

**Anona: A Maori Story.**

(Continued from last week.)

When he reached home that night he asked Mr King, an old missionary friend with whom he was staying during his visit in this part of New Zealand, for more particulars about the Maori girl. He was told that she was the daughter of an old Maori warrior, who had long since been dead. Her mother, who had died at her birth, was a half-caste, and a great beauty. From her, no doubt, Nona got her good looks. The girl's father had had her well educated—that is, as well as was possible. Before he died, however, he did something which so angered his people, so turned their old respect to intense hatred, that had he not died when he did they would certainly have killed him. Nona was thus left a friendless orphan when only sixteen, for, her mother having died so early, she and her father had been great friends and companions, and consequently the people suspected her of having been the accomplice, and looked down on her accordingly. As she was left with nothing in the world belonging to her but her clothes, trinkets, and a few valuable old relics, however, they took care of her; but that was all. They would have very little to do with her, would not let her be one of themselves, and when she refused to marry a young Maori whom they had picked out for her, they were very angry. Since then her life had been more miserable than ever.

"But it was no fault of hers when her father did wrong," protested Colin, when he heard the little story.

"No," replied Mr King. "But the Maoris, like many other dark races, are very superstitious and peculiar in their views, and this man committed a most unpardonable offence in their eyes. They took a strong dislike to Nona, and cheated themselves into believing her as bad as her father undoubtedly was, simply because she was his daughter. Poor girl! it was a great shock to her when she found what the father whom she loved and trusted had done. She is a clever, very clever girl, and a noble one, too. I am very fond of Nona, and very sorry for her. It is a shame to treat her as they do, but it cannot be helped."

Colin saw the girl frequently after this, nearly always roaming over the hills or through the bush alone. Sometimes he was guided to her by the sound of her voice, as she sang some of the old Maori songs in low, rich tones. Sometimes he came upon her reading in some secluded spot, and was somewhat surprised at her choice of books. They were nearly all English histories, or poems, or famous novels, and she seemed to enjoy them, too. He had never met a girl ronder of history and deep reading than she was. Had she been an educated, modern English girl she could not have been a greater or more intelligent reader, or a more interesting talker. She spoke English remarkably well, and talked to him in a simple, unaffected way whenever they chanced to come together, frankly telling him her thoughts and strange fancies, and speaking frequently and affectionately of Mr King, who had taught her much of her extra knowledge, and lent her books to help her.

One bright, hot day Colin came slowly along the wide path in front of his host's house, and paused near the gate to watch Mr King, who was carefully tending some choice bulbs.

"Why, Colin, you're surely not going out walking this roasting day, are you?" he said, straightening his back as he looked at the young man.

Colin laughed. "Why not?" he said. "Really, Mr. King, I can't see any difference between going out for a quiet stroll and stooping over flowers in the full glare of the sun. You will tire yourself out. Leave them till evening, and then

I will look after them for you," and he hid his hand affectionately on the elder man's arm.

The old man laughed and shook his head. "I suppose you're right," he said. "You like walking. I like gardening. No thank you, my boy, I enjoy it. Go for your walk and never mind about me, good-bye!"

Colin wandered on slowly towards the bush. He felt sure of seeing Nona there. He could not describe the pleasure he got in the society of this simple, sad-eyed Maori girl. There was a charm about her which no other girl of his acquaintance possessed. He found himself comparing her with some of his English girl friends, and somehow Nona always came out the best and purest in his estimation. He realised in a vague way that she was altogether different, not to be compared to any of them.

He wandered on till he reached the bush, and then followed the winding track which led through it. He had nearly reached the spot where he often found her, when he heard the sound of voices near by. Some instinct prompted him to remain where he was, and he looked cautiously between the trees.

Standing in the very spot where he had first seen her were two persons. One was Nona. She had evidently been there some time, for she had been half-unconsciously twining flowers in her loose hair, till she looked like some dark wood-nymph. The other was a good-looking young Maori whom he had often seen in the village, and to whose cunning, cruel eyes and evil smile he had taken a strong, though unaccountable dislike.

"I tell you I will have no more of it," the Maori was saying in tolerably good English. "You are to marry me, as your people promised, and as your bad father promised when I helped him once. I will not wait any longer. You love that cunning pale-face. I am sure of it, and I tell you I will kill him if I see you with him again."

This then, must be the man whom Nona's people had chosen for her. The girl had never mentioned the affair at all, and he was shocked to find who it was. It was only by a great effort he could keep himself from interfering with the insolent Maori. He knew also that he ought not to remain where he was, but a curious feeling, a strong but vague presentiment of coming evil took possession of him.

"I tell you I have been put off long enough, went on the man's angry voice. "Marry me, Nona, or I will kill your fine English lover. Oh yes! I have arms. Give me your answer now, or ——" He took a loaded revolver from his left hand, where it had been concealed, and advanced threateningly.

Nona faced the man calmly. There was a hunted, terrified look on her face, but the splendid eyes were flashing, and she held her head proudly and defiantly.

"This, then, is my answer," she said sternly, "I will never marry you, never, never, never!"

The wild, defiant cry rang through the silent trees, again and again, echoing startlingly, as the girl faced her tormentor, and with a howl of rage, the Maori sprang. He was trying to strike her cries for help, when a sudden, quick blow from behind felled him to the ground.

Colin Lindsay was standing there with angry eyes and stern set mouth. Without another look at the Maori, who was on the ground, he turned to the girl.

"You!" Nona said, with a little sob of relief, and then she almost held her breath with horror, and every muscle seemed to grow rigid.

The Maori had quietly arisen, and with an angry, triumphant gleam in his eyes, was pointing his revolver at the Englishman, who stood with his back towards him.

For the fraction of a second, the girl stood still, almost stunned. Then she seemed to recover, and with one terrible ringing cry, she sprang forward. There was a loud report, a thud, and then—silence.

Had the Englishman fallen, killed by the hand of the Maori? Ah, no! for Nona had literally flung herself on the weapon, and received the death-wound which was meant for him.

There in the gloomy stillness of a New Zealand forest, the strong man knelt beside the lifeless form, a look of frozen horror and despair on his face. For a minute he only gazed, as if fascinated, at the slight figure, from which her life-blood was flowing. Then all his heart went out in a great, passionate cry, "Nona! Nona!"

Thus they found him half-an-hour later. The foul murderer had been found, killed by his own hand, when he discovered what he had done. They spoke to him, but for a few minutes he did not stir. Then his lips moved as if in prayer, and, having reverently kissed the cold hand, he turned and went away without one word or backward glance, years older and sadder and sterner.

Years have passed. Colin Lindsay is back in England, working for the poor in London. He is still a bachelor, with a sad face and eyes. His friends sometimes ask him why he has never married, but when they do so, his eyes have a vacant, far-away look, as his thoughts fly to a silent, gloomy forest, thousands of miles away, where a sorrowing man is kneeling beside the Maori girl who gave her life for him.

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