

Tū

by Paul Mason



“That dog has to go!” said Mum when I got home after school.

“What’s Tū done now?”

“My vegie patch,” Mum moaned. “All my hard work ...”

Tū and I followed her out to the garden. There was no vegie patch. There was a patch all right, but there were no vegies in it. It looked more like the green-waste pile at the tip.

Tū bounded over and launched himself into the wreckage. He grabbed a tomato stalk and gave it a good, hard shake.

“No!” Mum shouted. Tū looked up for a moment, tail wagging, and then buried himself in the remains of some lettuces.

“He’s never been trained,” said Mum. “You haven’t even seen what he did to the hall carpet. Not to mention your father’s slippers. He’ll be so upset when he gets back from his trip and sees them.” Mum sighed. “I’m sorry, Jake, but back to the pound he goes.”

I could see there was no arguing with her. I patted Tū on the head. I didn’t want his feelings hurt.

“There’s no mention of Tū having any behaviour problems,” the woman at the pound said as she looked up his file. “Affectionate family pet it says here.”

Tū gazed up at us, eyes bright.

“He’s completely wild – that’s what he is,” said Mum. “And he’s doesn’t listen to a word we say.”

The woman looked at the file again. “But that’s because Tū only responds to te reo,” she said, tapping the screen.

“Te reo?” asked Mum.

“Te reo Māori.” The woman leaned over and smiled at Tū. “E noho!” she said, and Tū sat down obediently. “See, you just need to give him the correct commands. We did explain that to the man who picked him up – your husband was it? He must have forgotten to tell you.”

I laughed. Dad’s always forgetting things.

“I see,” said Mum. “But what do we do? We don’t know any Māori. We haven’t been in New Zealand that long.”

“Then I guess it’s homework time!” said the woman, smiling. She handed back the lead.

Mum didn’t say anything on the way home, but I could see she’d set her teeth to “grind”.





“Now,” said Mum, sitting in front of the computer. “The first thing we need to find out is how to tell him to stop!” She went to a te reo Māori website and did a quick search. I leaned over. There was more than one option for the word “stop”.

“Which one is it?” I asked.

Just then, Tū trotted into the room and picked up one of my comics.

“I have no idea,” said Mum with a laugh, “but you might want to try something pretty fast.”

I scanned the list on the website. “Ira kati!” I shouted, sounding as firm as I could. “Ira kati!” Tū stopped and tilted his head to one side.

“Look! He understands!” I said.



Just as I said the words, Tū bolted out the door, the comic clamped between his teeth.

“Tū!” I raced after him, but it was too late. By the time I caught up, my comic was paper spaghetti. “We need help,” I said.

“You should have said just kāti,” said Nīkau when I asked him at school the next day. “That means stop as in ‘Stop! Please don’t eat my precious comic.’ Ira kati means full stop,” he laughed. “You were helping him with his punctuation.”

“Very funny,” I said. “Maybe you could come round after school and teach Mum and me a few things?”

“Sure,” agreed Nīkau. “I’ll check with Dad.”





We got home to the sound of Tū barking like he was auditioning for the finals of *New Zealand's Loudest Pet*. Over the din, I introduced Nīkau to Mum as our “te reo expert”.

Nīkau blushed. “I’m not an expert, but I speak it pretty well, I guess.”

“Great,” said Mum. “Perhaps you can get him to stop? He won’t listen to us.”

“Sure,” said Nīkau. He called out, “Turituri!” Straight away, Tū stopped barking. His ears flopped down, and he did his saddest, puppy-dog expression.

“Thank goodness,” said Mum.

“Turituri means be quiet,” said Nīkau helpfully. “You could also try hoihoi.”

“I’d better write these down,” said Mum. She went to grab a pencil and paper.

That afternoon, with help from Nīkau, we found out Tū could do a whole lot of things. We had him coming and going like a boomerang, fetching sticks, sitting, lying down, and even rolling over. I could tell Mum was starting to see Tū in a new light.

“Ka pai!” Mum said, patting Tū on the head. “Good boy for making us learn a new language.”

Tū wagged his tail happily then ran over and flopped down in the vegie patch, crushing what was left of the parsley.

Mum called him to her. “Haere mai!” Tū didn’t move.

“Haere mai!” I tried. Tū just closed his eyes.

“Are we saying the wrong thing?” Mum checked her notes.

“No, they’re the right words,” Nīkau laughed. “I reckon Tū just wants a rest after all that running around you’ve been making him do.”

Mum shook her head, smiling. “What’s the word for worn out?” she asked.

“Ruwha,” said Nīkau.

“Then that’s one ruwha dog,” said Mum.

I went over to Tū and ruffled his ears. I didn’t want his feelings hurt.



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