

The Touchstone

Chapter Fourteen – The Night before the Hunt

Forgetting Rua and his sulks I followed the river around the bend and stood on the bank and watched the Kawhai fish swim from the sea into the entrance of the river. Some darted through like bullets and others just swam lazily in the same spot.

I looked up and could see the palisades from the pa towering above me. I tried to remember the name of this pa but had forgotten it. I recalled sadly that Aunty had told me heaps of times the names of all the old pas in Ohawe but I'd never paid her any attention because I thought it was just boring old history!

The pa that I was now walking into must've been the one that Aunty had told me was by the boat shed and carpark where people would drive about drunk and stuff. It looked cool. It was quite small and was mainly a defensive pa as everyone could run to it quickly. It'd also be hard to attack because of the steep cliffs on three of its sides.

Looking along the beach I could see that there were crops of rounded rocks all along the sandy beach. I watched as a fishing waka came in from the sea on a breaking wave. It was quite big and held four men. Inside the waka were heaps of snapper that was still fresh and wriggling and one large shark.

I watched as the men gutted the shark and then I followed them as they carried it up to an area where many sharks had been strung up to dry. The day was beginning to end as the light had subtly changed and so I thought that I'd may as well head back up the hill to the main pa.

After the feast that evening our toa sat together with the men from Ohawe.

There was a lot of talk about the strange star in the sky and about hunting moa. Our men told them that the Gods had sent this star as a sign of favour for the moa hunt. Soon the older men from Ohawe were sharing their hunting stories. One old koro, who was so bent over with age, stood up and starting a waiata about hunting moa. As he sang his body changed and grew youth-like as he imitated the movement of the great bird and his old hunting moves.

Another old man told us that his grandfather had told him how great numbers of moa used to be herded into the bowl like area below the main pa. When I heard this story, I remembered again how Aunty had told me that where the Ohawe camp ground now was, used to be where moa were trapped. Aunty had even given me fragments of old moa bones to hold that she'd found buried in the sand! I felt a whack on my head! Rua had snuck up behind me and had cuffed me with his hand.

"Have you got into any more trouble yet Matakite?"

"Whatever! Hey when can we eat?" I asked him. At least I'd remembered that Tohunga Matapo had told me not to eat with the toa!

"Come on!" Rua said grinning! There were heaps of kites of food left over from the feast that'd been packed away to keep them safe from the kiore (rats). Rua and I had our own feast! We ate koura, plump kereru, hunks of shark meat and even some boiled dog!

Afterwards we were so full that we could barely stand as we headed back down to the beach to find a spot to sleep for the night. We gathered together a pile of driftwood and dug a big pit in the sand and put all the wood in it. Rua then lit it with an ember he had taken from one of the main cooking fires.

“Hey Rua” I asked. “What were you talking about today when you got so angry at me?”

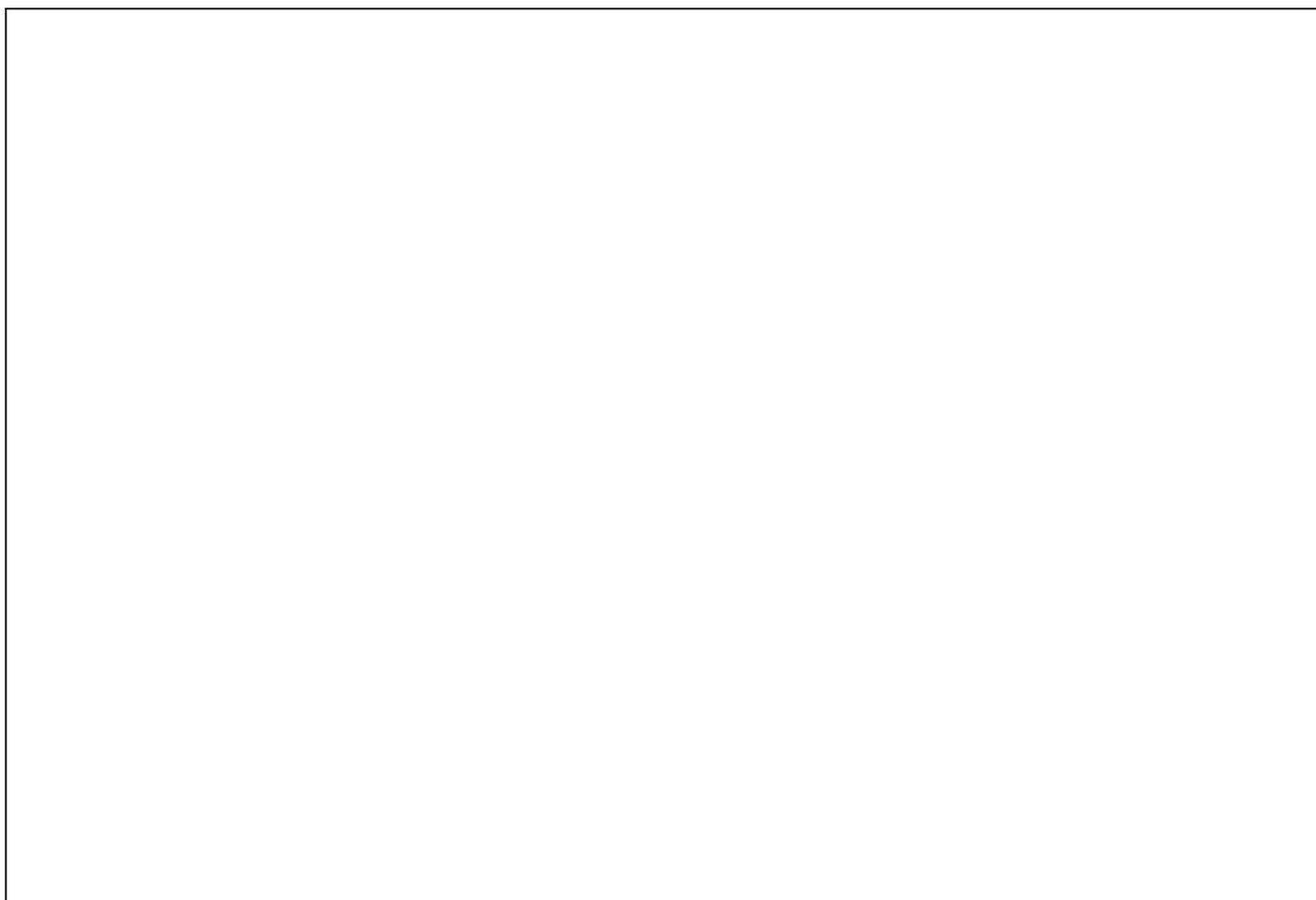
“Figure it out yourself Matakite!”

“Far man! For a guy that was normally easy going he could be a sulky little snapper!”

I just shrugged my shoulders. Rua and I settled down to sleep. We were going to have to get up early as the hunters would be leaving well before the sun was up. The sunset at Ohawe was amazing as the sun looked like a gigantic orb as it sat on the horizon for ages before it slowly sank. I fell asleep listening to the rhythm of the waves breaking on the beach and the soft whisper of the wind as it wound through the beach grasses.

A couple of hours after darkness had fallen the comet started to make its re-appearance. As it came closer to this part of the hemisphere the night sky changed to a light brighter than any moonlit night.

But I was totally unaware of this as I was fast asleep.



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