

## The Touchstone

### Chapter Six – The Ceremony

At a discreet nod from Tohunga Matapo, Rua hurried inside the whare to light the small fire that would keep the old tohunga warm during the night.

Rua had collected a large kite of soft fern leaves which he'd spread on top of a thickly woven mat that covered the earthen floor. He'd then placed a mat of softly woven flax on top of the ferns. Shortly after the tohunga had retired a smell like incense started wafting out of the whare and a low chanting could be heard as the tohunga spoke to the Gods.

Rua and I could finally have our kai. Usually a mokai wouldn't eat with a non-slave, but when we were alone we didn't worry about rules! I hadn't realised how starving I was until Rua placed the wooden bowl in front of me. Seeing the eel flesh my mouth watered, and after a hurried karakia, we both set upon the kai, skilfully using our fingers to push the tasty morsels into our mouths.

Rua did a quiet burp in imitation of old Tohunga Matapo and we laughed quietly together holding our hands over our mouths and then not being able to stop ourselves we fell to the ground rolling around trying to laugh without making any sound! Then to our total amazement a ruru (morepork owl) sitting watching us from the top of one of the stakes in the palisade called out "Mutu whakapohehe ana a tawhio noa!" (Stop fooling around) and then it flew off!

Rua was visibly shaken and his knees knocked together as he ran around putting away the cooking bowls and tidying things away. I was sure I could hear a quiet chuckling coming from inside Tohunga Matapo's whare!

But all the same, the ruru's words kinda put a damper on the moment and so I started to get myself ready for sleeping.

I slept in the small open porch in front of Tohunga Matapos's whare. Because it was summer the night was warm enough and so I didn't need a cloak to cover me. Since arriving, I'd been so busy that I hadn't even had a moment to stop and think about why I was here. Or more importantly how I was going to get home! For the first time I wondered what'd happened to me at the 'other end'. I still wasn't really a hundred percent sure that any of this was real. Maybe I'd knocked myself out somehow, and was actually in a coma? I finally fell asleep, only to be shaken awake by Rua a short time later.

"Wake-up! Tohunga Matapo is ready for you. But first you need to prepare yourself."

Rua and I hurried along a pathway away from Turuturu Mokai. The path led over the softly rounded hills heading in the direction that the sun rose in the morning. Shortly we came to the wai tapu where Rua and I parted. I went forward by myself chanting the karakia that Tohunga Matapo had taught me for the purpose of cleansing. Reaching the small pool, I sat on my knees by the water and cleared my mind. This was harder to do now as I had so many images jostling for attention in my head! Before when I was blind, my head was full of sounds and feelings, but not images.

As I completed each part of the karakia I leant forward and scooped a handful of water over various parts of myself. Finally, I was able to say 'Kei te mahia e te reira' (it is done!) and re-join Rua for the walk back to the pa.

After a few minutes we rounded the final corner and there in front of us was Turuturu Mokai! The moon lit the landscape in a bright light. Turuturu Mokai was an amazing sight to see with its terraces, palisades and watch towers all standing so commandingly on the hill surrounded by the fast-flowing stream. It looked like a medieval castle!

We stopped just before we rounded the corner from the tohunga's whare and again Rua stepped respectfully back from me to let me walk by myself. Approaching Tohunga Matapo who was sitting cross-legged in front of his whare I kept my head respectfully bowed as I approached. When I was within hearing distance, the tohunga started chanting an ancient karakia.

At appropriate times I responded letting my voice weave in with the tohungas. As I walked, I carefully chose the placement of each step I took letting my legs flex and bend as I flicked my heels up behind me!

When I was about two metres away from the tohunga we both ceased chanting and entered into a type of a trance. The elderly tohunga was sitting before me with his head tilted to one side listening intently to the whispering Gods and I crouched before him on bended knee.

The tendrils of incense gently wound around us like tentacles. The incense had been made by mixing different gum resins and herbs together to make a blend of smoke that was heady and exotic smelling.

A ruru hooted three times and the tohunga's head snapped up... And he spoke;

***I had a vision of Maori boy who had a trumpet in his mouth. This boy looked like a Maori of all the ages. This boy had at the end of his trumpet a tui bird making a tui call. The boy blew his trumpet and I could see that the Maori people, and the others, heard his call. They rose to the call of the tui to be warriors of the land. They rose up from different parts of the land all over Aotearoa and threw the unrighteous from the land of Pukehaupapa (Ancient name for Mt Taranaki)***

Hearing the tohunga from my place amongst the stars I returned to the land to reply:

"I am that Maori boy. I hear the call of Tohunga Matapo and will walk the way that has been laid out by the Gods."

Tohunga Matapo replied "ka waiho i te reira" (it will be).

Chanting quietly, Tohunga Matapo now led the way up to the highest part of the pa. Everyone was asleep within Turuturu Mokai and no one hindered us. We turned to face towards the east, then the west, south and then finally the north.

At each turn, the tohunga chanted a karakia, while he gestured towards me and repeated "kua tae mai te kaitiaki!" (The protector has come).

In return I nodded my head and replied "ae" (yes) three times!

The night passed and the ceremony ended.

Tohunga Matapo and I stood next to each other and we looked to the east to see the horizon lightening as dawn approached. Rua now stood next to us. He was closely watching the elderly and frail Tohunga Matapo, ready to spring to his aid if his step faltered.

Tohunga Matapo spoke once again;

“This place is special! This place is your touchstone! This place is for you to watch over the years! We are caught in a circle! This place is named...

...But as the tohunga’s last words reached me, it was as if I was slipping through a funnel! The particles of me became fluid as I was sucked away!

**The name...?**

## **What is the name...?**

I tried to shout as my mouth dissolved and I was no more.

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