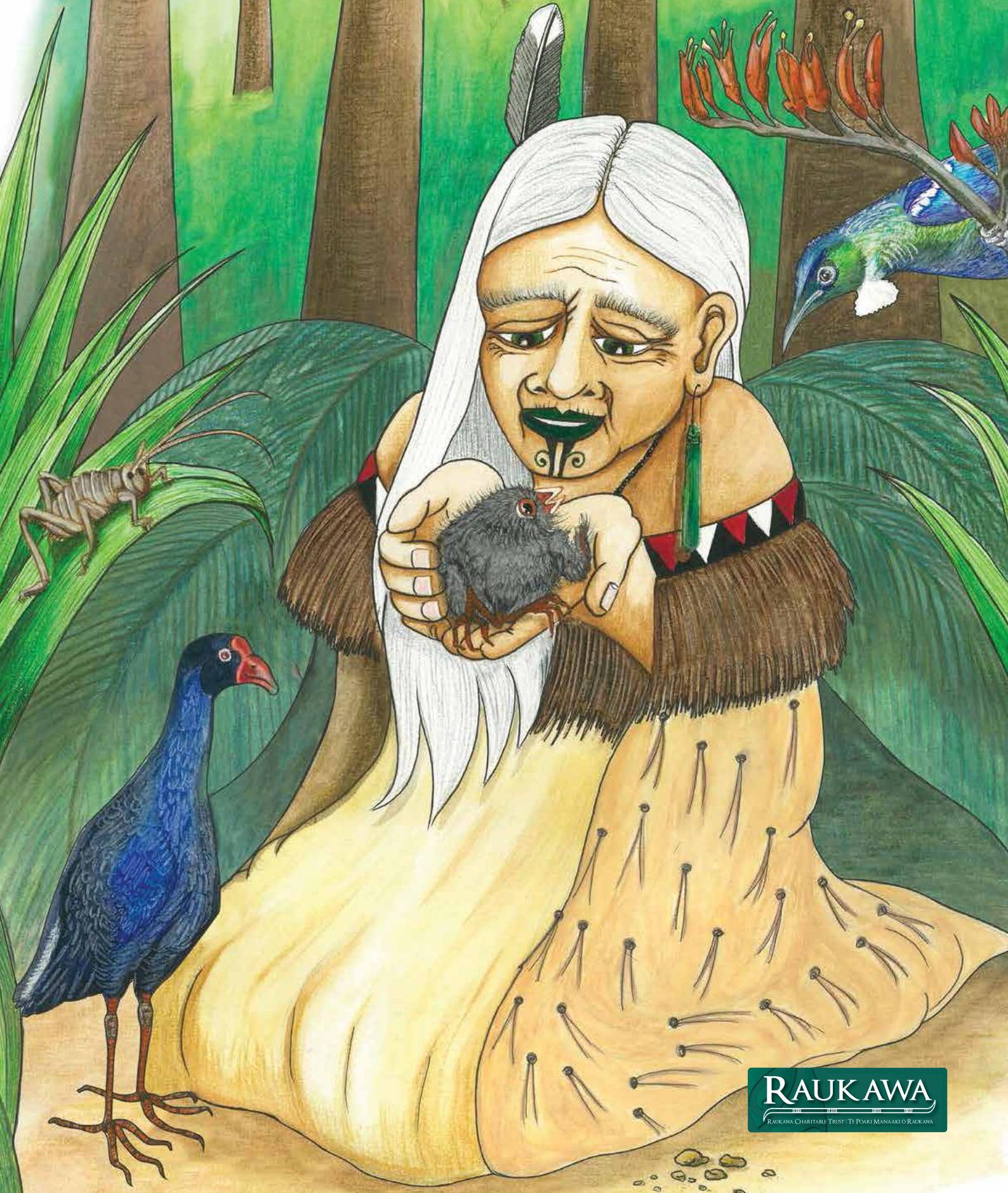
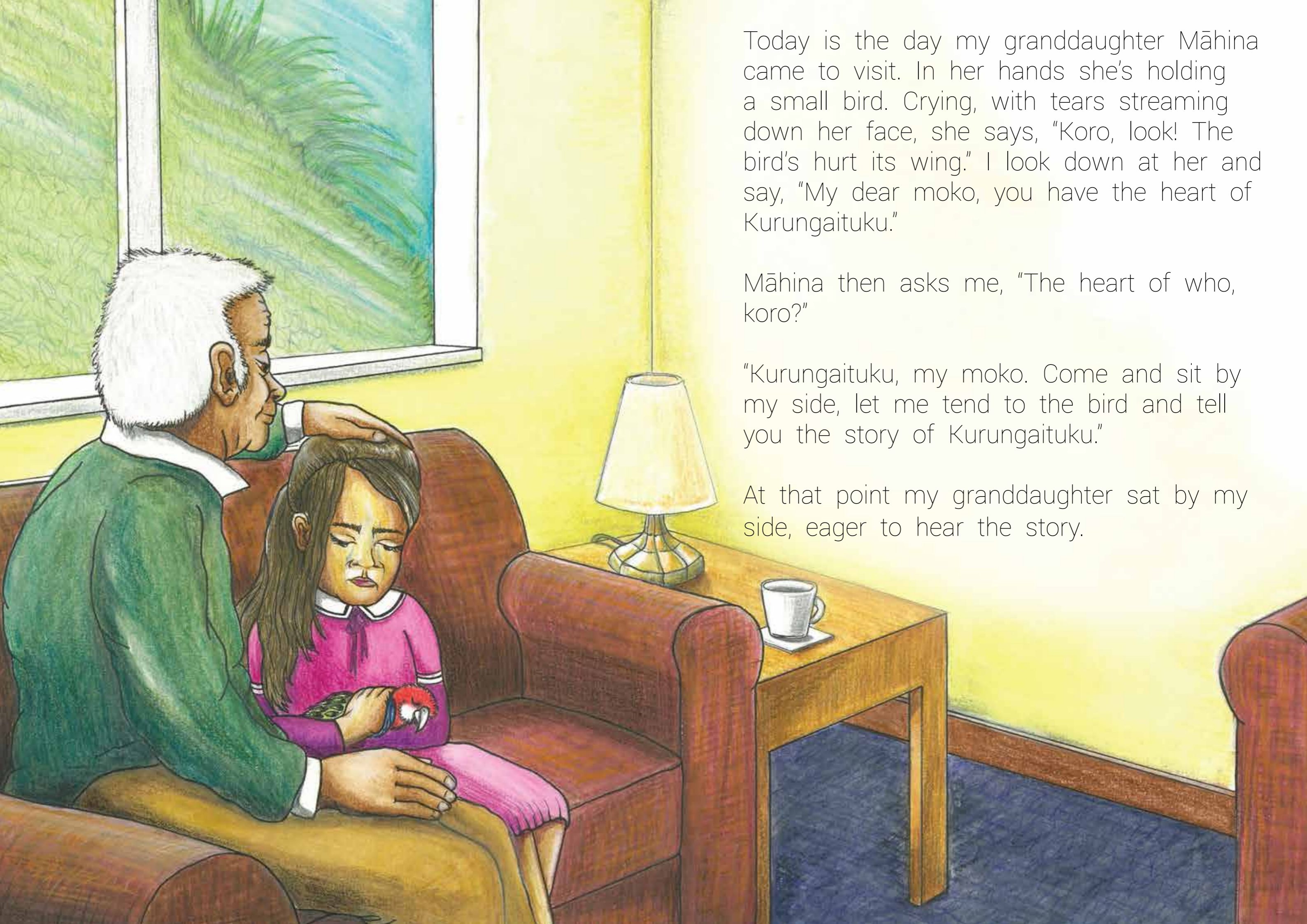


# KURUNGAITUKU, THE GUARDIAN OF THE FOREST





Today is the day my granddaughter Māhina came to visit. In her hands she's holding a small bird. Crying, with tears streaming down her face, she says, "Koro, look! The bird's hurt its wing." I look down at her and say, "My dear moko, you have the heart of Kurungaituku."

Māhina then asks me, "The heart of who, koro?"

"Kurungaituku, my moko. Come and sit by my side, let me tend to the bird and tell you the story of Kurungaituku."

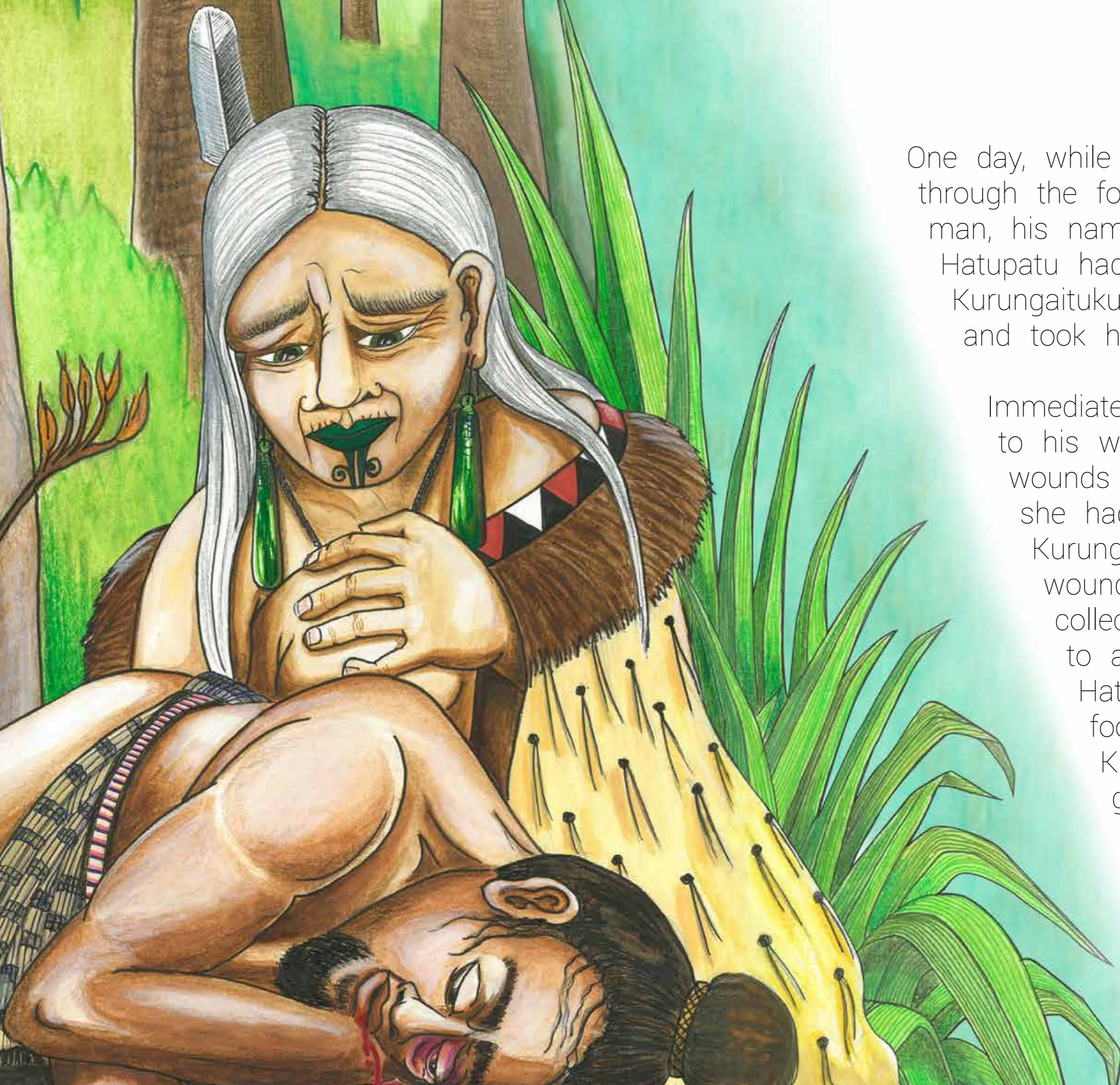
At that point my granddaughter sat by my side, eager to hear the story.



Long ago, before the arrival of the Pākehā, there lived a special elderly woman, her name was Kurungaituku.

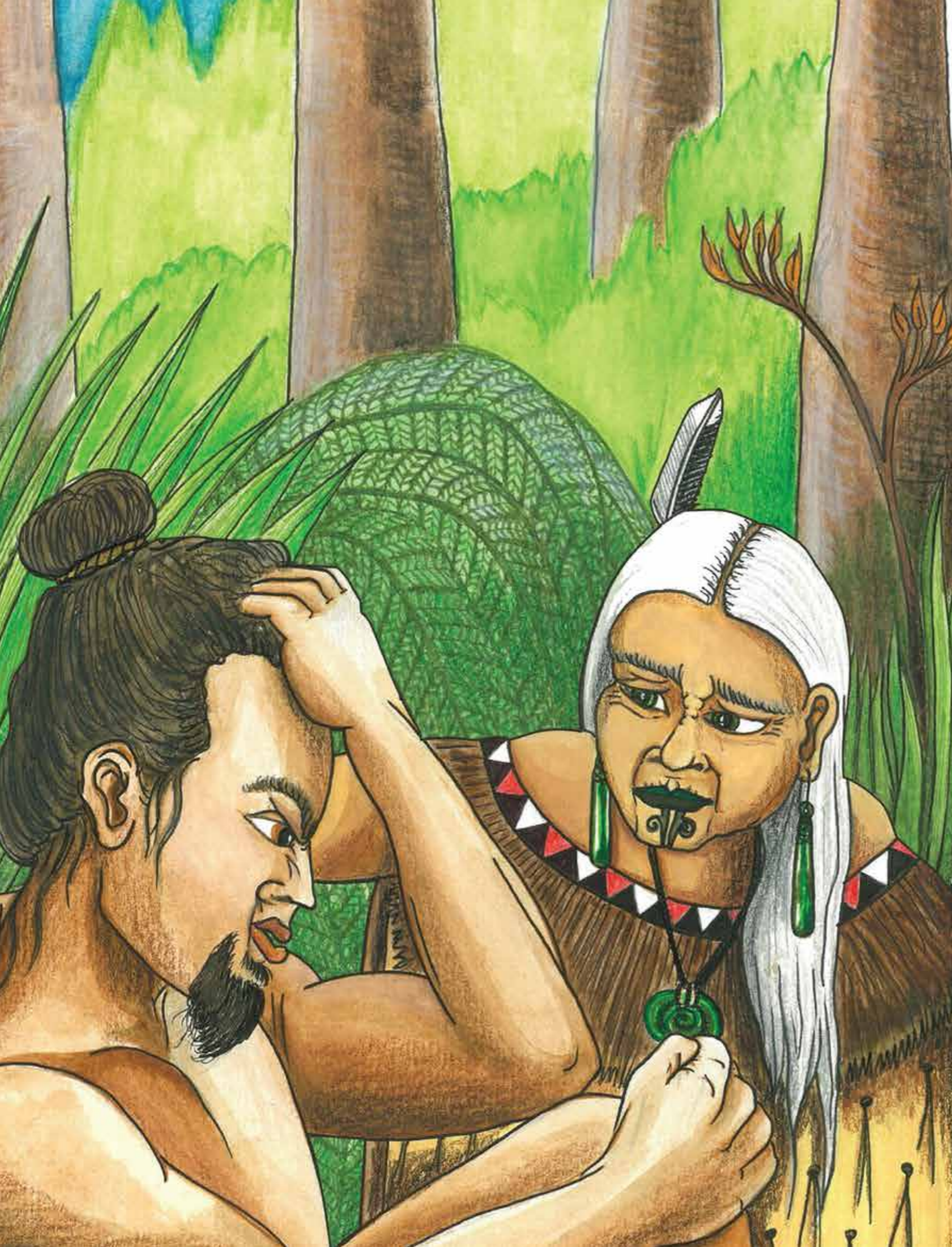
She lived alone, isolated from the rest of her tribe, as it was her responsibility to protect the forest and look after the great realm of Tāne, starting at Ātiamuri, extending to Tūaropaki in the Te Pae-o-Raukawa district.

Kurungaituku lived in a giant cave and took care of the various birds and animals of the forest. She would feed and nurse back to health any animals that were injured or ill. She protected all the children of Tāne. Kurungaituku was a very kind woman. It is said that Kurungaituku could transform her appearance, taking the form of a bird and changing again to a woman, hence she was so fond of the birds.



One day, while she was walking through the forest she met a young man, his name was Hatupatu. Hatupatu had been injured badly. Kurungaituku helped the young man and took him back to her cave.

Immediately, she began tending to his wounds. She covered his wounds with medicine, which she had gathered in the forest. Kurungaituku washed Hatupatu's wounds with water and collected kawakawa leaves to assist in his recovery. Hatupatu was fed the food of the forest by Kurungaituku, he was given berries and insects, including hūhū and wētā.



When Hatupatu awoke, he began to tell her what had happened to him. He told her, "I was beaten by my elder brothers and left to die in the forest".

However, Hatupatu neglected to tell the elderly women that he had eaten all of the birds in their storehouses.

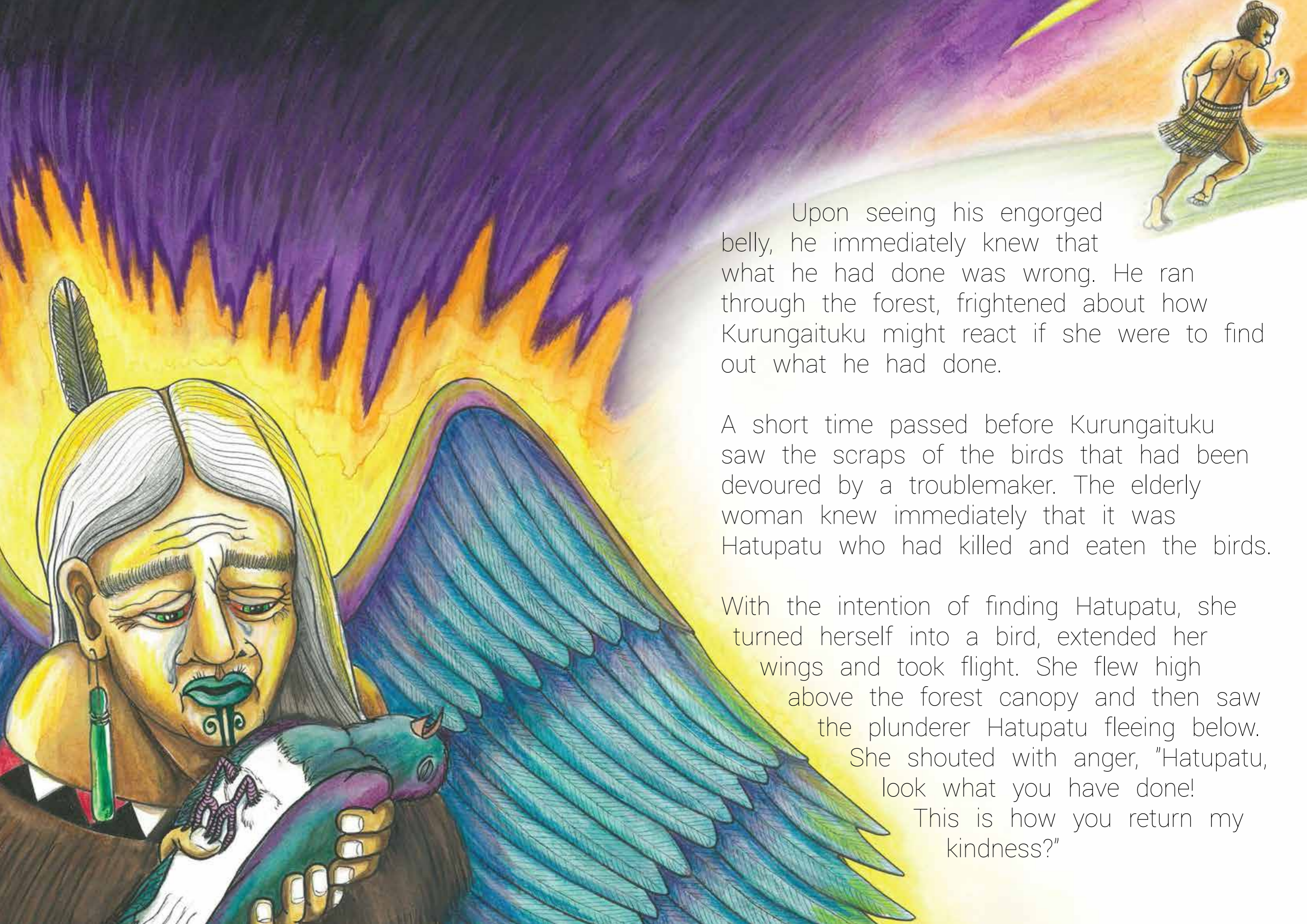
Kurungaituku was saddened to hear what had happened, she embraced Hatupatu and began to sing to him like a bird. Due to the harmonious sound, Hatupatu was soon overcome with sleep.



Despite Kurungaituku's love for Hatupatu, he had only one thing on his mind as he slept, which was the craving to indulge in the delicious taste of bird. That was his hidden desire. Despite this, Kurungaituku continued to nurture Hatupatu. In time, Hatupatu regained his health.

While walking through the forest one day, he grew tired of eating fruit and insects and started to think about the birds singing above him.

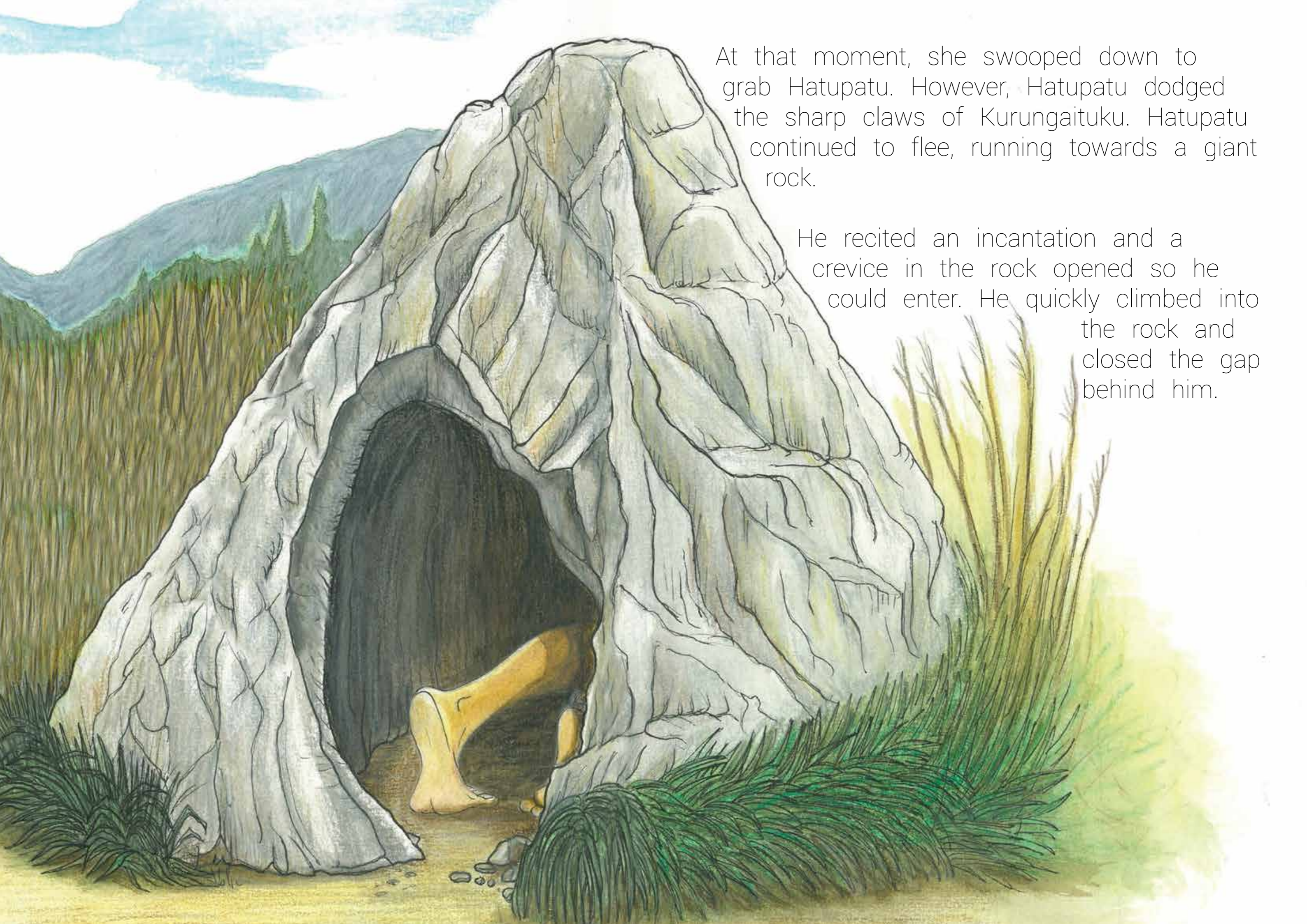
Therefore, he went about building a bird snare. He placed the snare high in the treetops and waited below. It wasn't long before he had caught a bird, then a second. He killed the birds, plucked their feathers, cooked the flesh and quickly devoured them.



Upon seeing his engorged belly, he immediately knew that what he had done was wrong. He ran through the forest, frightened about how Kurungaituku might react if she were to find out what he had done.

A short time passed before Kurungaituku saw the scraps of the birds that had been devoured by a troublemaker. The elderly woman knew immediately that it was Hatupatu who had killed and eaten the birds.

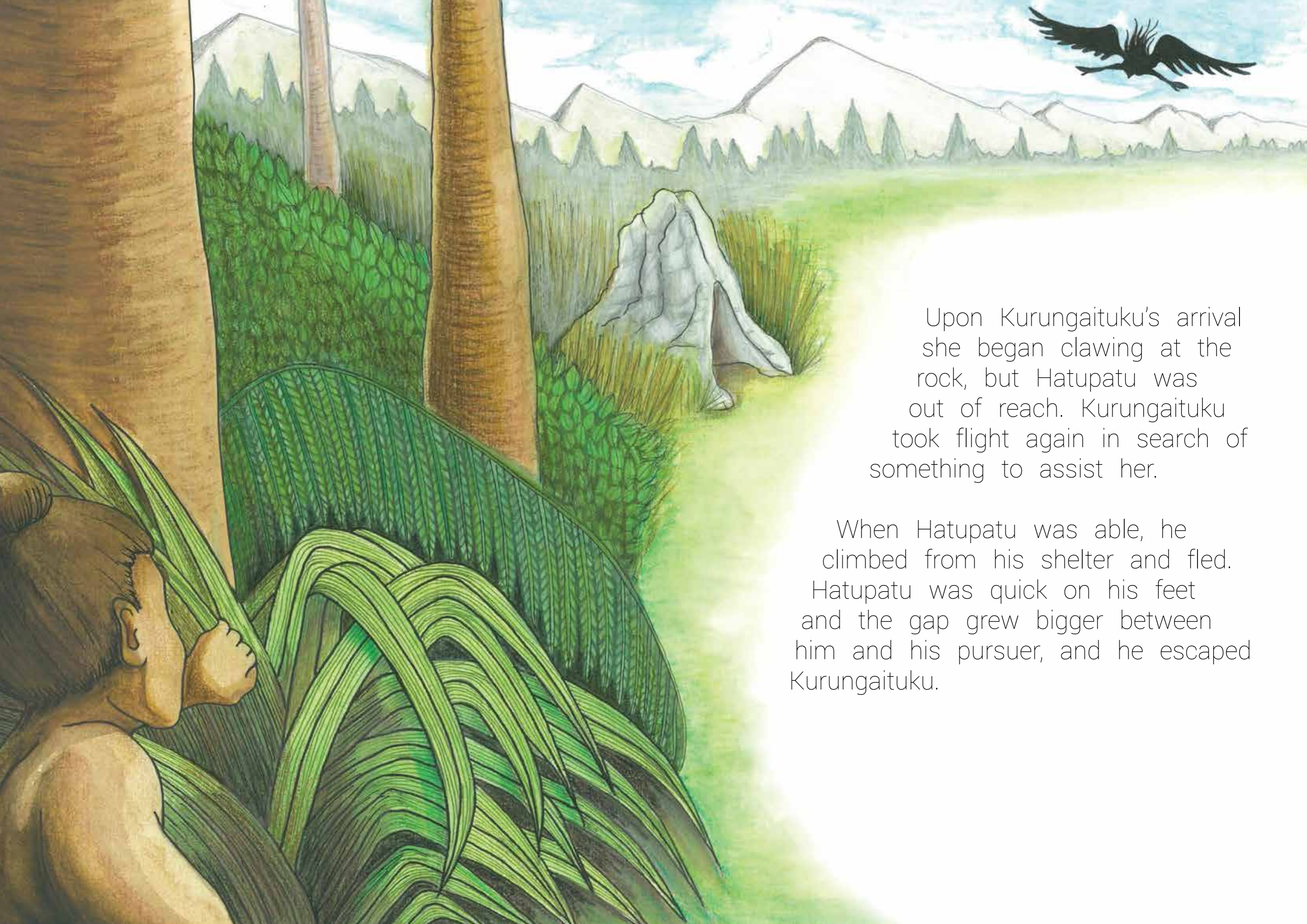
With the intention of finding Hatupatu, she turned herself into a bird, extended her wings and took flight. She flew high above the forest canopy and then saw the plunderer Hatupatu fleeing below. She shouted with anger, "Hatupatu, look what you have done! This is how you return my kindness?"



At that moment, she swooped down to grab Hatupatu. However, Hatupatu dodged the sharp claws of Kurungaituku. Hatupatu continued to flee, running towards a giant rock.

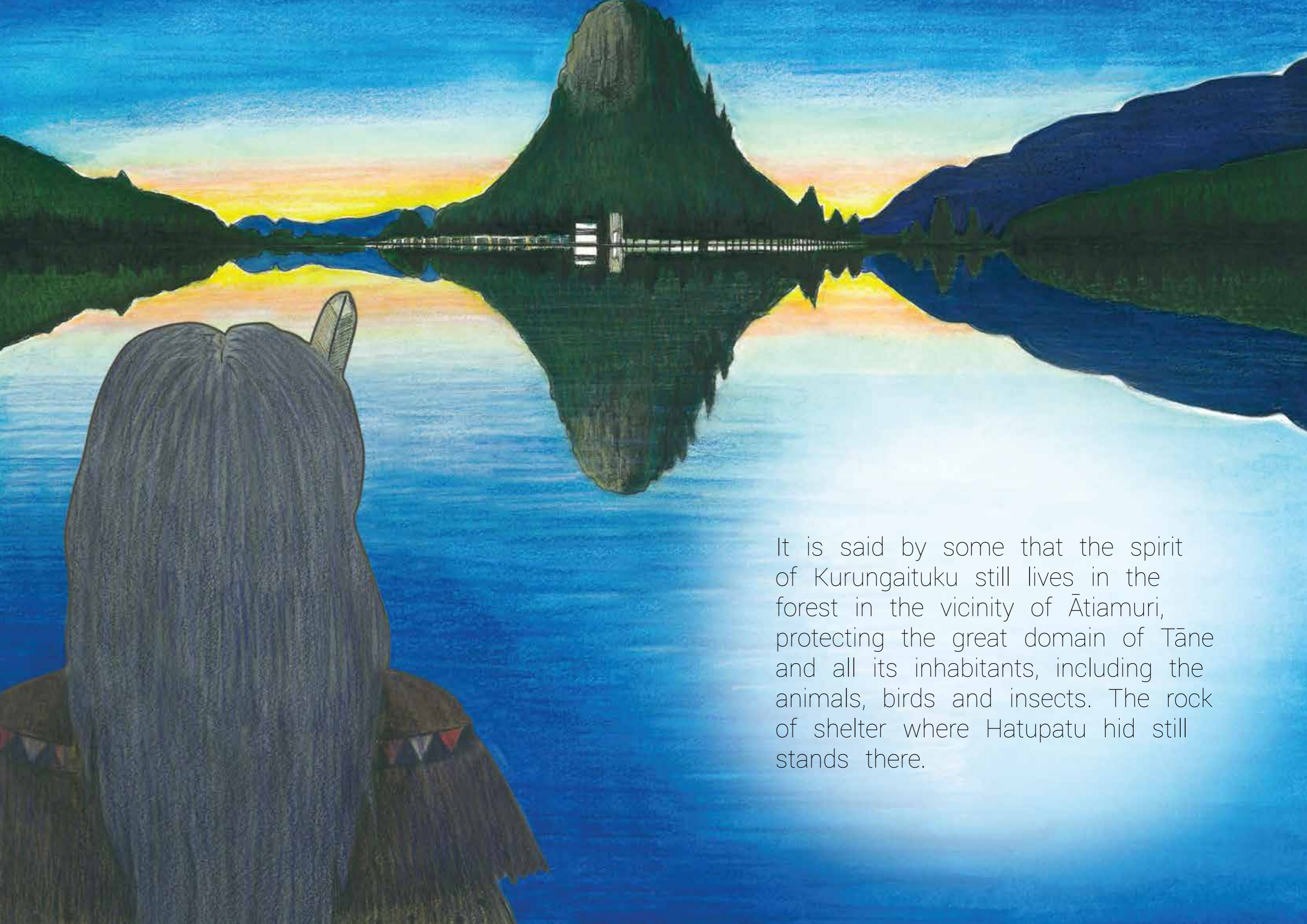
He recited an incantation and a crevice in the rock opened so he could enter. He quickly climbed into the rock and closed the gap behind him.



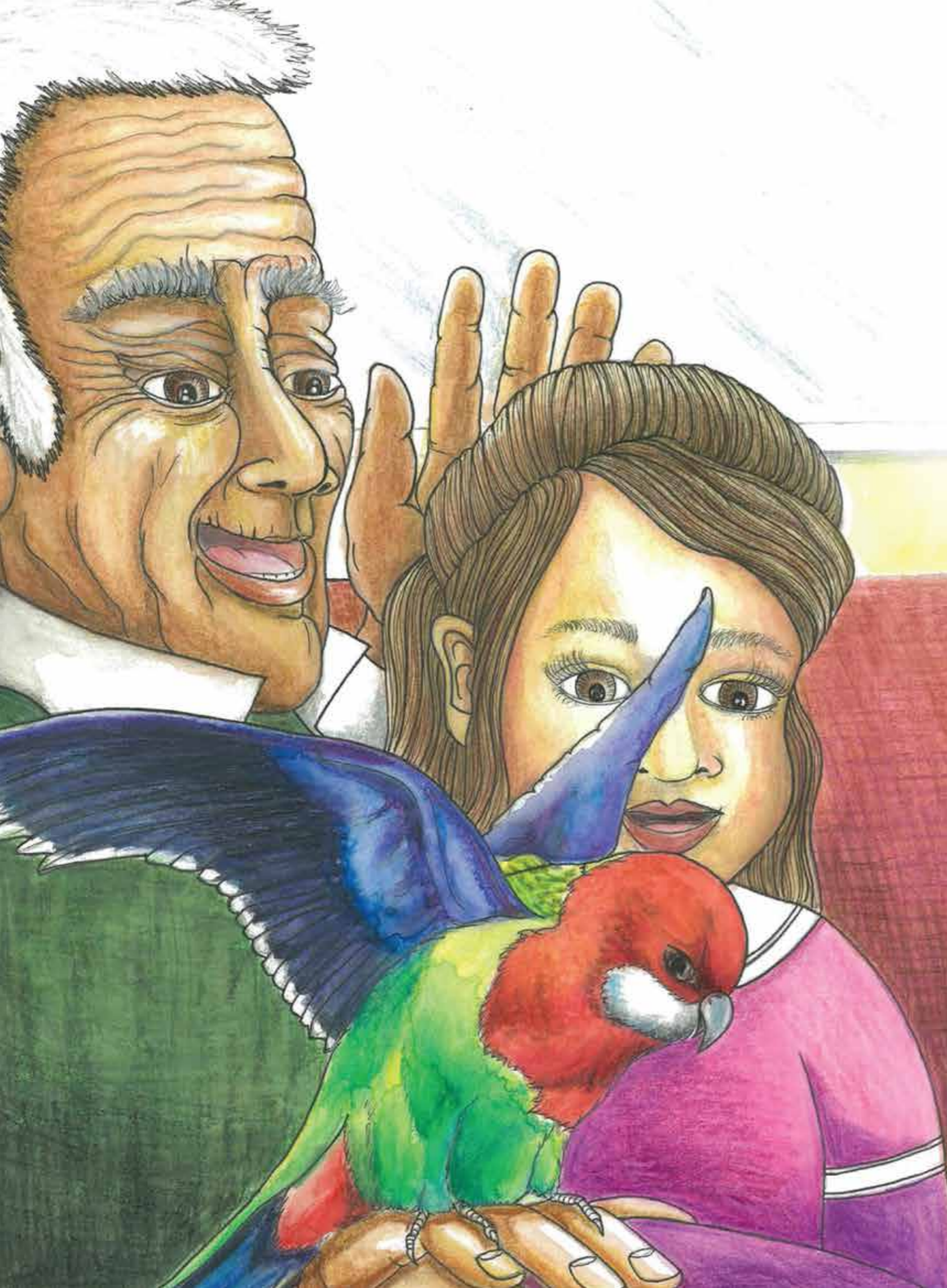


Upon Kurungaituku's arrival she began clawing at the rock, but Hatupatu was out of reach. Kurungaituku took flight again in search of something to assist her.

When Hatupatu was able, he climbed from his shelter and fled. Hatupatu was quick on his feet and the gap grew bigger between him and his pursuer, and he escaped Kurungaituku.



It is said by some that the spirit of Kurungaituku still lives in the forest in the vicinity of Ātiamuri, protecting the great domain of Tāne and all its inhabitants, including the animals, birds and insects. The rock of shelter where Hatupatu hid still stands there.



"What happened to Hatupatu, koro?" Asked Māhina.

"Well, moko, that's another story all together. Although Kurungaituku was betrayed, there is a lesson to be learnt from this story; help those who are without, those who are bereaved and ill. However, you must be careful! You never know what hidden agenda one might have."

"Wait, look. Your bird is well again. Now, let it free!"

"Thank you, koro. Take flight little bird, take flight like Kurungaituku!"

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