

# HARDEST CHOICE

## ANONYMOUS

Cautiously, I watch as the bright, kōwhai coloured sun teeters over the horizon's edge.

"Taonga get back here!" I yell to my younger brother as he splashes around in the heart of the Mahi Tahi instead of bathing. I trudged through the wet rocks and collected my two younger sisters as well, Mania and Aroha. I put on my Korowai cloak and helped my younger siblings dry off with large tūi feathers and then slip their woven garments back on. My dark locks sway with the gentle breeze settling over Aotearoa.

We made the hike back to our house, the paper thin one off to the side of our local pā, I wasn't hugely enraptured to see my Pāpā and Māmā, so I was glad to not see them anywhere. Ever since the Pākeha people came, the usually ultramarine coloured sky has been weeping, the grass looked parched instead of luxuriant. Pākeha are rapidly encroaching on our land. Ma' and pa' started trading our resources for tobacco. We're on our own now.

I get dinner started outside, on top of our bonfire pit. I wish I had more time for my siblings; I wish I had more time to be a tamariki myself, but ever since ma' and pa's newfound obsession with Tobacco, I've had to nurture me and my siblings, and I've only seen eleven summers.

"Hinewai, come play with us!" Aroha yelps with a childish joy. I sigh and look around me. Shoe prints as large as a moa's foot have stamped the thick, sludge surrounding our home, stripping us from our freedom.

"I can't Aroha, I'm cooking dinner." I mention carelessly, not paying attention to her childish antics as I impatiently tap my foot, waiting for the kūmara to finish baking on our small, measly fire. Just then a loud smack echoes through my ears, my attention fleeing from the kūmara and my siblings.

"Mania!" I yelp, whipping around, my eyes wide in alarm. She was the only one not in my view.

"What's wrong Hinewai?" She quips, standing in the doorway of our weak, straw home.

"Nothing, I thought they took you..." I whisper.

"Who?"



“You know, the Pākeha. The evil English men.” I say, glancing back at the fire. I knew, deep in my heart, I was sure these men meant bad news. Their rough voices, that yelled phrases I didn't understand, their heavy boots that left intimidating footprints, their sharp-toothed saws, furiously gnawing away at our ngahere. This was all bad. Our future was doomed if they stayed here longer. Tobacco was slowly creeping her way into families, using her tempting methods to pick apart the most vulnerable.

Carefully, I watched my siblings as I fed them their kai, I knew I couldn't leave them. They were too young and naive to be in Aotearoa, a place that was being taken over and used for no good. I yearned to feel safe again. To not live in a constant paranoia for me and my whānau.

As I stared at the ceiling that night, a restless hunger to be freed from my restraints and explore the unknown flared inside me.

“Mania?” I ask quietly. She was younger but she was just as wise. There was always a steadiness in her– a steadiness that made her easy to trust.

“Yes?” She replied quietly, trying not to wake our siblings from their light slumber.

“Should we leave?...” A distinct silence settles over our hut, dense, protruding, waiting to break.

“Hinewai, I know we should, but what about Taonga and Aroha?” Mania pleads in a desperate tone.

“We'll go without them.” I say sternly, these words hang heavily in the air.

The next morning before dawn we packed our few belongings in an empty potato sack and before anyone realised, we fled onto the damp deck of the Fifeshire, where the crew was already getting set up for departure. Me and Mania swiftly crept under some boxes, this was our last hope and the hardest choice of my life. We were now stowaways, leaving the little we had behind.

