

Ahi and the Sacred Pounamu

By Matilda C3

It all started with grandma's old fable. The sacred pounamu. When I was a six-year-old girl, my grandma would scoop me up in her arms and set me down on her lap as she creaked in her rocking chair. Just like a cat, I would curl up with the fire crackling away three metres away from me. When we were all cosy, she would tell me her favourite story. "Now listen closely, my darling," she used to start. "The tale of the sacred pounamu is no lie. This happened thousands of years ago, when the food grew abundantly, the sun would always beam, and the sea would sparkle like your mother's eyes. Yes, New Zealand was a paradise, even more than it is now! When the mighty Ahi would walk the earth. She lived in Wellington, then it was such a simple, quaint little village, and would wear her magic pounamu. Some thought that she was mad to think it had a magical trait, but many thought otherwise. No one knew exactly what it was capable of, but everyone knew it was special. All the non-believers did secretly believe but didn't want to and tried to deny it as they felt fear. Then, tragedy occurred. Ahi and the sacred pounamu disappeared one morning. No one knew what happened but all the villagers were scandalised and flew into a blind panic. They say that one day, a brave warrior will venture out to find her and the pounamu. Many have tried, but many have failed."

I miss her. Now I'm thirteen and living with my mother, father, and little brother Kai. He's so frustrating! The thing is, I secretly believed that I, Kaia (and, yes, I know I have a similar name to my brother), might be the warrior who can find Ahi and the sacred pounamu. When my brother found out about this, he would not stop teasing me. Now I just need to find his embarrassing secret and use it against him. I'm sick of his antics. "Why are you not eating your breakfast?" questioned mum. "You have just been staring at it for the past twenty minutes! Do you not like it?" I, truthfully, was just getting anxious. I really wanted to find Ahi and her pounamu. I was bored of waiting. Bored of waiting for seven years! That's over half my life. I wanted to set out and find them, whatever it took. Then, I started to plot. But, before I could start, mum cleared her throat, and I realised I was just glaring at her blankly. "Oh, no mum. It's not that. I promise!" I urgently replied. My brother, Kai, started to snicker before grinning at me wildly, knowing what I was thinking. He just opened his mouth when I shot him a stare that could kill an elephant. That shut him up.

That night, I packed a small bag with essentials for my journey ahead. I was going to do it. That night. I began to pack a water flask, food rations, bandages, a compass, a notebook, matches and a map before I crept out of bed, tiptoed across the corridor and gently slid the door shut. I was actually doing this.

Through the forests I galloped, the aggressive wind shoving my hair into a disgusting mess, until I came upon the perfect camping spot. I gazed at my watch; ten o'clock. I set up a small camp and gradually dozed off.

I woke with a start. Was that a grumble? And a grunt? I convinced myself that it was probably just a gust of wind and rolled over. Again? I sat up with energy and my senses were tingling. The hairs on my back pricked like porcupine spines. I grabbed the knife that was attached to my belt and stood up. That, I can tell you, was the worst day of all days (or rather nights as it was night). Out burst a hideous ogre. His teeth were blunt stubs but still managed to create a vicious smile. His whole face was uneven and his eyes burned red. As he hunched over, he wielded his club and howled.

I screeched defiance and charged. The battle was ugly. I don't remember most of it as it happened so quickly, but I do remember that he had a disgustingly acrid smell about him. It made me want to hurl but I knew I couldn't. In a flash, I must have really injured the beast, as he fled into the forest, wailing like a ferocious baby. That, my friends, is what exhilarating is.

At dawn, I rose to my feet and realised that my family would be worried sick before remembering that I left them a note. I would be back in three nights maximum. Right. Three nights. I just had night one so would be coming up to night two. *I'd better hurry* I thought. Once again, I raced off into the distance, whooping with joy. Maybe I had a chance after all.

At three o'clock, I reached a stone temple. I figured it must have had something to do with Ahi as it had her name on the door. With trepidation, I heaved the door open as silence descended upon me like one of Kai's devious pranks. "Hello?" I called, but the only response that came was the echo of my own voice. I timidly crept forward, hearing the click-clack of my feet. I saw a gargantuan statue made of solid gold. Now, I didn't know what Ahi looked like, but I could guess that it was her. She was also wearing her pounamu, and that was when I found that it was in the shape of a fishhook. Just like mine. I felt my hands clasp my own around my neck and I felt its good mana pulsating through me. My grandma gave it to me.

With a tremble, the strangest thing occurred. There was a flash of lightning that struck the statue that made the temple shudder. I thought that it would collapse on top of me but the statue of Ahi started...talking. Vibrant violet smoke trailed along the floor and onto Ahi. Her eyes soon glowed the same colour and began to speak. She spoke with a rasp. She also sounded and looked like she was possessed.

Listen here Kaia. I know that most of your life, you wanted to be the one, the one to find me and my beloved pounamu. You are a true warrior and have a pure heart. You may be worthy after all. If you wish to continue, you must follow these instructions. Go to cave Whakani and follow the faint glow. It will be a deep red and will lead you to where I am. Good luck, Kaia. Hopefully, see you soon.

I just stood there, gaping, absolutely awe struck. It's not every day you see an enormous statue come to life and tell you that you're the special warrior. But, of course, I decided to go to cave Whakani anyway. The bitter cold kept nipping at my skin, almost giving me frost bite and the biting wind made my eyes water. I almost lost all hope. Could I ever make it? What was even waiting for me there? This could all be a trick or a hoax. Despite this negative thought, I kept on going.

After setting up another camp and leaving it in the morning, my hard work paid off. I finally made it. There stood the mighty cave Whakani. An ink black stone fortress. With the rose sunrise, it made the whole cave glow a gentle yet dark gold. It reminded me of Ahi's statue. I thought it better not to show fear so I strode in without a second thought.

All the giant stalactites and stalagmites jutted out of the floor and ceiling. I felt the moist air filling my lungs, everything feeling heavy around me. Just then, a sudden glint caught my eye. It was a deep red glow coming from the end of the cave. *This must be the light that Ahi mentioned!* I thought. The light was gentle and warm. It gave me a feeling of DeJa'Vu and made me homesick. I wondered if I could make it out alive. To see my mum, my dad and, of course, my brother, Kai. I know he always drives me up the wall but I still miss him and his classic tricks. I wanted to turn back and go home. I would be safe there and get to see my beloved family. No, I couldn't give up. I had to finish the mission. I had to finish the quest.

I was making good progress. At the start, it felt like it would go on forever but after seven minutes, it felt like I was getting close. When I turned the corner, a massive rock wall led straight down to the source of the light. The wall had multiple cracks and crevices, so I clambered down, lodging my feet in them.

Many times, I thought that I would slip and fall into the abyss even though I could see the ground. I swallowed before my left foot slid out of the mini nook. I screeched as I went tumbling down, sure I would hit the solid floor. Tightly screwing my eyes shut, the wind whistling in my ears, I came to an abrupt halt. Just a hair's breadth away the ground was. I was hovering over it. What was happening! I noticed that around my heart, there was a warm, tingly feeling. It was on my skin. I swung my body slightly so I could once again stand and peered down at my chest. My pounamu hook, was it glowing? A greenstone pendant was glowing a heavy shade of emerald. It was truly mesmerising.

I was quickly snapped out of my trance when my ears detected a low humming noise. It flipped around to face the eery red glow. It was coming from the same direction. I headed towards it. As soon as the red glow touched me, a sudden feeling of terror washed over me like a wave crashing down on a surfer. This was unnatural, otherworldly.

When I entered the tight cavern, there sat a young lady in a golden throne. She had a warm smile that spread across her face. Her chocolate hair bobbed over her shoulders as her hazel eyes kindly gazed at me. She wore a warrior style red and black outfit and a golden belt. "Good to see you again, Kaia," she spoke in almost a whisper. She also spoke with such kindness and serenity. Ahi. That's why she looked identical to the statue at the stone temple. "I know you came all this way, through all these challenges to find me and my greenstone hook. Have you learnt anything?"

"Yes," I stuttered. I know she was kind and all, but it's still a shock and slightly intimidating to meet her after all these years. "I learnt to be patient, to do what's right and to never give up. You can always reach your goals if you try."

"Very good Kaia. So, the quest was useful to you."

"What do you mean?" I questioned.

"I am going to give you the straight truth. The pounamu. Look at your chest one more time."

I stared down once again. It was glowing like earlier. Then it hit me. This was the greenstone hook! The sacred pounamu! It was with me all along.

"Yes, Kaia. But there is one more thing," Ahi continued. There was a giant swirl of light and my image blurred. When everything came back into focus, I saw my grandma, sitting where Ahi was. No way. There is no way that my grandma is actually Ahi! My brain fogged up. Information overload. I always had the sacred pounamu and my grandma was the magic Ahi. Woah.

"Grandma!" I cried. I sped towards her and she rapped me in a great big bear hug.

"Let's go home! Come with me grandma. The family will be so pleased to see you, especially Kai. Didn't you want to meet him?"

Grandma sighed heavily. "I would love to my dear, but my place is here. It wouldn't be right to return. You will understand one day."

"Oh, do you want the hook back?" I offered, hurriedly taking it off.

"No Kaia! I want you to keep it," she ushered. "I gave it to you for a reason. The gods knew it was right. I knew it was right. I know it has done you good and when you wear it, it will remind you of me. I really would love to come with you darling, but I can't. You also must promise me, that you won't tell anyone of this. Not even your family."

"Understood grandma." I answered.

"Now I must go. But I can do you one favour. I'll take you home. Use your left hand to hold mine and use your right to hold on to the pounamu. Then think of home."

So, I did. I closed my eyes and held my breath. When they opened, I was home in my bedroom. Grandma wasn't there. "Thank you." I muttered under my breath.

Then there came a faint reply. *"I'll always be with you Kaia. Always..."*