



WANTED: 50,000 WIVES

FOUR years ago Dr. O. C. Mazengarb, a leading lawyer and sociologist, gave a warning that New Zealand needed more girls to become wives of the country's surplus bachelors. Now he says the unbalance is getting worse.

New Zealand today has 50,000 young men of marriageable age who cannot find wives, he maintains. The country's big problem, he asserts, is not its surfeit of butter or shortage of overseas funds but the shortage of marriageable women.

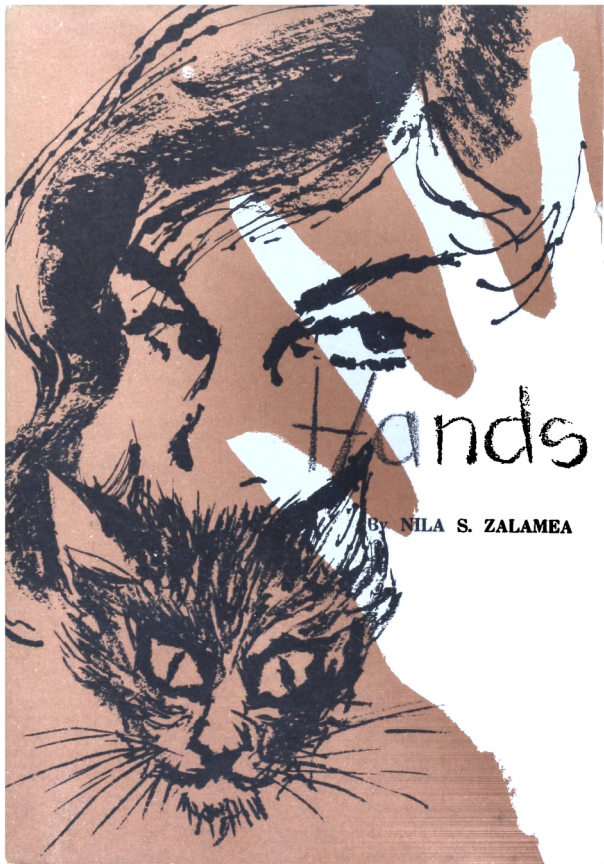
Dr. Mazengarb advocates a campaign to bring 20,000 20,000 girls of good character from abroad to assured jobs and the added attraction of "a sound prospect of happy romance in nature's most favored land."

Attributed the situation to unbalanced immigration, Dr. Mazengarb says thousands of young men have been lured to construction jobs in a country with a surplus of bachelors to start with.

Men in the 21-to-35 age group who have never married now total 82,764, the sociologist says whereas the number of women in the same category is only 38,537. Bachelors thus outnumber unmarried women by more than two to one. If men in their twenty-first year are added, the male surplus is more than 50,000.

The lack of balance is responsible for grave social effects, in Dr. Mazengarb's opinion.





Hands

By NILA S. ZALAMEA

FATHER'S right hand was gripping my own that Sunday evening. I sat on his lap staring at the long white fingers, stemming from a smooth narrow palm and tapering at the tips; at the almond-shaped nails shining like lustrous pink shells.

I turned to examine my left hand resting on Father's own as it lay on the arm of the chair. It looked very much like Father's: soft, delicate—even gentle. Yet how vigorously it had pounded the piano this morning, I thought, recalling the thunderous sound it had summoned from one bass key.

"The hands of a pianist," Father had said when I was five years old. They looked so small then, as he held them in the cup of his hands. Now they were large and long; yet, how humiliatingly petty was their occupation, compared to that of Father's hands.

Only last night, his right hand held the baby up by its feet; his left hand parting the steely cold air in a slap that still cracked like a whip in my mind.

The imprint shone white like a hand on the baby's red skin,

instantly regaining color as the wail split the chilly night air.

Mother's eyes, shining with tears, lovingly caressed the new baby; then, unblinking, searched father's impersonal face for some hint of happiness; but suddenly, they withdrew from the hard thin lips, the thoughtful eyes, in horror, then shame, then pity.

What had her eyes seen in Father's eyes?

VAINLY, I tried to penetrate the depths of those two round pools that sought me out, standing at the foot of the bed. But some unknown hand cast obliterating shadows over them, and my gaze met only the inky blackness of her eyes, glimmering under the cool light of the bulb that hung, swaying from its wire.

The water in the basin caught the fitful light and glowed on the baby's soft red body. It trickled over Father's right hand as it rubbed the fat from the baby's skin.

The ripples ran crazily and dizzily, and made the hand, working under the water, become grotesque and ugly.

"What are you thinking?" Father's voice broke the silence,

cutting short my thoughts. I turned to face him but did not answer.

Smiling, he released my right hand and tousled my hair. "You're always thinking," he said; then asked again: "What are you thinking?" I did not answer. He pulled me closer to him. Consciously, I moved my arm protectively over my breast, which was just beginning to pain me.

Suddenly, he said: "How would you like to have a new mother?" His eyes blazed with a strange evil gleam in his thrust face.

I did not understand. I was shocked. No, I was frightened. I knew he had a paramour.

Quickly, I stood up to face him. But his eyes, where evil flashed only a moment ago, now glistened with a soft, gentle light as they looked up into my eyes. I turned to go, and he put out his hands to stop me. Deftly, I darted out of their reach. "Hey!" he said, but I was already running to the kitchen. At the threshold, I looked back and saw that he had not followed.

BERTA was in the kitchen, getting ready to leave for the night. She started as I entered. She was wrapping up something in a piece of brown paper. Rice, perhaps, I thought, or lard. She got the butcher's knife from its place on the wall

and cut the string with it; then she placed it back on the wall. She patted the package with a satisfied air. I did not say anything. Instead, I went down on my hands and knees and crawled under the worktable. Immediately, she was upon me, uttering curses.

"Come out from under that table!" she ordered indignantly. But I was not listening. I made an opening through the woodpile and put an eye to it.

"You young people are far too advanced," she continued in an accusing tone. "Imagine," she said, as though speaking to someone in particular, "watching a cat in labor?" She paused. I could feel her eyes glowing at me like live coals. "Why, in my day—" she started to say and suddenly stopped. Then as abruptly, she charged toward the back door, spitting disgustedly. "Tse!" she said, and slammed the door behind her.

Relieved of her presence, I shifted to a more comfortable position — straightening out my legs and lying flat on my stomach. Then I put my eye to the hole again and watched, fascinated.

The cat was breathing hard and laboriously. Her eyes were closed, and her nostrils dilated. After a while, a tri-colored kitten appeared and whimpered at once. The cat reached out to it and pulled it to her side. She started licking its organs. It

was a male. A tri-colored tomcat.

I'll be the proud owner of a rare tri-colored tomcat, I thought happily.

Suddenly, as I watched, the cat stopped licking the kitten. There must be another one coming, I thought. I waited, trying not to guess what the color or the sex of the next one might be, because I wanted to surprise myself.

I watched and saw, not with surprise, but with horror, the cat biting the tri-colored tomcat by the neck and swinging it mercilessly to and fro. The kitten whimpered for an instant, then became silent.

DESPERATELY, I put my right hand through the opening and tried to release the kitten from its mother's mouth when something hard and sharp struck my hand. I felt something warm and sticky run through my fingers. I jerked out my hand. It was covered with blood. The skin was dreadfully torn and scratched. Slowly, it started to hurt. I gripped it in my left hand and tried to crush the pain. The pain increased, however, as the blood continued to flow—and that angered me.

Working feverishly, I detached a bundle of firewood nearest the opening, and gripped the sturdiest piece in it in my wounded hand. I approached



the now large hole and prepared to strike, but the sight of the cat placidly chewing the half-eaten body of the kitten stayed my hand. Stunned, I slowly backed out and pulled myself out from under the table.

My mind still saw the cat giving birth to a kitten, and then . . . No. I must stop thinking. I must not think anymore. I must not . . . I must tell Mother. I'll go to Mother.

THE BEDROOM door stood ajar. I went in without knocking. Father was there, bent over the bed, his hands gripping Mother's neck. I stood there—shocked; dazed. Then I saw the baby again, Father's thoughtful eyes, his thin lips,

Mother's eyes, the half-eaten body of the kitten in the kitchen. Father's words drummed through my head: a new mother? A new mother? He's strangling her, I told myself. Killing her. I saw her struggling to release his hold. She gasped. I screamed and charged Father. The piece of wood was still in my hand. I raised it and brought it down on his head. He fell unconscious to the floor, his arms spread eagle-like. His hands lay on the cold floor—the palms up, the fingers relaxed. They looked so beautiful, so gentle. They seemed incapable of causing harm, or pain; of destruction. They did not seem to belong to the man. They shouldn't be parts of his body, I thought, and suddenly knew what I had to do.

I went to the kitchen and picked up the butcher's knife with my right hand which was now soiled and dirty with the dry blood. I returned to the bedroom and knelt beside the prostrate body on the floor. Slowly I raised the knife and brought it down hard. Blood

gushed out from the severed palm. I crossed over to the other side and cut the other hand to the quick.

"Child!" Mother's voice called me. I turned and saw her rising from the bed. "Child!" she cried again. I ran to her just in time to catch her from falling.

"What have you done?" she asked. She knelt before me, her hands grasping my arms. Her upturned face was streaming with tears.

"I did not kill him, Mother," I said. "I did not kill him, because he is your husband."

"Child!" she cried. "Child, he is your father."

"He's your husband, Mother," I repeated calmly.

"He's your father," she insisted.

"No, Mother."

She buried her face in the hollow of my stomach and wept piteously.

The moonlight streamed through the window and shimmered on her hair. I stroked her head, vainly trying to catch the light.

* * *

Can What?

*A canner, exceedingly canny,
One morning remarked to his granny,
"A canner, can can
Anything that he can,
But a canner can't can a can, can he?"*