

A day (and a night) in the life of a native New Zealander

West Coast, North Island, New Zealand

7.15am

Woke up, went outside the *whare* and took a surreptitious piss near the back wall of *Hone's* hut.

The nearby pounding surf disguises the mere trickle emitting from me. I sniff the salt air, languid as a morning mist, taking the scent deep into my chest and near to my heart for I revere this coastline and its wild moods. The sea; the sounds of surf; the mist; the smells. This is me.

I am *Cook of Tainu and Ngati Whatua* on my mother's side. I have no father.

Ever since those missionaries who set up their *Pa* further along the estuary got word from some *wahine* name of Florence Nightingale, they been telling us *Maoris* to wash our hands when we take a shit and not to piss outside the door of the *whare* even on cold nights!

Judging by the state of my erect cock, this being precipitated by desire to piss rather than desire for to take a *wahine*, I reckon it would be 7.16am.

7.30am: Report to the work division palisade.

Watching that upstart *Tai*. Thinks he a big cheese just because his *whakapapa* includes a distant relationship to that *Maori* who cut down the flag pole. That *Tai* don't like me because he wants to pluck the petal of *Aroha* but she wants me to do this thing.

'Hey you. That *Maori* hiding in the back row.'

Shit. He has seen me. Now I am for a bad day.

'You. That *Maori* hiding back there trying to avoid work detail. Yes you, you shirker. Go stand to the *kumara* patch. You're late again.'

'I am not late and haven't had breakfast yet,' I say, not allowing this upstart to get too much on top.

That stuffed him. No *Maori* is ever to be denied a good feed before he goes on the work detail. I have shamed him in front of the bros. He should have told me to report for work after breakfast.

7.45am: Breakfast.

Cold *kumara*.

8.00am: *Kumara* patch.

'That fella *Tai* he don't like you *Cook*.' This was a statement from my best friend *Hone* whose *whare* I pissed on before his *whanau* got out of bed.

I nodded and took up my *kumara* digging stick. It was a well worn *manuka* tree branch with a knot protruding on one side about the length of a good sized *kawahai* fish from the ground, onto which I can place my foot to push the sick into the dirt and make room for a seedling.

'Why you reckon we only got these sticks and not those spades the *Pakeha* got?' asked *Hone*.

'I dunno,' I said but in fact I had been thinking about this for many months and had formulated an explanation.

'I hear that Missionary fella say we are all dumb arse black Stone Age people,' continue *Hone*. 'What a Stone Age people, *Cook*?'

I stabbed my stick deep in the dirt. This talk make me angry. These white people too fond of calling us *Maori* dumb arse black fellas.

'Hey *Cook*. You gone deaf mate?'

If I tell *Hone* what I have been thinking about these frequently used pejoratives, I could end up in deep shit with the *tohunga*. I must say something to *Hone* but if I say too much they will know that I have learned to read the white man's books.

'I think it is all to do with where that woman Florence Nightingale is helping the English soldiers in a place called Crimea many days paddling in a *waaka*. Before the white man got there and caused more wars, the Crimea *Maori* had been a people, even before that fella the missionaries call Jesus, was alive.'

'Ho,' interrupted *Hone*. 'You don't believe that story about Jesus do you man? Nobody can walk on the water – not even *Hone Heke*!'

I shook my head. 'No, but I am telling you about the peoples who lived in caves in a place called Crimea before the white man got there and caused trouble. These people had spears for hunting and bow and arrow and they had made things from metal, like the English use to make spades and muskets. But the Crimea men only made a sort of knife from their metal.'

'So?' said *Hone* slightly perplex by the erudition of the conversation.

'So,' I said. 'The white people who come to *Aotearoa* and find us with no bow and arrow and no spears with iron tips and no iron knives ("And not even a bloody wheel", I also thought, remembering more pejorative curses cast upon us Maoris), they think we are more stupid than people who lived in caves in Crimea before that Jesus fella was born by magic.'

Hone's face was black as thunder. 'We should take a *waaka* and have a *koe roa* with those brothers in Crimea. Maybe we can learn how to make our own muskets?

I shook my head. 'Cant do that *Hone*. The white man kill all those cave people and now fighting each other to find who is boss of all the lands they stole from the cave people.'

Hone shivered. 'What's a matter with you Bro,' I asked.

'I had a shiver down my spine when you talk about white fella's stealing land. Like something bad is going to happen to us like that.'

The perspicacity of *Hone's* premonition is not lost on me but I say nothing, just in case.

10.30am: Morning tea.

Cold *kumara* and water.

10.55am.: *Kumara* patch

'I been thinking,' said *Hone* with more acuity. Good I thought. *Hone* and I can now discuss the problems confronting our peoples rather than talking about *wahine* and *kai* all the time.

'How come you so smart you know all this stuff about *Maori* living in caves making knives of iron?'

Oh oh! My heart sank. *Hone* has been thinking in the wrong direction.

'You been talking to that missionary fella who is always trying to pluck the flowers of our *wahine*?'

I kept my head down and dug at the earth with some fury. I cannot tell *Hone* that I have been plucking the flower of the missionary's daughter for that would land me in serious trouble with the *tohunga* and the *rangitira* of all our tribe.

'I been listening careful when we have compulsory attendance at the meetings of missionaries every day they named Sunday. I listen to the words the Reverend Marsden say and watch the words in the book they make us hold. That fella say same thing many times; Ten Commandments he call them. I keep listening and watching the book words and soon I can understand.'

Hone look at me like sly dog. I cannot tell him the missionaries daughter teach me the alphabet in her bed. 'Understand – some.' I add just in case and to ameliorate the effect of *Hone* absorbing, however slowly, that I can read.

12.30pm: Lunch.

Ahiee! Not more cold *Kumara*?

12.50pm:

I take a shit. I got to walk down the side of the hill where is no sunshine and crap over a creek running out to the ocean. This new shit hole procedure is all because of that Florence Nightingale telling the Queen of England that soldiers must be clean of dirt and they will not die in the Crimea. Somehow the missionaries in *Aotearoa* decide *Maori* shit holes all over the place and no washing hands are reason why so many of our people are sick and sometimes die for no reason. This is confusing for me but I wash my hands – just in case and walk back up the hill to the work division palisade.

1.00pm: Compulsory military training.

Allocated to compulsory military training section.

Run back to *whare* and collect *mere*. Run to side of *Pa* where sun goes to sleep.

Stand in line with bros; jump up and down, yell, pull faces, throw rocks down the hill at imaginary foe. This goes on for a full hour. I am utterly exhausted.

Time to return to work division palisade for final work detail.

'Hey you!'

I stop. Trepidation and anxiety, soon replaced with anger.

'You, white man's bastard. Go down the hill and collect all the throwing rocks. They are no use down there.' It is *Tai*, my company commander.

I sense silence amongst my brothers. Many look at their feet. They are ashamed for me, not of me.

I have witnessed before the response of my brothers to this terrible insult to my mother, my *whanau* and to me. Mostly I know my brothers are ashamed of *Tai*.

This time I do not go down the hill. This time I grip strongly my *mere* and walk up the slope to where *Tai* glares down at me. He smirks at me, gloating that my mother was raped when the man who should have been my father was killed trying to defend her against white marines who came silently by small boat upon them in an estuary where they spent the first days of their marriage.

I am the height of one and a half muskets and with all the hard labour that has been heaped upon me for the last three years by *Tai*, I am strong in my chest, my arms and my legs. *Tai* he is bigger because he is older and has body weight young men like me do not yet possess. If he grapples with me I know he will crush me in spite of my youth and strength. I approach him without fear.

I have made up my mind as I walk the last five paces toward him. All men and boys are silent and watch the spectacle unfold. One step before *Tai*, I stop; he is standing on a mound of dirt and my head comes only to his waist.

'You stand above me *Tai* but you are lower than a dog.' I say this with such conviction my voice is loud and all present can hear. The fury in the face of *Tai* makes men nearby quail back in fear. *Tai* raises his *mere* to deliver me a blow to the skull but I am too quick and nimble. I back hand smash my *mere* with all my strength into his shin. Bone shatters and *Tai* tumbles from his perch, crashing to my feet screaming in pain. I walk away.

4.00pm: Work division palisade.

I am standing apart from my brothers in the work division palisade.

Chief *Te Tuhi Mahuta* walk proud, but angry look upon his face no tattoo could disguise.

Soon the paramount *rangitira* stand before me. He lean forward. He whisper in my ear: 'The only reason you not dead you dumb arse *Maori* is I sleep with your mother and she has my balls and my heart between her thighs.'

I am dumfounded. Mother always tell me *Te Tuhi* is arse wipe and only comes to our *whare* because he wish to be seen before the tribe as a loyal friend of the man who should have been my father. I never considered he was shagging mummy.

'You go in night patrol fishing *waaka*. If *waaka* not bring home good bounty of fish *kai*, you die.

Penalty for bringing bad luck on the tribe is death and *pudding*.'

'Fuck', I think resorting to my English lexicon. This is serious trouble. Full moon tonight and all tribe know there will be no fish caught. I am in big shit. I know *pudding* is a euphemism for eating one's enemies. If we catch no fish I will be devoured in a cannibalistic ritual.

5.30pm: *Whanau* ware

'Who you dumb arse black fella think you are?' my mother she say to me with much passion and I reflect with dismay that we *Maori* have taken up use of the *Pakeha* pejorative to describe ourselves.

'We are low life in the tribe. You must know your place. *Te Tuhi* he is merciful to me after you are born and it is not the seed of your father.'

My mother she not tell me *Te Tuhi* is shagging her to demonstrate his humanity.

'*Tai* he is baby chief. He is son of some slut *Te Tuhi* shagged before he loved me.'

Now my mother she tell me in her gentle manner *Te Tuhi* shags her.

'*Tai* is his son from a slut he shagged many moons before. He has tribal obligation to promote *Tai* because his true son killed by *Taniwha*.'

I am forlorn and down caste. I am afraid. *Taniwha* is demon fish of the deep. This is why *Te Tuhi* he sends me to my death with his nemesis.

'That missionary girl who keeps looking at you with evil intent; she say *Tai* in big trouble. *Tai* get Crimea disease!'

I wait for mother to extrapolate. There is no extrapolation.

'What means Crimea disease mother?' I ask.

'He is in big shit.' Definitive statement.

I keep my head down. I know Crimea disease is called typhoid but sometimes also gangrene. The missionaries have been pumping into us like zealots all this stuff about disease, as if we were little children who not know how to look after ourselves. Unless one washes ones hands one dies from gangrene or maybe typhoid- I become confused. I not understand all this stuff but I am secretly elated *Tai* might die from the blow I delivered to his shin because he didn't wash his hands when he take a shit. Crimea disease has got him.

5.47pm:

Tips comes to me and rubs her fur against my leg. Her eyes are like pools of liquid amber. She wants me to touch her. I do. My hand reaches out and she sniffs and licks my fingers. I love my dog. She knows when I am in big shit.

6.00pm:

All crew for the night of peril on the sea attend the launch of our *waaka*. Our chariot of the seas has been high and dry in the sun for the past few days: she will be light in the water and respond fast to the paddle if we must avoid the *Taniwha*. But *waaka* will also leak like a sieve because dry wood shrinks and leaves gaps for water to intrude.

I watch as my mother's body recedes in the distance and the twilight. The bros all paddle and sing a *waita* to appease the Gods for we all know we are a crew of outcastes; thrown together at a time of food shortage but a most unpropitious time in the lunar calendar. We are vagabonds on the high sea who await a fate foreseeable by even the most addle pated soothsayer.

6.30pm: Upon the High Seas.

'You bring shame on our *waaka*,' say *Moses*. A big *Maori* who has been named after a baby Jesus found in the *raupu*. 'You bail out water. You not worthy to fish with us men,' he say because he is boss of the *waaka*.

I am cognisant of surreptitious glances or perhaps they are glares. All men in the *waaka* on this unpropitious night for fishing have been assigned because they have transgressed in some way against the tribe mores or laws during the preceding calendar month. It is not only I who had been a miscreant. But my crime, that of smashing the shin of a bastard prince is the most outrageous event the tribe has seen since I was born with skin not so dark as my friends, hair with a tinge of red but most astonishing, with blue eyes.

I am secretly pleased my people named me after the English explorer who is second only to *Kupe* and not some character who performed unbelievable things like the missionaries tell us that *Moses* did.

Soon all the bros have caste their lines to the deep; hooks fashioned from birds bones and platted flax strips to secure this fish catching device which never produces much bounty. The tribe fish diet invariable comes from small fish captured in our nets near the estuaries or eels which we stun when throwing boulders into the fresh water creeks where they linger and loiter waiting for more scraps to be thrown from the *hangi pit*. Sometimes a whale will strand itself on the beach and the tribe rejoices the *Taniwha*. But tonight *Taniwha* is a demon lurking beneath our *waaka*.

Judging by the throb in my cock, which reminds me that if I was back in my *whare* I would need to masturbate to appease the ache in my balls, I determine it is mid night. No fish have been caught.

Maori in the *waaka* now lament their bad deeds which precipitated their assignment to the crew of death. The men are afraid; I can smell their fear. *Moses* is most terrified of all. His crime was theft of a *mere*. If he fails to redeem himself on this expedition, he will be banished from the tribe.

'Ho you lazy squid lurking in the deep. Get your bad arse out of bed and give us some fish!'

This I shout at the top of my voice. I am angry at the *Taniwha*. If I am going to become *pudding* then I will tell this serpent of the deep what I think of him.

The bros are stunned. Eyes become wide with fear. *Moses* he piss down his leg and this give me an idea. 'Hey you keeper of all fish. You come up here or I will piss on your head.'

Some of the bro begin to wail. I have threatened the God of the sea.

'*Taniwha*,' I scream at the top of my lungs. 'Send me fish from your lair. Make them fly into our *waaka*. Hurry and I will piss onto my feet to honour you as a great God.' I add this last bit just in case, because I am suddenly afraid also that I have said too much insult and begin to worry *Taniwha* might tip us all into the sea.

Suddenly there is a ripple on the ocean. All bros can see perturbation on the surface in the moonlight as it moves inexorably toward our *waaka*. The wailing of the bros has reached a crescendo. I now feel like I want to shit on my feet, not only piss.

Soon it is clear the water disturbance is created by fish which fly for short distances before plopping back into the sea. An amazing sight; something only a few warriors of our tribe have ever witnessed but always it has happened when the moon is full. 'Fish that fly,' is a fable told around the fires at night when the *tohunga* is re-enforcing fear of his high office.

Before we can do anything, these fish that fly, land in our *waaka* and are flapping amongst our feet. At first the terror amongst us is profound and *Moses* he jump out of the *waaka*. But quickly the fish pass us by and are soon lost from sight. Only the fish in the *waaka* are proof that we did not dream this phenomenon.

1.42am: Beach landing

The *Pa* is sleeping but still many people are gathered to witness the fate of us outcastes more than they seek news of our bounty for the outcome was a fore gone conclusion before we set sail.

None of my compatriots in the *waaka* have looked at me let alone spoken to me during the hour's paddling to the beach. I see Chief *Te Tuhi* and the *tohunga* clothed in blankets recently acquired from trading with the *Pakeha*. If the white man has brought nothing but trouble to our lands, they did bring one item of value: the blanket.

My mother she is now visible and as we draw to the shore I see she has been weeping for she will have feared that I will soon be put to death.

I am the first to alight from the *waaka* and carry all the fish on a flax rope threaded through the gills. Other crew members were too afraid to touch this gift from the *Taniwha* so I was quick to seize the moment and by my body language demonstrated that this was my doing; the response to my challenge to the *Taniwha*.

Fifty one fish I dump at the feet of the *Rangitira*. A wail goes up from my mother; a piercing shrill lament. Like a mist rolling in from the sea, soon we are surrounded by many who have been roused from slumber to witness this extraordinary occasion.

3.40am: *Whare of Tai.*

I bow my head and take fish to the bed side of my tormentor. He is in much pain. His mother she receives my gift. In the fire light I see the wound is bad. The leg has been straightened and is bound on either side with sticks of *manuka*. This is a *Pakeha* skill we have all seen them apply to their men in battle who sustain broken limbs.

I leave *Tai* for a moment and return to my *whare* where I collect a white man's grain sack which is now empty but which I stole for a pillow. I return to *Tai's whare* and place the sack under his calf muscle to provide him softness but with dismay I notice the sack still has grain residue which has turned to mould. *Tai* nods to me to leave the sack and by his hand instructs me to wrap his wounded leg. Perhaps the warmth of the heavy fabric is relief I think to myself.

4.00am: Walking to my *whare*.

'You are handsome warrior in the breaking dawn light,' say a voice as smooth as velvet. I am startled.

'You want to pluck this petal?'

5.15am: My *whare*.

I am in deep sleep before I have time to dream myself to slumber on the wave of my changing fortunes.

7.15am: Wake up.

Take surreptitious piss on rear of *Hone's whare*.

Another day after another night – two years later.

River that flows: Waikato.

6.40am:

The noise of the British bugle sounding reveille is clear for all who lurk in the mist upon and about the *Waikato* River.

7.15am: *Waikato* River

I take my morning piss, the stream of urine emitting from my bladder causing steam to rise in competition with the damp swirling mist lifting from the river. *Hone* curls his upper lip as he stares at me, cogitating I think how much liquid I have spilled over the years onto the rear of his *whanau* *ware*.

I am standing at the bow of the sleekest war canoe our people have ever launched. It is with great pride to my mother and for me that I have been anointed a war chief. I am by the estimation of *Pakeha*, twenty years old. I have no royal blood in my veins but my promotion to war chief from a lower class, is not unprecedented. Like the British custom where they who distinguish themselves in battle may have 'field promotion to commissioned rank from the ranks', us low caste Maoris can also climb the ladder by deeds of valour.

I distinguished myself in a battle for Mercer. The British had 40 pounder artillery on the hills at *Whangarmarino* and were shelling our people in *Te Teoteo's Pa* where the mighty *Waikato* river absorbs the *Whangarmarino* stream. Many of our people were killed. This was not my *Pa* which is near the ocean, but we had travelled up river to help. Since *Te Wherowhero* a chief of *Ngati Mahuta*, the cousin of our chief *Te Tuhi* has been made King *Potatua*, all *Waikato Maori* are one people.

Our spies told us the British had 450 soldiers at the redoubt they named, “Queens” near *Pokeno*.

Governor Grey warned us *Maori* never to come north of the *Mangatawhiri* river or we would forfeit all rights to our lands. This was an outrage which our new *rangitira* could not abide.

It was therefore on the 12 day of July 1863 according to the *Pakeha* way of counting days that an event transpired that would change my life forever.

A bombardment of our peoples by the British artillery commenced and though we fought with great skill and guile the inevitable outcome hovered above us like a guillotine. It was also a day the *Pakeha* Colonel Mercer would later lament, for commencement of the bombardment of our people and following skirmishes would lead to him losing an eye and then his life.

For this, in his honour for killing so many of us *Maoris*, the *Pakeha* would call the place – *Mercer*.

At the time of this bombardment I was holding reeds to anchor our *waaka* in the tall river grasses where we could not be seen. At night while my brothers discussed whether to enter the *Te Teoteo's Pa* and take out wounded or whether to return to our own *Pa*, I slipped over the side.

Later in the night I came upon the British gunners celebrating their day's work around a camp fire. As they drank and laughed I entered the powder magazine, stole a casket then led a trail of explosive powder into the darkness. My plan was to light the powder as a fuse back to the main stock pile but I did not have a flint to spark. Like a flash of gunpowder I darted from the darkness, snatched a burning stick from the camp fire under the noses of the British, then I touched this flame to my laid fuse and scampered for safety.

When I returned to my *waaka*, my brothers had forgotten about my disappearance and were totally absorbed with the explosions occurring on *Whangarmarino* hills. Only next day as daylight came upon us did my brothers notice that I lay bleeding from burns caused when I was too close to the first explosion and was blown through the night with much skin blistered on my torso. That is how my tribe learned that I had caused great grief and casualties to the British and that is why I was

made a war chief by the new *rangitira* of our *Pa, Tai*. Now, six months later I am again holding vegetation of the *Waikato*, to seclude and anchor our *waaka*.

'This war, it is very long,' I hear a warrior complain.

'It is because the *Pakeha* take our land for their farms. More and more they come,' replied my close friend *Hone*.

'The British war chief Cameron make *pakeha* forts along our river so that we cannot trade nor even fish,' commented another. 'Soon there will be no where for the *Maori*. We must fight.'

Chief Tai could no longer lead a war party. His smashed leg had healed without him getting the Crimea disease but he limped and was not able to run or walk great distance. *Tai* became our *rrangitira* when Chief *Te Tui Mahuta* was lost at sea. People believed he permitted the *Taniwha* to take him so he might join his son from true marriage, who had been taken earlier by the God of the sea. *Tai* was the next in line of succession. But for me *Tai* would still be able to run. But for me however he would have died of the Crimea disease or that is what the missionary told chief *Te Tui* for the missionary claimed the mould in the sack of grain which I had used to cushion *Tai's* leg had some strange medicinal effect on wounds. This had been noticed in the Crimea by that woman Florence Nightingale, before my capricious act to comfort *Tai*, but was not fully understood. The missionaries insisted the healing properties in the mouldy grain was another miracle for which we need all be forever great full to Jesus. Fortunately for me, *Tai* extended his gratitude to me but just in case, *Tai* had also taken to washing his hands when he took a shit.

'Hey *Cook*. We been sitting here since the moon disappear. My feet are cold and my arse is numb,' came the profound observations of *Wiremu*.

'Only *kai* in the *waaka* is cold *kumara*,' say *Moses* who is always thinking about his belly.

I tell the men to share the *kumara* then bail out the water furiously to get warm and limber the muscles ready for action.

8.00am: Still on the Waikato.

I am now at the stern of my *waaka* from where I can observe all men and how they behave as we go into battle. *Moses* now stands at the bow sprit, one leg forward the other set back to maintain balance and his hands resting on his abundant hips. Silently we glide forward under the spreading limbs of many willow trees.

Suddenly there is pandemonium. *Moses* lays flat on his back in the bottom of the *waaka* somehow wedged between the rows of paddlers.

'Hey bro, what you doing down here?' demands to know one warrior.

'Ho, *Rewi* is flattened,' calls *Wiremu* in alarm and tries to free his paddle- mate from under the body weight of *Moses*.

'Shut the fuck up,' hisses *Hone* with a recent English addition to his vocabulary.

Moses flummoxes to his feet, staggers, grasps a warrior's shoulder then steadies.

'Someone hit me on the head,' he protests.

'You dumb arse *Maori*, you not see low branch of willow tree; it smack you as we glide beneath.'

Hone has little time for *Moses* and this is evident by his tone of voice.

Out of the mist too close and too soon looms the silhouette of a Cameron gun boat. Close up the iron monster is formidable. Trepidation floods through the warriors. 'Is our plan too bold?' our minds in unison enquire. River mist is our weapon of surprise. At night the darkness would have been an enemy but in the mist sodden daylight there is sufficient visibility for us to navigate while at the same time avoid detection by sentries tired by a night's vigil.

The clunk of wood against steel is not as silent as I would wish but too late now. Like ants my warriors crawl from the *waaka* onto the gun boat. The sound of three splashes inform me the sentries have been overpowered. I visualize *Hone* now placing oars taken from a row boat which rests permanently near the gangway of the gunboat, through the twin iron handles of dual doors giving access to the bowels of this behemoth. 'A design fault,' is how *Tai* described the doors from

an observation post we shared days previous as we spied on the craft our enemy use as a floating gun barge to batter our people into submission in riverside *Pa*'s which are exposed and vulnerable to these new weapons of destruction.

Soon I feel the hull of iron catch the river flow: hawsers to shoreline trees have been cut. But now I hear also commotion; the denizens of this vessel have stirred. The oars hold fast the doors and devils must remain below. But alas, soon they have troopers now on deck. A hatchway neither *Tai* nor I spied, spews forth more and more marines; marines whom I hate with a loathing for they raped my mother and killed the man who should have been my father and now I leap upon the decks of steel to kill perhaps my father.

8.00pm *Waaka on Waikato.*

'Cook, I see our *Pa*. See.' An exclamation of glee.

Softly the warriors who survived sing their *waiata*.

Soundlessly now we beach our *waaka*. The sea shell horn signals our arrival: a poignant siren.

People pour from the hilltop fortress. Soon they will be amongst us and their lament of grief will overwhelm us all.

'It was the colonel von Tempsky; we did not expect him to be aboard. His men were too many *Cook*.

It is not your fault,' says my true friend *Hone* who holds my head upon his lap.

I see my mother, she is near. Are her tears for her son who is a warrior chief from nothing?

Be glad to be proud my mother, this is not time for tears. Strange, I cannot see so clear. Is it the encroaching darkness that disguises her so well?

The end.