



THE BOOK OF WIRIMU

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Chapter III.

THE RIVER AND MRS. WATERFORD

WHEN the river was green and quiet as moss, it ran softly between the boulders, gently brushing the waving tresses of the river slime. And Wiri played for hours in its warm waters, until the soles of his brown feet were pink as the under-neaths of mushrooms.

He made boats of the thick flax sticks that grew beside the river. He cut the sticks, then sharpened the ends and hollowed out the pith until he had a whole fleet of canoes.

He piled some stones between two boulders so that the water deepened behind them, then fell with a tiny rush down the other side. And he talked to himself in Maori, pretending.

"I am the Great Chief, and these are my warriors, and he who can shoot over the Kata Kehua falls shall marry my beautiful daughter, Tinopai, but the inside of the canoe must be untouched by water—the warrior must sit straight to sail the rapids below."

He put his canoes in the water and tried them over and over, till his bare brown back was burnt almost black with the sun, and the palms of his hands and his feet were pink as the under-neaths of mushrooms. But still none of his canoes could win the great chief's daughter. So he helped his favourite one by guiding it with a blade of grass and it won.

Then he pulled out some river slime and scrubbed and washed a boulder for the wedding feast. He went to the bank and collected watercress and river pipi's from the mud to put on the boulder table for the feast. But there came a thud, thud along the sand and splash, splash through the water, and Tiger bounded on to the boulder and pushed the great feast into the water.

"Etama, Tiger! Etama!"

Tiger slithered about on the rock and licked Wiri's hot brown face, whining and barking as he looked up the river till Wiri looked too.

At the lower end of the pool, above the crossing, Hori was baling out his canoe, and Wiri ran along the bank and splashed through the water and climbed

into the stern. Tiger struggled in, too, shaking the water from his rough coat as he trotted to the bows.

Hori finished baling and paddled up the river, up the longest pool in the Wai-tuku-tuki. The canoe was made by Toa, Hori's father, shaped and hollowed from a giant Totara.

There were flax kits, and hooks and lines in the canoe, and a hinaki for trapping eels, and some jam tins.

Wiri sat dragging his fingers through the deep cool green water, listening to the soft splish-splash of the paddles. They passed below the Waterford's house. They passed below the woolshed and the dip and slid into the cool green darkness of the gorge. A mob of wild duck flew quarking from the water, and a water-rat scuttled along a mossy ledge into the maidenhair. "I hope I had a gun," whispered Wiri to himself.

Away ahead a trout rose, dimpling the water, caught at a beetle which dropped from a fern frond, and darted to the bottom as the canoe came over. They slid round a corner and suddenly came aground in the blazing white sunlight of the open river bed.

Hori took two of the kits and Wiri followed him—blinking at the glare from the papa rock. They climbed up the bank through the Koninis to the clump of wild cherry trees beyond. They ate and ate the fat red cherries till the juice made wet clean tracks from the corners of Wiri's mouth down his hot brown chin. And Hori ate just as many as Wiri, because they hadn't had any breakfast and they hadn't had any dinner, and only eels and puha the night before.

When they were full, they filled their kits and carried them down to the canoe. They floated easily down the river to the track leading up to the Waterfords.

Hori went first, carrying his kit of cherries, then Wiri, then Tiger.

They found Mrs. Waterford picking sweet peas in her garden.

"Hello, Hori! Hello, Wiri, and Tiger, too? What lovely cherries, Hori. Been to your secret place I suppose."

"For you, Mary," said Hori.

"For me? Oh, Hori! Go round to the kitchen and have some dinner with the men, you must be tired."

So they ate their dinner. Kapai. Kapai. Lamb, mint sauce, green peas, new potatoes, apple pie, cream. And the shepherds talked all the time about dogs.

"Thank you, kapai." Hori and Wiri left the men and the cook and went to find Mrs. Waterford, who was hosing the vegetables.

"Good cabbage, Mary."

"Yes, Hori, you must have some. Oh, and Hori, the boss said to give you a quarter of meat. And there's half a bag of flour you can have—the cook doesn't like the brand. You're looking thin, Hori, you work too hard. Wiri, here's a white rose for your buttonhole. Oh, you haven't a buttonhole, have you? Well for your belt then, Wiri."

But Wiri held it in his hand, his belt was tight enough—and he followed Hori and his heavy load down to the river.

"Py corry, Mary the good woman—I give him kumara in the autumn—all my kumara."

They loaded the canoe and floated silently down the river—the trout were jumping round them, silver sickles in the star-light. Wiri, with his white flower, sang softly to himself, and Hori smoked peacefully, lazily steering the canoe with his paddle. In the bows, Tiger, the tense brindled figurehead, strained forward in the half darkness. . . . On the whare doorstep, Miu, the cat, waited trustful and patient. . .

(Next week you will hear about the big fish they caught in the river).

EASTER IS OVER

To Young Listeners,

EASTER is over and most of the eggs and chickens seem to have left town. We hope that you each had at least one of the magnificent golden and silver eggs which have been glittering in shop windows for the last few weeks.

If you didn't, then perhaps you were luckier still and had one of the old-fashioned kind that hens lay.

Perhaps your mother took Anut Daisy's advice and wrapped an egg in onion skins before she boiled it. Or perhaps she boiled it in gorse flowers, or put cochineal in the water, so that you could have a yellow or a pink egg which children used, to like even more than you like your golden chocolate egg.

It's spring at the other side of the world where Easter began far more than 1941 years ago, and hens are hatching out chickens, and trees that have seemed to be almost dead have burst into leaf. Primroses are out and lambs and calves and rabbits and daffodils. The birds chirp and burst into song because things that have seemed dead have come alive again to live forever.

Box of Tricks

Timothy wants a trick for his party next week. Not one of those silly ones that anyone can see through, but something pretty good. Here's one out of the Box.

Get a sheet of brown paper and a glass tumbler. Put the glass on a corner of the paper and mark round it with a pencil. Cut out the paper and paste it neatly over the opening of the tumbler. When it's dry, cut off any edges. Make your sheet of brown paper tidy. Put the glass upside down on the sheet. Get a sixpence and a big handkerchief, preferably a Pirate one.

The party will begin, and when it's time for the trick, Timothy must put on a very important look, and talk rather importantly, too.

"Now you see that sixpence?"

"Yes," they'll all say, breathlessly.

"Well, you just watch." And he will then put the handkerchief over the glass and mutter some mysterious words as he lifts the tumbler with the handkerchief and places it over the sixpence, then with a flourish he will flick off the handkerchief.

The party then will all gasp with wonder, because the sixpence has quite disappeared, and they don't know that it is hidden by the brown paper pasted on the glass—they don't even know that there is any brown paper pasted on the glass.