

# The Titiwai and the Turbine

Author: Bill Kelly

Welcome to the future, 2040. Oily, grey clouds drifted aimlessly in the sky above Wellington. The Brooklyn Windmill stood derelict, a monument from the past. It had been that way since 2025 when 'someone' took over as Prime Minister. The same 'someone' who didn't believe in climate change and forced us all to burn fossil fuels, ignorant of the impact on the environment and our health. At school, we read by candlelight while the only heat source came from the smouldering pile of books in the centre of the room. Redundant iPads gathered dust in the corner, broken gadgets of a bygone age. We had run out of power five years before.

"How did we get into this mess" I thought to myself, as I gazed out of the classroom window towards the old wind turbine, which had been built ages ago as an experiment to harness Wellington's gusting winds. "If only we could find a way to start it again." We had learnt at school what had gone wrong; something to do with an old scientist, Isaac Newton, and the Law of Inertia. Once the turbine was stopped from turning it remained frozen in time. Over the years, people had tried to get it up and running but without power there was no way of getting the blades to move again. It needed a jump start.

I trudged home from school thinking about how sad and depressing my life had become when I saw a sudden flicker of bright greenish-blue light in the gloomy darkness. Through the hanging cloud, I spotted the pulsing beam again. It was coming from Central Park. No one went through the park anymore, not since the streetlights went out and the weeds took over. "What could it be?" I wondered. "My mind playing tricks on me, aliens invading from another planet, a beacon of hope in an ever-fading world?"

Shivering in the chilly autumn air, I turned and sprinted for home, only stopping to open the door. However, that night I couldn't sleep, tossing and turning as the vision of the light invaded my dreams. Time to investigate. The door of my bedroom creaked as I tiptoed out, silent as I passed my snoring parents. I noiselessly climbed out of the window, descending safely into the garden, the grass wet between my toes.

I walked warily to the bend in the hill, the soles of my bare feet aching as pebbles dug into them. Unsure if it had all been in my imagination I stared down into gloom. "I see it," I whispered. There was the light again, a quivering flash of cyan. Central Park was dark and foreboding as I stumbled in the blackness down the winding path through the overgrown bush. The broken and rotting bridges no longer

needed as the once clear stream had turned in to a trickle of brown, foul-smelling sludge. Above me, the trees sliced into the air like silver knives, silhouetted by the full moon.

As the path took me to the bottom of the park and under the largest arched bridge, I was drawn almost trance-like to the source of the unusual beam of flickering light. A large, pulsating shape about the size of a wild goat hung from the brickwork wrapped in a string of silvery beads, its light reflecting in the pool below. The body was long and cylindrical, with a flattened head and large mouth. The tail end glowed with green light. The rhythmic movement of its luminescent body glimmered through slimy, leathery, black skin. Transfixed, I reached out slowly with my hand to touch it.

Crack!

Electricity danced down my fingers and shot down my arms. I screamed as the pain ripped through my spine, and I was thrown back into the wet mud, stunned. Lying by the stream, my fingers and toes still tingling from the electric shock, I stared at the huge gyrating creature dangling above me and tried to think clearly. "What had just happened?" Suddenly it came to me. Jumping up I waved my hands in delight, the realisation hitting me like another bolt of lightning. The pulsating mass of luminous, insect larvae, this incredible, beautiful titiwai, was producing electricity, lots of electricity, enough electricity to knock me off my feet. "We have power!" I shouted into the silence.

In the shadow of the tallest trees of Central Park I began to walk home, this time skipping with excitement and humming to myself as I formulated my plan. How exactly could I get a giant glow-worm producing enough electricity to charge a windmill all the way up Brooklyn Hill, without electrocuting myself in the process? I needed the help of the city's best creative and scientific minds. Next morning at school, I told my best friends of my discovery, and together we made a plan.

Later that night, once my parents were asleep again, I sneaked back to school, tiptoeing through the deserted playground, the moon casting long shadows like tombstones in a graveyard. "Lucky the caretaker leaves his closet open," I said thankfully as I 'borrowed' his wheelbarrow and bolted down the hill, bumping the barrow in front of me to hack a path through the undergrowth. Catching my breath, I heard the soft hum of electricity and saw the steady flicker of the light in the park below. My friends were waiting by the bridge, silently staring at the phosphorescent glow in front of them.

"You're late..." one hissed angrily.

"I had to go to school to get the barrow, remember" I whispered back.

I led my friends under the bridge and heard them gasp one by one as we stood under the pulsating creature. The tallest reached out to touch the shining mass, but I slapped their hand away. “No, stop!” I shouted, “You’ll get electrocuted. I did and it really stung.” Leaving the wheelbarrow, we climbed up onto the top of the rickety old bridge. “Everyone remember the plan,” I whispered. “After four.” In the glowing light I saw my friends tense faces. “Yes,” they replied simultaneously.

“Tahi, rua, toru, wha ...”

Together, we jumped up and down as hard as we could and after a few seconds heard a soft thunk below as the glow-worm fell onto the yoga mat insulating the wheelbarrow, its light still gently reverberating like a beating drum. We grabbed the wheelbarrow and, putting the strongest people at the back and the smartest to the front, started moving. Slowly we hauled and heaved for what seemed like hours; out of the park, through the crossroads and then very laboriously up to the top of the hill. Just as dawn broke, we reached the top and collapsed on the grass in front of the giant structure.

Once we had got our breath back, we carefully pushed the wheelbarrow up to the small door at the bottom of the tall, thin shaft of the turbine and pulled it open, delicately tipping the creature inside. I watched as it rolled across the floor to the generator, its wet silky threads wrapping around the ancient machine. Muttering a last prayer of hope I slammed the door on the darkness and waited. No one said anything... We stood together in deafening silence, interrupted only by the sound of the wind whistling through the surrounding trees and the thumping of my heart inside my chest.

“Pop!” I jumped at the sound of a crackle and then watched as the body of the turbine began to glow, first a dim orange and then a brighter fiery red. I heard some sputtering and then a low whirr, “Vrrrr... vrrr... vrrrr...” as the motor cautiously coughed into action and the cogs inside the structure began to turn. High above us the blades of the turbine creaked and rumbled, stuck fast with rust until suddenly they jolted with a loud boom like the sound of thunder. We ran for cover.

After a few more creaks and bangs, sparks flew from the top of the turbine and magically the huge sails slowly began to turn. As the southerly wind whipped around the blades the turbine picked up speed until it turned hypnotically, spinning like a helicopter, and freeing the black and powerless city from five years of hibernation. Below us, lights flickered on across the houses and office blocks throwing off their blanket of darkness, and the noise of industry began to hum. Gradually the power from the turbine reached the wind farms of Mākara and they also burst into action. Wellington City came alive once more.

My friends clapped loudly, and we all started cheering as we heard the shouts of happiness and excitement drifting up from the city below. However, as I stood tall, surrounded by my friends, I now understood the real meaning of having power. Yes, I felt proud I had started the turbine, but the hero of this story isn't me. It's the Wellington wind, our powerful sustainable resource giving hope for the future.