

## The Touchstone

### Chapter Seven – The Return

*What is the name? Turuturu Mokai! ... What is your name?*

“Bart? **Bart?** Can you hear me?”

I opened my eyes and nothing. Just complete darkness. I was blind again.

I’d never understood what depression was until I felt it wash over me. I was poleaxed by my grief at not being able to see. I couldn’t even talk to anyone.

Not even my twin sisters Hine and Huia. Nothing could remove this grief. Nothing.

When I hadn’t come home for dinner, my family together with everyone in the neighbourhood had started searching for me. They’d soon found me fast asleep by the bridge at Turuturu Mokai. Apparently I had a guardian sheep sitting by me, chewing its cud. My parents kept on coming into my room and trying to engage me in talk. My mum in particular hovered around me, clucking her tongue and fluffing up my duvet and pillows. I would wake to feel her presence in my room. But I was too disinterested to be annoyed. I knew at a certain level that I needed to break out of this dark place I was in. But I couldn’t muster the strength. I had never felt so tired in my life.

All I could think about was what I’d lost. The feeling of running, watching people’s facial expressions, the moon and stars, even the heads on stakes! All of it gone. Worse was the nagging doubt that I’d never really experienced it. Maybe I was going porangi (mentally ill /crazy) or had a brain tumour.

I’d missed the last week of school and now it was the school holidays. I could hear my mum coming down the hallway towards my room and annoyingly it sounded like she was bringing me a visitor. No doubt one of my aunts who would cluck over me as well!

“Hey Bart,” said a familiar voice.

OMG! How could my mum bring Maddy into my room to see me like this! I was so embarrassed that I couldn’t speak. I swear the muscles in my throat all constricted. Maddy could sense how uncomfortable I was but she just talked like everything was normal.

“So, your mum said you haven’t been very well and that you haven’t wanted to talk to anyone. So what’s up?”

“I can’t talk about it,” I mumbled.

“Why, is it a secret? Are you a werewolf or do you have some freaky disease or something?” Maddy jokingly challenged.

“No. It’s just too weird. I don’t know how to explain it or where to begin.”

Maddy biffed me with a pillow!

“Come on Mr Secretive! You stink! When was the last time you showered! Poo! Go chuck on some lynx or whatever guys do to make themselves smell good and let’s get outside cause it’s so stuffy in here!”

I couldn’t help but crack into a grin. That’s one of the reasons I really liked Maddy. She was straight up!

---

I held my face up so that I could feel the warmth of the sun on it. Maddy and I were sitting together out on the patio talking.

“So come on, tell me what happened?”

How could I tell my new best friend everything that’d happened to me when I wasn’t exactly sure what had happened!

“Maddy do you believe in ghosts?” Before she could even answer I started talking.

“What if everything we know is not all that there is? What if there are parallel dimensions where you can exist in two places or times. Even physicists talk about chinks in time where two points meet.”

“Bart! For the third time! Tell me what happened! I mean it must’ve been serious. You haven’t talked to anyone since you were found. The first time I visited, you just ignored me!”

“What do you mean the first time?”

“The day after you were found I came to see you. But you were just curled up in a foetal ball and wouldn’t acknowledge anyone! Not me, your parents or sisters, no-one! Your mum said that you’ve never been like this before and she was really worried. So I know something weird has happened as you’re like a regular guy and not the sort to have hysterics or make stuff up.”

“I don’t know where to start. I still don’t know if it happened at all or if I’m going crazy. Do you remember when you guys were teasing me at school about living next door to Turuturu Mokai and you said that it was haunted? Well it is. When we moved here I could feel it almost straight away. I always felt like I was being watched.” Maddy shuffled closer and put her hand on my arm.

“So what happened that made you disappear down the rabbit hole?”

“I saw Turuturu Mokai.”

“No kidding you doofas! You do live right next door to it!”

“No Maddy, listen to me, I *saw* Turuturu Mokai.” I must’ve stunned her because we sat in silence for a while. Eventually Maddy spoke.

“What’d you see?”

I told her about seeing Rua for the first time and Tohunga Matapo and what the pa looked like in the moonlight and the heads up on the stakes and what it felt like to run. I talked about how it felt weird having visual images inside my head and then I told her about the ceremony and how Tohunga Matapo was just about to tell me the real name of Turuturu Mokai when I was pulled away.

If you want to talk to someone about yourself or someone you know - These numbers are all available 24/7

**KIDSLINE** phone: 0800 54 37 54 \* Over 18? Call **LIFELINE** 0800 543 354

Maddy questioned me for ages! She wanted me to explain the colours of things, and fifty million other bits of miniscule detail. We must've talked for hours because suddenly I realised how shattered I was as I couldn't stop yawning. "But Maddy, honestly I don't know if any of it was real. I mean it was just so unnatural. I've never even believed in ghosts before!"

"Bart I believe you, you were born blind. You've never seen anything, but you could describe things to me that you could've only experienced through sight! This is so cool Bart! This is totally amazing!" she said as she threw her arms around me hugging me tight.

"Whoa now you two! What have I walked in on?"

"Hey Dad, have you ever heard of privacy?"

"Yeah well sorry about that...but dinner waits for no one! Come on you two, grubs up!"

Mum was so happy that I was talking again that she wouldn't stop talking all through dinner! Bart, if you're feeling up to it the day after next I'm going out to Rotokare with my parents to see some hihi get released."

"What's hihi Maddy?"

"Birds! They're little birds that haven't been seen in Taranaki in 130 years! Don't worry though, by the time we drop you home my parents will have bored you stiff with a crash course on them!"

To be truthful I wasn't keen on going on a boring walk to watch birds being released that I couldn't even see. But I liked hanging out with Maddy and I would probably need a break from my mum who I knew would still want to hover around me for ages yet!

I was still really flat though. I'd never felt so constricted by being blind. For the brief time that I could see, it was like my whole world had opened up before me and anything and everything felt possible. Now it was just like my whole life was squashed down into things that were safe enough for me to do. I just had so much energy pulsing through me, but what could I do with it?

**I would've given anything to be able to see.**



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