

## Ruka Trilogy – Story Three (2-2) 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. This is the last chapter in the series. What were your thoughts? Has something had an impact on your life that you (& your children, partner, etc) could take a healing look at?

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.

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

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

Time slows. My feet feel like they don't belong to me as I get escorted to the 'At Risk' unit in the prison. I've been sent there because of my youth and all the cutting scars that they'd seen on me.

Life can be weird, and in anticipation, I watch for my younger self to see something he won't be expecting. I watch how he rubs his eyes in disbelief and looks again at the rabbit hutch sitting in the middle of a small grass compound.

When he spots a reddish-brown rabbit, he gets a warm feeling in his chest. He's recalled the memory of the old man and how he told him about the gentleness of rabbits. For the first time since he arrived in prison he speaks.

**“Mr, is that a rabbit?”**

“Yes, there are two. Do you like rabbits?” He just nods, and tries to smile.

He's inside the 'At Risk' unit now, looking at the shiny polished linoleum and all the faces peering out at him from behind thick glass windows. Some are flashing gang signs, and a few are barking like dogs to try and unnerve him. He suffers the humiliation of a full body search, and then a quick shower, while the guard stands and watches him.

“What'd you do all that for?” asked the guard, gesturing to the scars.

The cell door bangs shut and he can see that it's empty except for a concrete bed with a thin plastic-covered mattress and two padded canvas blankets.

I watch him climb under those comfortless blankets and pull them up over his head. My young self doesn't know it, but I'm also under that canvas blanket with him. I'm lying with my forehead pressed against his forehead, breathing in time with him.

“You're not alone,” I whisper to him, “listen...” and we both dream of those rabbits, not too far away, just on the outside of the wall made of steel and concrete.

Months, and then years, pass sleepwalking through these concrete days, drifting in between times of boredom with smatterings of random violence thrown in. This is prison.

**Watching.** The vibrations of the old Convair 580 with its truncated propellers wakes me up as it starts descending. As the plane circles in preparation to land at the Chatham Island Airport, I see beaches with golden white sand, set in a sea that is shimmering in topaz blues and greens. Everyone on the plane seems to know each other. I walk unseen, up and down the aisle, listening to all of the conversations taking place.

Their words and thoughts fill the cabin like a hornet's nest of whispers.

I look at myself sitting lost amidst all of the noise.

**Numb.** Large mollymawk albatrosses are screeching and wheeling overhead, feasting on my puke as my stomach empties into the heaving swell. My city-soft hands are raw and painful from handling rope and my life as a deckhand. At night the pain of my throbbing hands keeps me awake, as salt constantly leaches out of my pores.



*“Piss on em mate, your hands, it’s the lanolin in your piss ya see, it’ll protect em!”*

The ocean is a deep cobalt blue, flashed with caps of pure angry white. I’m tossed about in this vast ocean chasing blue cod and am frozen to the very core of myself.

Spinning. I’m down at the lake with my wild Chatham Island mates. A bonfire is burning, and I’m partying up large and acting delirious as I revel in the freedom of this place. We are all moneyed-up with big pay packets from the catch and whiskey, whiskey, whiskey, and we’re all laughing drunk, not realising that all of our young lives are caught on a spinning carousel.

“Go easy,” I whisper.

*My eyes open and I’m floating amongst the stars again. I feel as if I’ve been tossed around in a series of grade five rapids. My limbs are now too heavy for me to move, and so I just float there. The unseen current picks up again and now the stars begin to flash past me at warp speed.*

**Questioning.** In the distance, I can hear the rhythmic lap of the sea breaking on the beach, and every time the wind blows from the east, I catch snatches of drunken laughter carried from the patrons at the Hotel Chatham a couple of hundred meters away.

I’m standing in the small police cell, looking down at myself sleeping off the effects of too much booze and the bad end of a fight.

As I stare at myself lying there looking so small and vulnerable, **I fall to my knees and scream out to God;**

**“Why me?”**

I point to myself lying unconscious on the cot.

**“What’d he do so bad?”**

“Short Shanks, wake up!”

The starlight is flickering behind my closed lids as I listen to my sister Mere call my name, and I smile to myself as her voice sounds just how I remembered it.

“Ruka!”

A sharp poke in my ribs makes me sit up. Standing above me is my sister smiling down at me. My eyes devour her, “Mere?” I reach out and touch her and a cry escapes me, as I bundle myself into her, just the way I did when I was a little boy.

“Mere!” We cling to each other laughing and crying, holding tight and not wanting to let go.

“I’m sorry.” She keeps saying to me. “I’m so sorry. I didn’t mean to. I didn’t know what would happen to you both.”

We talk together about the fears she’d faced as a teenager, and how she didn’t know what to do with all those dark feelings that’d overwhelmed her. She told me how at the very moment she let go of the bridge that she’d realised just how much she wanted to live, but that it was too late because she’d taken that step.

She also told me about the torment she’d had to endure, as she’d watched both me and our mum suffering because of what she’d done.

“Easy, easy, lift him carefully!”

The ICU doctor that’d come in on the Life Flight instructed the ambulance team. The doctor hovered over the young man constantly during the flight as the survival of this one was going to be touch-and-go.

Sitting quietly, monitoring the life support equipment, the doctor studied his face. It held such a look of vulnerability and sadness. As the doctor worked she chanted a quiet karakia over him and repeated over and over to herself ‘keep with me boy.’

The stars shone down on Mere and Ruka as they held each other close. It was only when Ruka looked around that he noticed that he was no longer in the big blue space, but was sitting in a field with long brown summer grass. He hadn’t needed to say the words ‘I forgive you’ to his sister, as they were both now at peace.

“I have to go,” Mere told him, and Ruka smiled as this time it was going to be a gentle parting and Ruka knew that he’d see her again.

“I love you Mere... I never forgot you.”

The Life Flight was banking out over the Cook Strait, getting ready to land at Wellington Airport.

The doctor felt puzzled as she looked at the young man’s face. She was trying to work out what the difference was. She could see that whereas before the expression was of sadness, now the frown lines on his face were smooth, as if a burden had been lifted from him. For some reason the word ‘beautiful’ kept coming into her mind.

“Good on you boy,” the doctor whispered to the patient, and she marvelled at how good life can sometimes be.

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Flickering lights, the smell of antiseptic, and a feeling of deep heaviness has taken prisoner of my body. I try to fight it but I can’t and I sleep the deep sleep of healing.

My dreams are filled with laughter and I can see my beloved mum’s face the way it used to look, before Mere died.

Even though I’m dreaming, I’m aware that my body is absorbing, sponge-like, all those long-lost feelings of hope and love as I run holding hands and leaping over puddles with my mum.

We’re running together towards Mere, who is laughing and calling out to us both; “Come on Mum! Come on Short Shanks! If you can beat Mum, I’ll read you five chapters of Harry Potter!”

The light, brighter now, flickers more persistently, tickling the back of my eyes, and this time I force my reluctant eyes open.

I can see my mum sitting next to me, dozing in a chair. My head feels like it’s swaddled in thick cotton wool, and so I just lie there, peacefully watching her.

Suddenly, her eyes flick open, as if she can feel me looking at her. I see her face light up and I watch her lips move. I can’t hear what she says, but I can lip-read.

My mum had said, **“My boy”** and seemingly like a magical incantation, those heartfelt words, that I haven’t heard since before Mere died, miraculously finish healing all of the pain and hurt.

**Finally, after all these lost years, the circle is complete, and we are all now at peace.**

*Ko oti te porowhita*