

Ruka Trilogy – Story Three (1-2) Porowhita O Te Ruka. Mum. Mere.

Hi _____

Freestyle Area - Let your loved one know why you sent this story & something good that's happened recently.

Kia ora young one, I hope you like the story I've written for you. I was brought up in the NZ foster system & just like your mum or dad I've been in prison to. I like writing stories for you because writing is a good way to share your feelings & thoughts. I also have a 'vibrant' imagination & so being able to write lets me use this fun part of my brain.

I want to share some of my thoughts with you because I've a feeling that you'll understand what I mean. When I was a kid & then a teenager, I didn't really hold a lot of hope. I couldn't read or write for most of my childhood & I didn't speak much either. I also didn't trust people & never felt safe around them.

& then, I was surprised in later life to learn that: there are more good people than bad people & that there are so many cool things to do in this world. Please let my message of hope help you during this hard time & please:

Learn to be 'your champion.' When you do something well, congratulate yourself, when you feel sad, acknowledge your feelings - but don't let them take over you. Also learn to read books as that will teach you all sorts of useful things & allow you some escapism when life gets hard. The thing to hold onto is that **one day you will be an adult** & the ruler of your own destiny.

Arohanui to you from Darby

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It seems ironic that I'm looking so angelic, cause even by my own admission I'd call myself a ratbag.

My hair floating around my head looks like a halo. This combined with the wide-eyed look of surprise on my face, reminds me of a painting of an angel that'd hung in our marae. I'm looking in at myself through the broken windscreen of my overturned car which is lying semi-submerged in the dark, peaty waters of the Te Awananga Stream on the Chatham Islands.

Tonight for the first time ever, I'd left a party early instead of getting sucked into a fight that was brewing between me and one of the locals. Given that my car's now upside down in this stream, I reckon my one-off attempt at doing the right thing got fucked up when I drove off in my car almost too pissed to walk.

The shock of the cold water was like a slap waking me out of my stupor, followed by my frantic struggle as I tried to free myself from my jammed seatbelt. A wave of pure terror washed over me when I realised that I was stuck tight.

I thought I could hear voices calling out to me, over and over, and hands pulling at me. My last conscious thoughts were crowded with regrets of a life lived too hard and a longing for my mum who I hadn't seen in years.

Suddenly everything went still and I found myself enveloped in this cocoon of silence for what felt like an eternity but passed in the blink of an eye. Then I was torn away, cartwheeling and spinning like I was caught in a river current. My body tumbled along in this endless blue space lit by dazzling stars of all sizes. I was spinning so fast that I felt physically sick as colours and emotions swirled and exploded in and around me.

Just at the point where I was certain that my mind was about to explode, my life started flashing before me in full technicolour clarity.

It started.

"Ruka?"

"Come on Short Shanks!"

My older sister Mere laughs at me;

"If you can be showered and in bed in less than ten minutes, I'll read you five chapters of Harry Potter!"

Spinning. I'm amongst the hordes of kids pouring out of the school looking like a mass of green ants in our uniforms. Standing by the gate, I spot my mum looking for me. I play an impromptu game of hide 'n' seek with her. I duck behind one of the bigger kids, and peek at her from behind his back. Her face lights up with happiness when she sees me.

I can see her say to herself with pride "**my boy**". I feel loved.

Hovering. My sister Mere is sitting on a bus, looking lifelessly at the window which is too thick with condensation to see out of. I know what she's thinking, but I can't do anything to stop the black depression that has just engulfed her.

"I give up."

She doesn't say these words out loud, but I can hear her thoughts. Her face looks so sad. She thinks she's alone.

Running. “Son, you can run faster than me!” My mum’s laughter combines with mine as we run, holding hands jumping over the bigger puddles. We are oblivious of both the rain and Mere’s torment.

Witnessing. Cold water is rushing and tumbling far below the bridge. I stand unseen next to my sister as she looks down into the water.

Is this Hell?

Do I have to watch my sister die?

“Mere don’t...please don’t do it!”

She lets go.

Spinning. I watch my mum collapse in our doorway. Even before the police lady told her that Mere was dead, Mum started screaming.

“Please God no, not my girl!”

The sound of such raw pain made the rubberneckers, who’d gathered, look away.

Blue. I’m floating in blue again and the stars are pulsing as if alive. The current I’m in slows and the voices come through more clearly;

“Ruka Mataika, do you have any lunch today?”

Watching. I’m walking unseen behind my mum as she walks, night after night, to the bridge where she stands at the same spot where Mere stood before she jumped.

Her head, as always, is slanted to one side as if listening to those same deceitful waters that whispered so convincingly to Mere.

Aue. I’m standing in the CYF’s waiting room watching the little boy who has just lost his sister and who is now about to lose his mum because she can’t deal with the grief of her daughter’s suicide.

I watch him sitting there bravely trying to hold back his tears by examining his favourite Sesame Street sneakers.

He’s waiting to be taken to his first foster home.

Warmth. The old man was showing me a rabbit. It was tawny-coloured, with ears that went down instead of up, and its fur was silky and smooth. The old man’s wrinkled face became softer as he talked to me. “Rabbits don’t do any harm. They just go about their business in their own way. They won’t hurt you or attack other animals. They are just the gentlest creatures on the Lord’s planet.” I felt a spark of warmth deep inside me. This was a good thing



Abuse. I’m sitting on my bed, squashed back as far as I can get into the corner, with my knees drawn up tight under my chin. I’m listening to the sound of her footsteps coming up the stairs, and then the sound of the cold tap running in the bath.

“Leave him alone!” I scream at the sadistic woman as she grabs me off the bed, and pulls off my pyjamas exposing my scrawny little body covered in bruises.

“Leave him alone!” I scream again, but the scene continues to unfold before me. She chucks him in the deep cold bath in the middle of the night.

“That’ll stop you from pissing in the bed you little shit!”

Hunger. I’m standing in a long corridor with rows of school bags and jackets hanging on hooks. A classroom door opens, and I watch myself walk out and sneakily look around to check that the hallway is empty.

My stomach is rumbling and my mouth is watering with anticipation as I start rummaging in other kid’s school bags. I watch myself as I steal sandwiches, biscuits and even fruit. Whatever I can get hold of, I cram into my mouth. I had learnt quickly that some foster parents can forget to feed you.

I’m floating again. The stars in all their various brilliances are shimmering. I feel so exhausted, as if seeing all this shit is draining my very soul.

My body jolts with shock when I realise that I’m surrounded by countless people of all colours and ages floating alongside me. The others are all motionless as if caught in a deep sleep.

The pulsing gets louder and I start to move.

Surveying. I’m freezing cold and my wet jeans are clinging stiffly to my legs as I move into a better position to see inside the window. I wedge my screw driver into the gap between the window and sill, then carefully prise and jiggle the window until both latches give with a satisfying pop.

Carefully climbing into the room, I take a step, only to hear the tell-tale sound of the security system start to beep.

“Fuck it.”

Moving swiftly now, I leap catlike back out through the window, all the while looking around for nosey neighbours as I sprint away.

Spinning. Blood red and thick is running down my arm from two new cuts and I see myself exhale my breath with a feeling of release, just like after a first puff of a ciggie.

I’m filled with horror at being confronted with my old cutting habit.

“Stop!” I scream as I try to grab the blade out of my hands, only to discover that I am as insubstantial as a puff of smoke.

Trapped in time, I can only watch as the cuts go deeper and deeper.

Witnessing. “Ruka Mataika you are sentenced to ...”

The court judge pauses melodramatically and glares down at the scruffy Maori youth standing before him. Every gesture and frown highlights the judge’s irritation in having to deal with him, yet again. He wearily sighs and resumes his rhetoric;

“You are sentenced to two years and ten months. Case closed.”