

me and I was wishing the skylark would come back and say something; but skylarks don't come out at night. In the morning I pushed up through wet ferns. The bush was thick, it was hard to see where I was going, I knew if I kept going up I'd get somewhere.

At times the bush blanket thinned. I saw the mountains. They looked massive. Rearing out of the earth above me, like wild horses. There was one great high one. It was like a giant unbroken stallion. They were a morning blue colour. Then there was the quiet. It was a deep, far-away quiet. Everything was massive. All those peaks, somehow I knew I had to climb them — especially that wild unbroken one, the highest one.

I decided to call him "Maori", because he reminded me of a horse my father couldn't break. In fact, Maori ran right over him, smashed some of his ribs. When he was better he stock-whipped Maori, nearly killed him. Never broke him though. He called him Maori.

I wasn't so lonely in the day time. There was so much to see, fantails flickering, red flowers, white flowers, and greenness, everywhere there was greenness. Now and again I'd stop and listen, the deep far-away quiet made me feel little. It was just about dark when I found an old hut. It had *The Whare* carved on a squeaky door. I cooked up some food. I sat on a silent log by the fire, listening to the river chatter. A mouse flicked across the corner of my eye. The more I thought about it, the more I smiled. Now if a mouse dawdled to the centre of the hut and lay down for a snooze, that'd really be something. I made up my mind to be friends with the mouse. Little things seemed so important, things I hadn't noticed before.

That night I dreamed about my posh Aunt Hilda, she was wearing Mum's greenstone tiki, everyone liked it. They were saying it was valuable. Someone offered her a lot of money and she sold it. That's my mother's greenstone, I shouted, but I couldn't stop them. They couldn't hear me. They kept on talking as if I wasn't there. I sulked and sat at my desk in the corner of the classroom.

I woke up, the hut was dark. For a long time I didn't know where I was. Then I heard the river chatter, the mouse flicked across the corners. I was too frightened to sleep, I got the fire going again.

The next day there was a lot to do and it was good; being busy was good, it kept my mind off the lonely things. I chopped firewood, and caught crawlies and eels, picked watercress. Nothing seemed more important than to climb some of those peaks, those wild horses. Above the hut, a rocky knob stuck out on its own. I wanted to climb it, even though it was late in the day, I took off.

It was a lot further up than I thought, I slipped and slid and went up the wrong way a few times, but I got there. It was nearly dark, but it didn't matter. Standing on top of that rocky knob, I felt bigger. It wasn't a high knob at all, the Wild Horses peaks were a long way further up. But it was the highest peak I'd ever been on . . . and I'd climbed it, on my own. I did feel bigger. Everything was big, especially the silence. There was a close silence and a far-away silence. I stayed there till it got dark. Going up it felt good, going up and up and up. I got puffed and thought my legs wouldn't go on anymore, but I kept going.

Keep going, keep going, that's all I said to myself, trying to keep a rhythm as I plonked down each foot. Sometimes it was keeeeeeeep . . . goooooooooiiiiing, and sometimes I was so puffed I couldn't say it — just thought it. I had to climb it. I wasn't strong like all those other Pakeha boys at school. They always seemed strong.

Standing on top of that "wild pony" I felt stronger. Especially when I looked way down and saw the knob I'd climbed two days before.

I looked up, there was another higher peak. In the next few three weeks, I had no time for anything else. I was breaking in those Wild Horses. "Nelly" was easy. "Mustang" was a

rugged, steep, rock-faced one, he nearly broke me. "Rocky" was a tricky one, I got a bit lost, I had to spend all night out and it took me two days to get over it. But I felt stronger and stronger. The higher I went the stronger I got. The cops and Mr Bull and those posh Pakeha kids in my classroom, they were way down below me. Father went on about me being a dreamer and a fat puppy. I'd like to see him climb Maori. His head was going right into the clouds. But I knew what his head looked like by heart.

I slept well, I was away a long time before morning could see. Five deer chased down into a steep gorge. I didn't go fast. I kept to the main ridge and kept a steady "Keep going, keep going, keep going, keep going". It was a clear day. A hot, hot day. Near the bush edge the trees were really stumped and I'd got a bit off the main ridge. I had to get down on my belly and wriggle through. The trees kept me down. They were trying to stop me from getting through. I hated it, got mad with them and I pushed and smashed branches off. I wasn't getting anywhere very much and I was covered in cuts and scratches. I was using up a lot of energy. I must have fought my way back to the main ridge because I landed on a track. I knew then I'd been struggling for nothing, there was a well-worn track. It had been made by the deer. Through the stunted trees, I crashed out onto the tussock. Wild with myself because I'd used up so much energy. The track must've been only about five paces to my right all the time. It took me a long time to get my breath back. It wasn't just getting my breath back — it was getting my fire back. It was hard to overcome the hollow in my guts.

By the time I got cracking again, the sun was bouncing off the bare rock. It was hot. It was hard going. "Keeeeeep goooooiiiiing, keeeeeep goooooiiiiing." Plod, plod, my singlet was wet through with sweat. I could hardly suck in enough air to keep my legs going. I was dry, all that sweat and nothing to drink and it was hot. Before I got to the top I could see the head above me. Tried to go faster but my legs wouldn't answer. I started getting ahead of my legs and that made me worse. As soon as I hit the top I stripped off my clothes, hung them over a rock. Stood naked and breathless all in one movement. It took me a long time to get my breath back. I wanted to collapse but I didn't. It was a complete victory I wanted . . . I didn't want the Maori to see me collapsing, on the finishing line. So I stood there, tottering. Slowly things started to get back into focus.

There was layer upon layer of ruggedness. Patches of wet rock glittering in the sun. Far below rivers winked their way to a green lake. Fuzziness hung low over the towns. From my high place I could see it all. I was above everything. All those wild horses. I'd conquered them. No wonder the skylark said I was doing right and told me to keep going. Of everything I could see, I was the highest. I looked down at my naked body. I wasn't a fat puppy anymore. I had a body like a man. I'd conquered Maori. Me, Boy, I'd done it. I raised both arms above my head, hands stretched right out and bellowed as loud as I could, I'm king, I'm king. I'm king, I'm king. It echoed back off all the rock faces. All those wild mountains shouted back at me, king, king, king, king, king, king, king. I tried again in my new deep voice, but it didn't echo as much so I changed back to my high voice.

Look at me Mum . . . Mum . . . Mum . . . Mum.

Look how high I am . . . high . . . high . . . high.

I'm king, Mum . . . king . . . king . . . king.

Look at my new body . . . new body . . . new body.

I stayed there raving, letting my hands slide right over my slimness to my toes and back again. Listening to the deep, far-away quiet, and the close quiet. Night covered me. A warm blanket. I lay on the earth. I stayed all night on top of Maori.