

your mind, forget it, because it isn't so."

There was a slight pause as they took measure of each other. Mike's sincerity began to affect Richard. Impossible!—yet—Mike, not wishing to taunt him by withholding anything, hurried on. "But, you see, she came back to tell you about me. Only she found you'd burned your bridges in public and she couldn't let you down."

Richard felt weak with sick relief.

Prizes for Essays on N.Z. Bird Life

READERS are reminded that the essay competition dealing with New Zealand birds or forests closes on Sunday, February 10. The following prizes have been donated by the New Zealand Bird Protection Society for essays contributed by readers of the "Radio Record," the "N.Z. Referee" and the "N.Z. School News": First prize, a cheque for £5; second prize, one for £2/10/-; third, three separate prizes of three cloth-bound albums valued at £1 each; fourth, three separate paper-bound albums valued at 12/6 each. The albums contain a beautiful collection of coloured reproductions of the more interesting of our native birds.

The essays to be of not more than 500 words and upon one of the following subjects:—

1. Personal Observation of any Native Bird, or,
2. The Value of the Native Forest to New Zealand.

Recognised ornithological experts are requested to refrain from competing. Entries must be written in ink on one side of the paper only and forwarded to the Editor of the "N.Z. Radio Record" by Sunday, February 10. Results, to be judged by an authoritative expert, will be announced as soon as possible thereafter.

"Well, I guess that just about settles the matter, doesn't it?"

Mike shook his head firmly. "No. It can only be settled one way. Her way, which she's too unselfish to face. So I'm trying to face it for her."

"Oh. And I suppose she asked you up here? So that you might—"

"Far from it. When I called your office and learned you'd left earlier than you expected, I simply knew she'd run away from me."

Richard was scornful. "You're kidding yourself, Bradley."

"No, I'm not." Mike struck back at him, cruelly. "You're in a better position than I am to know a man can't kid himself about a woman."

"I—I don't understand," Richard faltered.

Mike continued inexorably. "Don't ask me to use a club. You know what I mean."

It was a blow that hit Richard between the eyes. The past few months began flashing through his mind. But he refused to accept what his reason told him. "I think this talk is finished."

Mike stepped in front of him. "Not yet! You once untangled a snarl like this is by facing it squarely and asking the woman you were married to to do the same. Well, she came through for you, didn't she? And now, according to your rules, it's your turn to come through for somebody else."

"What do you propose I should do about it?" Richard's laboured breathing was clearly audible.

"Give her up. Give her back to herself." He stopped at Richard's look of derision on the word "herself." "Oh, I know I'm getting the breaks. But there's nothing I can do to keep them on your side. And I know it's tough, but there's nothing you can do."

"Get—out—of—here!"

Mike's voice went hard. "All right, then! I'll take her away from you! I've never tried—but I can, and now I will. Right past divorce courts and marriage certificates, and all the rest of it. And we'll be more openly and honestly and completely together than all the—"

"You heard me." Richard's voice had risen almost to a scream, and the veins on his forehead were distended. "Get out. I won't answer for my actions, I tell you—"

Neither of them had noticed as Diane entered the room.

"Mike," she now breathed in whispered reproach. Then she searched Richard's face. What had been said? He addressed her harshly. "Diane—do you—love this man?"

There was a short, awful pause.

Underneath, his plea had reached her ears. She responded to it, not daring to look at Mike. "N—no—Richard." She stared at him as if to sustain the lie by her fixed stare.

"Dinah!"

Richard continued, ignoring Mike's cry. His voice was hoarse. "He—he said he could take you away, if he wanted to. Is—that true?"

"No—no. He—couldn't, Richard."

"Dinah! Look at me!" Mike commanded her in agonized tones.

But Diane, struggling for what she believed was right, gripped the table for support and, with eyes averted, spoke to Mike in hurried, strained reproach. "You had no right to do this! I told you. This is my husband. He means everything to me, everything! Can't you understand? Can't you see what you—"

With blanching face, Richard noted Diane's unwillingness to face Mike and

the strained unnaturalness of her accusation. A nerve began to twitch in his eye, and his body stiffened until it shook.

"No, Dinah," Mike was saying.

As he started towards her, Richard stepped between them. His voice was like granite. "I think she's decided."

"No, she hasn't," Mike said sharply.

"Then I'll decide," Richard thundered suddenly at him.

And as Diane stood rooted to the spot in stark terror, he strode to the gun rack beside the hall door.

It was only when Richard lifted the gun from the rack that Diane found her voice. With a wild, terrified shriek, she ran to Mike and planted herself before him as a human shield.

"Richard—no—it's Mike!" Her voice rose and broke. Even then, even in this near danger to Mike, she half caught herself. Her fingers went to her mouth, for in that instant she realised that she had betrayed herself.

(Continued on page 52.)

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