

and the erstwhile young priestess was suddenly transformed into an ordinary society belle for whom the most eligible husband had to be chosen, approved by her people, and given every opportunity to win her. Hauiti was unanimously selected. Much as I detested the formidable rival, I could not but admit that he was the finest specimen of a young Maori chief I had ever seen. An ardent lover; he was ever at her side. I watched them jealously from a distance, and even went so far as to curse the day on which the *tapu* had been removed, for I felt that it was far better that she should be a priestess than the bride of a rival. I made friends with Poi, who told me in confidence that her mistress would undoubtedly marry Hauiti, but could not yet be persuaded to name the day.

There was small comfort in this.

Hauiti, impatient of delay, called a meeting, and made it the occasion of a sumptuous feast in honour of his approaching marriage. It was a scene which I shall never forget. In the centre of the *marae*, or village green, sat the two young people and their relatives, a clear circular space dividing them from the rest of the guests, who crowded round. Kits full of pork, kumeras, dried shark and other dainties were handed round by the *wahines*, and disappeared like magic.

Then Hauiti rose to his feet in the centre of the group, and addressed the girl he loved and her relatives in courteous but impassioned tones:

"Salutations to you, Te Aokatoa, and to all here! I have given this feast in honour of the lovely Whara Whara o te Ra, whom I wish to make my bride. The obstacle to our union has ceased to exist. The consent of Ngatituwharetoa to my suit has been received. The sacred *tapu* has been removed by the mighty Aokatoa, and now I wish to hear from your lips, O maiden, when the day is to dawn on which I am to claim you for my own? There is another thing I wish to add. In the past I was debarred from approaching you, and making my love personally known to you, but since the *tapu*

has been removed I have done so, yet although you are very gracious to me in other ways, there has always appeared to be a great shadow between us! Why is this, O maiden? Have I offended you in any way? If so, pray tell me! It makes my heart dark within me to see you thus indifferent to me! Your grandsire told me the only obstacle was the *tapu*. That is removed, and my mind dwells on you night and day!"

A murmur of approbation rose from the assemblage as Hauiti concluded, and Te Aokatoa rose to his feet, looking every inch a king of men, although his attire consisted only of a Maori mat hanging from one shoulder, and draping his fine form to the knees. One mighty arm was bare. No ancient Roman in his state toga ever looked a more splendid specimen of matured manhood than this artistically tattooed old *tohunga*.

"Salutations to you, O Hauiti, and to your guests here assembled! You have spoken well, and I am proud of what you have said. But don't speak of any shadow between you and the young maiden! I am her guardian, and therefore her mind is my mind. Why should she have a mind of her own? She could not know what was good for her. But do not be hasty with her. Give her time. This matter of a husband is a strange thought to her. She has been brought up under the sacred *tapu*, and taught to look darkly at all earthly pleasures, but she is young, and her nature will soon assert itself, and she will be as other young girls are. I have told her my wishes since I removed the *tapu*, and to-day she is to give an answer. We will hear what she has to say."

Whara rose and came forward. She was dressed in a light skirt with a rich *kiwi* feather mantle thrown over her shapely shoulders. To my eyes she looked more beautiful than ever as she stood there. No wonder Hauiti was mad to possess her! She was a little nervous at the idea of speaking on such a subject before the assembled crowd, and her voice was low and tremulous as she commenced: