses hung skew-wise from perilous angles over the cliffs, or lay smashed at the bottom of gulleys. The Bluff hill had largely fallen into the sea, covering the railway and roadway and burying the traffic passing at the time. The hospital had fared badly, especially in the nurses' new home. While we stood before the ruins, very poignant memories filled my heart, as the sight of the familiar landscape stirred me deeply.

Madame's brother-in-law had worked all through the night of the disaster, assisting in carrying out the wounded. Doctors operated in the open air under torchlight in the endeavour to save lives. The place was a shambles. From the debris they had taken a nurse who, at the time of the earthquake, was evidently wheeling a patient along the front hall to pass out through the glass doors into the garden. The first shock must have jammed the heavy doors. Frantically she had banged the heavy glass with hands and arms; then the edifice crumbled and she was buried. When found her flesh was completely torn from both arms; the bare bones gave mute testimony to her heroic efforts to save her patient.

The inner harbour, or Spit, presented a queer appearance. It was drained, and raised many feet. Boats rested on high, dry land. The earthquake had added seven thousand acres of fertile land to the town and enhanced the parade on the beach. Napier had always been a pretty little town, with its wide esplanade planted with tall Norfolk pines and lined with flower gardens. How often I had sat there in my childhood, dreaming and gazing out to the open sea.

The new Napier which has risen phoenix-like from the ashes has low-built, earthquake-proof buildings painted in various attractive colours. The little town shows few scars of the terrible disaster—only a memory remains.

Before madame and I left Napier I expressed a wish

to visit the Taradale cemetery. As every tombstone in the various churchyards was shattered, I expected to find the newly-erected stone on my parents' grave in a similar condition. Every headstone in the Taradale cemetery was down, "smashed to smithereens," as madame put it—all except the tombstone on the Morgan grave; it had not moved a fraction. Madame, who was greatly interested in signs and tokens, avowed solemnly that it was a message from the unseen world. Turning to me, she said, "You will do something big in the world before you leave it."

As we turned to go, my eyes fell on the priests' tomb; then on a floral broken glass wreath, and a card on the grass. The shaft from Father Jardin's tomb had fallen on my poor little offering. "What does that mean, madame? See, it had three other sides on which to fall; why on my token of gratitude to the old priest?"

"He does not require material proofs," she answered softly.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

Rejuvenation

SIX years have passed since the Napier earthquake, during which time many strange things have happened to me, and far have I travelled. But the greatest transformation is in myself—a conversion and a miracle have taken place. Miracles happen to-day as surely as they did nineteen centuries ago. Very often God uses strange vessels His wonders to unfold. Probably my fleshly ills were sent to open the eyes of my understanding, for each day my weight increased in such an alarming manner as almost to blot out the power of thought. Like Sinbad's Old Man of the Sea, it would not be shaken off, by belts or other means.

From earliest childhood I had the soul of an artist, and loved beautiful things. Deep in my heart lay a

dominant desire for human affection. It seemed to overpower me, but how could I hope for love? Who would want such an unlovely creature? Bewildered and distracted, I stood before my mirror. I turned from left to right and viewed my bulk from different angles, then stood still to gaze in despair at my reflection. Impatiently I tore off the irritating wig which I was compelled to wear because my hair had fallen out. In the glass I beheld the almost exact counterpart of a fat Chinaman I had once seen in a picture. The sight sickened me, but still I could not tear myself away from the awful sight. Life could be very terrible, I decided; there did not seem anything to live for, and, secretly, I determined to end it all.

Here the entrance of my little maid caused a distraction.

"Have you forgotten the appointment with the hair specialist?" she reminded me.

"No, Bessie, but I have lost faith in doctors and specialists. How can violet rays, or any other rays for that matter, put hair back on my bald pate? 'Phone the hairdresser, Bessie, and cancel the appointment!" I settled back on the couch, with black despair pressing me down.

Bessie had been with me several years, and was like one of the family. She lingered now to gossip.

"My mother knows of a place where they use an electric machine to beat the fat off," she ventured. "She says it's remarkably effective, that is, if you can put up with the whipping of the belt." My ear caught at her words like a drowning person clutches at a straw. Perhaps there was hope for me after all. I lost no time in reaching the address given me by Bessie. I would make a last bid to free myself from this obnoxious mountain of flesh.

The belt treatment included a course of physical exercises. I contrived to get to my knees, roll on the floor, and then struggle up again. At first it seemed to be a physical impossibility that I could perform such a feat, and I eyed my instructress with the thought that she must

be insane to ask me to do it. Still it was accomplished, and repeated several times. I was all "hot and bothered," but nevertheless felt better. I found myself laughing for the first time in many weary months. It is surprising the transformation laughter brings to a serious face. I glanced at the studio mirror—hope looked from my eyes—from that hour I had but one desire—to exercise. It was only the miracle of human blood being compelled to circulate, that was all. The harder I exercised the faster did my superfluous, fatty tissue disappear. In six weeks I had reduced two stones; in fourteen months the total reduction was five stones.

.

Now began a part of my life immeasurably more bewildering than anything which had ever happened to me before. I found myself engulfed in a series of what appeared like fairy-tales. I might have been deceived into thinking them such had not the press of New Zealand and Australia, as well as of other parts of the world, confirmed these strange happenings.

In the space of fourteen months I had mastered dancing and acrobatics, never having studied them in my life before. Now the real secret of the apparent miracle was brought before the public. I appeared in pantomime. "Gulliver's travels," then played at the Regent, one of Auckland's leading picture theatres. For several weeks I appeared in company with children, not one of them more than fourteen years of age, some of my little partners only seven and eight years old. Queues waited in the street eager to witness the phenomenon of a grandmother dancing amongst children, but they often failed to detect me. Behind the wings, awaiting my turn to go on the stage, I looked at the mothers of the children with whom I danced. They were no older than my own daughter, and my small partners no older than my own granddaughter.

Then a definite urge came to me. I would go out and attempt to make a world's record by walking two

thousand miles, to prove to the world that my return to youth and health was not a myth. Mother Nature provides us with legs, which, I am afraid in these modern times, we are apt to forget. I would walk to draw the attention of the world to this fact. We are provided with muscles, and, in order to retain the wonderful gifts of activity and agility with which we have been endowed, we must daily stretch and exercise these same muscles.

Well, I put my idea into practice, and did that walk. On the trek I averaged from thirty to forty miles a day, and kept it up all through. I made four world's records; first, the length of New Zealand, from Spirits Bay (Te Reinga), the most northerly point, to the Bluff, in the extreme south of the South Island. Next I crossed to Australia, and beat the existing walking record, for a woman, from Melbourne to Sydney. Returning to New Zealand, I decided to make another record, and, eighteen months after the walk I set a bicycle record by riding a man's heavy roadster bicycle over the same route, from Spirits Bay to the Bluff. All these records have been authenticated by the Press, besides which I have written the story of these first three treks, giving my secret to the world. Taking my readers by the hand every step of the way, I dare to hope that my efforts may bring happiness and lasting health to some of the human family and millions yet unborn.

This book appeared under the title of: "A World's Wonder," by Kitty O'Sullivan, New Zealand's Modern Grandmother." It is fully illustrated, and was printed and published by the Dawson Printing Co., Ltd., Auckland. The sole agents are Messrs. Whitcombe and Tombs, Ltd., who have branches in all the larger cities of New Zealand.

I would like to repeat two or three items from this book which will be of interest in connection with the story of my life.

The first is a letter which I received from Her Most Gracious Majesty Queen Mary, as follows:—

"Lady Cynthia Colville presents her compliments to Mrs. O'Sullivan, and is commanded by Queen Mary to thank her very much for sending Her Majesty a copy of her book: 'New Zealand's Modern Grandmother,' which the Queen is pleased to accept. The Queen congratulates Mrs. O'Sullivan on her feats of energy and endurance, and will read with interest the story of their achievement. Mrs. O'Sullivan's kind thought in desiring to present a copy of this record to Her Majesty is much appreciated by the Queen.

Buckingham Palace.

21st July, 1936."

With regard to all these wonderful events, I permitted myself the luxury of feeling that I was beginning life over again. It was a project far beyond my wildest dreams, undertaken not for personal gain, but for the good of my fellow-men. Perhaps its true meaning and value will be revealed when I have passed on to the great unknown.

The "New Zealand Herald" wrote:—"If the world harkened to New Zealand's Modern Grandmother's advice, sick people would most assuredly regain the strength and vigour of youth—there need be no hospitals, no jails nor asylums."

Would to God that it might be so!

How may I best describe this latest cycle of my existence? For at times I wearied of modern methods and longed to live my own way, think my own thoughts; to be entirely my own self, and escape from mass beliefs. My real happiness, I knew, lay in being able to maintain an inner sanctuary where imagination could still weave its spell along my daily path. With this idea in mind I leased a tiny studio in the very heart of the city and converted it into a gallery. The walls I covered with paintings and photographs of stage and acrobatic feats. In this small haven of rest I am away from the world, yet within sight and sound of its life. From my window

I love to gaze at the variety of humanity, but above and beyond the petty bickerings and jealousies of the throng. Soon I began to live the life of a voluntary hermit, not from compulsion, but free choice. I learned to pray, not in a torrent of words and formulas, but humbly and silently, the putting from me of human doubts and fears. "In the quiet sanctuary of earnest longings" I sought guidance of Spirit.

In this was I to discover the solution of the mysterious curse which had clouded my whole life. Of course, it was only an illusion, that curse, fastened upon my mind and consciousness by a deluded and fearful little mother, who could have no real understanding of immortal being. Through the many vicissitudes of my life began to shine a faint, misty light—like a nebula in the immensity of space. It beckoned me forward, almost as it were to a world, a life, beyond this earth.

The real beginning of my enlightenment came in those strange experiences alone among the silent hills at Spirits Bay, at the commencement of my walk. I have already described it in my previous book, but feel impelled to repeat it here, for such an experience could not have been the outcome of abnormal mental or physical conditions, as proved by subsequent records of endurance and perfect health.

Twenty miles over the hills is a long way, and so it appeared to me on the first day of my self-imposed task. I followed a narrow clay track through country densely covered with scrub much taller than myself. I was in deadly fear of wild boars which abound in these parts, and to increase my fears a thick blanket of fog blew up from the sea. The silence was intense; it folded me round, and the track was scarcely discernible. I remembered the Maori saying—When the mists hang low the mountain fairies are abroad. That the great Northland of New Zealand is a weird and wonderful region is generally admitted, yet it was not Maori folk-lore that halted my feet and caused me to utter the words which formed on my lips: "Oh, God, how wonderful Thou art!" It was

the feeling of a holy presence around me, a divine power which caused me to realise that I was not there entirely of my own will, but was being guided and protected. This may sound strange to the lay mind, but, dear reader, I was only a lay mind myself, without a clear knowledge of God—just a frightened little old grandmother among those lonely hills.

Then, suddenly, the fog lifted. Rounding a bend, I beheld the mighty ocean where the waves of the Pacific and Tasman meet, and caught the grand sweep of the bay—Te Reinga. Often, as a child, I had listened to Rakiura's tales about this wonderful place, where the spirits of the departed sank into the tide. It was all like a strange dream—like something I had lived before.

My final incident of the trek is this. A most extraordinary thing happened. It stirred me profoundly. As the poet said, "The mills of God grind slowly, but they grind exceedingly fine." Strange also that I should be passing that way when the thing happened.

As usual, I had been on the road since early morning, and had covered some thirty-three miles of barren, undulating, desolate country in the South Island. Twilight had merged into night. A long, straight road led into a shabby little hamlet, where rows of wooden houses faced each other across roadways overgrown with grass. From what I could observe in the starlight, years of neglect had obliterated every vestige of prosperity in the neighbourhood. Regretfully I began to realise that I must push on, nor cared to linger in such dismal surroundings, when suddenly a woman emerged from one of the larger houses. "Come in!" she half-shouted, at the same time beckoning me with her hand. I murmured my thanks as I approached.

"I've been watching all day for your coming," she said as I followed her inside, the wind banging the door behind me. "There's a sick woman very anxious to speak with you," pushing aside another door which opened protestingly upon its hinges.

An oil lamp, held in a bracket on the wall, and fumes

from a charcoal stove made the air heavy. The room was wide and long, the walls and floor bare. Odds and ends of old, fantastically carved furniture stood haphazardly about. The subdued light at the head of the bed disclosed a figure upon whom my eyes became riveted. The haggard face of the obviously dying woman was that of Mrs. Rouse, exactly as it had appeared in my dream the night my mother lay in her coffin—the hideous bird with the woman's head. I had a big shock. Gladly would I have escaped from the place and turned to go, when the woman who had admitted me beckoned to me to come nearer the low bed. "She's here!" she called in the same half-shouted tones. "You can talk to her yourself."

The eyes of the dying woman looked up in surprise; her thin, bloodless lips parted in amazement. I noticed that she had great difficulty in breathing, and I waited patiently for her to speak.

"You are the daughter of James Morgan?"

"Yes, and you are Mrs. Rouse," I answered for her.

"I thought you wouldn't remember, you were such a small child." Her voice fell to a whisper. "It does not seem possible. . . ." For a minute her eyes closed and she remained silent. Then she whispered, "That's all I wanted to know."

"Why?" I asked.

The woman with her explained that they had read in a newspaper about my attempt to walk the length of New Zealand, and Mrs. Rouse, who had been bed-ridden for over thirty years, was consumed with longing to speak to me; declaring that it would give her spirit release to be able to prove to a daughter of James Morgan that she had atoned. She must have passed away almost as her friend uttered those last words, and it was some time ere we recognised the fact.

As the hour was too late for me to proceed further that night I consented to stay with the good Samaritan who had nursed Mrs. Rouse. Therefore I waited outside while she extinguished the lights and the fire. Emerging

with a lantern in her hand, she softly closed the door on the dead woman, and together we crossed the silent road. I tried to utter a prayer for the departed. What came to me was, "Thine angels bring release." Poor soul; there was ample evidence of what she had suffered.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

Finis.

SINCE this book was written I have made another effort to teach the world the folly of allowing the body to take possession of existence by apathy and slothfulness when it is only too anxious to be the willing servant of the active mind.

In February, 1938, I crossed to Great Britain and set a world's record for the walk from Land's End to John o' Groats, in thirty-four days. After this present book is published I intend to recount the adventures which befell me in the "Homeland."

Space forbids that I should write more about the past, but I must return to the present time. Looking from the window of my little studio, I beheld the famous "America Clipper" arrive from the Golden Gate on its first trip to the Antipodes. Cutting through the distant air in the late afternoon sunshine that shed a beautiful pale blue mist over everything, she came straight at us, a new and amazing spectacle. As she came closer the roar of her engines became audible; slowly she glided to alight on the water as though she touched it with a kiss—almost at my feet, after only a few days' travel. A colossal event, the arrival of this silver seaplane. "Civilisation on its ladder of progress," I thought to myself. Crowds flocked to every point of vantage to get a peep, and I could not help comparing it with the arrival of the first tractor steam-roller which brought the Taradale people hurrying to their gates to witness what to them was also a marvel of the age of progress.

I stand at the open window of my studio as the day draws to a close. The sky is aflame with a golden sunset. The Mighty Artist dips his brush in gold and changes all below. I watch the great ball of fire sink lower and lower behind the western hills, till only twilight remains, and another day is over.

My thoughts are with those who have passed beyond to the great Kianga. Where are you? Have you knowledge that I am writing you into my book?

Suddenly I fancy I hear the silver notes of a woman's voice singing in Maori—'tis Rakiura, and it is the song she used to sing, years ago, when she nursed me to sleep on her knee:—

Hewawata i nga ra nei,
 I nga po ro roa, nei,
 I kite au i akoe, e, taku tumanako.
 E rerera e nga kapua ma,
 Rapua te tau kei e whea,
 E kore ra e mutu, te aroha i ahau?

Which may be freely translated as follows:—

All through the day I am dreaming,
 Oft in the night time, too,
 Seeking the face I am dreaming of—
 Since nobody else will do.
 Oft on the clouds I go sailing,
 Searching the wide world through.
 There is no end to my rainbow—
 Why don't my dreams come true?



CURSE OF THE GREENSTONE TIKI

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CURSE OF THE GREENSTONE TIKI



The Author when she was an invalid weighing 13st.

CURSE OF THE GREENSTONE TIKI



Photograph taken 14 months after the "Invalid" picture, having reduced five stone. Grandma then appeared in pantomimes with children, no-one else being more than 14 years of age in that company.

Auckland Service Print

9-304

NZC
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1945

Greenstone

Tiki



O'Sullivan

NZC
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