

"This is how waves reflect from an island and flow around it," he said. "You can find an island from waves like this, even when it is out of sight over the horizon."

He put another pebble in the pool, then handed her the twig and a bunch of dried grass straws.

"I have business to attend to. When I get back, I want to see a precise model of the ripple patterns around these pebbles made with the straws. No running off today," he warned sternly. "You will be a Master Navigator, but you must study."

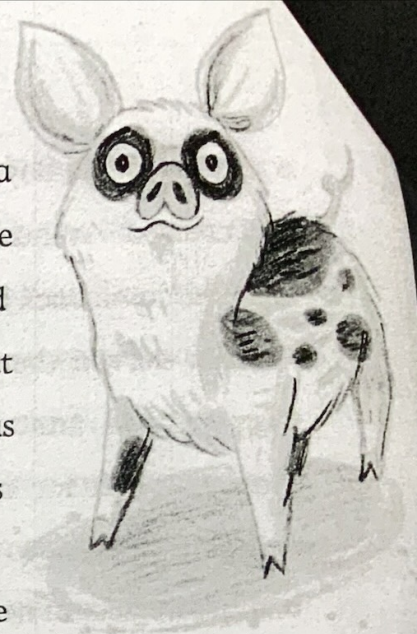
Ariki watched the tall, straight figure of the old Star Walker disappear between the tree trunks. Her pet pig Bad Boy, seeming to sense that the day might finally get a little more interesting, suddenly woke up.

"Snrt?" he said hopefully.

Ariki shook her head. "No time to play yet," she told him. "Go back to sleep."

But Bad Boy was ready for a game. He trotted over from the patch of sunlight where he had been snoozing and looked up at Ariki with his most mischievous expression: eyes twinkling, ears wiggling. It was irresistible.

Ariki flicked water from the bowl onto his nose. He snorted and stamped his feet, making her laugh. She flicked some more water, and the pig squealed and took off, his tail twirling in delight. Ariki scooped water into both hands and chased him round the Gathering Hut, trying to shower him. Just as she got within range, he doubled back to the bowl and jumped on the edge with both feet, catapulting it into the air. It landed on its side and instantly split into two neat halves, which came to rest on either side of the soggy, and now useless, straws.



Ariki and Bad Boy stared at the muddy mess they had created. Arohaka wouldn't be gone long, and when he came back he would be very cross.

Ariki shoved the remains of the bowl and the soggy straws into a dark corner. Maybe if she speared a fish for her guardian's dinner then he wouldn't be quite so angry about the broken bowl and her neglect of her studies. She grabbed her new fishing spear – the one studded with a row of small, sharp shark teeth – and ran out into the sunshine with Bad Boy at her heels.

It was so good to be outside! Ariki was about to jump into her canoe when she thought of her best friend, Ipo. Ipo was a young artist whose beautiful designs were in great demand. For the last few weeks he'd been too busy to come fishing and Ariki couldn't help feeling that it was partly her fault.

She had solved the mystery of the giant shark that was terrifying the Islanders, by working out

that all it wanted was a safe place to have its pups. Then, when the pups were born, an amazing thing happened. It turned out their skins had the same black and white pattern as her own tattoos. Those patterns had always marked Ariki as different – she was the strange girl who had washed ashore as a toddler, from who knew where. Now, the tattoos were part of a story everyone wanted to hear – and to record by painting some scene from the story on the bark cloth of their best clothes. Poor Ipo was working *all* the time.

He definitely deserved a break, and Ariki was going to make him take one. She turned from the beach and slipped back through the trees.

“Stay close!” she told Bad Boy. “We don't want Arohaka to spot us.”

Ipo worked under the big thatched awning that his granny had built next to their house. During the day, he had to keep out of the bright sun because he had

been born as white as a shell, and his skin burned in bright light. But everyone enjoyed a bit of shade, so he was rarely short of company as he worked. People stood around, chatting and watching all that was going on along Turtle Back beach: net-mending, fish trap-making, boat-building, baby cuddling, paddling, swimming, plus all the comings and goings of boats heading up or down the Nose – the narrow channel in the reef that linked the lagoon with the open sea.

This afternoon, to Ariki's delight, Ipo was alone.

"Pssst," she hissed from behind a tree.

Ipo looked up, pushing a cloud of snowy white hair out of his eyes.

"Hiding from Arohaka again?" He grinned. "Come and sit. Everyone's at the Queen's house talking about the wedding." Ipo rolled his eyes.

The Queen of Turtle Island, Manatui, was getting married to the eldest son of the Queen of Big Toe, an island three days' journey away across the sea

– their closest neighbour. Turtle Island grown-ups had talked about nothing but the wedding feast for weeks. It was *very* dull.

Ariki plopped down on the sand beside her friend, while Bad Boy snuffled around on the floor for bits of dried fish or coconut.

"We did looking at pebbles *again* today," she grumbled, "and then looking at ripples in a bowl. If I don't get on the ocean soon I'm going to go mad. Come fishing with me!"

"I can't," Ipo groaned. "The daughters of the Queen of Big Toe are visiting and I have to get their outfits done by morning."

Ariki glanced down at the huge area of cloth. "These are *skirts*?"

Ipo nodded.

"Wow, I thought they were tents."

"They wanted them extra swirly, to make room for designs." Ipo sighed. "It's a lot of work."

As if hearing themselves mentioned, three young women with very elaborate hairdos emerged from the house of Queen Manatui and came rushing along the beach towards them, their shell necklaces jangling.

"Oh! Oh, it's *her*," the one on the left exclaimed.

"It is!" cried the one on the right. "The *real* Ariki."



They squealed like piglets.

"Amazing," said the one in the middle.

"I'm sorry," Ipo whispered. "I should have warned you..."

Before Ariki could escape, the three sisters had her surrounded and were looking at her as if she were some kind of special ingredient in their favourite meal.



"Just look at those weird tattoos," the first one said, poking Ariki in the arm.

"And on the boys' side. How strange," said the second, stretching out her arm to show off her "normal" tattoos – swirls and curves painted on her right arm, the "girls' side".

"Amazing," commented the third, again.

Ariki glanced between the girls to see if she could make a run for it and instead spotted a beautiful boat, with a smooth hull and graceful outrigger, a deck with a cabin and a bright new sail. It was, she guessed, the boat the three young women had arrived in. It gave her an idea.

"Would you like to hear about my meeting with the Giant Shark," she said, "at the place where it actually happened?"

"Oh," said the first one.

"Yes!" said the second.

The third struggled to answer. "That would be ...

be..." she stuttered.

"Amazing?" Ariki suggested and they all nodded. "Good." She beamed. "Can we go in your boat?"

The girls looked at one another rather uncertainly, then nodded all together.

"It's new," the first girl said proudly. "Our mother had it built."

"She named it *Sea Beauty*," said the second, patting her hair, "after us!"

"Oh," said Ariki. "That's nice."

Ipo looked at Ariki with a "What are you up to?" expression on his face, but Ariki just smiled innocently.

"Come on, Ipo," she said. "You can take a little break, can't you, now the sun is going down?"

Ipo hesitated, but only for a moment. He grabbed his sunhat, with its extra-wide brim, and followed his friend down the beach.

It was obvious that, as the girls were older and

stronger, they should be the ones to push *Sea Beauty* out into the waves, while Ipo, Ariki and Bad Boy sat on board, and paddled to get it moving.

The moment the boat floated free of the sand, Ariki felt it come to life under her feet – like a fish suddenly released from a net. It was thrilling! The breeze that earlier had been ruffling the palms had picked up, so when Ariki released the sail, perhaps just a little too early, *Sea Beauty* leaped away before the Queen's daughters could climb aboard. The boat raced from the shore as if it longed for freedom as much as Ariki did.

"I'm so sorry," Ariki called over her shoulder to the girls now standing chest-deep in water. "We'll take her out a bit and turn her round."

"Ariki," said Ipo, "you planned that."

"No I didn't! The wind was stronger than I expected. But now we've got her, let's just take her for a little spin?"

"We'll be in trouble..." Ipo said.

"We will," Ariki agreed.

And then they smiled at each other and shot out through the Nose into the ocean.

