

The Touchstone

Chapter Nine – The Pou

“Hey you’re in a better mood! But I bet you won’t be by the end of the day!” Maddy whispered quietly so that her parents wouldn’t hear her. But she was wrong!

We had an awesome day out at the Rotokare Scenic Reserve which is inland from the small town of Eltham. The sounds and scents of the native bush, lake and all the birds were totally awesome. Even the air felt cleaner out there.

Maddy’s parents were really into conservation in a big way and were really excited about the release of these rare forest birds called Hihi or the stitch-bird. Hihi meant ‘ray of sunshine’ and that’s the name given to them because the male bird has some bright yellow feathers.

Every one oohed and arred as the 40 Hihi were released into the bush. Even I felt good knowing that these little critters were back in Taranaki after 130 years!

On the drive back Maddy’s parents talked with passion about their upcoming protests against the sea bed mining off the coast of Patea. Maddy firmly instructed me not to ask them any questions... otherwise she warned, they’d never stop going on about it!

Summer began in stops and starts. The older aunties and uncles kept complaining that December wasn’t as warm as it used to be but I thought it was fine. Christmas was only three weeks away and I was really looking forward to it. I’m a total sucker for Christmas. Just the smell of the tree, tinsel and sugary biscuits topped with cinnamon is enough to make all my senses tingle with anticipation of fun and of course... heaps of presents!

Most days I’d either hang out with Maddy and our mates in town or she’d come out to my place and we’d listen to music. She’d make me laugh by reading out loud what our friends were talking about on Facebook or she’d describe the funny photos on Snapchat. Hine and Huia usually had mates over too and more often than not everyone would end up laxing in my room. Because it was as far away from our ever-hovering parents as you could get!

Today Maddy and I were lying outside on a blanket in the shade of a tree in our backyard. Maddy wanted to hear in detail about my adventure over on Turuturu Mokai again. It was like she was totally fascinated with it. I just tried to forget it as it did my head in thinking about it.

“So what was the last thing Tohunga Matapo said to you?”

“For the millionth time, he said: 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... and that was when I got sucked away!”

“Where were you standing when he said of this?”

“Um... we were on the highest part of the pa. Looking towards where the sun comes up.”

“Bart that’s where the fenced-off pou is! Listen to what the tohunga told you...This is your touchstone! Bart it could be a portal!”

“Whatever Maddy!”

“No it must be! He said it was your touchstone! Why else would he say that? Why don’t we sneak over tonight and find out?”

“Maddy you’re crazy!”

“You aren’t scared are you Bart?”

My parents were okay with Maddy sleeping over, but I had to keep my door open during the night. It was kind of embarrassing really. I mean did they think I was going to turn into some type of a lecherous horn-dog that would pounce on my best friend?

I couldn’t stop thinking about her guesswork all afternoon though. Could she be right? Was the carved pou standing to commemorate the spot where the elders had lifted off the tapu from Turuturu Mokai back in 1938 a portal? I had all those random feelings you get when something too good to be true might be going to happen. I mean what if I really did go back? That’d be totally mind-blowing. But what I was really preparing myself for was the disappointment I knew I’d feel if nothing happened.

Well after midnight, Maddy and I crept out of the door leading off the side of the garage. To me the darkness of night was the same as the light of day. But I knew that Maddy would be finding it hard.

“Are you okay?” I asked.

“Yup, it’s all right. There’s a moon tonight. It’s hidden behind the clouds, but it’s enough to help me see.”

For the first time I heard a bit of hesitation in her voice. “What’s up with you?”

“It just feels ghosty” she replied.

Now that we were outside, our roles had been reversed and I was the brave one.

“We’ll be okay. You can see the way to go, so I’ll just hold onto the back of you so we can get there quickly.”

Soon we’d reached the bridge where I’d been found sleeping. Crossing it we passed through the wooden gate. Maddy then led us around the lower part of the pa before we scurried up the steep banks on our hands and knees. Finally, we reached the very top. In climbing up we’d startled a flock of sleeping sheep that gave us a massive fright with their loud baas as they ran!

“There it is... the pou!”

Maddy led me over so that I could feel the picket fence protecting it. The fence was quite high but Maddy had found that a couple of the pickets were missing and so we were able to squeeze through.

“Okay, are you ready?” Maddy asked.

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I felt nervous. This was it. Maddy guided my hands towards the pou and then I heard her step back.

Cold sweat was running down my back and the glands in my armpits and groin were prickling uncomfortably.

I grabbed hold of the pou and nothing happened!

Then, just as I was about to let go I heard a voice say:

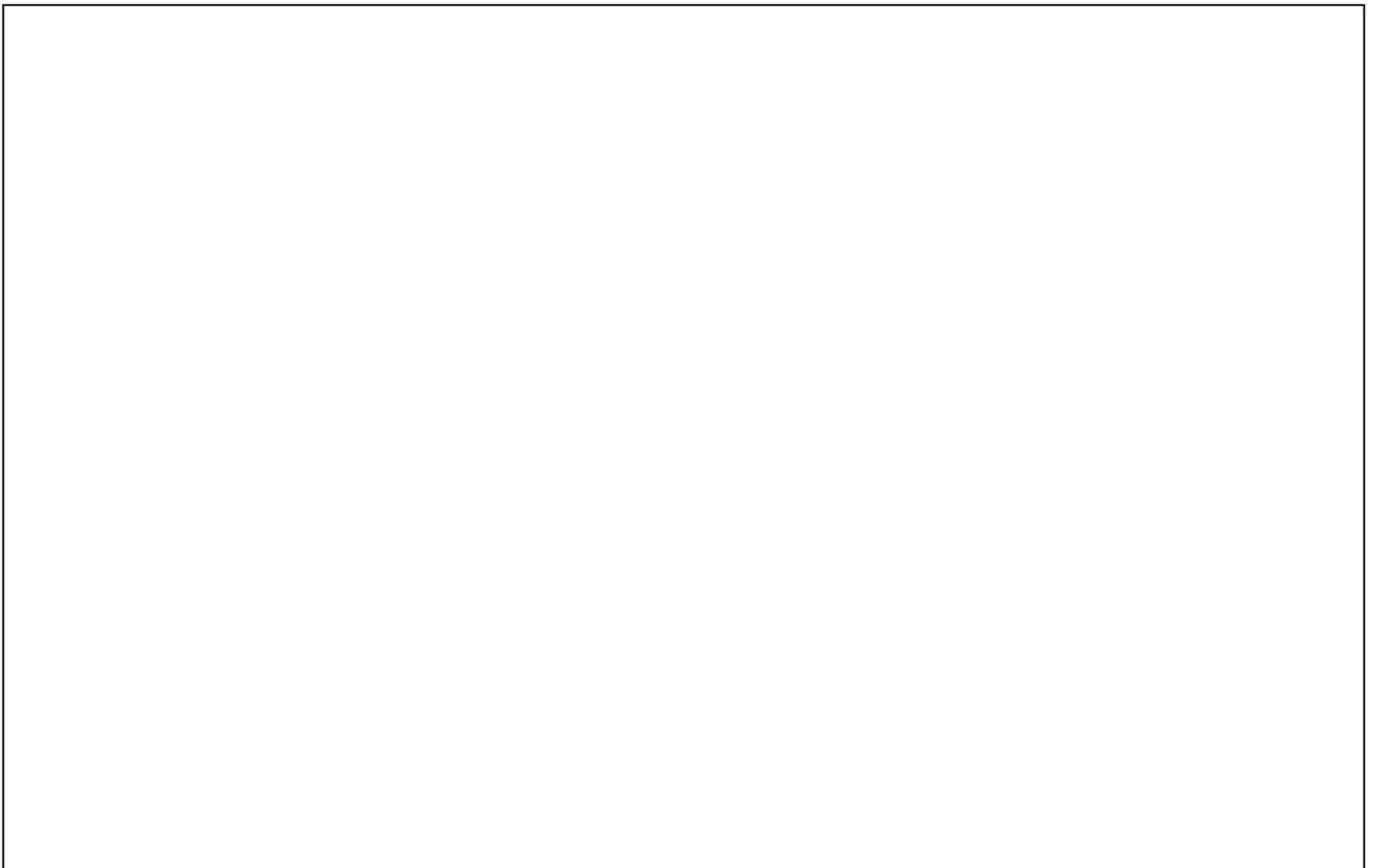
"I had a vision of Maori boy who had a trumpet in his mouth" and I responded automatically

"I am that Maori boy. I hear the call of Tohunga Matapo."

Straight away it felt like my body had become fluid. I could feel every particle and every atom vibrate and move. It felt as if my body was being torn apart and made boneless.

The last thing I saw was a gorgeous girl crouched down before me with frightened eyes the size of saucers...

"Maddy!"



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