

## THE FLAME AND HER TWO HUSBANDS.

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RANGI had fallen hopelessly in love with The Flame, who lived at Waitara, where a white man's town now stands.

But love-sick men are common and pretty girls are rare, especially pretty girls possessing that strange quality called mana, which is not exactly reputation, or position, or wealth, but a compound of these, blended with the power of managing the genus homo. The Flame, however, was not only renowned for her beauty among all the tribes about Mount Egmont, whose great cone stands sentinel beside the sea; but, in her own pa and among her own people, she was famed for the manner in which she managed her grim old father, Little Tu, the bloodthirsty chief of Waitara.

Now, Little Tu's principal fighting-man, Wind-in-the-Tree, was also hopelessly in love with The Flame, and he had the great advantage of being on the spot, whereas his rival, Rangi, lived fifty miles away, at Hawera. But, on the other hand, Wind-in-the-Tree laboured under the disadvantage of being detested by the object of his passion; so that the odds seemed even between the two warrior-suitors.

The Waitara man made the first move. He demanded of Little Tu that he should be requited for his services, and with an eloquence born of love he pleaded for possession of The Flame.

"Am I not your fighting-chief?" he asked of Little Tu. "Have I not been conqueror in five battles? If I am not good enough for your daughter, I will attach myself to some other tribe where I shall be better appreciated."

"No, no, don't do that," said Little Tu. "Don't

think of such a thing. We will see what can be done."

"I must have your daughter—nothing else will satisfy me."

"Yes, yes, I am quite agreeable. I should like you to have her. But she is so imperious that I no longer am able to control her."

"I will control her."

"You could, of course you could—you are so much more masterful than I. Let us call her, and see if you can persuade her."

So saying, Little Tu fetched The Flame from her hut, but neither her father nor her lover could divine from her pretty, oval face, or from her winsome, girlish manner the thoughts of her heart.

"We have been having a little talk about you, my dear," said Little Tu. "The fact is that we both think you should be married. And as for your husband, The Wind, here, thinks that he would make as good a husband as you could find, and I quite agree with him. Indeed, he has conceived quite a fancy for you, and nothing would make him happier than that you should return it, and I hope you will."

"But what if I don't?" asked The Flame.

"My dear," said her father, "that would be girlish foolishness; you would love him warmly enough after you were married to him."

"Though I may be fierce in war," said the fighting-chief, bridling ferociously, "I would show you how tender and affectionate I can be in love," and he smiled evilly.

"But haven't you got three wives already?" said the girl. "Isn't that enough?"

"They are low-born women," said the fighting-chief. "I want a well-bred girl for my principal wife. They are ugly. I want a beautiful wife who will give me beautiful children."

Little Tu smiled with delight—such a manner of courtship pleased him. But his daughter turned away in disgust.

As she walked towards her hut, her father called

her petulantly.

"Let me tell you," he said, "I have decided that you shall marry my friend The Wind, here. I consider it a most suitable match."

"But what if I don't agree with you?" asked the girl. "What if I won't consent?"

"I wouldn't answer for the consequences," replied her father.

"I would," said the fighting-chief. "I can tell you exactly what would happen. You have been given to me: I am very fond of you, and will treat you with every kindness. But if you don't consent willingly, I will take you by force. And in the circumstances, that would be good tikanga and perfectly correct."

"Perfectly correct," said Little Tu, "even if it were a thing to be regretted." He looked at his daughter; his daughter looked at the ground.

"Very good," said the girl; "but I want ten days in which to prepare myself. After that, if nothing occurs to change my mind, I will consent."

For six days the village talked of nothing but the match, but on the seventh Rangī arrived with five hundred men, and the subject of conversation was changed. The Flame had sent a messenger to warn the Hawera chief of her impending fate, and his response had been immediate and remarkable.

Of course Little Tu was obliged to treat his visitors with every hospitality, or a feud would certainly have ensued; and, moreover, it would have been contrary to etiquette for him to have asked them when they intended to leave. He had to stand by and see them eat him out of house and home, out of whare and kainga, if they so pleased; which was just what they proposed to do.

At first The Flame kept herself in the background, but before long Rangī pointedly asked her father, "Have you not a daughter, a beautiful girl whom I saw when last I was here? Where is she?"

"Yes, I have a daughter, but she would not be called beautiful," replied Little Tu.

"I would like very much to see her," said Rangi.

So Little Tu had to fetch his daughter, though, on the way, he instructed her to show nothing but the severest politeness to his visitor; and though the girl complied openly with her father's wish, she secretly informed Rangi through her *hoa takapui*—that peculiar Maori institution, the walking-about friend—that her coldness was merely assumed.

The merry go-between treated the strangers as familiarly as if they had been her brothers.

"What fine fellows you Hawera men are," said she to Rangi. "How many more such warriors have you got at home?"

"About three hundred," answered Rangi.

"You must be a big tribe."

"We are."

"You should have brought a bigger *taua*—my mistress wishes to see all your people."

"They are coming," said Rangi. "I expect another body of men to-morrow."

"It will be a great honour to entertain them. My mistress will be delighted. But have you no women and children?"

"Plenty."

"Then send for them."

"By and by," said Rangi.

When the whole of the Hawera forces had assembled, it dawned upon Little Tu that he was practically in Rangi's power.

"You have a great many men here," he said.

"Yes, a good number," said Rangi.

"I had no idea that you were a man of such power."

"No? There are many chiefs greater than I."

"Hawera and Waitara should be friends after this," said Little Tu.

"That is what I came to effect. You have a daughter. She and I have formed a great liking for each other. Of course you would not object to our marriage—it would unite our tribes."

"It would," said Little Tu, "but much as I admire my daughter, there are women here whom you might like better."

"I have seen them all. I prefer your daughter."

"That is unfortunate, because my fighting-chief has asked for her."

"Tell him that when he comes to Hawera I will give him the prettiest girl in the kainga."

The old chief was ominously silent. Evidently the proposal did not please him. Without another word he walked down to the water, where the men were getting ready to go on a fishing expedition.

The fighting-chief was on the river-bank directing the canoe-men.

"Rangi has asked for my daughter," said Little Tu, taking his tattooed friend aside.

"That is why he has collected his men here," said the fighting-chief. "But we will send to every hapu round the mountain and collect double his force."

"It is too late. He will act before our friends can come; and, further, we have no food for such a gathering—we cannot ask our friends to come here and starve. These Hawera men have eaten up everything."

"Are we not going out to catch fish?"

"We have no sweet potatoes to eat with them. But I have a plan. If you will be content to let Rangi have my daughter, in six weeks she shall be yours for ever."

"You are talking nonsense," said the fighting-chief. "You have given in to the wish of the girl through fear of the Hawera man."

"I am talking like a wise tohunga. Rangi is too strong for us now; but in six weeks my daughter will be free to marry you."

"If you intend to kill Rangi you must prepare for war."

"Kill Rangi? I shall not kill him; but in six weeks the girl will be your wife."

The marriage had taken place, and the Hawera people were about to return home.

Rangi, who at the farewell gathering of the two tribes had made a speech on behalf of himself and his people, now addressed his own men.

"This has been a great occasion," he said. "This visit to Waitara will never be forgotten by us. As you return you must spread through all the tribes the fame of Little Tu and his people, renowned for their hospitality, their abundance of food, the bravery of their men, and the beauty of their women. All these things are evident. We have eaten their food—it is good: so great is their bravery that I am determined Waitara and Hawera shall be at peace: and as to their women—I have taken one for a wife.

"But my wife so loves her father and her father so loves me, that he has persuaded me to stay here a little while longer; therefore you will return home without me, but I will rejoin you before the summer is ended, when the time for digging the crops has come. Then, when we have plenty of food, I will bring my wife and all her hapu, and we will empty our storehouses that our guests may feast."

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Rangi had been wrapped in connubial bliss three weeks, when he went a-fishing. He said that as he had helped to empty the storehouses of Waitara it was but right that he should aid in replenishing them.

"You are a good man," said his father-in-law. "You are the sort of man we want in this tribe, a man who understands the wisdom of having plenty of dried fish."

"Won't you come too? We shall then catch plenty, for you have the spell which will enable us to catch fish."

"I am too old," said Little Tu. "But you shall have a picked crew, and I will stand on the cliff and say the karakia for catching the hapuku, the kahawai, and the big shark. I will stand and repeat my incanta-



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tions, and you will sit in your canoe and catch the fish. I could not help you more if I were with you, miles out upon the sea."

At the river-side all was ready; the canoe was manned, and the food, bait, and fishing tackle were all aboard. Little Tu led his son-in-law to the water's edge, told him that he would be sure to catch plenty of fish, bade him adieu in his own heathenish, Maori way; and Rangi boarded the canoe, dropped down the river, crossed the bar, and made straight for the fishing-grounds.

On shore, the old necromancer smiled malignantly as he walked slowly towards the edge of the cliff, from which he could view the broad expanse of the North Taranaki Bight; in the canoe, Rangi was observing his motley crew. One man was blind in his left eye, another was lame, another had hakihiaki and his body was full of sores, a fourth was a porangi who talked nothing but nonsense and waved his paddle in the air, a fifth was deaf, a sixth was hunchbacked—a strange crew with which to go a-fishing.

On the cliff, the crafty old tohunga chuckled to himself, "I will pray for fish, I will pray for wind; he shall catch fish, he shall catch the storm!" On the sea, Rangi was saying to himself, "Why am I given such a crew as this? Little Tu knows—he wants to show the strength of his incantations. He has lent me the hook of his ancestor Tunui"—Great Tu—"a hook that never fails. I shall catch plenty of fish."

"He thinks he has the hook of Great Tu," said Little Tu, at the edge of the cliff. "Ho! ho! it is the hook which the Waikato people made from the thigh-bone of his own grandfather—for him an unlucky hook."

The old wizard watched the canoe till it was but a speck upon the waters, and then he began his karakia.

Now a karakia is to Pakeha minds a thing ridiculous, but to the Maori it is fraught with magic powers, benign or malignant, as the case may be.

The old priest, with arms extended and head

thrown back, first said the karakia for charming "the mountain wind," which blows suddenly from off the great peak of Mount Egmont and lashes the sea into foam—a most effective wind for swamping a canoe. Next, he repeated the karakia which should stir up the north-west wind, and render the Waitara bar impracticable to canoes and fill the river-mouth with breakers. Then he applied his secret formula to the south-west wind, which brings hissing, driving rain, and lashes the lower slopes of the great mountain with salt spray. He conjured all the winds of heaven to blow upon Rangi's canoe, and when he had finished he said with satisfaction, "There! Let the strongest wind prevail. I have not called one, I have not called two: I have called all. Each wind will come, and being angry at the presence of the others it will blow the harder. We shall have the sea turned into a whirlpool, and Rangi will go to the bottom. But I will tell his people that his death was accidental. If his body is washed ashore we will make a big tangi over it, and The Wind—ha! ha! 'The Wind:' it is peculiar—shall marry my daughter."

At first a gentle puff of wind, speeding from the hills, struck the soft bosom of the sea and ruffled its serenity. It was like the scout, active and light, who goes before an army. Soon there was a roar like thunder, as the "mountain wind" burst through the forest-land from the far top of Taranaki and churned the sea into foam.

As Little Tu watched the working of his witchcraft a smile of satisfaction overspread his brown and tattooed features. He saw the squall strike the canoe—and after that there was no canoe to see. But far out upon the ocean he marked that the north-west wind, responding to his call, had scattered the land squall, and was rushing towards the coast. The great breakers burst upon the shore and dashed their foam to the top of the cliff on which he stood.

"Ha! my spells are potent," he exclaimed, as the gale sported with his grey hairs, and almost blew his



flax cloak from his body. "They are stronger than an army. I spoke—the winds came: they blew—and Rangi's canoe is no more. I am a great tohunga."

It was of no use for the old man to watch longer—the salt spray and the driving rain obscured his view. So, turning his face towards the kainga, Little Tu sought the warmth and comfort of his whare.

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Thus it was that The Flame was given to the fighting-chief, and lived in the hut which Rangi had left. At first the girl expostulated with her father, who answered, "Rangi was a good man, but he is dead; he was a brave man, but he is now in a fish's belly at the bottom of the sea. Think no more of him."

"But suppose he came back some day, what then?"

"Yes, when we take our next catch of blue shark," replied her father, with a horrible chuckle.

But Rangi was always in the girl's thoughts. She would pace the beach near the village, hoping to meet him. In the night she would wake with a start, and say, "I thought I heard some one call. Perhaps Rangi has come back." So that her new husband hated the phantom Rangi as deeply as he had abominated the real one, and knew that though he was now absolute master of The Flame, the girl still pined for her first love.

One night, as the fighting-chief lay asleep with his wife by his side, and the silence of the starlit heavens rested on the kainga, suddenly The Flame awoke, and cried, "Somebody put his hand on me. There is some one in the hut. It is Rangi! He is here; I felt his touch."

"Go to sleep," said her husband. "Rangi is inside some great shark at the bottom of the sea."

"He is here. He came into the hut and placed his hand on my body, on my face, to feel if I, his wife, were here."

"He was drowned by Little Tu's incantation. He is at the bottom of the sea. The fish have eaten every bit of him."

"He is alive. He returned here, but when I moved he left the hut. If you are not a coward, get up, and see if he is outside."

In desperate fear the fighting-chief arose. If a spirit from the underworld were troubling his wife, he would rush back into the hut before it caught him; if a man, he would kill him. Seizing his taiaha—a species of wooden sword—he crept outside. All was still and silent. First he examined one side of the hut: there was no one there. He examined the other side: no one was hiding there. He was about to search the back of the hut, when he came face to face with a man, who, quick as lightning, gripped him by the throat before he could so much as cry out.

"I am at the bottom of the sea? I am in the fish's belly? And you take my wife? Take that!" and the hard edge of a stone mere was plunged into the side of the fighting-chief's head, and his skull cracked like an eggshell.

Without even a groan he sank to the earth, but the hand at his throat relaxed only when the last throb of life had died out of his quivering frame.

Then Rangi entered the hut.

"I knew you would come!" said his wife, holding out her arms in the dark. "I knew you were safe!"

"The storm almost drowned me, but my incantation was strong: it made the wind my friend, and the canoe was blown into Hua-toki. When I returned here, I came to your hut, I felt your face, I said, 'This is my wife, but there is a man lying in the hut with her.' Full of grief, I went out. By and by that man came to kill me, but he is dead. Tell me, who is he? What is his name?"

"My father thought you were drowned, and forced me to marry his fighting-chief."

"Instead of that I have been to Hawera, and have returned alive. Come, I will take you to my people—

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three hundred of them are waiting for me outside the pa."

Thus was The Flame restored to her first husband, come back as from the dead.