

'Magnificent ... a well-observed mirror of our current time' Pip Adam

# ALL THAT WE ~~OWN~~ KNOW

She didn't ask  
for the spotlight,

but she can't seem  
to stay out of it...



# SHILO KINO

ALL THAT  
WE ~~OWN~~  
KNOW

SHILO KINO

MOA  
P R E S S

## CHAPTER TWO

*I'm here.*

*So sorry! I'm on my way.*

Māreikura was definitely not on her way. She was still at home, her head in the fridge looking for something to eat. Māreikura was supposed to meet her Bumble date at 6.30 p.m. at Pacific Inn but she got distracted looking at the menu online and realised it did not align with her budget and now it was too late to cancel or change the venue. The mains were around \$38 and the cheapest food on the menu were the chive dumplings: \$23 for three. Māreikura could buy twelve dumplings from Mount Eden Noodles for half that price. She decided she would order the dumplings and eat something now to satisfy her hunger. She was looking in the fridge but couldn't find anything and then she'd looked at her phone and Kat was already there. *I'm here.* She even used a full stop, which definitely meant she was pissed at Māreikura for being late and not respecting her time. Māreikura did respect her time but her lateness was a combination of anxiety, self-diagnosed ADHD and poor time-management skills.

Māreikura took one last look in the fridge and spotted the apple on the bottom shelf, next to the bag of brown carrots she bought a week ago when she told herself she was going to eat only carrots for snacks, which she did not end up doing. She grabbed the apple and glanced in the mirror on the way out. She was wearing the green dress Eru's sister Erana had given her. It was long and flowy and slipped past her knees and everyone always gave her compliments when she wore it. Māreikura said bye to her nan, put on her white sneakers and headed towards Ponsonby Road.

*Sorry I'm late*, Māreikura practised in her head over and over again. Being late was a symptom of ADHD. Māreikura had diagnosed herself from TikTok and other unreliable sources. She couldn't afford the psychologist appointment to prove she had the disorder. In her notes app, she'd typed out her symptoms, which were, in no particular order:

- overthinks
- always late
- finds it hard to meditate
- can't sit still
- hard time regulating emotions
- overly sensitive
- impulsive
- procrastinates and always leaves things to the last minute
- doesn't shut cupboards
- doesn't put lids on bottles properly

The last one was because one time she did not put the lid on Eru's Sprite bottle and it fell over and spilt on the floor of his car. *Ma*, he'd said, in his non-angry passive way. *You always forget to put the lid on properly*. And he was right, he had told her so many times.

Māreikura didn't know it was a symptom of ADHD until a girl on TikTok told her.

Māreikura reached the top of the street and saw Kat through the window of Pacific Inn, sitting down at the table. She recognised her from the Bumble photos, and looking at her from afar, from the outside, she was clearly out of Māreikura's league. Māreikura went through phases where she was wildly confident and had the audacity to match with girls on Bumble who were a solid 10 when Māreikura was a solid 6, 7 at her best. The conversations on the dating apps always died out, though – it was always the same questions. *What do you do for fun?* and Māreikura wanted to say *Decolonise wbu* but instead she would lie and say hiking because that seemed more attractive and also she had a hiking photo on her profile from three years ago when she did the Tongariro Crossing with Eru and almost died. Then the girl would ask if she wanted to go for a hike and Māreikura would panic and block her.

Kat was different. Kat's first question was, *Nō hea koe?* and then *What do you think our country would look like if it was Indigenous-led and Te Tiriti was honoured?*

Māreikura had to think for a while and then she replied, *Our whole country would look different. We would honour the environment. There would be no homelessness. Our people wouldn't be in prisons. No child services. Everything would change.*

They sent long paragraphs back and forth and then it moved to voice memos and then they followed each other on Instagram where Kat's bio was 'be kind' and a link to her business.

Kat was thirty-two years old, the CEO of a tech company that had a net worth of \$20 million. She was Sagittarius, was once married to a white man, and had her own TED Talk about re-indigenising technology. Māreikura found out this information on Google. She's

a 10 and a CEO? Māreikura almost cancelled the date from extreme whakamā. But then she told herself she would simply eat her dumplings and then call it a night. Tell Kat she had to get up early the next morning and maybe they could be friends. Someone told Māreikura she had imposter syndrome once but she was 100 per cent sure that was a dumb term Pākehā invented because her tīpuna most definitely did not have ‘imposter syndrome’. They navigated the most expansive oceans in the world and discovered Aotearoa. She could not imagine her tīpuna ever looking at the ocean, sighing and saying, ‘No, sorry, I can’t do it because I have imposter syndrome.’

Kat spotted her and waved and Māreikura waved back and then remembered she was holding her apple in her hand so she hid it behind her back until Kat was out of sight. She took a few bites of the apple and dropped it in the nearest bin.

*I am my ancestors’ wildest dreams*, she told herself as she approached the very pretty and intimidating white woman at the front of the restaurant.

‘Welcome to Pacific Inn,’ the woman said. ‘Have you got a booking?’

‘Yeah, for Kat? She’s already here.’

The woman nodded and Māreikura followed her in. She always felt a weird discomfort walking into places like this – rich, white spaces where one night of eating could feed a family for a week. It was a mind-fuck when she’d just passed George, the man who lives at the park, on the way here and Māreikura said hi and sorry she didn’t have any cash on her and he said it’s okay, and Māreikura felt guilty because if she really wanted to, she would get cash out and carry it with her, but it was always her excuse – ‘Sorry, I have no cash on me’ – and now she was about to drop a whole lot of money on food that could feed George for a week.

‘Here we are.’

The waitress stopped in front of the table and Māreikura's mouth dropped slightly. Up close, Kat was the most beautiful woman Māreikura had ever seen. She was effortlessly beautiful, like she'd just thrown on a dress from her wardrobe minutes before the date, shook her hair out of her ponytail and made her way over to Pacific Inn. Māreikura wasn't sure if that's what Kat did exactly, but she looked like the kind of woman who could do that, like she didn't have to try to look pretty, unlike Māreikura, who spent two hours trying on ten different outfits and putting on shitloads of concealer to try to cover her forehead acne.

'Kia ora, Māreikura.'

'Sorry I'm late.'

'Maybe we should get you a watch, babe.' She paused and then burst out laughing. 'I'm kidding, I'm kidding. Sit.'

Māreikura sat down. There was a very expensive-looking bottle of champagne sitting in the middle of the table.

'Was that an apple you were eating?' Kat asked.

'What?'

'When you were walking. Were you eating an apple?'

'Yes.'

'You couldn't wait for dinner?' Her eyes flicked on Māreikura. 'I love that dress. You look beautiful.'

'Thanks.'

'You are beautiful.'

'You are too.'

The waitress interrupted them and asked if they wanted any drinks and Māreikura said, 'Just water, thanks.'

Kat handed Māreikura a brown paper bag. 'I got you something.'

'What? You didn't have to.'

‘It’s a maramataka journal,’ she said as Māreikura unwrapped it. ‘I saw on your Insta story you were wanting to follow the moon cycle? This is really good for tracking the maramataka. It’s been life-changing for me.’

‘Thank you. I didn’t get you anything.’

‘That’s okay.’ She waved her hand. ‘I get them for free. Perks of my job.’ She smiled. ‘Shall we order? You’re clearly starving.’

Kat handed her the menu and Māreikura scanned it like she was reading it for the first time.

‘The dumplings look quite good,’ Māreikura said.

‘Mmm, they are. Why don’t we get a couple of dishes and share?’

‘Okay,’ Māreikura said, but when the waitress came back, Kat did not order a couple of dishes. She ordered the market fish, the chao broccoli, the steamed buns and the stir-fried tofu.

‘Oh, and you want the dumplings?’ she asked Māreikura. ‘What flavour?’

Māreikura went to say the vegan ones, but then Kat said, ‘Let’s just get both,’ then she winked at Māreikura.

‘Do you want a drink, babe? I got us champagne but do you want something else?’

‘I don’t usually drink,’ Māreikura said. ‘I’m decolonising my whakapapa.’

‘Oh?’ Kat raised her eyebrows. Māreikura thought she would ask her questions about it but she didn’t. There was a silence and Māreikura wanted to add, *My tīpuna became alcoholics after they were colonised and alcohol has single-handedly destroyed Māori families since colonisation yet we pretend like alcohol is okay*, but she would save that one up for later. If Kat really wanted to know, she would ask.

The waitress left and now they were both staring at each other.



The music playing in the background was seductive, the kind of music that lures you into a false sense of reality.

‘What are you thinking about?’ Kat asked. She had a little smile on her lips and Māreikura looked down, fumbling the champagne glass in front of her.

‘Do you know if the owners are Pasifika?’

‘Huh?’

‘Just because of the island theme here,’ Māreikura said, looking around the room at all the flowers on the wall. ‘And the name. It’s a bit of cultural appropriation, don’t you think?’

‘Oh, right. Pretty sure the owner is Samoan,’ Kat said. ‘Do you want me to check?’

‘No, it’s okay.’

‘Well, in that case, cheers.’

Kat poured champagne into Māreikura’s glass. She raised her glass and Māreikura raised hers and they both took a drink. Māreikura felt a pang of guilt, like she was betraying her tīpuna.

‘So,’ Kat said. ‘When do you start kura? That’s what you’re doing this year, right? Studying te reo Māori?’

‘Yeah,’ Māreikura said. ‘I start on Tuesday.’

‘How did you get in?’ She leaned forward. ‘I heard there’s a five-year waiting list.’

‘I submitted a late entry,’ Māreikura said. ‘So I have no idea.’

‘Your tīpuna must really want you there,’ Kat said, sighing. ‘I wish I could take a year off and learn my language.’

‘Well, you could,’ Māreikura said. ‘There’s always a way. It just takes sacrifice.’

Kat looked at her. She kept eye contact when she talked and Māreikura wondered if this was a skill you learn over time. Being able to talk to someone and look them directly in the eye.

‘Well, I have a confession.’ Kat cleared her throat. ‘I recognised you from that amazing head girl speech.

‘I was so moved,’ she carried on. ‘You basically told the racist, white school to go screw themselves, and I remember thinking, *Wow, this young wahine is formidable*. What happened to that racist girl who did blackface?’

Māreikura picked up her fork and put it back down again.

‘I don’t know. I ended up dropping out after she left. I heard she can’t find a job anywhere but I don’t know if that’s true or not.’

Kat scoffed. ‘I’m sure she’ll be fine. So many people saw your video. It was doing the rounds on social media, wasn’t it?’

‘Yeah.’

‘What was that like for you? Must have been a crazy time.’

Crazy was an understatement. Māreikura had no idea Alexandra Minogue was recording from the third row and that she would upload it onto her Instagram page and that more than sixteen million people from around the world would see her speech on YouTube and social media and that she would be thrust into the spotlight, interviewed by media all across the world; even the Prime Minister weighed in and announced that the government would be reviewing protocol when it came to racism and racial discrimination in schools. Gretton College came out with a public apology but by then it was too late. Māreikura stood her ground and refused to go back.

Months passed and everyone forgot about it, they forgot about her. She was left with the damage, the aftermath, the shame and disappointment she felt from her nana every single day. *Now what?* her nan had asked her, tight-lipped. And so she got a part-time job at the local Countdown while trying to monetise her Instagram following, which had climbed to thirty thousand. She began posting commentary on all issues concerning Māori and she started calling people out on

Twitter. Māreikura refused to call it by its new name. Soon she grew tired of it, tired of finding things to get angry about, tired of fighting with trolls who came for her online and tired of feeling alone. She went on antidepressants and then deleted her Instagram permanently.

Kat squeezed Māreikura's arm.

'I can only imagine how hard that must have been for you. I don't think I know anyone who's brave enough to dismantle the racist education system the way you did. Māreikura, it was incredible. We are all lucky to be in a world with powerful, strong wāhine Māori like yourself.'

Māreikura said nothing. She was chugging down the champagne now. Kat's eyes narrowed in on Māreikura as if trying to make sense of her.

'What do you think of imposter syndrome?' Māreikura asked.

'What about it?'

'Do you have it?'

'No,' Kat said. 'I know who I am.'

'But do you ever feel like you don't belong in some spaces? Like in the tech space – it's filled with old white men, isn't it?'

Kat just shrugged. 'I don't have a reason to doubt myself. I'm good at what I do.'

'Is it because you're white-passing?'

Kat looked slightly offended so Māreikura quickly said, 'Oh, sorry, I mean, you know . . . Is it because you're white-looking?' which wasn't much better.

'Do I not look Māori to you?' Kat asked, and Māreikura told her she did, even though she didn't really. She could definitely pass for a white woman with a tan.

It got awkward and Māreikura took another sip of her drink. She wondered if that was part of her ADHD, blurting things out without

thinking and offending people. She wanted so badly to go on a rant about how she didn't believe in imposter syndrome. We are all imposters, aren't we? she wanted to say. We are born into a world we blindly accept. The world we live in is a white world, it's not our reality.

But it was only the first date. The food arrived and the waitress laid all the kai out on the table. Kat picked up a dumpling with her chopsticks and put it on Māreikura's plate.

'Eat, babe.'

They talked about colonisation and racism and LGBTQ+ issues and everything they were passionate about while they ate dumplings and sipped on champagne. Kat told her why she started Kaha. She'd had a dream in which her ancestors appeared to her and told her she needed to revolutionise data and Māreikura thought that was out the gate. They discussed problematic issues like the ACT party and David Seymour and the trauma of learning Māori, and Kat just listened and nodded and Māreikura thought it was quite refreshing that she didn't have to explain anything to her, that Kat just got it.

A few times, Kat put her hand on Māreikura's and said, 'Aw, honey,' and it did something to Māreikura that no male touching her had ever done before. The more time Māreikura spent with Kat, the more attractive Kat became. Up close, Māreikura could tell she wasn't even wearing makeup. Imagine having skin so flawless that you don't even need to wear makeup. Māreikura thought the only woman who could pull that off was Alicia Keys. Māreikura tried to wear no makeup once but then she went outside in the revealing Grey Lynn sun and some Karen stopped her on the street, pointed to her forehead acne and asked if she had thought about giving up dairy and gluten. Māreikura put her head down and said nah but now she wished she'd told the lady not everyone was in a privileged

position like her to afford gluten-free food. To be honest, Māreikura probably did have some hidden food intolerance but she liked cheese and noodles too much.

After dinner, they went to the counter and the Pākehā group in front of them were calculating the costs and dividing the bill by the items they ate. 'I had half the wine so I'll pay for half of that, and for my main and one of the sharing plates,' the guy in front of them said.

Māreikura and Kat just looked at each other. When it was their turn to pay, Kat stood guard over the EFTPOS machine.

'I'm paying. You're a student.'

'So? I can pay my own way.'

In the end, they agreed to halve the bill and when \$120 appeared on the screen, Māreikura said, 'Oh, we're going halves,' and the man looked at her like she was stupid. He pointed to the receipt on the counter.

'The full bill comes to \$240.'

Māreikura scanned the bill and saw the champagne was \$80 on its own. She had never spent so much on dinner before in her life.

'You okay?' Kat asked from behind.

'Yeah,' Māreikura squeaked. She quickly transferred money on her phone and then inserted her card. The \$120 would send her into overdraft but Māreikura decided it was worth it. Tonight was a special occasion. She was on a date with a hot woman.

Kat insisted on dropping Māreikura home but Māreikura said she would walk – the streets were safe because it was 'Ponsnobby' and Kat giggled and Māreikura liked the feeling of making Kat laugh. The alcohol seemed to give her permission to say things out loud she would usually keep in her head, which made her appear funnier and more confident.

Māreikura looped her arm into Kat's. 'Did you ever play basketball?' she asked. 'You're really tall.'

Kat said no but she had played netball and Māreikura felt dumb for asking such a basic question.

Both were too drunk to drive and Māreikura didn't want to go home. Then Kat asked her in a presumptuous voice, 'Wanna come back to mine and drink tea?'

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