

The Touchstone

Chapter Sixteen – Another Return

Bart, Bart! Wake up.

Someone was pulling at my shoulder and I suddenly realised that it was Maddy's voice that I could hear which meant that I must now be back in my own time.

It took a while until I felt okay enough to move. Maddy had led me back out through the hole in the picket fence surrounding the pou. I guess I must've collapsed as the next thing I knew I was waking up with Maddy's arms wrapped around me. We were still on Turuturu Mokai and were lying in the long grass. I could feel the weak morning sun on my face.

"Bart are you okay? Can you talk yet?"

"Maddy, there was this guy, he was just a bit older than us and his name was Tonga Hake. I held him as he died! There was just so much blood and I couldn't do anything to save him, it was horrible." Maddy's arms just held me even tighter and I felt her use her sleeve or something to wipe away the tears that were running down my face.

After a bit I felt okay enough to talk. "The thing is Maddy I just feel so bloody sad. He was like so alive. I don't care that he lived hundreds of years ago, he was just a neat guy and he had a girl he really liked and his whole life ahead of him. Death is just so unfair, and it sucks."

Maddy let me talk it all out before she spoke.

"Hey Bart she said softly, I can only guess at how you're feeling. I always feel really sad when I see all the senseless killings on the news. Like when I see what the kids in Syria and other places have to put up with, I feel angry and sad all at the same time."

"Yeah I know what you mean about shit happening in this world. I guess at least Tonga Hake was doing something he loved, and it was just bad luck, but it still totally sucks."

It was getting warmer now and the scents from the grasses and late flowering gorse bushes were being released as the sun rose higher in the sky. Maddy wanted to know everything I did when I went back in time and she laughed when I told her how Rua had called me an idiot and whacked me on my head.

"That guy has you sussed out Bart! I'd really love to meet him someday!" Maddy said wistfully.

When I told her about the vision I'd had about how Tonga Hake's name would 'remain long after we had gone' she jumped in excitedly.

"Bart there's a little pa by the entrance of the reserve and I think there is a sign hidden in the long grass that says something about Tonga Hake!"

We'd made our way down off Turuturu Mokai and had made our way back over the bridge and up and over a rickety sty and onto the little pa site.

“Here it is!” Maddy grabbed hold of my hand and had pulled me over to feel a wooden sign hidden behind some long grass. We pulled the grass out by its roots all around it so that I could use my hands to make out the writing:

TE UMU A TONGAHAKE PA

When I had felt Tonga Hake’s name written there on the sign all I could hear was the tohunga’s voice calling out to the excited audience in front of him;

“A young toa will lose his life! He will die with honour! He will be taken back into the breast of the Gods! We will honour this man and his name will remain long after we are gone!”

And I remembered the fire in Tonga Hake’s eyes. I still felt sad that young Tonga Hake’s brave feats had been forgotten and while his name had remained, it was only on a crappy old rickety sign that hardly anyone would notice.

For the first time in my life I started getting a real idea about what aunty meant when she went on about respect for our ancestors.

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

