



Ngā Tātarakihi o Parihaka*

by Lucy Ira Bailey

Rarawa was in the bakery, kneading bread dough, when she heard the news.

“The government men were here, talking to Te Whiti,” Api cried, bursting through the door. Rarawa heard the note of panic in her brother’s voice and left off her work. Her hands were aching anyway.

“No need to run to tell us that, boy,” Aunty Maata said. “Those Pākehā are always here, coming and going, saying the same thing and never listening.” The kuia shovelled more loaves into the oven, swinging the heavy paddle without effort. “Now pick up that sack for me.”

Api hefted the flour onto the bench where Aunty Maata could better reach it. “They read out some sort of proclamation,” he continued. “We’ve got two weeks before the soldiers come. That’s what everyone is saying.”

“We’ll see,” Aunty Maata said. “But I’ve heard it all before. Anything else? We’ve got work to do.”

“Te Whiti and Tohu have called a meeting. Everyone’s coming.”

“Well, we’ll need more bread then,” Aunty Maata said, wiping the sweat from her forehead. She shooed Api outside and came over to check on the loaves. Rarawa tried to hide her slow progress, but there wasn’t much the kuia missed.

Aunty Maata sighed, then surprised Rarawa by smiling. “Off you go for a swim. It’ll wake you up. And come back with Rangi. We’ll need the extra help.” She gave Rarawa a quick squeeze with one arm. “You’ll work better after a break.”

Rarawa wiped her hands and gently covered the balls of dough with a cloth. As she left, she heard the kuia muttering. “It will be all right,” Aunty Maata was saying to herself. But Rarawa wasn’t so sure. Her brother didn’t usually get things wrong.

* This title means “The Cicadas of Parihaka”. Parihaka has long associated its tamariki with cicadas. This is because children usually stayed inside during winter, emerging in the summer like cicadas with their loud, happy chorus. It is a very old metaphor expressing the idea that conflict and difficulty can be endured if you stay focused on better times when peace is restored. Summer always returns.



As Rarawa ran through the streets, messengers were already heading out of the pā. There was no doubt people would come to the meeting. Parihaka was where everyone came to hear the teachings of Tohu and Te Whiti and to make decisions together. There would be hundreds here by nightfall; more over the coming days.

At the river, she barely stopped to whip her dress over her head before plunging into the still-cold October water. She gasped, heart hammering, and ducked her head under. When Rarawa came up, she saw Rangi on the big rock, basking in the sun like a skink.

“Are you coming in?” Rarawa called. Rangi screwed up her nose, then shrugged. She leapt into the river, landing with a big splash right in front of Rarawa.

“Did you hear?” Rarawa asked as soon as her friend surfaced.

“Hear what?”

“The soldiers are coming.”

Rangi stood up, suddenly very serious. “Soldiers. Are you sure?”

“I think so,” Rarawa said, remembering all the messengers. She looked down the river, shivering in the waist-deep water. The soldiers would be coming from that direction, from the new road that led to New Plymouth.



When the Pākehā government began taking down fences and destroying crops, Te Whiti had tried talking. When words failed, instead of turning to violence, as the government expected, the people of Parihaka turned their swords into ploughshares, just like it said in the Pākehā Bible. The two girls’ fathers had been among the first to plough up the surveyed fields in protest. They had been arrested and sent to prison without trial. Hundreds more followed. Rarawa had turned twelve without her father. Now she was thirteen. She didn’t know when she would see him again.

Rarawa and Rangi clambered up the bank and began to dress.

“Are you scared?” asked Rangi.

“Yes,” said Rarawa. She was scared, but it was only then that she began to cry. Rarawa angrily brushed the tears away. Crying wouldn’t help. “What if they take our brothers this time?”

“Maybe we should all just leave,” said Rangi.

But the girls knew that no one would be leaving. This was their home, and the people of Parihaka had done nothing wrong. Instead, the Pākehā needed to see what Rarawa could see now: the potato and kamokamo and cabbage fields, the acres of wheat – their peaceful way of life. They would stay and stand strong – just as they always had.



Rarawa focused on the slap, slap, slap of her poi. She swung them in time with Rangī and the other girls, but fear had erased the words she was supposed to sing. She watched the soldiers marching towards them, the early morning light glinting on their rifles. The soldiers passed the young girls skipping. They passed the young boys playing with their marbles and spinning tops. The people of Parihaka were greeting the soldiers with their most treasured possessions as a sign of peace. They were greeting the soldiers with their children. As the men drew closer, the girls sang even louder. Rarawa met her friend's eye, and the words came flooding back. They spoke of the land, their ancestors, and peace. Rarawa felt the strength of the song and of the voices around her.

The soldiers were upon them, pushing their way through. The stale smell of their sweat was overpowering. Then Aunty Maata was there, holding out a loaf of bread. But the soldiers ignored Aunty Maata and the other women with bread. They carried on up to the marae, where the rest of the people sat, silent and unmoving.

For the next few hours, Parihaka held its breath. The man named Bryce, with his cannon on the hill, read out an order for the people to leave. Rarawa sat with her mother and brother on the marae, her eyes fixed on the albatross feathers on the heads of Tohu and Te Whiti. No one spoke, but whenever Api caught her eye, he gave Rarawa a gentle smile.

When the soldiers finally acted, Rarawa thought her heart might stop. But they didn't fire their cannon. They didn't take her brother. Instead, they took Tohu and Te Whiti and marched them away. As they left, the two men told their people to be steadfast, peaceful, and unafraid.

"We looked for peace, and we find war," Tohu called.

Rarawa and her mother held one another close. Her mother's cheek was hot and wet.

"Are we safe?" Rarawa whispered. "Will all of the soldiers leave now?" But her mother said nothing.

illustrations by Tom Simpson



Parihaka

A Brief History

“Ngā Tātarakihi o Parihaka” is an imaginary account of the experience of the author’s great-grandmother, who was born at Parihaka. At the time this story is set, Parihaka was the largest Māori settlement in New Zealand. It had become a haven for the people of Taranaki – and for those from further afield – whose land had been taken by the government during the New Zealand Wars. Two rangatira led the people of Parihaka – Te Whiti-o-Rongomai and Tohu Kākahi. Both men were spiritual leaders committed to the vision of a self-sufficient community that would peacefully assert the rights of Māori during a time of great change. Regular meetings were held on the eighteenth and nineteenth day of each month to discuss important issues and ensure that the kaupapa of Parihaka was upheld.

In 1879, the people of Parihaka began to protest about the government selling Māori land to Pākehā settlers. They protested by removing survey pegs, rebuilding fences that had been taken down to make way for new roads, and ploughing up the Māori land being used by Pākehā farmers. A law was passed allowing the government to hold the protesters without trial, and by September 1880, hundreds of men and boys had been sent to the South Island, where they were used as forced labour. Then, on the morning of 5 November 1881, Parihaka was invaded by over fifteen hundred government soldiers and volunteers. Te Whiti and Tohu were arrested, and most of the kāinga was destroyed. The armed constabulary occupied the village for the next two years.

Today, people still live at Parihaka, and the traditional monthly meetings continue to be held. The gardens remain an important part of the community – as do the teachings of Tohu and Te Whiti.



JUVENILE PARIHAKA W/ITE FEATHER INDICATES FOLLOWERS OF TE WHITI No 8



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