

WHEN THE RED MAN CAME

BY BEN BROWN (NGĀTI PAOA, NGĀTI MAHUTA, NGĀTI KOROKI)



*He whakahohou rongu wahine,
he tatau pounamu.*

*A peace secured by a woman
is a greenstone door.*

*1820s Aotearoa, south of Taranaki
Maunga. Inside the pā of a small hapū,
a kuia waits ...*

I had thought, after the battle of Hīngakākā, that our appetite for war would sour. How foolish I was. Roused by victory, the Waikato rangatira took the pounamu from their fallen enemies. A new whakataukī was coined: Waikato horo pounamu – the swallows of greenstone. The spoils of Hīngakākā only gave them a taste.

The war cries from that bloody day still echo across the motu. Despite the many winters that have passed, they grow louder, calling out for redress. And so I wait for Te Wherowhero – the Red Man – to come. He is bound by mana to chase down his enemies, collecting the price of our failed allegiances. Reports from the north tell me he’s approaching. Barely a day away. *Auē ...*

I am tired to my bones, too old to flee. I tell my moko, “Take the people south, deeper into the forest. Tāne will conceal you. I will attend to the visitors myself.”

The boy’s reluctance is expected. Hīngakākā took his father before he was born. Nor would he ever know his mother – stricken with grief, she could not survive his birth. Now he thinks he is a man, prepared to fall as his father fell on that terrible day. Perhaps he is, but he is also my moko, and the last hope for my people. If I am forceful, he will do as I say.

Today, I am forceful.

...

i ngā rā o mua: in the old days
kahukura: cloak



Before our people leave for the forest, I have them prepare a feast of welcome. They spread the food out on whāriki before my house. My moko fetches the taonga pounamu. It is kahurangi, a noble stone of deep colour, unworked by human hands. Named *Tiri-a-Ngahue*, it was left behind **i ngā rā o mua** by the tupuna Ngahue. It has been in the care of my whānau since we arrived in this land.

What would Ngahue think of my intentions today? Exchanging his taonga for peace – surely the only trade worthy.

...

take: issue or concern
tikanga: correct practice or custom

So, here you find me then, an old grandmother, sitting before her house and awaiting her fate. This pā has been my papa kāinga my entire life. Now its gates are flung open to welcome the Red Man and his taua. My korowai will keep me warm enough. *Tiri-a-Ngahue* rests at my side, shaped like a kahawai, smooth and sleek enough to swim against the currents. He is a greedy fish, the kahawai. It’s what gets him caught. It reminds me of the **take** that brings the Red Man to my home a generation later; a **take** not of his making, yet **tikanga** compels him to pursue its consequences.

I cannot understand the hearts of men so burdened by mana that only slaughter will satisfy them. It must be a weight too terrible to bear – a curse on the souls of the mighty.

And the Red Man, he is mighty.

He carries his father’s legacy like the blood red **kahukura** that gives him his name. It must be true that, in war, it’s not enough to win the day. You must secure tomorrow. Future generations must respect your victory. I would laugh were it not so grim.



When tamariki are born, mothers will look for omens that reveal their child's fate. Flushed with the joy of new life, they forget that a secure path forward does not exist. Only the past is knowable, unfolding before us as we walk backwards into the future. History requires constant attendance, or else we will lose our way. And yet, when I look closely at the cause of my sorrow, I am left bewildered.

How can a chiefly man of lineage bring so much misery for the sake of wounded pride and a few fat fish? How is it that men in their thousands make another man's honour their own? How did my son see fit to pursue this *take* instead of taking his proper place among his people?

How does one man's anger encircle the land and threaten to devour it? Perhaps the Red Man will tell me these things.

...

The forest alerts me to his arrival. Tīeke, watching from his canopied heights, is raucous in his alarm. Others join in. All but Pīwaiwaka will shrink from the advance. Ever the opportunist, he hunts the insects that are put to flight by the passage of men through the undergrowth. They feast on the fly, fearless of death, or at least uncaring of its presence.

I do not fear death. But I care about it deeply. Death should be dignified. Sadness needs a respectful space for expression. I wonder, Pīwaiwaka, what you make of that – flitting about me now with so much to say and no time to settle. Yes, I am aware they are coming. You cannot miss the energy of their intent. It's as palpable as the wind.

For all that, they are manuhiri. I call them on.

*Haere mai, haere mai, tomo mai nei ki taku kāinga, ki taku ngākau pōhara ē.
Welcome to my home, to my destitute heart.*

...

“So many fearsome, fine-looking men. How my heart would dance if this were the summer of my youth. You have come far. Please, eat – the birds are fat and succulent. I'm sorry, I wish there were more.”

The Red Man speaks with calm consideration. “Tēnā koe, e kui. You are more than generous. How is it that you are here alone?”

He stands before me, tall and striking, wearing his kahukura well.

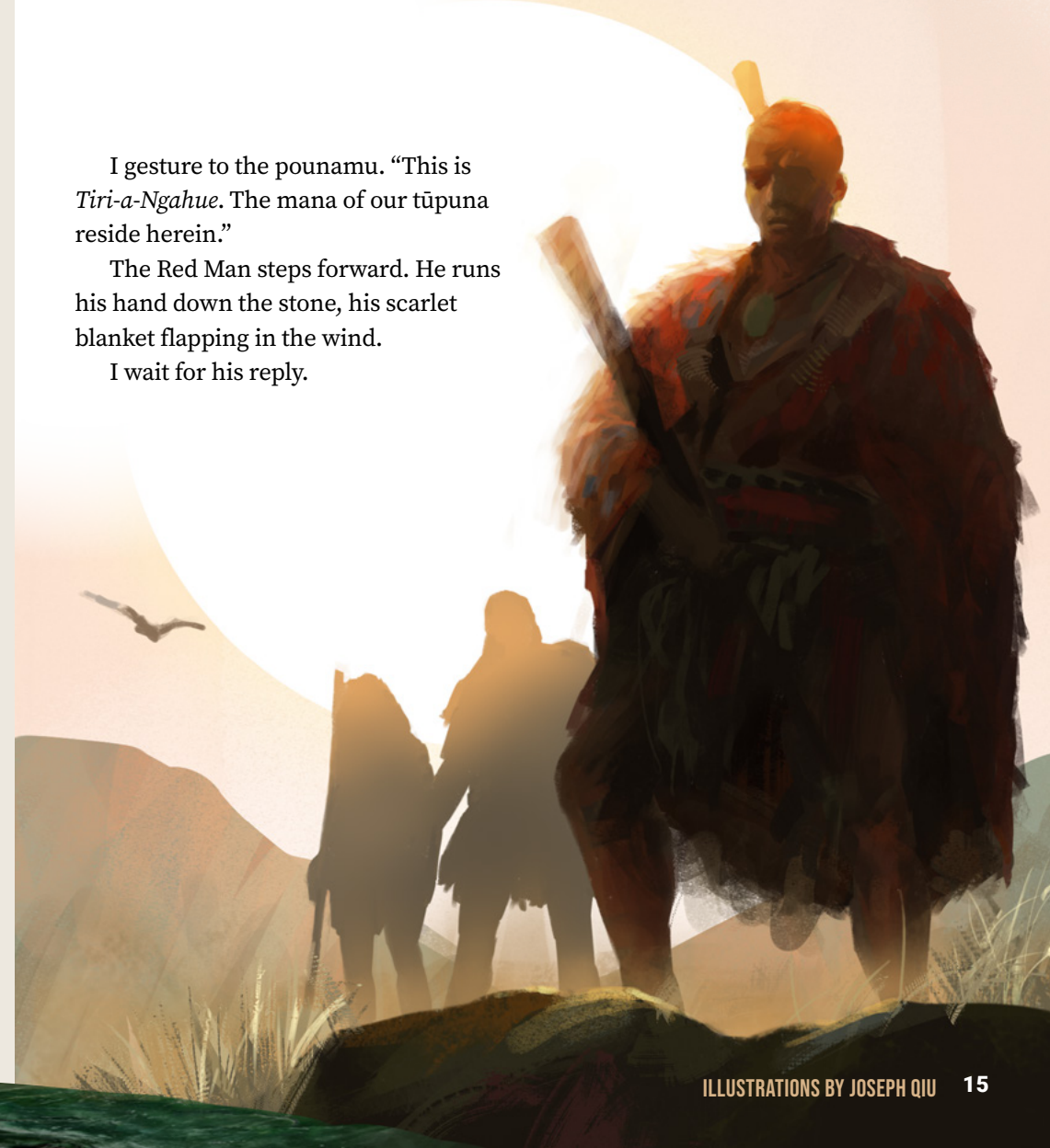
“E noho mai nei, e tama,” I reply. “Sit down here beside me. It hurts my neck to look up at you ... I know why you have come, though I do not understand it. You may not have my people. I have sent them away.”

His silence spurs me on. “As you were on your way here, I thought that I would ask you – why must you continue with this bloody work? Why did my own son think this mahi virtuous – is mana such a fragile thing? But I will not ask. I do not want to hear a fine-looking man talk nonsense. I will offer you a gift instead, if you are able to accept it.”

I gesture to the pounamu. “This is *Tiri-a-Ngahue*. The mana of our tūpuna reside herein.”

The Red Man steps forward. He runs his hand down the stone, his scarlet blanket flapping in the wind.

I wait for his reply.



WAR AND PEACE



This story is a work of fiction, but the battle of Hīngakākā and the rangatira Te Wherowhero are real.

Te Hīngakākā took place near Te Awamutu in the late 1700s. According to some accounts, the conflict was sparked by what Ngāti Toa chief Pīkauterangi saw as the unequal distribution of a large kahawai harvest. To claim revenge on the offending hosts – Waikato iwi Ngāti Apakura and Ngāti Maniapoto – Pīkauterangi raised an army of ten thousand warriors, calling on allies from across the North Island. But the Waikato iwi had allies of their own. The two armies clashed in what became the largest battle ever fought in Aotearoa. Despite being vastly outnumbered, the clever tactics of Ngāti Mahuta chief Te Rauangaanga ensured a Waikato victory. “Te Hīngakākā” translates as “the plucking of the kākā” – a reference to the feathers in the cloaks of the fallen chiefs who were stacked up after the battle.

Te Rauangaanga had a son named Te Wherowhero – the Red Man. Trained as a warrior and schooled in traditional knowledge, Te Wherowhero would one day go on to become the first Māori King. Before that, he led his people through the decades of intertribal war known as the Musket Wars. During this period (1818–1830s), Māori warfare was transformed, as new technologies made deadly conflicts out of old rivalries. When Ngāti Toa killed one of Te Wherowhero’s relatives, the hostilities that came to a head at Hīngakākā flowed on to the next generation. Te Wherowhero called for an invasion against the old foe.

But war was not the only way to settle disputes. Pounamu was such a highly prized possession that gifting greenstone taonga could restore balance between warring parties. The metaphor of a tatau pounamu – a greenstone door – came to represent a lasting peace agreement. This could be entered into through the exchange of taonga, an arranged marriage, or simply a commitment to avoiding battle. By agreeing to the pact, the two parties were closing the door on their conflict. They were committing to a peace that, like pounamu, endured into the future.

