

The Touchstone

Chapter Five – The Pa

Far out!

I must be dreaming!

I looked at my hands and waved and flexed them in front of my eyes! I looked down at myself. I was wearing a loin cloth that wound around my waist and between my legs. My feet were bare. Around my neck was a pendant in the shape of a manaia. Feeling my head, I could feel that my hair was tied in a knot towards the back of my head.

Tumeke! This was so awesome!

My feet seemed to know where to go and I followed them! On the west side of the area where the tohunga lived, the upper and lower palisades came together blocking any exit. There was a small opening that took you straight up into the top level of the pa, but as I was Tohunga Matapo's acolyte I had to go back around the long way, as this shortcut was forbidden to me. Retracing the way Rua and I'd come earlier, I tried to absorb everything I looked at! Everything was totally fascinating! I saw for the first time, all've the obstacles that can get in a person's way and I wondered how I'd ever managed to walk anywhere safely blind. I wanted to see and touch everything!

The chords binding the stakes together forming the palisades were bound extremely tightly by chords made of finely woven flax and they also had a layer of grease lathered over them to protect them from the weather. At the top of some of the stakes was a decorative bump or something.

Ugh GROSS!

I'd just realised that the bumps were human heads! It was definitely kind of gross standing next to parts of dead people! But they were so weathered by the sun and rain that you couldn't really make out any of the facial features otherwise I would've puked! They just looked all black and leathery.

I continued on and made my way back to the main entry where I had three choices. If I turned left I could explore the top level of the pa site directly above where Tohunga Matapo lived, or I could follow the pathway down into the deep trench and then back up into the second main area within the pa.

Turuturu Mokai was split into different areas. So instead of having one huge living space, it had two areas, divided by a deep trench and palisades. My third choice was to head down towards the gardens to explore the surrounding area. Excitedly hopping from foot to foot, I made up my mind and walked under the big wooden watch tower leading into the area above where Tohunga Matapo lived.

The few toa (warriors) who were gathered around the watch tower let me pass through un-challenged. Because most of the rules concerning a tohunga's tapu status applied to me I was always totally ignored. Anyway! I was kind of relieved that these toa didn't bother me as they were harsh looking men! Like me, they wore only loincloths. But some wore a cloth like a sash over their shoulders. They all wore their hair in intricate topknots and most had feathers stuck into their knot. All of them had their ears pierced and had bone or pounamu earrings and some had large shark tooth pendants around their necks on plaited chords.

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They also had streaks of white clay all over their bodies that made them look like kehua! Their fierce faces darkened by their moko, stood out even more above their whitened bodies.

Walking past the toa into the main area, I saw fires burning and could smell food cooking. Only the very young children were running around and playing. The older kids all seemed to be busy. The girls were helping prepare the kai with the older wahine (women). The boys were either listening to the conversations taking place between the elders so that they could learn how to korero (discuss/talk), while others watched as fish-hooks, tools and weapons were made. I smiled at a chubby baby boy who was staring at me. I waved at him and was rewarded with a shy smile before he turned his head away opening his mouth towards the food that his mother was intent on feeding him with.

“Matakite! Haeri mai, come on!”

Rua’s smiley face had appeared at my side and he beckoned me to follow him. He held a burning torch high in the sky to help light our path. On the way back to where the tohunga lived, I could see the small pa on the south side lit up by cooking fires and flaming torches.

“Where’s Tohunga Matapo, Rua?” I could see that he wasn’t in his small whare. Rua shrugged his shoulders, as if the answer was obvious.

“He’s preparing himself for the ceremony! He’s gone to cleanse himself at the wai tapu. He’ll be back soon.” Rua went and got a kite (basket) of Kumerahou (soap) leaves and flowers and we went down to the area set aside for us to bath in. I didn’t mean to keep staring at Rua, but man! How often do you get to see and talk to a boy your age that lived centuries ago!

“Why are you staring at me Matakite!” Rua was being cheeky but I just grinned back.

“I didn’t realise how atahuua (beautiful) you were!” I cheekily answered.

Rua made a disgusted looking face and dived under the water washing off all the suds from the Kumerahou leaves.

We ran back up to the pa. Running is so awesome! When you’re blind you can’t really run freely, just in case you bang into something, or someone! And so the feeling of running really fast with the wind whizzing past my face was amazing. I ran taking big bounding strides and then changed tack and pumped my arms and legs as fast as I could for the last sprint around the palisade. The moon was high now and the first stars had appeared. I hadn’t ever seen stars before and the way they sparkled was totally cool!

By the time we’d got back we saw that Tohunga Matapo had returned. Rua threw himself into a frenzy as he ran backwards and forwards from the small kauta (shelter to cook in) where he’d prepared the dishes for the tohunga. The kai (food) Rua had prepared were dishes of fine boned weka and a fragrant mash of aruhe root. The weka had been baking coated in clay all day, which when cracked open smelled delicious!

Rua squatted down and fed the kai to Tohunga Matapo using a selection of wooden skewers to place the food directly into the tohunga’s open mouth. The process took ages because the tohunga didn’t have many teeth and so he had to chew for ages on each mouthful making loud slaps of his gums and grunts of pleasure as he ate!

Finally, Matapo made one final loud bellow of a burp and I just caught myself from laughing out loud.

Rua had seen me struggle not to laugh and grinned at me! We both ducked our heads to hide our smiles from blind Tohunga Matapo, who could not see - but who saw everything!

Free-style area - mum/dad or other whanau: write or draw something for your kids or moko's.