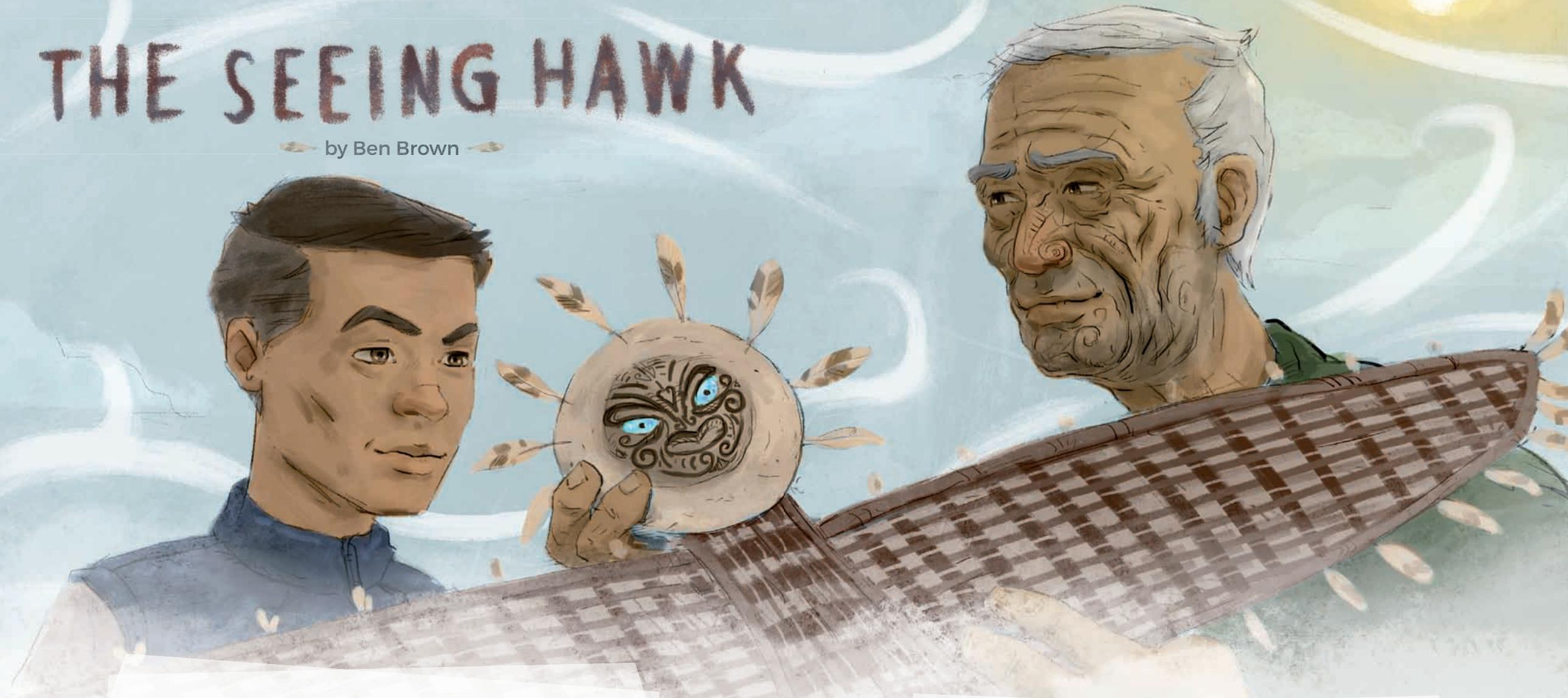


THE SEEING HAWK

by Ben Brown



Kāhukitekite – the seeing hawk. This is the name of my koro. On the day that he was born, a hawk was seen to circle in the sky. When Koro drew his first breath and gave his first cry, the hawk was heard to reply with a piercing cry of its own. Some say that as well as his name, this was how Koro came by his gift. Because my koro is matakite, a visionary. He can see the hidden ways of things – their shape and shadow. Koro can see what others cannot.

Koro is ancient. He is as old as the hills behind his house, my aunties say. He wears a moko, half-hidden by the lines of his age. The moko was carved in the old days by a tohunga using a chisel bound to the bone of an albatross wing. Koro comes from another world.

One day, Koro said it was time to show me something. I was staying with him at his whare with the red tin roof. The whare was built at a place everyone still called the pā, even though a town had long grown around it.

“Haere mai, e tama,” Koro said. “Titiro mai.”

Come here, boy. Look at this.

In one hand, Koro held a kite. It was shaped like a man and a bird, and it was as big as me. The kite had wide wings and a head with a big-eyed face; a tail in the shape of a gliding hawk. Feathers adorned the head and hung from the edges of its wings. In his other hand, Koro held a coiled line of plaited fibre made from cotton-thin strands of flax.

It was a cool, clear day with a good breeze blowing. Koro handed me the kite and the coil of line, and we walked out into the paddock behind his house.

“Hurihia,” Koro said. He wanted me to turn around, with my back to the wind as it came off the hills. I lifted the kite high and let the air take it.

The kite climbed quickly as though it were a bird released from a cage. I didn’t even have to run. The coil unravelled through my hands until Koro told me, “Puritia.” Hold on. I leaned back against the pull of the kite as the line became taut.

“Ka pai!” Koro said, nodding his head.

As the kite darted about, I could hear – or at least thought I could hear – a chanting karakia in words I didn’t recognise. The karakia swirled in the air as though the wind itself were speaking and then snatching the words away. Or was it Koro muttering?

“Tākiri i te tukutuku, e tama,” he said.

Pull on the line, boy. Pull on the line.

I pulled, and the kite lifted higher, feathers streaming. I could feel the hum of the wind. I could see the kite ride from gust to gust, straining at the line, the clouds passing by above. And I could hear the karakia, louder now, all around me.

Then it seemed I could see what the kite was seeing – as though I were the kite and the kite were me. The wind passed over me and under me, lifting me. I saw a boy in a wind-swept paddock, an old man with him. I could see the whare with its red tin roof and wisps of smoke coming from the chimney. There were the hills behind the whare, and beyond them, other hills rolling away into the distance.

I rose on the wind, and it carried me up and up. There was no coil of line beneath me now. I wasn’t a kite straining against the wind. My arms were now the living wings of a creature of the sky. I had become a silent, soaring hawk.





Down in a wild valley, I could see a river twisting like an eel between the bush-clad slopes. This was the wilderness that saw the birth and early years of my koro. In a clearing, people had built a kāinga, rough and ready, using timber from the trees of the forest.

I dropped lower and circled. Small fires burned in the kāinga, and there were people gathered round them. Some were cooking; others were keeping warm and staring into the flames. I knew what I was seeing: the very place and time my koro was born.

Even as I realised this, I heard him cry out for the first time, and I cried out myself. “Koro! I can hear you! It’s me, tāu moko.” But my voice was not my own – it was the shrieking cry of a hawk.

A man called up to me, asking where I was from. “Nō whea koe e kāhu?” He must be the father of my koro – my tupuna.

“Home,” I replied.

I called again and again as I circled in the sky.

Even though I wanted to stay longer, the wind took hold of me and led me back to the paddock where I had stood with my koro. But I could not see him anywhere. Instead I saw another old man with his mokopuna. The boy was carrying a kite as big as he was, and the man was talking to the boy and pointing into the sky. I saw that the face of the man was my own face ... but much older.

I heard the chanting karakia once again – and something else. It was the humming of the wind across a line. My wings felt tired and heavy, so I rested them, and it seemed that I fell gently from the sky, almost as though I were a kite on a softening breeze.

Now I could see the passing clouds above me. And Koro was looking at me, smiling. The kite lay on the ground.

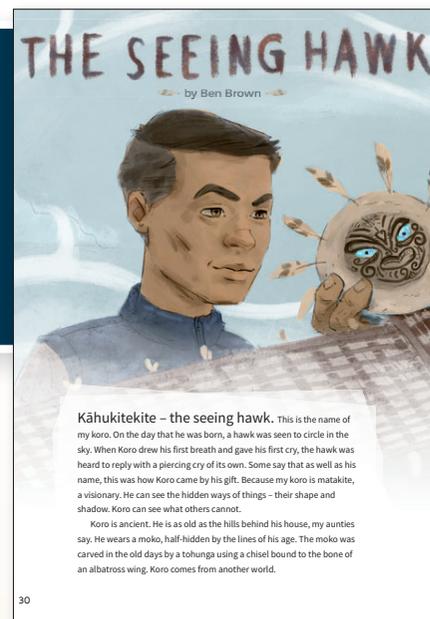
“Haere mai, Kāhui. Tikina tō manutukutuku.”

Come on, Little Hawk. Get your kite.

illustrations by Tim Gibson

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