

for everyone. At last all of them were opened, and everyone was happy. Even the old people smiled and got into the spirit of things.

"E kare," Tama's mother said to his father, "how much longer will the kai be? Everything else is ready."

"It should be ready now," he replied. "Ae," agreed Uncle Wati. "Time to dig it up."

Tama, Mutu and Rewa raced out to the hangi well ahead of the others. They didn't want to miss anything.

At last the men arrived and began to carefully remove the soil. Soon they could see the sacks and the light steam rising from them. These were peeled back, and so much steam gushed forth that Tama could barely see who was on the other side. The first basket containing the vegetables was removed and then the meat. The aroma of cooked food followed. Delicious! "Ae, ka pai e hoa!" Uncle Wati breathed, and Tama's father nodded in agreement.

The meat was placed onto a spare table in the marquee and the men began to carve it. Equal quantities of meat and vegetables were put in dishes and placed all around the tables. It was



so mouthwatering. Pieces of chicken, pork and mutton, steaming hot and perfectly cooked. Then everyone was seated. The children fidgeted and squirmed impatiently until Tama's father had said the karakia.

At last they were allowed to eat, and Tama took his first bite of hangi. It tasted more delicious than anything he had eaten in his life. The meat was so tender and easy to chew and, though he had never really cared too much for pumpkin and potatoes, cooked in a hangi they were something else again; they remained firm, and the faint taste of wood smoke gave them a taste of their own. The ooh's and aah's coming from everyone else told Tama that he was not the only one who thought so.

Usually Tama and Mutu had preferred the jellies, trifle and puddings, or the sweets and nuts; even the cakes. But now, they ate so much hangi that there was no room left for anything else.

A long while later, they left the table too contented even to play.

When everyone had finally finished, the remaining food was covered with table cloths, and Tama's father said that if anyone was hungry they were to help themselves. But for now, more food was the last thing on anyone's mind.

However, a few hours later, some of the family were back to pick again. Even cold, the hangi food was delicious.

Tama's last thought that night, when he, Mutu and Rewa were snuggled down for the night, was 'I wish that we have another hangi next Christmas.'

