

## The Touchstone

### Chapter Eighteen – Pitiful

Nothing lasts forever though, and my solitude ended when I heard my dad come stomping down the corridor to my room.

“Bart Kapo-Matakite get outta that bed and come and help me with my car. Hurry up! After we’ve changed the battery we’re going for a walk.”

Just like my mum can do, when my dad has made his mind up about something he becomes like a goat or donkey or something. Obstinate is the word I am searching for. My dad just barges on until he gets what he wants. So I knew it was useless arguing even though I wanted to.

“Coming” I said sullenly as I felt about on the floor for my shorts.

Dad started straight on in and went right for my jugular. “I haven’t seen Maddy around for a while. Why’s that then?”

“I don’t know” I muttered wishing he’d just shut up.

“Don’t you like her anymore? I thought you were best mates. I even thought she was heading towards being your girlfriend.”

“I s’pose she just went off me or something” I said shrugging my shoulders.

But when I added in a second later “she probably doesn’t want to go out with me because I’m blind” My dad’s patience like totally snapped!

“I’ll tell you why she doesn’t want to go out with you, he growled, and it’s nothing to do with you being blind. It’s because you’re too into yourself. When was the last time you asked your mother how her day was? Have you asked us how our new jobs are and how we’re finding the move? Your sisters missed out on a holiday netball scholarship and were really bummed out! But did you notice or even care? No! Because poor blind Bartimaeus has the world on his shoulders and is always feeling sorry for himself!”

I could tell my dad was angry and I felt myself shrink with embarrassment. Because even though I hated to admit it, I knew that some of what he said was true.

“Just snap out of it son. I reckon that girl isn’t coming around because you’ve turned into a boring and self-obsessed galah and to be straight up, you’re being pitiful.”

We spent the next 30 minutes working together in an un-easy silence. I felt humiliated because I wasn’t a little boy anymore and after seeing how Tonga Hake and his mates had been heading into man-hood I just felt like I’d been wallowing in babyish self-pity.

The thing was that even though I knew I was being stupid, I just couldn’t seem to control my feelings of anger. It was like one minute I would be feeling fine, and the then ‘bang’ I would just feel like this liquid rage course through me.

I also truly felt angry at myself for not doing anything to save Tonga Hake. I knew that I'd always feel this way because I should've done something. Tonga's life wasn't a computer game. It wasn't like watching a movie. It was real life and I'd failed. Back as Matakite, at age 14, I should have acted like a man. Instead I acted like a boy and I would always feel ashamed of myself.

After we'd finished working on the car we headed out-side.

"Where're we going dad?" I asked to break the ice.

"There's a guy who looks after the reserve and I want you to meet him. He's always looking for people to help him keep things tidy." I had to bite my tongue to stop myself from reminding him that 'I was blind and wouldn't be much of a help.'

As usual whenever I went onto the reserve at Turuturu Mokai it was as if I'd become plugged into an electric socket. I could feel energy tinkling up and down my spine and all my hairs on my arms rose.

After hunting around for a while, we finally found the guy feeding his horse and my dad introduced us.

"So, you're the boy that was found sleeping here a few weeks ago aye? I hope that's not an indication of your work e hoa (friend)!"

This guy was passionate about Turuturu Mokai and he spent like ages telling us about the history of it and all about the freaky experiences he'd had with kehua over the years! I had to work hard to keep my mouth shut because I'd had my own experiences to share! I really liked this guy though because I knew that he had a real connection with the land here. I happily agreed to come back and help him with some mahi (work) a couple of days later on Saturday morning.

When we got back home my favourite Aunty from Ohawe had arrived in her old beat up car. She usually popped in at least once a week.

"Hey nephew what's up? I heard that the ngeru had hold of your arero (cat had hold of your tongue!) again! What was it this time my favourite nephew?"

Aunty had knack of hitting just the right tone between sarcasm and humour that always left me a bit unsure if she was being totally serious or just joshing me.

"Oh, I just had things on my mind that's all Aunty."

"Yes, well Bart Kapo-Matakite we all have things on our minds. and don't you ever forget it!"

Oh, shit I thought she's in her serious mode! "Yeah but not everyone is blind Aunty!"

"Oh, for heaven's sake! Listen to you! Being blind is the least of your troubles."

"Nephew the good Lord gives everyone their own personal 'cross to bear' and yours is your poor attitude! You've always been the sort of kid that approaches life with the mentality of the glass being half empty instead of half full! And I am telling you straight up, that you need to be aware of this character trait and battle it!"

Damn it! She was not going to stop!

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With a deep breath Aunty continued:

“There is nothing worse than a person that is a whinger or a whiner and that my nephew is what you seem so intent on becoming! What do you think you’re gonna get hey? An award for being the saddest person about?”

Yup, I was sure Aunty was going to tell me what award I was in line for and I wasn’t wrong!

“Well I’ll tell you what your prize is going to be if you keep up on this waka!” By now Aunty’s voice had risen and I felt like I wanted the ground to swallow me up!

“Your prize will be... continued aunty ... a lonely and sad life because no one will want to be around you, especially any pretty girls! And if I hear you mention being blind again in that pitiful voice, I will wash your mouth out with soap, and don’t think I won’t!”

**“Far-out! What a sad day!”**

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