

## The Touchstone

### Chapter Twenty-Two – Kakaramea

The day after the old folk had left to make their way slowly to the coast, the rest of the people who lived at Turuturu Mokai were ready for the trek. There were somewhere between two and three hundred of us setting off and only a handful of people were staying back at Turuturu Mokai to act as caretakers over the summer.

Everyone was in a good mood and totally happy. It was a choice day with a clear blue sky and just a light sea breeze that'd help keep us cool as we walked. We'd set off not too long after the sun appeared on the horizon and now it was late afternoon as the sun was settling deep in the western sky. It'd been a long day, but everything had been totally awesome. Rua and I'd gone off on our own adventures along the way as there were heaps of things to see and do.

We'd crossed a couple of big rivers along the way. Both Rua and me'd hung out by ourselves diving and splashing about in the water to cool off. The water was so transparent and clear that it didn't hurt to swim with your eyes open underwater! I didn't even know you could see underwater as it was way off my radar as Bart! But it was totally fun, and I could see fish and everything under there!

It was always easy to catch up with the main body of people as they walked at the pace of whoever was the slowest and they loudly sang waiata as they walked. They'd also stop frequently and sit down to listen to a story or some advice about the land they were crossing. This helped make sure that important stories and secrets about the land was passed on from generation to generation.

Before we knew it a bunch of kids had come out to greet us from the pa where we were going to be spending the night before the final leg of the journey to Patea in the morning. The cries of the karanga were welcome to our ears as we were all tired and hot after our trek. We also knew that once the formalities over there would be a feast!

No one ever paid any attention to me or Rua. For Bart this could've been weird to get his head around but being Matakite, it was just felt normal to be ignored because of the connection with the old tohunga.

So, we got a surprise when we heard a voice say;

**“Who're you?”**

Huh? Rua and I looked at each other and then back at the kid standing in front of us. He was staring back at us with these big dark eyes framed by the longest eyelashes I'd ever seen. He'd be a couple of years younger than us, but he was small looking for his age.

**“Who are you and why are you here?”** the boy repeated.

Rua nudged me as it was my place to speak first. “We're going to the summer camp with our tribe and then we're going to watch the oratory competition at Otautu.”

“Are you going to enter?” Asked Rua who'd stepped forward. The boy started coughing.

“No, I'd really like to be able to compete, but I've been too unwell. If I'm allowed to travel, I will watch though.”

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I was watching Rua's face as he was talking to this kid. I'd never seen an expression like that on his face before. It was like his young face suddenly had all this wisdom or something in it. His eyes and smile were so warm and like gentle as he talked to him. I'm not sure why it bothered me, but it did.

Suddenly a wavery shout was heard;

**"Rongo, who are you talking to? Come away!"**

The boy's kuia was calling frantically to him. "Come away now!"

"But Nan! I want to stay with them!"

**"No boy! You come away with me! Aaei! Hurry now!"**

—

"That was totally weird! What'd she think we were going to do to the guy?" I said laughingly to Rua.

"You're so stupid sometimes!" Rua snarled at me.

"Whoa what the heck?" "What's up with you?"

"Forget it!" Said Rua as he shrugged his shoulders, "come on, let's go and find some food, I'm starving."

Everyone had lined up in orderly lines to get their kai, the older people and young children were taken care of first and then everyone else had filled up their own wooden platters or woven eating baskets with kai and were soon settled and were busily filling their bellies.

Rua and I'd soon chosen our kai and were sitting down comfortably leaning against each other's backs for support as we ate.

Every now and then depending on which way the wind blew I'd get a whiff of some sort of fragrance.

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