

Free-style area - mum/dad can you write or draw something in this space for your child.

The Touchstone

Chapter Thirteen – Ohawe

We ran for like hours! I was just beginning to feel a bit tired when the line of toa halted. Both Rua and I fell to the ground and lay there panting. Rua’s hand flicked my knee to get my attention “watch the leader”.

The leader of the hunting party was standing still with his head cocked to one side as if listening out for something. I could only hear a bird whistling.

“Did you hear that?” Rua whispered.

“Hear what?”

“The signal!” said Rua, “watch!”

The leader placed his cupped hands around his lips and made the sound of a piwakawaka’s (fantail) chattering and squeaks. Then just like magic, we were suddenly surrounded by warriors from another tribe!

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“It’s all right” Rua whispered. “These guys are from the same iwi as us and many are close whanau. Look, A couple of the warriors were laughing with Tonga Hake.

“So, Tonga! My sister let you join the men then. Are you sure you’re old enough to hunt moa?”

“I’ll be the one to catch the moa koro (Uncle), and then who’ll be laughing!”

The men slapped Tonga Hake on the shoulders and said “haeri mai! Come! A feast has been preparing all day! Our scouts heard you coming hours ago!”

Eventually we came out of the scrubby coastal vegetation into an area that looked like it’d been kept cleared of any plant growth by use of fire stick over many generations as barely anything grew. I was able to see for miles all the way along the coastline. I could now see that the large river that we’d been following was quite deep in places as it tumbled over and around large rocks. Large eel weirs (traps) were set every few lengths apart and I could see two waka that had been laid across the river in a narrower channel making what looked like a bridge.

Rua pointed out what some kids were using the waka for. “Look Matakite they are gathering koura (fresh water crayfish) for the feast!” And as we watched we saw a boy expertly flick a koura into the waka before its nippers bit him!

Pretty soon our hunting party was surrounded by heaps of young kids all jostling for our attention as they led us towards their pa. Suddenly we saw an awesome sight. We’d been following a trail that sloped down towards the sea. Then we came to an area where I could see everything. There was a large pa that sat on a flat hill-top overlooking two other pas below it. One of the pas was on top of a headland where the large river curved around a bend before emptying into the sea. And on the opposite side of the river mouth sat its twin pa. This pa sat right on the edge of the high plain with sheer cliffs on the river and sea sides.

Our group of hunting toa had gathered at the entrance to this pa. Soon an older wahine started her karanga (welcome call) which the leader of our toa responded too.

The wahine had welcomed us to Rangatapu! This was my hapu! I couldn’t believe it! I had just realised that we must be out at Ohawe where aunty lived! The river we’d been following must’ve been the Waingongoro! This was so freaky and cool all at the same time! I wanted to explore!

After the welcome speeches and waiata our hunting party lined up to greet all the members of the other hapu with a hongi. I had lined up too.

“Matakite! What’re you doing?”

“What’d you mean Rua?”

“We’re not supposed to talk to anyone! Come and stand over here!”

I laughed at the face Rua was pulling at me he was imitating me staring at everything with my mouth lolling open like I was stupid or something! Rua was a natural born comedian!

“Come on!” Rua called to me as he started walking off, “let’s just walk about and look at stuff. Everyone will just ignore us here as well.”

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“Yeah well how about I lead the way! As I’m the acolyte and you are my mokai!” I reminded him in my most serious sounding voice. Rua’s eyes sparkled mischievously! “Yeah okay anything you say Master Matakite!” Rua and I knew our roles, but when we were away from Tohunga Matapo we were just good mates.

Tonga Hake had met up with a couple of other young men. I think they must’ve been related as they all looked kinda alike. They were laughing and wrestling together. Rua and I sat watching them from a safe distance.

“Is this your first moa hunt tuakana?” (Cousin – high ranking). Tonga Hake stopped play fighting and lay back on the grass.

“Yes, and if I’m the one to kill the moa I’m going to approach the ariki and ask to marry his daughter!”

“Is she atahuua?” Tonga’s cousins asked.

“Yes she’s really beautiful and she will make a good wife.” Soon the three young men were all talking about the young wahine they knew. As their boasts got louder and more far-fetched Rua started rolling his eyes and making gagging sounds. I was chuckling too cause even though at least 500 years separated Matakite’s time from Bart’s, guys still bragged to one another about girls!

“I need a swim!” One of Tonga’s cousins suddenly yelled out, “let’s go!” The three young men raced towards the river. Rua and I jumped up and sprinted after them! By the time we got to the river they had already run in amongst all the younger kids and were laughing as they dived about in the water. On the other side of the river a steep cliff towered above the swimming hole. Part way up the cliff was a large thick pole sticking out over the river. Attached at the end of the pole were four or five woven flax ropes.

Tonga Hake and his cousins climbed up the cliff face pushing the younger kids out the way as they made their way up. At the top each of them grabbed hold of a rope before flinging themselves out so that they swung above the water together before they let go of the ropes diving or doing massive bombs into the water!

“Rua that looks awesome! I want to have a go!”

“No! Matakite don’t!”

Rua yelled as he tried to grab my arm to hold me back, but I was too fast for him and was already swimming across the river. When I’d scrambled up the cliff face I saw that there was a free rope and so I jumped and grabbed it and swung way out! Even as I flew through the air I noted that all of the laughter had stopped. By the time I was standing next to Rua on the riverbank I saw that everyone had gone.

“What happened Rua, where’s everyone gone?”

“You idiot he yelled at me!”

“What’d you mean?”

“Don’t you know yet?” **Hasn’t your pea sized brain worked it out?** Rua shouted at me. His face was bright red with anger.

“I don’t know what you’re going on about! I shouted back just as loudly. Rua just shook his head and walked off.

“**Whatever!**” I said to myself. I’d be happy to have a look around by myself anyway.



This is a painting done of Ohawe and the Waingongoro River in the 1860’s around 400 years or so after this story is set – but it gives you an idea of how it would have looked in the 16th Century.

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