

the weather was cold he would wear his leather jacket and have the cab windows open to the icy wind, and he would look queerly at her if she said she was cold. She smiled ruefully as the memories flooded back. She had been fifteen then.

She remembered the time he dropped the cream can off the tail of his truck on to his foot, and then kicked it violently with his other foot and made that sore, too.

As her thoughts weaved on through the years she could trace the changing pattern. This last year, Jim had managed to stow all the gear away somewhere when she wanted to ride with him, and sometimes, when he was driving, his arm would brush against hers.

HER sister, Lynda, came into the kitchen then, slopping across the floor in down-trodden slippers and breaking across Marion's thoughts. Lynda didn't say anything, but every swirl of her skirt was a protest at being dragged out of bed so early in the morning. Lynda was fourteen, and lumpy.

The sound of Jim's lorry, as yet an indefinite rumble in the distance, crept into the quietness of the kitchen. Marion heard it, and tautened.

She was glad everyone liked Jim and that they would all go through into the tearooms to greet him. Her mother would smile benevolently at him—usually it was the first time she smiled in the mornings. And Lynda would go close enough to be given a boisterous, brotherly hug. She would squeal and tell him not to be such a big bully. It was becoming monotonous.

Marion stood motionless as the rattling cream-lorry braked at the door. Lynda started to go through to the tearooms. Her mother hesitated a moment, then she said: "Oh, Lynda. Get me some sugar from the pantry."

Lynda stopped, amazed. She couldn't understand. Her mother said: "Well, hurry up!" and gave her an impatient push.

When Lynda had gone, Marion turned and looked questioningly at her mother. Jim's heavy-booted footsteps sounded loud on the wooden floor of the tearooms.

"Jim's there, Marion," said her mother, "You'd better go through and see what he wants."

Marion hesitated. Then slowly she eased herself away from the mantelpiece and went through into the other room.

AFTER the stove-warmed kitchen, the tearoom was cold. A shaft of pale sunlight streamed through the window and cast a patch of brightness on the little counter by the door. Marion folded her arms to keep them warm.

The man who stood on the other side of the counter had become almost a stranger to her. He was no longer the Jim who was good fun at picnics, who came to the Federated Farmers' dances in his working boots and stood with folded arms at the door all night—he was a new Jim: a Jim who wanted to marry her. For the first time in her life she looked at him critically.

He was above normal height, but his broad shoulders and thick arms made him seem shorter. Until she stood beside him, she did not realise just how tall he really was. He put his arms on the counter in the little patch of sunlight.

Marion could remember the times she had hoped Jim would ask her to marry him. Before Lynette had asked her to come to Auckland.

"Marion," said Jim, hesitantly, "there is something I want to say to you. I've been thinking about it for some weeks."

Marion had never noticed before that the hair on his freckled arms shone like gold in the sunlight. They were the strong arms of a working man—of a man who loved work. She knew that if they were married he would spend his week-ends in his oldest clothes, growing vegetables in the backyard which would be the pride of his life. Perhaps he would even train a creeper over that inevitable latticed structure

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