

# Māui

by André Ngāpō



Dad's taken us out to our secret fishing spot – just me and Te Paea. There's no one round for miles. Small waves lick and tickle the side of the boat as the sun climbs higher and higher. My fishing rod stands straight, cutting a line across the blue sky.

"How are you going?" Dad asks.

"Fine," I say, although I'm wishing Mum was with us. There's no point saying it. I'm sure Dad's wishing the same thing.

"Look," says Te Paea, pointing to my rod. The tip's suddenly begun to dip and twitch, curving down towards the sea. I grab the rod, feel the tug on the line. I carefully reel in the fish like Dad taught me.

"Ka pai, Tiki! A tāmure," Dad says. He reaches over with the net. "It's a good size too." Dad's right. My snapper's a big one – and we can keep it. Dad threw his first catch back.

"Luck," Te Paea says, eyeing up my fish.

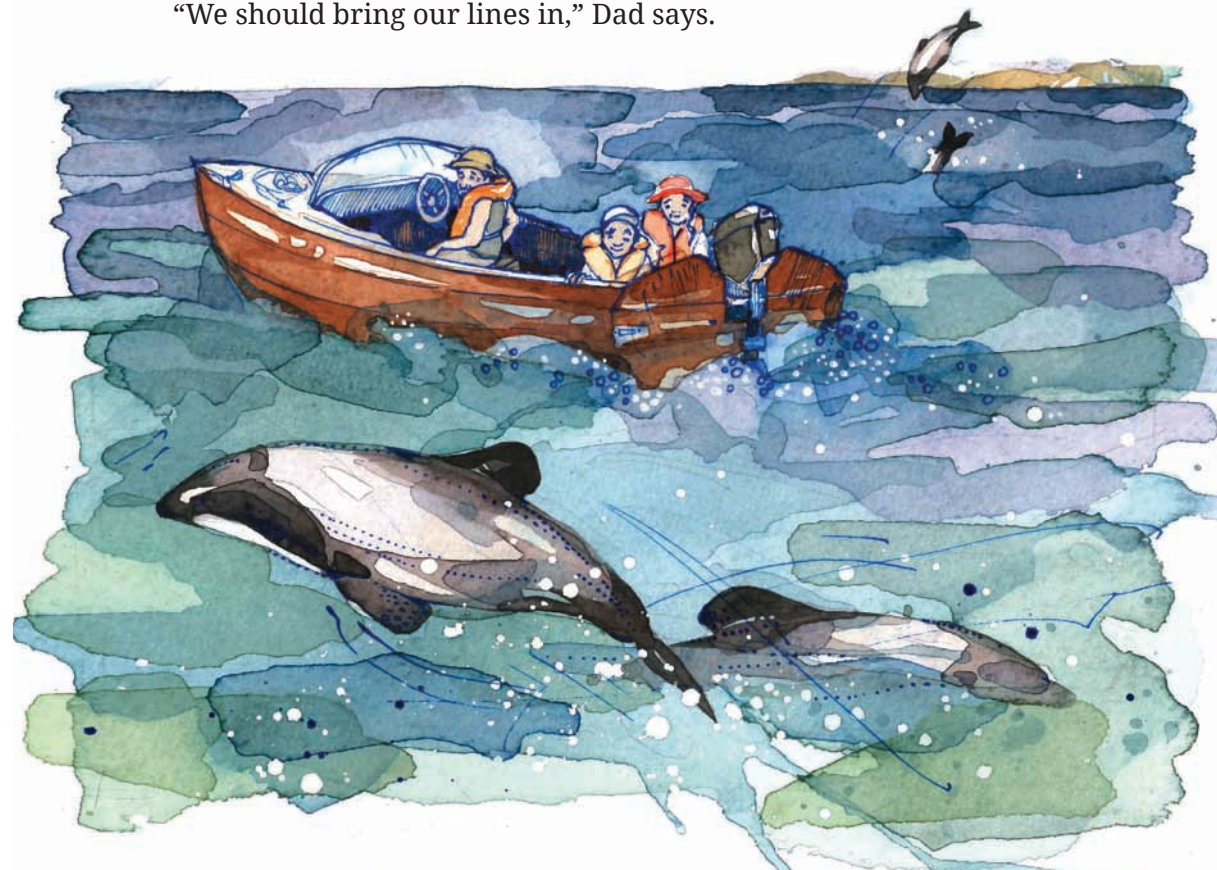
"Pure skill," I say.

Dad helps me get the hook out of the snapper's mouth. We say a karakia of thanks to Tangaroa and Hinemoana, then Te Paea changes the bait on her hook to squid and Dad chooses a new sinker. The competition's on. They cast out at the same time, Te Paea's rig flying through the air almost as far as Dad's. I take my time. I don't need to rush – I've got my fish, not like them.

"Hey, over there! A popoto!" Te Paea calls. I look and see a dolphin shooting through the water just behind us.

"There are more," Dad says, pointing. Now four Māui dolphins are playing round the boat. They catapult into the air, slapping their sleek, shiny bodies against the surface of the water. It looks like so much fun I wish I was swimming with them.

"We should bring our lines in," Dad says.



We reel in and wait while Dad rings the Department of Conservation. He tells the person on the phone exactly where our boat is anchored and describes each dolphin in great detail. When the call's finished, I see him checking for texts. Then he puts his phone away, looking relieved. We don't say anything, just sit quietly, watching the black and white streaks playing and racing in the water.

"Not many left now, eh, Dad?" says Te Paea.

"Āe. Not many at all."

"How many?" I ask.

"I'm not sure," Dad says. "Less than a hundred."

"Really? A hundred's nothing!"

"It's sad," says Te Paea.

Dad looks sad, too, much sadder than usual. "It sure is," he says.

We feel a bump. I peer over the side of the boat and see a dolphin staring straight at me – a little scar on the side of his nose.

"Look! I wonder how he got that scar," I say.

"It could be a she," Te Paea says.

The dolphin's real friendly. He follows us all the way to our island, the one where we always stop for lunch. He watches as Dad cuts the engine and chucks the anchor over the side. He's still watching as we wade ashore with our gear and lay out a picnic.



The food's different from usual. Mum always packs sausage rolls and banana cake, but Nan made lunch this time. Dad sees me looking and guesses what's on my mind. "Mum will be fine today," he says. He takes the lid off a big container of egg sandwiches. "She's glad we decided to come out. It's such a beautiful day. She said it would be good to charge our batteries."

I imagine Mum sitting in her green chair, trying to charge her own batteries, the sun hot and bright over her.

“Dad, why are they called Māui dolphins?” I ask. We’re lying about doing nothing, the three of us just lazing in the sand. “Are they named after Māui-tikitiki?”

“What do you know about Māui-tikitiki?” Dad asks.

“We learnt some stories at school. He’s the one who was cast out to sea, the cheeky one – cheeky, like a dolphin.”

“You could be onto something there,” Dad says.

“Māui-tikitiki is the one who stole stuff,” says Te Paea.

Dad looks amused. “Stole stuff?”

“He took fire and his grandmother’s jawbone,” I say.

“And wasn’t he the one who tried to cheat death?” asks Te Paea.

“Oh, yeah, I’d forgotten that bit,” I say.

Behind us, somewhere in the mānuka, I hear a fantail. Or at least I think I do. We’re quiet for a long time, the dolphin nowhere in sight.

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The sun’s dropping out of the sky, down towards the horizon. We stop for a quick fish on the way home, then pack everything away for the bumpy ride over the bar. Four snapper, two gurnard, and two kahawai are stashed in the cooler. Mum will be pleased about the kahawai. Smoked, they’re her favourite.

The boat’s slicing through the water when Te Paea points back the way we came. It’s the dolphin. We agree it must be the friendly one, the one with the scar. “He followed us all the way,” she says.

The headland is approaching fast, the choppy bar not far away – daring us to pass through. Dad slows the engine, and the dolphin comes right up to the boat before suddenly dashing off to leap high in the air. Then he dives in the water, his tail disappears, and he’s gone.

“Do you think the popoto will make it, Dad?” I ask.

“I hope so,” he says.

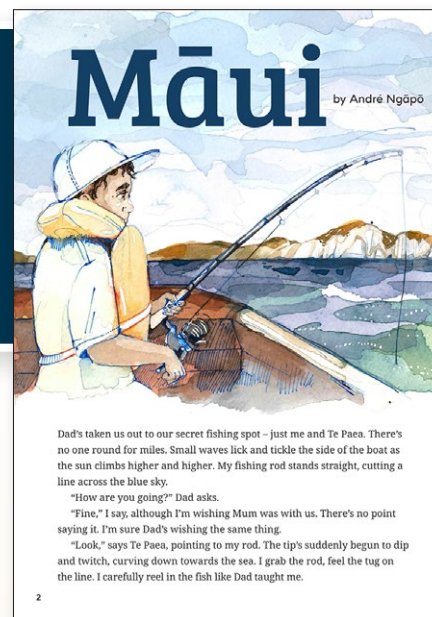
Dad gazes after the dolphin for a moment. Then he looks back to shore. “Right, let’s get that kahawai home to your mum. Are you ready?”



Te Paea and I hold tight while Dad guides the boat through the push of the current. He’s expert at this, always steering us safely through the breaking waves towards home.

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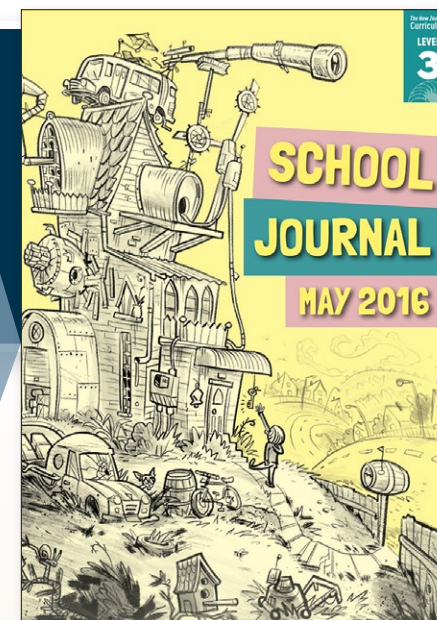
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