

LOST TREASURE

by Anahera Gildea

I've got this cousin Hoani. He always causes me *big* trouble. One time, I stayed over at his house and woke up paralysed. During the night, he'd plastic-wrapped me to the stretcher. The only thing I could move was my head. Another time, when I was really little, he convinced me to eat a dead spider. I wanted to be in his club. It turned out there was no club. Then last year at Nanny's eightieth birthday, he ninja-farted into a jar and forced me to smell it. Nanny told me not to worry – everyone gets their comeuppance.

I was determined this time would be different. I would be on the lookout for my cousin's tricks. He wouldn't fool me.

On our first night at the marae, Aunty Pam stood up and told a story. Nanny used to collect teaspoons. She had hundreds of them, from heaps of places: Kaitiāia, Dunedin, Onehunga ... everywhere. Aunty Pam talked about Nanny's first teaspoon, the one she got when she was nine. It was silver-plated and had a blue circle saying "Whitianga". Nanny was called Whiti, so she decided that made the spoon hers. When she saw it in the cutlery drawer in the wharekai, she dropped it into her pocket.

For the rest of the day, Nanny worried. She felt bad for taking the spoon but didn't want to give it back, so she went out to the orchard, dug a hole near one of the apple trees, and buried it. She never found that teaspoon again.

Hoani's eyes lit up. Even though I'd tried to avoid him, he'd parked his butt right next to mine. He whispered to meet him outside. "Urgent," he said. So of course, like a big dummy, I followed.

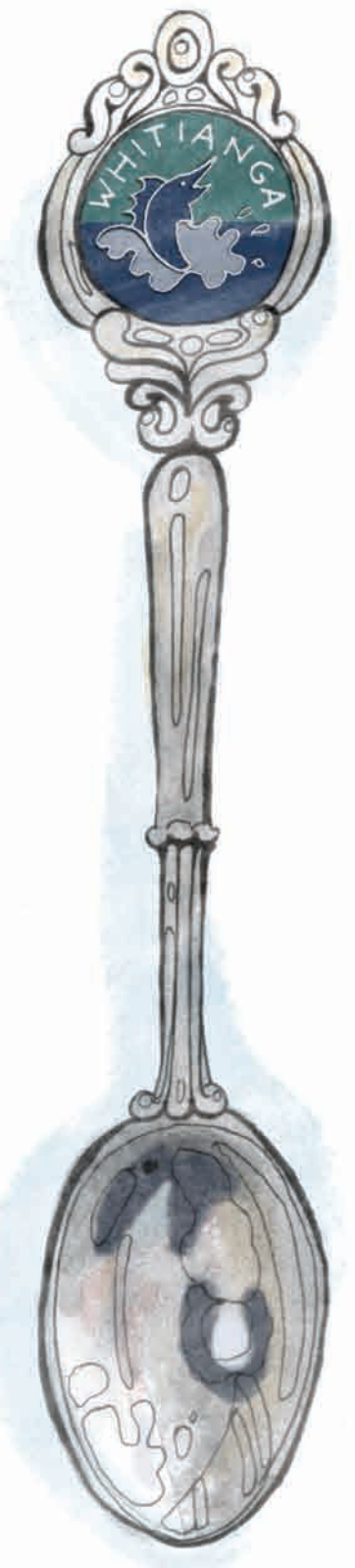
"Wai," he said in a dramatic, very serious voice. "We are going to find Nanny's teaspoon and give it back to her."

"We? What we?" I folded my arms and frowned at my cousin, trying to look staunch.

"You and me, Wai. We'll be heroes. Nanny would love to have that spoon back. It was her first one." He grinned like he'd just invented ice cream.

I could have said no. But deep down, I wanted to find that teaspoon. I was in, and he knew it. "No tricks?" I said.

"No tricks. Promise. Meet you in the orchard in the morning."



When I woke up, my cousin's sleeping bag was empty. The only people in the wharenuī were two great-aunties and Nanny. I went outside in my pyjamas and ran into Mum on the verandah.

"Good, I was coming to get you. I need help with jobs."

"But, Mum," I pleaded. "Hoani and I are doing something special today."

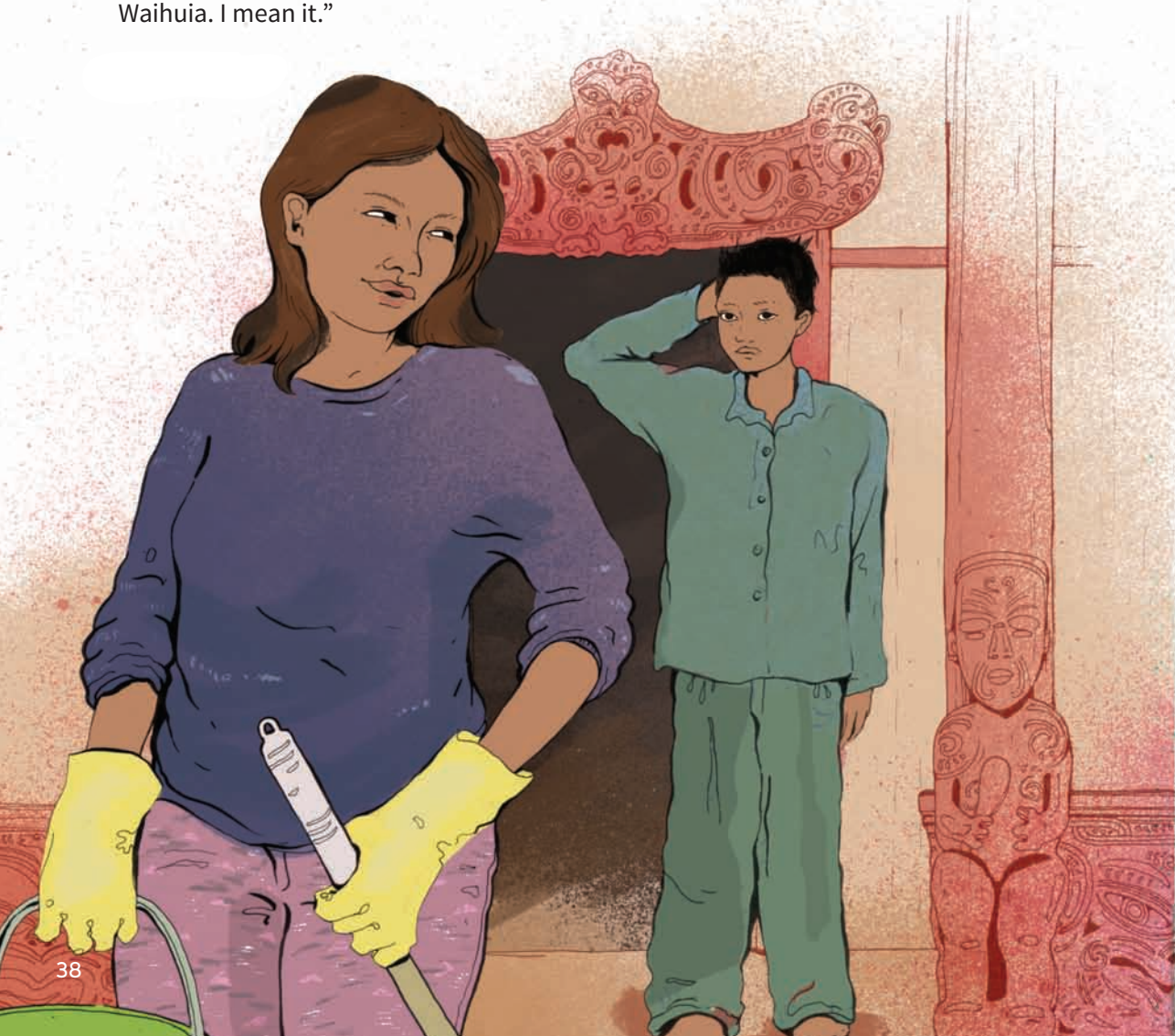
"Sorry, Wai. People will start arriving soon. You can help Uncle Dan set out the chairs, then you're needed in the wharekai."

I sighed and went to get dressed. Mum hovered while I brushed my teeth.

"Uncle is out on the paepae with your cousins," she reminded me when I was done.

"Is Hoani there?" I asked.

"I've no idea." Mum frowned. "But I've told you – no mucking around today, Waihuia. I mean it."



Once the chairs were done, Mum reappeared. She was like some kind of genie. "Good work, Wai. Now you can lay the tables for lunch."

"OK, I just need to mimi," I lied. If Hoani had found the teaspoon, he'd have come gloating by now. There was still time.

"I'll come, too," Mum said. "We can see if the wharepaku need another clean." It was impossible.

The toilets were fine, and Mum escorted me to the kitchen. I laid the tables and carried stacks of plates. Then I folded a million serviettes. I finished just as people began to pour in for lunch. For the next hour, I carried full plates and empty plates, back and forth like a yo-yo. There was no sign of Hoani. It wasn't like him to miss lunch. I felt mad, imagining the fun he was having without me.

Finally, the rush was over. I almost got away ... but then I was given the job of sitting with Auntie Jane while she ate. She has terrible eyesight and one time put salt on her pudding. Then my cousin Pounamu handed me her crying baby, and after that the ringawera decided I needed to peel potatoes for tea.



By 4 o'clock I was going crazy. I finally made a break for it. On my way out, I ran into Mum and Aunty Pam. They were sitting outside. It was hard to tell if they were laughing or crying.

"Wai," Mum called as I tried to get past. "Come over here and sit down."

"No, Mum." I put my hands on my hips. "I have to find Hoani."

"Hmm," said Aunty Pam. "No one has seen Hoani all day. I wonder where he is."

It all came out of my mouth in a rush. "He's going to find the teaspoon and be a hero when he gives it to Nanny, and I was supposed to help but I haven't been able to because *everyone's* given me jobs *all day*." My face was red. I wanted to cry.

Mum and Aunty Pam started laughing. Mum patted the seat next to her.

"We know," she said.

"You know?" I said.

Aunty Pam grinned the same grin that Hoani always had. "You didn't really believe Nanny lost that teaspoon, did you? She found it straight away, the first time she went back." Aunty Pam handed me something. The Whitianga teaspoon.

They cracked up laughing. "We may have told a fib last night," said Mum.

"We knew Hoani couldn't resist."

"Nanny did love it, though," said Aunty Pam. "Come on, let's take it to her."

I was completely gobsmacked as I walked with them to the wharenuī. It felt like everyone had been in on the joke. Now even Nanny looked as though she was smiling. We slipped the teaspoon into her pocket and gave her a kiss.



Then all three of us went out to the orchard. We hid behind the garden shed to look.

There was Hoani, covered in dirt. There were little holes all over the place. He reminded me of the diggiest dog, bum in the air, trying to find his lost bone. Aunty Pam was holding her stomach she was laughing so hard.

"We can't just leave him there," I whispered.

Mum pulled me back. "We'll tell him in an hour or two," she said. "When it gets dark."

I smiled and took another peek at my cousin. Nanny was right. Everyone does get their comeuppance.

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Lost Treasure

by Anahera Gildea

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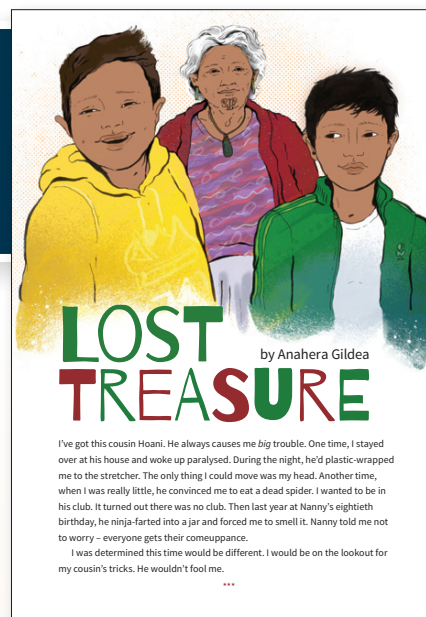
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