

## » The story of Huka, and the disease that she brought

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» **Kia ora koutou.** Jon whakapapas back to England, but it seems he's accidentally buried his whenua here; many people have said that they came to visit these lands and never returned to the country of their birth, and he fully understands why. Since growing up here and entering medical education, Jon has developed a strong interest in the well-being of our indigenous people. He would love to see Māori flourish and prosper, and for their culture to sit proudly on the world's stage and within our own country. Jon is one of the winners of the Creative Arts Competition for Issue 28. Ngā mihi.

Long ago, the people of this land ate the food that was provided to them by the gods of the forests, plants, and sea. It was plain and bland, but it was good and filling. From this variety of food, they grew strong warriors and mighty wāhine, and they were satisfied.

Then, one day, tūārangi arrived and brought with them things that had never been seen before: they brought food that had never been tasted and items that couldn't have been imagined. But the most stunning of all the things they brought was a little bird, called Huka.

Compared to the other birds of the land, she was most similar to the cheerful piwakawaka, but she was white all over with feathers like the kōtuku. Her song was pleasant and all the hearts that heard it were warmed.

But, most astonishingly of all, wherever Huka went, the people's food became more flavoursome than it had ever been before, and it filled them with more vigour and vitality. But the spell only lasted as long as she was in one place, for, just like the excitable piwakawaka, she never sat still and darted from one place to the next.

Soon, the people became greedy, and wanted to keep the powers of Huka's gift for themselves, and so they devised a plan. They planned to wait by the stream that Huka drank from when she visited, and capture her in a woven kete created especially for the occasion.

So, the next time Huka came to visit, they hid behind some harakeke bushes and waited for her to land. When she did, and began sipping at the cool water, they jumped out and slammed the kete around her.

At first, she laughed, because that was her nature, but soon she became afraid. They tied the kete shut with muka enchanted with their strongest magic. Huka knew she would never escape.

That night, the men brought all their families together and had a great feast, and it was the sweetest meal that any of them had ever tasted.

But while they ate, Huka mourned her fate and sang a song unlike any song she had ever sung before. It was filled with sorrow and told of her longing for freedom. As she sang, she slowly withered and died.

No one noticed that she wasn't singing anymore: they were too busy eating. But, rather than growing strong from the food enchanted by Huka's presence, they grew weak and afflicted by diseases they had never known before. Men's legs withered and other men lost sight.

When a young boy, who had been away at the time Huka had been captured, returned and saw the state of his whānau, he cried, 'Auē, auē! What has become of my people?' He tore at his chest and cried, 'We were once a strong and mighty people, and known throughout the lands for our vitality! And now we have fallen amongst the lowest of the low.'

And then he found the old kete where Huka had died. With strength borne from his grief, he tore open the bindings and found the remains of the little bird, who he recognised as belonging to Huka.

'Oh, my family!' he cried out again, 'How could you have been so short-sighted? Did you not know that Huka's gift was only sweet because it never lasted? That her gift was only sweet because it disappeared? Why have you cursed yourselves by casting her magic over all that you eat? By her death, you have surely brought this ruin upon yourselves!'

And this is why the disease that Huka brings is called mate huka, which means the death of Huka, or the disease that Huka brings.

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