

So I dived for the eel which was trying to wiggle its way back to the water, and stood straight on a clump of thistles. By now I was almost crying with frustration and temper.

Now we moved on further. For the boys it was easy going as all they had to do was follow the river. Me, I had to climb more fences, dodge clumps of gorse, and the large ponds that had built up in the paddocks. I had no torch as the boys thought it was a waste of candles, so that made things tougher still. On top of that, the sack was half full and heavy, and every time I heaved it, it would rub against my pants legs, soaking them. I stumbled through a clump of gorse which tore at my face and clothing, and looked back down at the river. There was no sign of a torch anywhere. For a moment I panicked, then Mutu's voice rang out to me from amongst the willows. "Roha, are you O.K."

"Yes," I lied.

"Well, wait there!" he shouted. "We're just going for a look through here."

Suddenly I was alone, standing on the bank of the river, cold, miserable and sleepy. My clothes were dripping wet, my gumboots full of mud and slush, and I fought to keep my eyes open. I was so miserable. I didn't care anymore if ten ghosts or a dozen vampires got me.

I listened to the sounds around me. Above the rushing of the river, I could hear the plaintive cry of a morepork from the distant bush. The occasional lowing of cattle came from surrounding paddocks mingling with the cries from pied stilts which frequented the swamps. I could hear the eels writhing in the sack, so I stepped forward and sunk my boot into the hateful things. Suddenly, a pheasant flew up from the long grass almost under my feet, its wings whirring and flapping frantic-



ally. I almost fainted.

Now I could see the torches making their way back towards me. Mutu and Rewi climbed out and made their way over. "Here Roha. Hold the sack open," said Rewi. They had one more.

They wiped their hands on their jerseys, and gave me one of the torches to hold. I watched as they lit cigarettes, and puffed out the smoke. The smell of candle wax and the heat from the tin lamp made me feel good, and made me think of home.

"Let's go on a bit further," said Rewi. Mutu thought for a while, and looked at me. "What do you want to do, Roha?" he asked.

"I want to go home," I said. "I've got prickles in my foot, and my clothes and gumboots are sopping wet. I'm sleepy too."

"Yeah, blow it, so am I," he said. "Let's go home." I looked at him gratefully. Rewi thought for a while then said, "Yeah, alright. We'll come out earlier tomorrow night and go further up." I didn't care about tomorrow night. I just wanted to go home right then.

Rewi carried the sack and I carried his ripi, and soon we were back at the old barn. My gumboots sloshed, the prickles in my feet hurt, and the slime had dried and held my fingers stuck

together. But I didn't care. We were going home. Home to the familiar kitchen smells, the comforting snores of our Father and our warm beds.

It seemed to take hours but at last we had reached the last paddock. Our house stood out sharply amongst the trees and hedges surrounding it, and I quickened my pace.

"That's the fastest I've seen you move all night!" sneered Rewi.

"Don't you like coming with us, or would you rather stay home and play hopscotch with the girls?"

"No," I mumbled and slowed down.

I kicked my muddy boots off at the door and made straight for the bathroom. First I scrubbed the slime from my hands, then washed my feet. Thankfully the water from the cistern was still warm, and made it easier. As soon as my head touched the pillow, I was asleep.

It seemed like only seconds when I felt myself being shaken awake. It was Rewi. "Roha, go and get the cows in." I blinked my eyes open, and it was broad daylight. Mutu was still asleep, and Rewi had climbed back into bed to glean the last bit of shut-eye he could get.

"Oh well," I thought, "I'm glad there's school on Monday." Slowly I dressed and made my way out.

