

# The Flight of Whara Whara o te Ra.

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*Illustrated by Kennett Watkins.*

**I**T was a glorious piece of bush. I was a favourite with the Maoris at the *kainga*, by the Rangitikei River. At the price they had offered me the right to cut the timber I should make an excellent thing of it. As I came out from the shade of the noble *totaras* and *rimus*, one evening, I saw a sight which drove timber calculations to the winds.

Down the bridle track which led to the settlement, four Maoris rode in single file, brushing through the great glossy flax blades and sweet-scented *manuka*, which reached to their saddle bows. First came a splendid specimen of a tattooed old chief, closely followed by an elderly dame. A short distance in their rear was the most beautiful Maori girl it had ever been my luck to see. The women of our settlement were famed, far and wide, for their personal charms, but this girl outshone them as the *rata* blossom does the *manuka*. Her maid rode after her, but I took little heed of her.

I followed them to the settlement near which I had erected my hut. They were greeted by the usual cry of welcome: "*Naumai! Naumai!*" from a large body of natives who had come out for the purpose. The *hongi*, or rubbing of noses, was freely indulged in, and a *tangi*, or mourning for those who had departed this life since they last met, completed the ceremonies.

I learnt that they were *tino rangatira*, people of great rank in Maori society. Old Te Aokatoa, whose aspiring name signified "The Whole World," was a far-famed *tohunga*, the elderly dame was his wife, and the lovely girl was their granddaughter, Whara Whara o te Ra. The other girl was her

servant, Poi. They had ridden from their home by Lake Taupo to visit this tribe.

I was a good Maori scholar, and had spent many evenings in the Wharepuni listening to the native orators as they discoursed on many subjects, told their romantic legends, and sang their poetic chants of love and war.

I was introduced to the distinguished strangers, and fair Whara Whara's smile as she returned my greeting, completed my conquest. That evening hosts and guests joined in a general *whai korero*, or address to the departed. Never in my life had I heard anything so impressive as old Te Aokatoa's exhortations to the spirits, and his minute directions as to the road they were to go to Te Reinga, and the company they were to keep when they got there. Other orators spoke, and on one point they all agreed, viz., that if the almighty Aokatoa had been here, his power against the great cause of all maladies, *makutu*, would have prevailed, and many lives been saved.

I incidentally learnt that this renowned *tohunga* was instructing his granddaughter in the arts in which he was so proficient. She was therefore *tapu*. She had her food cooked separately, and was always attended by her maid, Poi. She joined in no frivolous amusements like other young people, and worst of all, from my prejudiced point of view, she was not allowed to entertain for a moment any thought of earthly love or passion.

No *hapu* could exist without its *tohunga*. They could even win battles by their supernatural power. Nothing was really impossible to them. In their strange poetic