



6. WAIROA MARAE

TE PURA TE TANIWHA

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About 100 metres upstream from the road bridge over the Wairoa River, there is a deep hole near the riverbank on the Tauranga side. This is the home of Te Pura and the road down there nowadays is called Taniwha Place. Te Pura was also the name of the pā that is now called Wairoa, on the hill above the road-bridge.

The people of Te Pura knew about the taniwha in the river and mostly left it alone. One day, though, some young men of the pā were feeling bored and decided to have a bit of fun. A group of them went down to the river to the bank by the home of the taniwha. They made sure the taniwha was out before they plunged into the water and dived right into the resting place of the taniwha in the deep hole in the river, and took away all of the taniwha's eggs. They then put the eggs in a kete and took them back to the pā.

That night, the taniwha returned home to find its nest had been robbed of all its eggs. The taniwha climbed out on the bank for it knew, in some magical way that a taniwha does, what had happened. It climbed up the hill to the pā and followed the scent of those cheeky young men who had stolen its eggs. It found the wharepuni where they were sleeping, but it did not disturb the people inside. Instead, it crept carefully through the door and looked around. The kete full of eggs was hanging from the rafters.

The taniwha then stood up on its hind legs, reached for the kete and turned back toward the door. Unfortunately however, it misjudged the size of the doorway and crashed into it, bringing down the lintel. The sleepers awoke in time to see the great tail of the taniwha disappearing through the doorway. They huddled together in terror, not knowing what revenge the taniwha might take on them for stealing its eggs. All was silent.

After a while, curiosity overcame their fear and the people looked out of the wharepuni. There, they saw the taniwha in the moonlight, making its way back down the hill to the river. They followed at a safe distance and saw the taniwha plunge back into its home in the hole by the bank of the river.

Nothing else happened that night but the next morning there was some explaining to do. What had made the lintel fall down from the doorway? The young culprits who stole the eggs of the taniwha had to admit what they had done and they were harshly scolded by their elders.

The people of Te Pura felt that they had to acknowledge the generous action of the Taniwha; for it had not taken its revenge on the people of the pā even though it had been disrespected. It was decided that the people of Te Pura should adopt this taniwha, and be responsible for its welfare. In times when food in the river was scarce, the people of Te Pura made sure the taniwha had enough to eat.

In time, this taniwha became known as the guardian taniwha of Te Pura and was named Te Pura too. The taniwha acknowledged the concern shown by the people by watching over them. Whenever they went into the river. The taniwha took care to ensure that they met with no accident. If a child went out of their depth and was in danger of drowning, the taniwha gently nudged them back into shallow water.

One day a man named Te Teira decided to sail with his family from Te Pura back to Hawaiki. Preparations were made for the expedition and when all was done to equip the waka with provisions, the family sailed out of the Wairoa, out of Tauranga Moana, and into the great ocean, Te Moananui a Kiwa.

For several days the family sailed northeast in fine weather and away from Aotearoa. They were well out of sight of land when a great storm blew up. The wrath of Tangaroa descended on them in great foaming waves. The winds of Tawhirimatea tore through their rigging. By the time the storm blew itself out, Te Teira and his family were lost in unknown seas. Fearing the worst, Te Teira called on the four winds of heaven for guidance and from the ocean depths there appeared a taniwha. It was none other than Te Pura - the guardian taniwha of Wairoa.

Te Teira then gave up the idea of returning to Hawaiki. He did not know where it was anyway and the sight of Te Pura, his own guardian Ttaniwha, made him realise that his destiny lay back in Tauranga Moana. The taniwha led the people in their waka back to Aotearoa where the height of Mauao and the bush-covered ranges from Ōtānewaiknuku to Te Aroha and on to Moehau soon came into view. As the canoe entered the waters of Tauranga Moana, the Taniwha dived down and swam away back to its home in the deep hole in the Wairoa.

Te Teira and his family returned home too. For a long time, the chief topic of conversation around Tauranga Moana was how the guardian taniwha, Te Pura, had guided them back home safely.
