

Ring! Ring!

by Diana Noonan



“Phit, phit! What am I?” asked Dad.

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“A fantail!” said Dad. He hammered the last tent peg into the ground. “Oornk-oornk! How about that one?”

Charlie looked at the big brown bulls grazing on the other side of the fence. He wished he was at Pipi Bay Camping Ground, pitching the tent beside their friends like they always did. Instead they were here on Mr Rose’s farm.

“Ouch!” said Mum, squeezing between some flax and the tent. “A mozzie just bit me.”

“There aren’t any mozzies at Pipi Bay,” said Charlie.

“That’s right,” said Dad. “Just radios playing and the sound of cars coming and going. And worst of all – mobile phones ringing non-stop. Tring-tring! Beep-buzz! This year we’re having some peace and quiet.”

From inside the car, the twins started crying.

“It’s past their bed time,” said Mum.

Dad gave the tent peg an extra hard bang. “There,” he said. “Now we can all snuggle into our sleeping bags and listen to the moreporks.”

Charlie didn’t want to listen to moreporks. He wanted to be at Pipi Bay playing torch tag in the dark with his friends.

In the morning, Charlie didn't want to go collecting firewood with Dad, either - not with the big bulls staring at him. He sat on a rock and watched the fire send grey smoke into the air. At Pipi Bay, you cooked breakfast in the camp kitchen with everyone else. You could flick soap bubbles at your friends while you did the dishes together in the big sinks.

"This wood just doesn't want to catch alight," said Dad, blowing onto the pile of sticks. "Still, it's nice and quiet. Not a phone ringing for miles."

In the afternoon, the sun came out.

"Let's all go for a paddle in the river," said Dad. "The only sound will be the water swishing over the rocks."

Charlie and Dad made stick boats so they could have races. It was fun for a while, but then Charlie thought about the camp pool. He wished he was there, snorkelling with his friends.

Just then, something fast and black whooshed past them. "Ooh!" cried Mum, ducking her head. "What was *that*?"

"It's a tūi." laughed Dad. "Look! It's flown into the flax beside the tent. Now that's something you don't see at the camping ground."



Early next morning, Dad went to the river to get some water. Charlie wriggled like a worm in his sleeping bag until he was right beside Mum.

“I wish we could go to Pipi Bay,” he whispered.

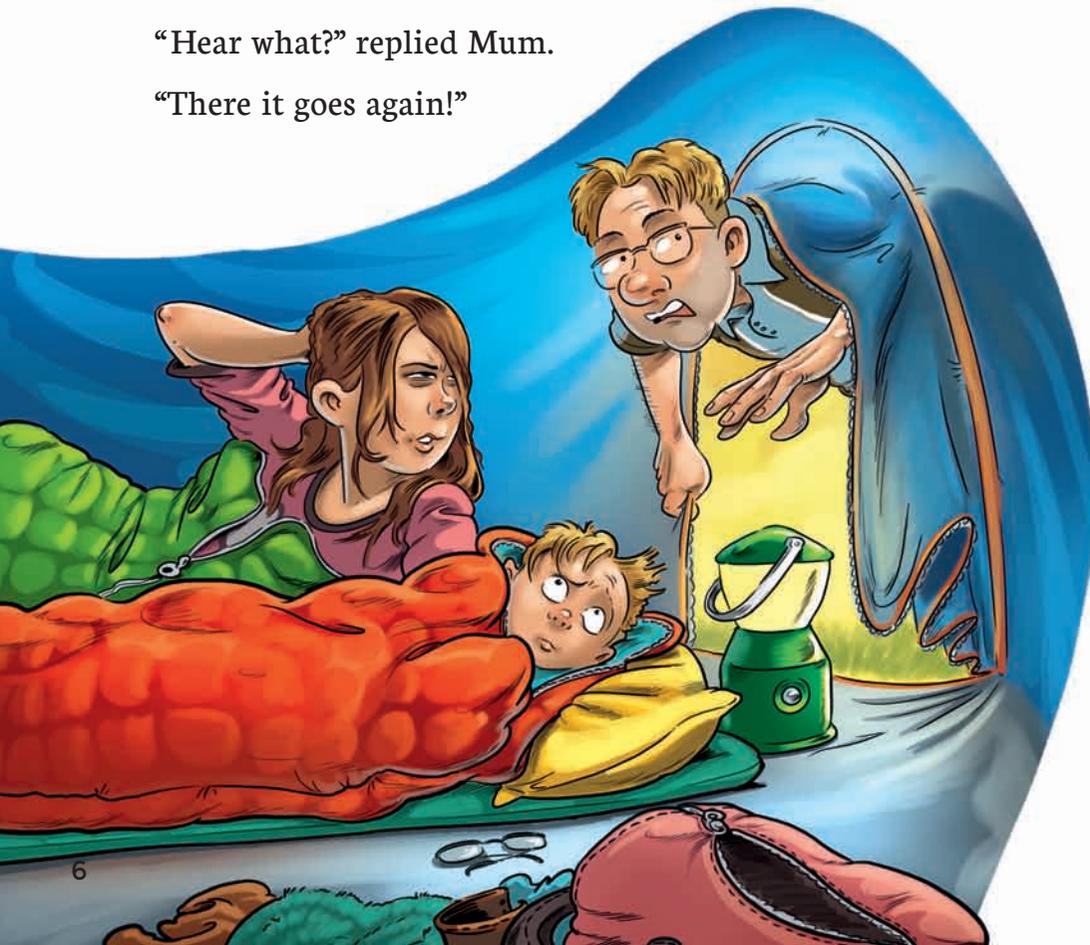
“It is a bit quiet here, isn’t it?” Mum whispered back. “But Dad loves it. Besides, there won’t be any tent sites left at the camping ground now. We always book in August.”

Suddenly, Dad poked his head into the tent. He looked like he’d seen a ghost.

“Did you hear *that*?” he asked.

“Hear what?” replied Mum.

“There it goes again!”



“It’s a mobile phone,” said Charlie.

“It’s not ours,” said Mum. “It’s not switched on.”

Now Charlie could hear lots of ring tones – and a motorbike. He hopped out of the tent.

“Morning!” called Mr Rose. “I see the townies have arrived.”

“What do you mean?” asked Mum.

“The tūi from town. They’ve found the flax flowers.”

“The tūi?” said Dad. “Are the tūi making those *ringing* noises?”

“Yes! Jokers, aren’t they,” laughed Mr Rose. “They learn to copy the sounds from the mobiles they hear ringing in the streets. You’ll have a lot of fun listening to them.”

“How long do they stay?” asked Dad.

“Oh, all summer,” said Mr Rose. “They feed and ring from dawn till dusk.”

Mum disappeared into the tent.

Mr Rose revved his bike. “Well, I’d better get those cattle shifted,” he said. “Happy camping!”

Charlie waited for Dad to say something, but he was staring at the tūi on the flax.



“They have one campsite left,” said Mum, coming back out of the tent.

“Huh?” asked Dad.

“At Pipi Bay.”

Dad looked at her. He looked back at the ringing birds. “Tell them we’ll take it.”

“It’s not the quietest spot,” said Mum. “It’s right next to the swimming pool. And the shop. There might be phones ringing.”

More tūi flew into the flax bushes.

“They won’t be ringing at five in the morning!” said Dad.

Charlie smiled. “I’ll get the tent bag,” he said quietly, “and pack up the sleeping bags.”

Tūi Talk

Tūi are very good at copying sounds, but no one is quite sure why they do it. It might be to pretend they are more than one bird. This would help frighten other birds away from their food. Or it might be to show that they are extra clever and would make a good mate.

Long ago, Māori kept tūi and trained them to speak. Some even taught them to give welcome speeches to visitors.

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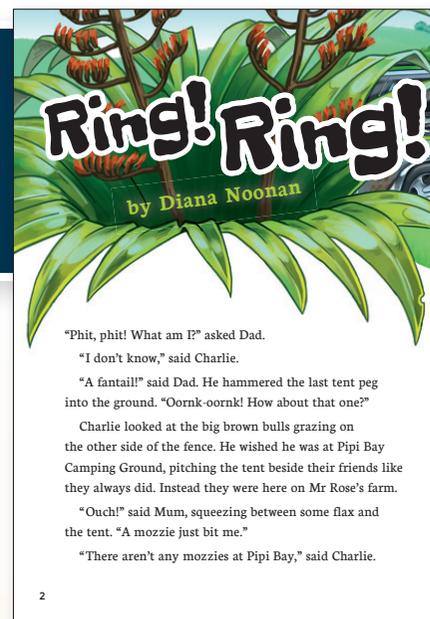
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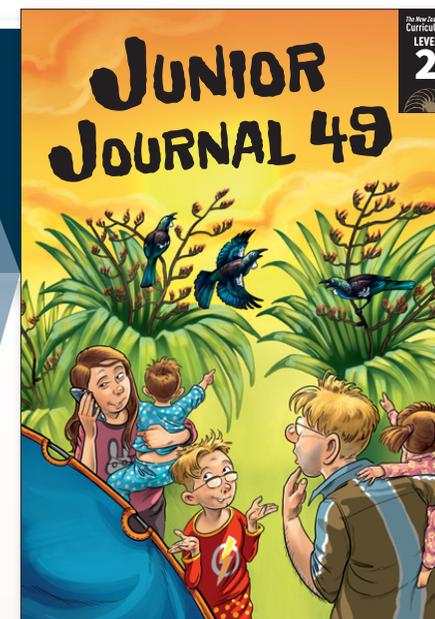
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