

The Touchstone

Chapter Twenty Four – He Waiata Patupaiarehe

Sometime during the night, I got woken out of my deep sleep by a noise. I lay there straining my ears to suss out what'd woken me, but apart from the repeated ruru bird calls that sounded like 'more pork, more pork' I couldn't hear anything unusual. I was wide awake now and so I wriggled into a more-comfy position on my back with my hands linked behind my head so I could look up at the stars. The night sky was so clear, and the stars looked so close that I reckoned that if I climbed on top of a hill I could reach out and touch one.

Then I heard the noise again, it was a moaning sound that was carried on the breeze from a good distance away. Tying my dog skin cloak around my shoulders for warmth I got up and followed the sound. Tiptoeing I quietly wove in between the groups of whanau as they slept. Our tribe had been allocated a sheltered area on the outside of the Kakaramea pa to spend the night. When I'd reached the edge of the outer palisades, I followed them around until I came to a gateway. I spotted two people hurrying towards one small whare that was lit up by firelight, so I crept along behind them. Standing in the cover of the shadows opposite the entrance to the whare I was able to see what was going on.

“Aeiii, aeeeia Rongo! My mokopuna! Come back to me!”

The old kuia with the wavery voice was sitting and rocking backwards and forwards over the sleeping form of the boy we were playing with earlier in the day. I was curious to know what was going on and so I moved a little closer until I was able to peek around the door frame and look down onto the kuia who was sitting just inside the doorway. I could see Rongo's face clearly now and it was...it was...he was mate. Dead!

I got a fright and must have gasped out loudly cause the old kuia's head jerked up and she looked me in the eyes! She raised her hand and pointed at me!

“You took my boy! You took my Mokopuna! You bloody Kehua! You killed him! Get away! Aeiii!”

I ran stumbling away as fast as I could. What did she mean? Why was she angry at me? How had I killed Rongo?

I felt sick to my stomach and terrified. I was really scared and so I ran and ran. I don't know how long I ran for but eventually I stumbled and fell onto my knees and spewed up all this caustic bile. I retched until I thought my stomach was gonna come out of my mouth, but nothing could make me feel any better. The trees and bushes crowded around me claustrophobically.

What had I done? I was totally confused. All I could hear was the old woman's cries of 'kehua' and then I thought back to Tonga Hake calling me spirit boy, just before he died. What the heck was going on? My head was swirling and that only made me feel more nauseous and I puked some more but only a burning trickle of fluid came up out of my throat this time. The sound of my blood was pounding in my ears and I was panting like a dog. I curled up in a tight ball and surprisingly I quickly fell into a deep sleep.

Movement and sound woke me. I lay there with my eyes closed and a frown on my face as I tried to hear the words of the chanting that was slow paced and melodic.

*Kāore te rangi nei te pēhi whakarunga
I torona e au te tau o Tireni*

*Kāore te rangi nei te pēhi whakarunga
I torona e au te tau o Tireni*

*Kāore te rangi nei te pēhi whakarunga
I torona e au te tau o Tireni*

The chanting washed over my senses like a series of rolling sea waves. Sometimes instead of words I could hear a flute – no definitely flutes as in plural, the sound was unlike anything I'd ever heard as either Bart or Matakite!

*Whakatata rawa mai ka murimuri aroha
Kei Pirongia rā ko te iwi tauwehe*

*Whakatata rawa mai ka murimuri aroha
Kei Pirongia rā ko te iwi tauwehe*

*Whakatata rawa mai ka murimuri aroha
Kei Pirongia rā ko te iwi tauwehe*

I wiped the bitterness from my mouth and rolled over and sat up. Then I had to rub my eyes because I couldn't quite believe what was I was seeing!

Weaving in and out of the trees and bushes like mist were people unlike any I'd ever seen before. They were smaller than normal and fine featured, and their skins were a light colour with a faint light blue hue!

Their hair was various shades of the most beautiful blond and red colours. It was night time, but all around these-folk it was glowing like a light was on. They were dancing in a most elemental way as if their bodies were swaying like a leaf caught in a breeze. They were mesmerising!

When I stood up, I felt big and clunky in their presence and the smell of puke didn't help either. As they sang and played the flute they danced further and further away from me, but as they moved, they beckoned me to follow. I felt as if I was in a trance as I followed them. I wanted desperately to join with these folk and sing and dance for eternity and I stumbled forward to try and catch up to them.

Matakite!

Huh? Tohunga Matapo had appeared and was standing tall between me and the patupaiarehe. He had spread out his arms and he held a taiaha clasped in one hand and a book in the other!

A book? It was the sight of the book that broke the spell woven by the patupaiarehe.

Like mist the patupaiarehe disappeared and so did the tohunga leaving me all alone in the silent bush.

I stood looking around me, swivelling my head this way and that. I was by myself and it was so quiet.

Dawn was about to arrive, and the night birds and wind had stopped to acknowledge the transition between night and day. In the blink of my eye the light got brighter, and the day birds burst into their dawn chorus.

I heard a shout and then Rua burst out of the bushes and almost ran me down!

“Matakite, there you are! I’ve been looking for you for ages! How come you’re so far away? What happened?”

I opened my mouth to tell him and then I felt my throat close and my eyes well up with tears. I was terrified that I was about to cry like a kid and so I angrily turned away to hide my feelings from him.

“Nothing! Nothing happened!”

Rua shrugged his shoulders and indicated with a nod of his head that I was to follow him.

“We’re not going back to Kakaramea, were going to cut across the bush to Patea” he called over his shoulder as we ran.

I was relieved. I didn’t ever want to see that old kuia again.

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

Watch out for the next instalment of chapters in The Touchstone