



BATTLE

BY MARIA SAMUELA

"Hey, sole! Bring your moves over here. We gotta get this battle started," Charlie yelled.

Timiona pulled his hood over his head and crossed the courts, ignoring the jibes from Lucy and Moera and the other wannabe gangsters.

"Hey, Timiona!" yelled Lucy, trying one last time. "Moera thinks you're dumb."

Timiona locked eyes with Moera. She cocked her head to one side, daring him to look away first. Timiona scowled and dropped his gaze, kicking himself for giving in. He fingered Papa Ari's medal in his pocket. Still there. He wasn't stealing it, he reminded himself. He was *borrowing* it – and as soon as this was over, he'd return the medal safe and sound. Nobody had to know.

He'd heard the story about the medal a million times, how his great-great-grandpa got it for bravery in the war, representing Rarotonga in the Sinai Desert nearly a hundred years ago. But that was then, back in the olden days, and right now, Timiona was facing a battle of his own.

"Uce!" Timiona said when he reached Charlie. He gave his mate a homie handshake. "What's up with your dog? He's possessed." Charlie's fox terrier, Krusty, was running jagged circles at their feet. Timiona nudged the yapping mutt with his foot.

Charlie shrugged. "He's crazy. He keeps following me to school."



Timiona groaned. The boys had been neighbours since ages ago, and that loopy dog was forever bringing over "gifts" – like dead rats – which he left on the doorstep for Timiona to clean up.

"Just make sure Miss Luapo doesn't see him. She'll eat him at kai time," Timiona teased, looking down at Krusty. The dog suddenly stopped running his manic circles and darted off towards the rugby field. The boys laughed.

Soon all the krumpers were gathered at the netball courts. They formed a circle, and Charlie appeared in the middle. "OK, listen!" he ordered. "You know the rules. Last man –"

"Or woman!" cried Lucy.

Charlie grinned. "Or woman. Last *person* standing wins. I'll pull the first two names from my hat." Charlie held up his cap. "Whoever wins this round takes on the next challenger, whose name will also be pulled from my hat. *Kapeesh?*"

Everyone understood and crowded round the krumpers to watch. Charlie sorted the music, and the netball courts were filled with a pounding bass. Then he pulled the first two names.

"Let's give it up for Lucy and Wiremu!"

Timiona gripped the medal. His turn would come.

The other krumpers bounced a hand in the air, saluting the two competitors, as Lucy and Wiremu came forward.

Timiona always felt like a warrior when he stepped into the ring, just like his Papa Ari. It was the best feeling ever. The hardest part was waiting for your name to be called, especially in the lunchtime heat. Timiona peeled off his hoody and threw it down.

Round one had finished, and Charlie goaded the audience to vote for a winner. "Let's hear it for Wiremu!" Cheers filled the air. "Not bad," said Charlie. "But it's not over yet. And Lucy?"



This time, the noise spilled over to the rugby field.

"Lucy wins the first round!"

The girl krumpers high-fived each other, squealing their delight. Moera raised an eyebrow and flicked her head at Timiona. His stomach did tiny backflips.

Charlie pulled another name from his cap. "The next challenger is Sue."

Lucy's face fell. They all knew that this could happen at any time – that you might have to battle your own mates. But knowing it could happen never made it any easier.

Timiona suddenly remembered Papa Ari's medal. He turned to grab his hoody. His backpack was slumped on the ground where he'd left it, but his hoody – with Papa Ari's medal – was nowhere in sight. Timiona scooped up his bag. Perhaps the hoody was hidden underneath. Nope.

"Who took my hoody? Have you seen my hoody?" Timiona quizzed everyone in sight. Nothing. Behind him he heard the booming beats from the speakers. The yelling seemed to intensify.

The second round finished, and the audience made their vote. Timiona's heart started to pound. He searched frantically among the schoolbags and shed clothing as another krumping round finished ... and another.

Then he heard his name called.

As he walked back to the krumpers' circle, Timiona could hear his mother's voice in his head. *That medal never leaves this house.* The crowd parted, and Timiona got a clear look at his opponent.

Of course it was her.

"Final round, peeps!" Charlie grinned. "Who's gonna take it out? Will it be Timiona?" he urged the other kids. Their cheers filled Timiona with confidence. "Or Moera?" Now the sound filled him with dread, adding to the bad feelings that already threatened to overtake him.

Moera took centre stage first. She swung her arms with such force that each swipe looked like a rugby tackle. Her legs jerked as her fists punched the air, sharp jabs – all in perfect time. She shuffled towards Timiona, teasing him with her twitching shoulders before the music suddenly stopped.





Timiona swallowed. He admired Moera's moves, but he'd been practising hard. He knew he could freestyle just as well as her – if not better. But could he pull it off without the medal? He took a deep breath and forced himself to swagger to the middle of the circle. He had to keep his head clear, the way he imagined Papa Ari had tried to keep his own head clear.

The music began, and Timiona's limbs twitched involuntarily. He swung his arms, swiping the air, and punched the space in front of him with tight fists. Then he edged his way towards Moera. He popped his chest like a heartbeat in time to the pulse of the music. There was only 2 feet between them, and the music was coming to an end, when Timiona brought a hand to his mouth and blew his opponent a kiss.

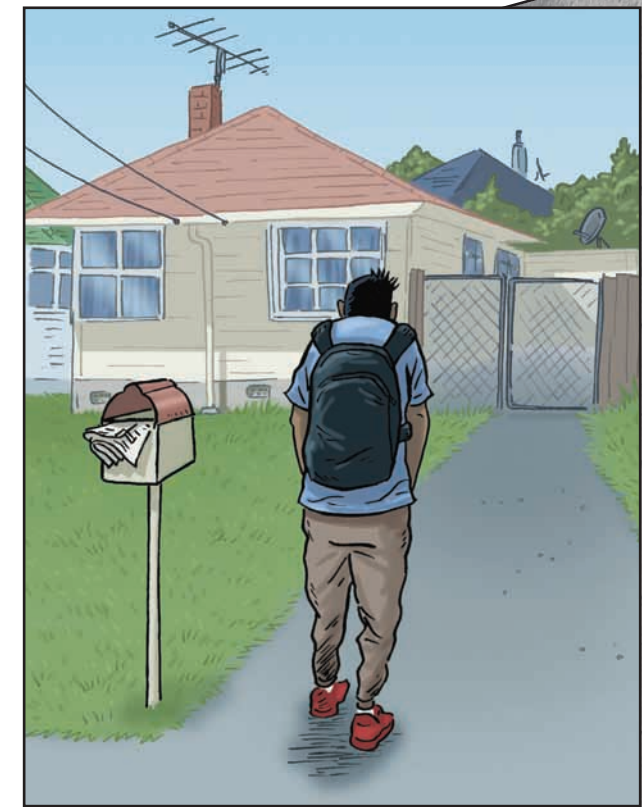
Moera blushed. Timiona had killed it! It was clear who won that battle.

After school, Timiona turned into his driveway, hoody-less and medal-less and with his heart in his stomach. He heard a familiar, irritating yap. Krusty was sitting on his front doorstep. Stupid dog. But as he moved closer, his heart jumped. For the first time ever, he was happy to see that loopy mutt. And he didn't mind one bit that his hoody was covered in fur.

"Krusty!" he cried. He ran towards the dog and yanked the hoody out from under him. He plunged his hand deep into the pocket to find nothing.

The front door opened, and there in the doorway stood Timiona's mum. Her head was cocked to the side, one arm raised in the air. Dangling from her fingertips was Papa Ari's medal.

Timiona looked down at Krusty. He could swear the dog was grinning.



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