

## THE ANGEL-WIFE.

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ORNAMENTS was the handsomest man of his tribe, and his mind, as that of a young chief should be, was set on nothing but sport and warlike exercises. For the love of woman he cared nothing, to him girls were beings who did the cooking and made themselves useful about the kainga; that they were intended for higher things was an idea which had not intruded itself into his philosophy.

This indifference to the sex was extremely hard on Marino, the belle of the tribe, who had never lost an opportunity of showing her affection for Ornaments ever since they had played together as children. In those days he had shown some sort of regard for her, but now it was simply, "Marino, I am going to catch pigeons: pack me some food in a basket," or "I intend to fish to-morrow: get some girl to help you, Marino, and bail out my canoe—it is half full of water after yesterday's rain—and see that my lines are in good order." On none of his expeditions did he ask her to accompany him.

When his mother perceived her son's ripening manhood she at once had set about finding him a wife. But when she would say to him, "Ornaments, I have seen the prettiest kotiro, and a big chief's daughter, too, Te Tuna, of Ngapuhi," he would say, "I hope, mother, you have seen that the food-baskets are ready—the war-party leaves in two days, and we must take plenty of food with us." If she said, "Ornaments, have you noticed Marino? how pretty she has grown? how fond she is of you?" he would answer, "I want you and her to make me a new kiwi cloak, a long one which will reach down to my feet—to-morrow I intend to go and hunt for

the birds, and will fetch the feathers from which you can make it."

Food, fishing, hunting, fighting, these seemed the objects of his life: but a sudden change came over Ornaments. The men might go a-fishing, but he stayed in his whare and slept. A fighting-party might prepare to wage war against the tribe's enemies, but he paid not the slightest attention to the drilling of the men.

His father, Great Heaven, the old and grizzled chief of the tribe, expostulated with him for such lethargy, but all the youth said was, "I have an inclination to sleep; leave me alone. I will fish when the spirit moves me, I will fight when the proper time comes; but for the present I will sleep." And he kept his word. He slept day after day, never stirring from his hut where his patient mother and the devoted Marino brought him his meals.

"Maro," said Great Heaven to his wife, "our boy has got the makutu—some wizard has bewitched him."

"No," replied the mother, "he is in communion with the spirit-world. He will surprise us all some day. Mark my words. He speaks to no one, not even to Marino and myself."

The people said, "We thought to see this boy stand beside his father and become a great chief, a skilful leader in war, but he is a lazy fellow who does nothing but sleep." And as for Marino, she thought he was sick, *pouri*, as she called it, and she redoubled her attention to his welfare.

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The pa was as still as the night, not a sound was to be heard save for the gentle sighing of the wind. Ornaments lay wrapped in the deepest sleep within his hut. Suddenly there came a knocking at the panel of his door. At first it was gentle, but grew louder and louder, till at last the sleepy youth awoke, sat up in bed, and cried, "What do you want? Who's there? What is all this noise about?"

But there was no answer.

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Ornaments arose, pushed back the sliding panel of the door, and looked out. He saw no one.

Then he lay down again, after putting the peg in the door, that he might not be disturbed.

But no sooner was he asleep again than there came a rapping at the panel of his window, and, awakened a second time, he cried angrily, "Go away, and leave me alone. What do you want to wake me for?"

The panel of the window was pushed aside by an unseen hand, but Ornaments could discover nothing in the gloom. He ran to the door and put his head and shoulders out of the hut, but all he saw were the dim outlines of the huts round about. So he went back to bed, fully determined to keep awake and watch for the person who disturbed his rest. But again an uncontrollable drowsiness came over him, and soon he fell fast asleep.

Then there came a gentle rattle at his window, the panel was pushed aside, and the spectral form of a woman entered the hut. Seizing the korowai and kiwi mats which covered the sleeper, this ghostly visitor disappeared with them by the way she had come.

Ornaments awoke with a start, to find himself naked and cold. Sleep was now successfully driven from his eyes: he would watch till morning for the thief who had so impudently entered his hut. But he did not watch long, for the first faint streak of dawn soon appeared above the tall trees which surrounded the pa, and Ornaments thought he would see nothing more of his visitor.

When Maro brought her son his breakfast as usual, she was surprised to see him sitting naked on his bed.

"Where is your korowai?" she asked. "Where is the mat of kiwi feathers which Marino and I made for you?"

"They have been stolen," said Ornaments. "Some thief came, and took them in the night while I slept."

"Who was it?"

"Can I see in the dark? Who gave me eyes to see like a bat? How should I know who the thief is?"

"To-night," said his mother, "put the peg in both window and door, and watch for him. And if he comes again, rush out and throw him down. Then we shall know who the thief is, and what tribe he belongs to."

Ornaments slept during the day, to be wakeful at night; but no sooner had the sun gone down than he was overcome by an unconquerable drowsiness. Do what he would he could not keep his eyes open.

The window and door were both shut tight. Everything was still. The young warrior's hand, which held a keen mere as he fell asleep, dropped limply to his side. Suddenly there was a rustling, and without door or window moving there appeared in the hut the figure of a woman, who kneeling beside the sleeper, shook him by the arm, and said,

"E oho! E oho!" (Wake up!)

Ornaments moved in his heavy sleep, and rolled over on his side.

"Maranga! Maranga!" (Get up!)

The young warrior sat up, and rubbed his eyes. He felt a soft hand laid on him. In a moment he caught the intruder in his strong arms, to find that he held a woman.

"Ko wai koe?" (Who are you?)

"Ko ahau." (I am I.)

"He aha to hiahia?" (What do you want?)

"I haere mai au kia moe taua." (I have come to be your wife.)

"Ae!" (Indeed!)

Thus was Ornaments married.

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In the morning when the bridegroom's mother came to the hut she found it tightly shut up, with cloaks hung before the window and door to keep out all light, and to prevent people from looking through the crevices.

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She knocked on the panel of the door, and shouted to her son, but received no answer.

"He is sleeping more soundly than ever," she said.

However, in the afternoon Ornaments came out of the hut of his own accord, and went straight to his mother.

"Well?" she said.

"Well," said he.

"Did you catch the thief?"

"I did," he answered.

"And who was he?"

"It was a woman."

"A woman!"

"I have her in the hut at the present moment."

"What is her name?"

"I don't know."

"What tribe does she belong to?"

"I don't think she has a tribe."

"Then who is she?"

"I think she is a spirit from heaven. She came into my hut in the middle of the night without opening window or door, and stayed with me, and we are man and wife."

"My son, you have been dreaming."

"Then my dream is very real. Come, and see the woman for yourself."

When Maro entered the hut, she saw sitting there the most beautiful being she had ever beheld, a graceful, gracious creature, who rose and said, "I have come to be your son's wife—he is in great favour with the gods, who have sent me. In three days I shall bear a son, who will be half a man and half a god, and he shall teach your tribe everything about the spirit-world. He shall be above all priests that ever lived, and shall have power over everything in the world. Great is the favour granted to your son and to you, his mother. But remember," she said, turning to her husband, "if you find any fault with our son, or complain of his crying while he is a baby, that very day I will take him away,

and you shall see him no more."

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Everything had happened as the angel-wife had foretold. Her boy had been born miraculously on the third day, and he was growing with a quickness that was unexampled. His father's habit of incontinently sleeping had been conquered, and Ornaments, who devoted all his energies to bringing the choicest food home to his marvellous wife, had returned after a heavy day's whitebait-fishing.

Late in the afternoon he lay on his bed sleeping, when his son set up a wailing such as appears to be common to the sons of men and of spirits, and the father, awakened disagreeably from his well-earned repose, said sharply to the angel-wife, "Why don't you stop the child's noise? Can't you see I want to sleep?"

Immediately the lovely mother rose, and clasping her child to her bosom, looked reproachfully at her angry husband.

Without a word she went out of the hut and, mounting the roof, she sang a song so sweet that all the people of the village came to listen. Then, without effort or noise, she vanished with her child, as a little fleecy cloud evaporates in the blue sky.