

The Koru of Times

The Legacy of a Māori Family

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Foreword

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, events and incidents are either the products of the author's imagination or used in a fictitious manner. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or actual events is purely coincidental.

The inter-chapters marked “...” serve to link the historical context with the unfolding narrative.

Chapter 1

Hahana and Amiri

The day started well. Since the two Māori tribes went fishing together success was almost everlasting. They exchanged knowledge and experience and only a selected best of the fishermen and the most suitable canoes went out at incoming tide to cast their nets.

As Amiri pulled in the last bits of the seine net into his canoe, Hahana shouted across the strip of sand, "How was the fishing today?" Her female companions exchanged glances, as it was disrespectful in their tribe to address a Māori warrior from the neighbouring tribe in such a way.

Amiri looked up briefly. A grin played around his blue-lined tattooed lips. Those close to him knew he liked the bold way Hahana appeared. He did not answer knowing that she had noticed his reaction. The young woman could read his body language, even from a distance, however inconspicuous it was. Instead, he instructed his warriors to take the heavy wooden boxes of the morning catch out of the boat, and then to haul the canoe up the beach where it would be stored in a long, narrow shed until the next fishing event.

Hahana was the eldest daughter of the head of the tribe and Ataahua, his first wife, and she carried herself with that status.



On this day, she wore one of her finest cloaks, which she had woven from ngaro flax, carefully scraping, beating, and washing the cloth until it was silken. The cloak was split into two parts, one worn around her waist and the other as a coat over her shoulders. She had long, thick hair which she parted at the back of her head, using the two bundled strands to cover her breasts. Being of high status in her tribe, she

wore a variety of necklaces made of animal teeth, colourful bird feathers, strips of animal fur, and dried, painted seeds. The necklaces held the cloak and strands of hair close to her body; only her partially exposed legs showing her smooth, slightly olive-coloured skin.

The first thing Amiri noticed when he looked up was Hahana's fine cloak and necklaces, confirming that she had her eyes on him as a potential husband. Amiri was not of a low standing himself, his father being the eldest war monger who, in his youth, defeated an attacking enemy tribe by taking the men as slaves and the women as workers. Because of this, his tribe was well-off, with many huts, a large guest house, and various food storehouses. The warriors were well-equipped with spears, and the women made the finest fishing nets and bore healthy children.

It was the women's task of both tribes to walk down to the beach, collect the fish, and carry it away to their respective cookhouses, where it would be smoked and dried. This was also an opportunity for the young people to interact, as

normally the sexes were busy with their daily tasks and remained separate.

As Hahana and her companions approached the canoe, Amiri signalled to her that he had something to say. Curious, she walked towards him. He looked at her with smiling eyes before speaking. "I will ask our fathers to exchange messages about us," he said. Hahana's heart warmed as he formally addressed her. She nodded, her gaze roaming over his appearance. He was a strong warrior and fisherman, with tight abdominal muscles, a broad chest, and heavily tattooed shoulders and arms. He had strong legs, making him an excellent warrior. He also had a prominent chin and a determined look on his broad face, and she liked his calmness and kindness towards all those around him, be they slaves, family members, peers, or elders.

Amiri was not immune to Hahana's beauty, as her shapely feminine contours did not go unnoticed by him or any of the men in his tribe, with many of them licking their lips at the thought of her as a potential wife. However, Amiri had been with

many women, mostly of a lower status, whom he used only to satisfy his sexual appetite.

But Hahana was different. As the daughter of the tribal chief, her moko kauae, the sacred female lip and chin tattoo, was elaborate. Amiri believed that every woman carried her moko kauae close to her heart and that the tattoo artist would bring it to the surface as soon as the woman was ready for it, usually after her first blood. Hahana's moko consisted of intricate patterns of spirals and lines that extended to her neck, featuring a unique design representing the carving tradition of her tribe. Amiri could not help but feel proud at the thought of his future with a woman of such social status and beauty, and of the children she would bear him.

Their eyes met with such passion that they became anchored in each other. Neither of them wanted to break away from this beautiful moment until Hahana's closest friend, Irirangi, tugged at her dress. "Let's get on with it or we won't be able to finish our chores today," she whispered.

Hahana tore herself away from Amiri, who was still standing there like a statue, adoring her. "Go

ahead," he shouted after the departing group of young women, "Matariki, the time of reflection and hope is approaching. Our tribes will gather for a Hāngī to share food from the earth oven. We will meet again then!"

Matariki, the appearance of a cluster of certain stars, was significant to them. It was a celebration of the natural elements, the harvest, and the tribe members' mental and physical well-being. Matariki also ushered in a time of remembrance when they allowed the spirits of their dead to become stars.

Irirangi, Hahana's childhood and soul friend, winced slightly when Amiri mentioned Matariki. Irirangi was the most spiritual of Hahana's companions, and before and during the celebrations, she usually withdrew into herself and hardly spoke. Her mother had died in the last winter, and this occasion would be a time for her to mourn her, making her even more inaccessible to others.

Hahana took her hand and squeezed it gently. "I will not let you leave my side," she said.

"It is not what you think," Irirangi answered softly.

Hahana stopped in her tracks. "What do you mean?"

"Let me brush your hair tonight," Irirangi suggested. It was Irirangi's way of communicating a sense of intimacy, a time she would use to tell a secret or deeply felt thoughts. She had Papuan blood in her ancestry, which gave her skin a darker tone and made her features appear flatter than those of Māori of Polynesian descent. Despite her background, Hahana never saw any reason to discriminate against her. Nevertheless, Irirangi's way of thinking differed markedly from that of her other peers, but this pleased rather than displeased Hahana, as it made her best friend interesting. Irirangi was very empathetic and had always been loyal to her.



Evening was fast approaching as the women were busy preparing the fish. The walls of the cookhouse were built with the crooked trunks of fern trees, allowing the smoke to escape through the gaps. The delicious smell of smoked fish drifted through the village, making everyone relax,

knowing that there was enough food for the near future.

Tired, Irirangi made her way to Hahana's hut. All day she had carried the fish from the beach to the cookhouse, which had left a sore spot on her spine from the basket. She knew she would spend most of the next day with Hahana, resting and recovering. Hahana was always fair and kind to her, and for that, she was grateful.

Hahana received her friend with impatience. Irirangi fetched the boar's hairbrush, stood behind Hahana, and began to arrange her hair so that she could brush it. As she did so, she gently ran her fingers through it and laid it out on Hahana's back. As she set the brush for the first stroke, she said, "Be warned, you might not like what I'm about to tell you."

"As always, your words are surrounded by a cloud of mystery," Hahana said as she enjoyed the gentle touch of her friend on her back.

Irirangi swallowed before she began. "In my dream, which wasn't a dream because I didn't

wake up from it, but rather found myself in the middle of the forest, I saw a spring rising from between the roots of a huge tree."

"Why do you mention a dream if it wasn't a dream?" Hahana interrupted.

"Because it felt like an awakening when I suddenly found myself in the forest near the spring."

This confused Hahana, but she nodded to prompt her friend to continue.



"The spring was unusual because it bubbled from several openings around the base of the tree, at the places where the partially exposed roots disappeared into the ground." She paused to concentrate on brushing and to remember the details at the same time. "When I got closer, I knelt to touch the spring water. It was very soft, almost like the down of a newly hatched bird. It was also warm and flowed very slowly over my hand; not as fluid as water, but more like honey."

What does it all mean? Hahana wondered as she dozed off during her friend's tales. The gentle strokes over her hair made her sleepy.

"And as I sat there gazing at the strange spring, I remembered why I had come there," Irirangi continued.

Hahana felt a tug on her scalp. A knot in her so well-kept hair? "Why had you come there?" she asked, somewhat annoyed about the painful moment.

"I was looking for you. You had disappeared from the village, and I was worried."

Hahana felt the brushing getting harder.

"Do you know when all this occurred?" Irirangi asked, not waiting for a response before continuing. "It was during Matariki, and I was wandering in the darkness."

Hahana turned around to face her friend. "But... did you find me? Where was I?"

Irirangi seemed to be in a trance and did not respond to her friend's question. "As I looked up, the moon shone brightly as it peeked out from

behind a cloud, and I could hear the melodic chirping of a bird overhead. The bird spread its wings and flew away, disappearing into thin air. And then I noticed that I was covered in the sacred and rare tail feathers of the Huia. I couldn't understand why I was wearing them."

Hahana listened to her friend with wide eyes. "I don't know, Irirangi. I can't explain why you wore the Huia feathers," she whispered.

"But the worst part is yet to come," Irirangi continued. "I heard a gurgling sound coming from the roots and saw that the water had turned to blood. It was the spirit of the taniwha, the water demon. I was in its place," she said fearfully.

* * *

Hahana pushed aside her fears, determined not to let Irirangi's warnings ruin her wedding day. Matariki had passed without incident, and she was excited for the official announcement of her union with Amiri. The elders of their tribes had also made plans for further unity and fortification against a hostile tribe moving in from the south

taking everything suitable with it on its way: women, children, food, canoes, and weapons. She was eager to become Amiri's wife and strengthen the bond between their tribes, knowing that together they were invincible.

As Hahana stepped out of her hut on the wedding day, she found her female companions waiting for her, ready to walk her to the guest house where the ceremony would take place. Hahana asked, with a hint of irritation, "Where is Irirangi?" to which her companions replied, "She has gone to gather kawakawa leaves."

Hahana's eyes scanned the path that led to a group of trees, where she expected Irirangi to return. When she saw her, she relaxed. Irirangi approached and explained, "This is a good luck charm for pregnancy and to remove bad energy," as she placed a handful of leaves one by one on Hahana's shoulders.

Hahana let it happen patiently, but couldn't help asking, "My dear friend, why are you always so superstitious?"

"It is part of my being." Irirangi smiled.

The sight of her friend's rare smile made Hahana's heart leap with joy. *She too must have put her vision behind*, Hahana concluded. With a deep breath, she pushed aside her doubts and focused on the present moment, ready to embrace the future with Amiri by her side.

Hahana was adorned with a beautiful crown made by her mother Ataahua, crafted from grass roots, and decorated with shells, seeds, and bird feathers collected over the weeks. The crown was the most beautiful headdress Hahana had ever owned, and it fitted her head perfectly. She also wore a matching braided hairstyle with colourful feathers and shells. To complete her attire, she donned a kurī cloak, made from noble dog skin and passed down through generations. Hahana honoured the spiritual quality of the kurī cloak, which was said to transmit a source of energy through ancestors: authority, power, prestige, status, and integrity – ancestral power embracing people and the lands they depended on.

. . .

Upon arriving at the guesthouse, the group was greeted by a group of Māori women from both tribes who sang with powerful voices. They emphasized the meaning of their words by holding their fluttering hands in front of them, symbolizing the waves of heat that expressed the burning passion between lovers. The women sang and danced, forming a corridor through which Hahana walked towards Amiri, who stood tall, magnificent, and smiling at the end.

He was connected to a group of elders from both tribes by a sacred long, dark green feather of the Moa, an extinct giant bird. The feather was attached to his belt and held at the other end by the elders. Each of them touched it and once Hahana had reached Amiri, they dropped it. This signalled the change in the women's chant, which now became louder and more joyful. Amiri stretched out his strong arms, lifted Hahana up and walked back down the corridor between the singing women. At the end stood their respective mothers, greeting them with a solemn hongi. Tears rolled down Ataahua's cheeks as she pressed her nose and forehead against Hahana's and Amiri's. Amiri's mother remained composed,