

# HIDDEN TALENT

BY MARIA SAMUELA



Annie read the poster for the umpteenth time. “School Talent Quest! First prize: \$50. Second prize: \$30. Third prize: \$20.”

She couldn’t ignore it. Her younger sister, Kana, had made the poster, and their mother kept a copy on the coffee table so everyone could see it. Whenever visitors came to their house, her mother made sure they saw the poster. “Kana’s so talented. Just like Great-uncle Puna. He was a great carver and artist in the islands.” Everybody knew that he built the family homestead in Rarotonga.

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“I’m going to sing in the talent quest,” said Juanita, Annie’s older sister. She started to sing. She sounded just like their Mama Ine, who wrote songs and was the lead chanter when the mamas did the ‘ute.



“If only I had a talent like Juanita,” Annie thought.

“My daughter sings like an angel,” Dad smiled. “Mama would be so proud.” Then he sang with Juanita because Dad also sang like Mama Ine. They sang for what felt like hours. Annie hoped Juanita was going to pick a shorter song for the talent quest. She knew there’d be a time limit. If Juanita sang for too long, she might be disqualified.

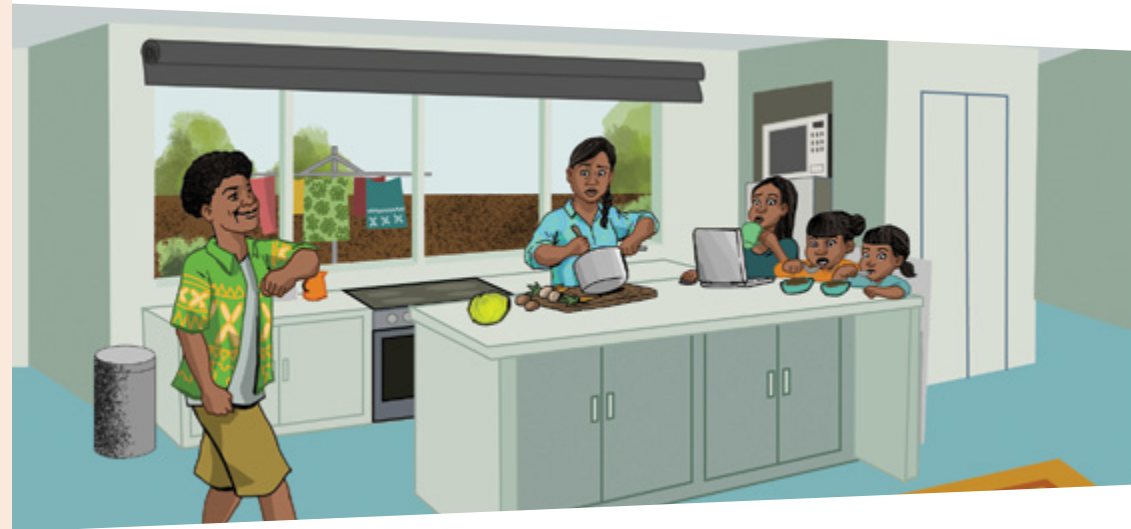
“Oh well,” Annie thought. It was sad she had nothing she could do in the talent quest, but at least Jackson wouldn’t be in it either. Her brother was only good at rugby. He wouldn’t be allowed to kick a rugby ball at the talent quest.

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One week before the talent quest, Jackson strolled into the kitchen. “Guess what?” he said.

“What?” said Annie and her mum. Annie had a bad feeling about this.

“I’m the props manager for the talent quest. I’m in charge of all the props for the show.”



Annie’s mum acted as if Jackson had won the talent quest! “They need someone strong for that job!” she said. “That’s why they chose you. You’re like your Great-great-aunty Mattie.”

Annie could see how proud that made Jackson feel. Their Great-great-aunty Mattie once tackled a wild pig. Then she cooked it in an umu, and all the people in the village had a massive feed. Jackson pushed out his chest and strutted around the kitchen. Annie was worried he might trip over the mat. He needed to watch where he was going.

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On the night of the talent quest, the whole family were at school an hour early. Mum was in the office helping Kana print out the programmes. Dad and Juanita were huddled in a corner, practising her song. Jackson and his team of helpers were busy setting up the hall. They'd lined up the chairs into rows and put the background scenery in place.

Backstage, Annie watched a small dance group go over their moves. Then she listened to a trio playing ukuleles. They were all so good!

Back in the hall, a boy from the senior school stepped up to the microphone. He was going to comperé the show. "Testing, testing," he said with a big smile. "I just want to practise my lines. Tēnā koutou. Welcome to ..."

Crash! There was a tremendous noise from the side of the stage, and the microphone went dead. Then the lights went out.

"Aargh!" cried Jackson. Ms Hohepa turned on her phone flashlight and shone it towards the stage. Jackson had tripped over a power cable and fallen in a heap, knocking over a pile of props. Annie jumped up onto the stage.

"Are you OK?" she asked, clearing away the props to give her brother some space. She could tell by his face that the only thing hurting was his pride. "He's fine!" she called. Then she winked at him. "Just showing off, eh, bro?" Everybody laughed, and Jackson jumped up and took a bow.





“We can’t print the programmes!  
The printer’s dead!” a familiar voice called.

Ms Hohepa’s phone flashlight was on Kana now. She was holding a handful of programmes. “This is all we’ve done. There won’t be enough.”

“How many do you have?” asked Annie.

“About forty.”

Annie knew many of the guests would be family groups or friends. “I don’t think every person needs one,” she told Kana. “Some of them can share a programme. Anyway, it’s better for the environment to use less paper.”

The worry on Kana’s face disappeared. But then a wail came from the corner. “I can’t do it.” Annie recognised Juanita’s voice. “There’s no power, so I can’t play my backing music.”

Annie turned to the ukulele players. “Can we borrow one of those for Juanita’s song?” she asked.

“Sure,” said one of the group. He handed his ukulele to Annie, and she passed it to Dad. He started strumming, and soon the hall was filled with Juanita’s singing. She sounded magical.



“Hey,” said the boy. “You don’t need a backing track. The ukulele sounds better.” Juanita smiled with relief. And then the lights came back on.

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On the drive home, Mum turned to Annie. “You know who you remind me of?” she said. “Your Papa Mana. He was a great ariki who knew how to make things right.”

Dad chipped in. “Your Papa Mana was calm but strong. Smart too.”

“And quick thinking,” said Mum. “Good at solving problems.”

Annie had heard heaps about their Papa Mana. Everybody respected him. They looked up to him like a superhero. She stared out the window and smiled. It felt good to know she had a talent after all.

illustrations by Darcy Solia



# Hidden Talent

by Maria Samuela

illustrations by Darcy Solia

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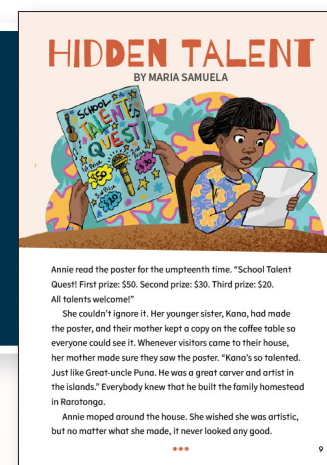
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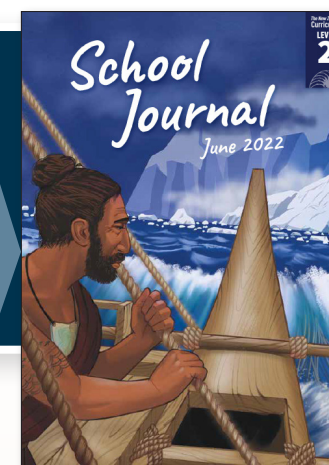
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