Dear Father

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DEAR FATHER

By
Rochelle A. Fankhauser

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
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This thesis has been read by each member of the following graduate committee and by majority vote has been found to be satisfactory.

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As chair of the candidate's graduate committee, I have read the thesis of Rochelle A. Fankhauser in its final form and have found that (1) its format, citations, and bibliographical style are consistent and acceptable and fulfill university and departmental style requirements; (2) its illustrative materials including figures, tables, and charts are in place; and (3) the final manuscript is satisfactory to the graduate committee and is ready for submission to the university library.

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ABSTRACT

DEAR FATHER

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*Dear Father* is a memoir of one year of the life of Shelly Fankhauser. Experiencing the death of her grandfather and husband, she is forced to reexamine her basic belief system as a New Zealand Maori LDS woman. Through her losses and the process of her grief, she discovers the identity that she was struggling to find did not come from her culture or her religion as she had once thought, but from within herself.

*Dear Father* is an autobiographical account of finding inner strength and discovering hope.
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Thank you to everyone in the English Department who pushed, prodded, and generally helped me reach my own goals, especially Joyce, Rick, and Sally.

Thank you to Lisa, Clare, Mum, and the Waikato University Creche for watching Lainn when I couldn’t.

Thank you to everyone who believed in me, and everyone who didn’t.

To Tupe, this is the first of many testaments to your honor.

To Chris, now your name will always be in print.
INTRODUCTION

*Dear Father* is a novel about finding inner strength through adversity. In it, I relate the events surrounding the deaths of my grandfather and husband and my responses to those events. In doing so, I have examined my basic belief system as a New Zealand Maori and a Latter-day Saint. Into the narrative I have incorporated some of the stories from my rich oral heritage as well as short stories I had previously written in order to illustrate my belief system and its origins. At the same time, however, I have written this novel primarily for a New Zealand, non-LDS audience, and have therefore avoided labeling specifically LDS doctrines as such where possible.

The beliefs I have examined come from many elements of my upbringing. As a Latter-day Saint I believe in the eternal nature of the spirit, and in the sometimes-lucid nature of the veil between me and those in the spirit world. As a Maori I believe in the constant presence of my ancestors and in the probability of communication from them. As an LDS Maori woman who has been raised on the tales of my ancestors, I also have emphatic romantic beliefs about destiny and the ascendant nature of love.

In telling this story and examining these themes, I have also investigated my own sense of self-worth and the source of my inner strength. My hope is that my audience will relate to these experiences and benefit from the growth I have achieved. In this way, my narrative fits into the larger field of creative writing in the genre of autobiography.

Like Frank McCourt in *Angela's Ashes* I have written in the present tense in order to draw the readers into my experience. I describe my writing style in *Dear Father* as a blend of stream of consciousness and Maori oral tradition, both of which are manifested in my use of sentence fragments and repetition, which at times are comparable to Alan Duff's style in *Once Were Warriors*.

Like Witi Ihimaera I have not included a glossary of the Maori vocabulary in my text, as both English and Maori are the national languages of New Zealand. I have,
however, tried to give definitions of most Maori words through the context in which they are used.

In the development of my novel I first simply wrote down the events as they occurred. I then rewrote the sequence of events in a consistent voice to create the flow of a story being told to the reader, and filled in necessary background information relating to the characters. After doing so, I inserted the family tales I grew up with so the reader would be able to acquire the tales and therefore an understanding of my identity along with me. When I felt I had told the whole story, I made sure I had developed all my themes and then resolved them all by the end of the narrative.

In particular, I paid attention to writing scenes throughout the book that would show not only the events but also the development of my personal reactions rather than telling them. This was especially a concern in the last chapters of the book where I had to create scenes that showed the personal growth I was experiencing. In order to do that I decided to change the sequence of events somewhat from the way they actually happened in order to give the reader a clearer and richer picture of my experience.

In focusing on this aspect of my writing I found Sloane’s chapter on “Scene” in The Craft of Writing critical. Although he is specifically referring to fiction, I found the need in my non-fiction to choose carefully which characters and scenes to include and which to exclude, in order for my narrative to be convincing. Sloane says, “First, the author has to know what his book is about . . . . The writer must know also what happens in his book . . . . Even more important, the writer must know exactly what each scene accomplishes in and for the novel” (72-74). I omitted large chunks of my original draft because the events were not necessary to the story I was telling and the points I was trying to get across.

The finished product, I hope, is a contemporary New Zealand novel—a fresh way of dealing with the age-old subjects of death, loss and love, fresh because I am young and am looking at these issues from a perspective they have not been examined from before: as a Maori LDS woman who has lost much and emerged richer because of it.
Whakapapa

Tupuna Kino = Tupuna Raiha

Granny Waima = Old Tupe

Nana Dowling

Nana Davies = Tupe

Mum = Dad
Bruce = Jackie
Gaye = Wayne
Kevin = Kaye
Syd = Maureen
Mike = Linda

Sharon = Mark
Dione = Shaun
Francie = Ken
Shelly = Chris
Lainn
Megan
Rachael
Andrea

Jono
Danny
Jamie

Lauren = Ammon
Kristie
Rob
Mel

Kurtis
Lisa
Karl
Rebekah
Aaron
Stephanie
Claire
Michael
Tyler

Melissa
Ryan
Matthew
Ben
Sam
Zak
Shannon
Dear Father,

Please bless her while she's sleeping
that she might have sweet dreams
with every breath she takes

And Dear Father,

Please bless her in the morning
and make the sun shine brightly
as she wakes

And have the gentle moon watch over her
when she walks within its light
and when the stars see her smile
may they live to shine half so bright

Dear Father,

Please bless her as she travels
through this life reaching every
single goal she sets

And Dear Father,

Please let her know I love her
and that you love her too,
lest she forget.

Please Father give her every reason
to believe that she is worth the sun and skies
and let her know that I see heaven
for heaven is within her deep blue eyes

And Father,

Please hold her when she cries.

--C. J. Fankhauser
One

I'm cruising north along State Highway One heading for Whangarei driving my mum's Mitsubishi V3000. In the passenger's seat beside me my cousin Karl won't shut up. He's been talking non-stop for the last three hours about some guy called Dallan and I think I stepped out of the conversation about two hours ago. He hasn't noticed. In the back our thirteen-year-old cousin Rob, a year younger than Karl, is currently strangling himself with a bumblebee finger puppet in a last-ditch effort to keep my thirteen-month-old son Lainn entertained. It isn't working. There's spit frothing out from between Rob's braces and Lainn is screaming at the cow-filled paddocks as they flit past the window. This is the third time we've made the trip in three days, and Lainn wants out. I'm ignoring him. Kind of.

"If you'd just go to sleep, Lainn, you'd be a lot happier." Did I really think that would have any effect? But we'll be there soon, only half an hour more. The traffic is already thinning out the further we get out of Auckland, through Orewa, past Warkworth. I overtake a smoking green Honda Accord and then indicate to the white BMW behind us that it's clear for them to follow. In my rear-view mirror I watch my cousins Lauren and Kristi and Lauren's fiancé Ammon doing synchronised head-bobbing as they sing along with the stereo. They're doing a better job than me of hiding the fact that we think our Tupe, our grandfather, might die before we reach the hospital.

We were there with him on Wednesday, just two days ago, and he was fine. Sure, he's 91, has some internal bleeding from a suspected stomach ulcer, but he was okay. We visited for a day, took photos, alleviated our fears that he might die, eased
our consciences so that even if he did, at least we’d been with him, and then went home to Hamilton again. And then I got the phone call from Aunty Maureen this morning. Tupe’s heart failed overnight. He’ll probably never regain consciousness. Get everybody up there as soon as possible. Damn. We should have done it when he first got sick, brought everybody home, and now they might not have time to get there to see him. Of Nana and Tupe’s six children, three are in Fiji on business, two live in Australia, and one is in Canada on the first leg of a world trip. Right now all of them except one are on their way home. We haven’t been able to get in touch with Uncle Bruce in Canada. Please God, let them all make it in time. Please.

But I’ve been lucky. I’ve seen him. Lainn has met him. A cloud of toitois swishes past my window and I look out over a hill covered with ponga trees arching above the manuka. If he really is going to die, I’m lucky to be home in New Zealand. For 10 years every time I’ve seen Tupe I’ve expected never to see him again. When I was fourteen we lived in Chicago for a year while the government put my Dad through a Police Management course at Northwestern University. When we left New Zealand Nana told us that a year and a half earlier, Tupe’s dead father and Uncle Nupere had visited him in a dream and told him they wanted him to come home. They said he had three days to get everything taken care of, and then he had to go home. The three days was apparently three years, and the things to take care of were whakapapa that only he could do. I believed that my Tupe, the gentle old man who sat in his chair looking out over the ocean for hours on end as I sat at his feet, the man who taught me what it meant to be Maori without actually teaching me anything, my only grandfather, would die then and I wouldn’t even be able to attend his funeral.
But we made it home and he was still there. I guess subconsciously I somehow believed he always would be there. I mean, how can someone who has never lost a loved one conceive of life without them? Anyway, apparently Nupere came back with the rest of the family to take Tupe home with them, but Tupe’s mother, Granny Waima, stopped them. “No, no,” she said. “he’s got much more to do. We can’t take him yet.”

So he was there to answer my questions and read my poetry and stories that always featured him, a wise old man who quietly analysed the world around him. He was there to send me out to water his garden when I visited, or to tell me off for swimming at the water hole alone with an older male cousin. And he was there to walk me down the aisle when I got married. So again I left, moving to Hawaii with my husband Chris, leaving behind a New Zealand that in my dreamer’s mind would remain the same until I returned—Tupe, the Barrier and all. As I studied at Brigham Young University—Hawaii Campus, Tupe was ever present in my writing and it became glaringly obvious that one day I would receive a phone call to say he had indeed gone home to his father and his uncle, even if he was days long overdue. I expected my world to come crashing down and me with it, collapsing in a fit of grief and the uncontrollable wailing I had seen at a tangi when I was a child. The phone call would confirm a previous night’s dream, and my one connection with my Maori spirit would be wrenched from me. I always have had an overdeveloped sense of the dramatic.

But eventually I was pregnant, finished with my teaching certification and ready to begin my Master’s degree, so we moved to Utah. Still in my writing Tupe was there. He was the one who gave me not only all my inspiration but also my
understanding of who I was and what that meant. I was the blonde-haired, blue-eyed, freckled girl who could make a difference because I was Maori in spite of all outward appearances. I could never write without Tupe because I could never write without being Maori. In a country so far from my culture, Tupe was the link that held us together.

Lainn was born and then Chris left me. My world had come crashing down but not as I expected. In a flurry of sold furniture and restructured graduation plans, I was home in New Zealand after being gone for three and a half years. Tupe was the last person on my mind. I could barely handle my own life, felt completely incapable of mothering Lainn; there just wasn’t room for anyone else. For the last two months my world has had room for me, with Lainn somewhere in the fuzzy fringe. No one else.

But now, who cares? Who cares that I’ve been feeling sorry for myself? The plans I made for my life fell through. Big deal. I’m twenty-three and I can start over. But I might never see Tupe again. This is what matters. Until two days ago I hadn’t seen him in years, and my son Lainn, the one with Tupe’s huge brown eyes, had never met his only living great grandfather. I also wanted Tupe to see Lainn, see that although I came home disappointed with my life I hadn’t come home empty-handed. I wanted him to see one of the latest additions to his third generation of posterity, a wonderful boy who is a combination of me, my dad, and my Tupe.

And we did that. I got to see the light in his eyes even though he was weak from the internal bleeding, and I got to hear the aged voice whose echo had been fading in my memory. “Hello, Sweetheart,” he said to me just two days ago. “How are ya?” He had to be told twice whose baby this was as I struggled to keep Lainn from
wrenching the IVs out of Tupe’s arm, but we took photos and talked with him. We hugged him and told him we loved him. The idea was to do all that then because it might be our last chance, but I don’t think we really believed it would be.

Only fifteen more minutes to go now, and we might already be too late. I wonder if we will be greeted at the hospital by others grieving the death of our grandfather. It was hours between the time we heard the news and the time we left Hamilton. I had to call the family in Fiji and Australia, relay updates and travel plans between them and the hospital, and I had to pass on the news to my sisters in Auckland, Australia, and the States. I’m the baby in my family. I’m used to having an excuse for not holding up under the pressure of emotional situations. But there was no one else to help me this time.

I’ve grown up my whole life seeing my Aunty Maureen as one of the few people I could call stalwart. She is religious above anything else in life, and very practical. She’s the woman who gave birth to her seventh child on the bathroom floor and then had a shower before going to the hospital. She’s very private with her emotions, and I have never known her to cry until she called me this morning.

“He looks terrible,” she said, and I could hear her voice breaking over her tears. “He’s just not here at all. His eyes are all rolled back in his head and I just don’t think he’s going to come back. He looks like he could go at any minute. Tell them they need to come home straight away.” Maureen was crying. It had to be bad. Sitting at the breakfast bar in my parents’ house I started making the phone calls. First was Francie in Auckland who started packing her boys into the van—she could be there
in an hour and a half—and then Sharon in Denver, Colorado. I spoke to her just days ago to let her know Tupe was in hospital. Her husband Mark answered the phone.

“Hey Mark, it’s Shelly.”

“Oh Hi Shel, what’s up?”

“Well, I think I’d better talk to Sharon, but stay there because she’s gonna need a hug.”

“Oh, okay. Hold on and I’ll just get her.”

There was no greeting, no hello or how are you when she got on the line, just “How’s Tupe?”

Every time I called someone else in the family to pass on the news I started each phone call composed and calm and then broke down as soon as I described Tupe’s condition. He’s completely unresponsive. He can’t talk or move his arms or legs, and because of his heart the doctors can’t continue tests to pinpoint the cause of the internal bleeding which is continually weakening him. He isn’t expected to recover. The nurses have told Nana and Maureen, “Anyone who can get here should come as soon as they can,” and are apologising every time they walk in and out of the room. “We’re so sorry.”

For hours I tried to get hold of Dione in Darwin, Australia. It was very early in the morning there and I couldn’t figure out why no one would answer the phone; I let it ring for minutes at a time. Eventually I called the Darwin police—her husband Shaun is a police officer. They got hold of her and she called me. The phone is quiet and it simply didn’t wake anyone up, she explained. I told her what’s happening and then we left, the same two cars full of young cousins who travelled together two days ago, the
same faces being pulled and tongues being poked out at each other as we leapfrog our way along SH1, but a new uneasiness and urgency behind it all. Our Tupe is dying.

And now we are here, pulling into the parking lot and barely taking the time to stretch as we pull Lainn out of his car seat and lock the cars behind us, almost running up the road to the hospital entrance, temporary because of construction, and banging the lift button again and again until the doors open and swallow us up to regurgitate us on the fourth floor. Our eyes question Maureen who is standing in the hallway and there is sudden relief as we see her lined but smiling face. He’s still alive. There’s still time for our parents to get here to be with their dying father. He’s still alive.

We file past the quiet group of friends and relations in the hallway. Tupe is sleeping now, not unconscious. Nana tells us he has even been talking, although his speech is slow and slurred. The heart failure has affected him like a stroke. Kristi takes Lainn for a walk and I sit by Tupe, holding his hand. I will him to feel my love. My cousin Andrea sits at the other side of the bed; her eyes tell me she is doing the same thing. We are here now. And the next thing to worry about is whether or not our parents will make it in time.

More relations arrive: Tupe’s nieces and nephews, distant cousins and friends. We take turns alternately being in the room with him or standing out in the hallway. My boy cousins have overtaken the dayroom as they test their wheelchair skills, and my girl cousins and I claim a quiet corridor corner with two Lazy-Boys and three shelves full of decades old *National Geographics*. While we wait for our parents to arrive we sit, our red, blonde, and light brown hair reflecting the sunlight that shines on us.
through an open window. We sit in the warmth and start getting to know each other in our varying stages of young-adulthood. We have only known each other as children.

Kristi’s green eyes are glistening with held-in tears. “I know I’m Maori,” she says, her cheeks flushed pink under a mass of freckles. “And I know that it was Tupe who taught me that. But I could never tell you how he taught me.”

I feel tears in my throat.

“I feel exactly the same,” says Andrea, her brown eyes replicas of Tupe’s. “And if you asked me, I couldn’t put a finger on exactly how he taught me Maoritanga, but I know for a fact it was him. It wasn’t as if he ever sat us down and said, ‘This is how to be Maori,’ but he might as well have.”

A nurse walks past. What would she think if she knew these three Pakeha girls were discussing their Maori heritage and how important it is in their lives? “Oh my gosh, you guys,” I say. “I never knew anyone else felt the same way as me. I could never explain to anyone how I felt. So maybe you can tell me how you feel about this—if Tupe is our connection to our Maoritanga, then what happens when he dies?”

“I don’t know.” Both girls shake their heads, Kristi biting the inside of her cheek.

“But I know what you mean,” says Andrea. “I mean, I’ve spent all these years taking Maori at college and now three years of total immersion so I can be a teacher. I speak Te Reo and I live completely immersed in the culture. Now, no one’s ever pressured me to do any of it, but I think it’s been for Tupe. If he’s not here any more, do I still want to do it? Can I still be this person without him?”
Can I? I can’t believe the three of us are sitting and discussing what it means to us to be Maori, and how that knowledge and pride came from the dying man down the corridor. No matter how much I go over and over it in my mind, I can only remember one time when Tupe actually did sit me down and tell me something about being Maori.

Now, now, you practice this, you practice this until you can recite your whole genealogy all the way from, from Adam and Eve until me and then your dad and then you. And you stand on the marae and you, you recite the whole thing, oh, sometimes it can take hours, but that’s what makes them give you respect, aye, knowing you can recite the whole thing. All your whakapapa. All the way from Adam and Eve. And then you stand in front of them, you stand in front of them, tall and proud, proud, proud of who you are because you can tell them who you are, oh, and you stand in front of them, of the elders on the marae who say you shouldn’t speak, and you stamp your foot, you stamp your foot and say, “I AM YOUR RANGATIRA!” And you look them in the eye because you know who you are, all the way from Adam and Eve, and you’ve proven it to them, that’s the only way they will see you have mana, if you prove it to them.

You recite your whakapapa, slowly, oh, you’ve got to say it slowly, that way they’ll have to listen to it, you recite your whakapapa and you stamp your foot and say, “I AM YOUR RANGATIRA!” “I AM YOUR RANGATIRA!” And then it won’t matter, cah, it won’t matter that
you’re not a man, and that you’re only young, it won’t matter that you’re only a girl if you can say your whakapapa. If you can say your whakapapa that means everything. Cah, cause you know, there’s not many Maoris who know their whakapapa today, that’s why everything’s dying. That’s why everyone’s forgetting. If you don’t know where you come from, you don’t know who you are, oh, not many Maoris know who they are anymore. But we’ve been through a lot to get this far, though, cah, we’ve been through a lot.

You know, me and Mum, we didn’t teach your dad and your uncles and your Aunty Gaylene what it means to be Maori, because when they were little it was still bad to be a Maori, cah, we couldn’t get any work, any money, we had no land, no language and no way to be Maori. I wanted them to be happy and have all the things the Pakeha have, so I let them be Pakeha. I let them be Pakeha and they never knew what it means to be Maori. Cah, they still don’t. So when you kids came along, we had to teach you. Take you to the marae to the tangis and listen to the speeches and take you to the urupa and tell you the stories about your, your tupuna. You know those stories, you all know those stories because we told them to you and now look at you. You look like a Pakeha, but oh, you’re more Maori than, more Maori than all the rest of them. You know who you are. Not them. Ask them who they are, where they come from, cah, and they’ll, they’ll tell you what street they live on!
You never forget who you are. You're Maori, and that's special. That's mana, that's your mana. That's strong.

But surely he was teaching me about who I am, about being a strong person, strong in the knowledge of my ancestors and where I came from. Surely he was teaching me about my mana, which I have irrespective of the colour of my skin. He was teaching me to be myself, the person it is inevitable I become because of where I come from, not about belonging to any particular culture, Maori or otherwise. He was teaching me to be strong in spite of Maori traditions, not because of them. Speak on the marae, he said, even if you are only a girl. I step away from myself and look at the three of us sitting there. We each have mana, and that's because of Tupe. This is the beginning of an important time together, sharing our understanding of ourselves.
Two

I'm sitting in Tupe's hospital room. It's quiet. Tupe is sleeping and we are waiting, waiting for my aunties and uncles to arrive from all over the world. I have no idea where Lainn is but I'm glad someone's taken him away. I feel completely drained. Most of the people in the room are murmuring quietly in conversation or reading. What is it about hospitals that makes people read so much? Sheer boredom? Anyway, I'm not bored enough to read the six-year-old Woman's Weekly I've been flicking through for ten minutes now. I watch Tupe, his tan skin sunken in on his cheeks and his hairline further back than I remember, but basically he's still my Tupe. How much time have you spent in my thoughts over the years? Why has this little granddaughter revered you with such awe for so long?

When Chris and I were in Hawaii and I was just beginning to do something about my dream to be a writer, I wrote a story about Tupe and me. I know now, it was so romanticised, so mystical and surreal, but that was how I've always seen my relationship with him.

Whitau and Gold

In ancient times there was, in Aotearoa, a master carver, and he was ancient, even for his time. He knew his art well and was revered by his people. Each carving produced by his hands was created with the utmost reverence, and hence demanded extreme respect at its completion, but one day, as he completed one pendant in particular, he felt that it was special. He also knew it would be his last.
His thick but graceful hands caressed the bone. Wairua throbbed throughout the carving, coursing through each masterfully created swirl and curve. Every component of the fish hook had been sculpted with meticulous time and care, and the master carver felt warm peace now that the final stroke was made and tapu had been observed in the making. He had exercised every gift he possessed (and he possessed many great gifts) and the product issued unprecedented strength. Surely, he thought to himself, this example of peerless craftsmanship (for he modestly knew that the gods had allowed him to be their best carver) will adorn the breast of only the truest warrior with the mightiest spirit.

But he knew that warrior had not yet been born, nor was such a leader yet needed. In the dark hours of a misty morning, he pushed his canoe away from the shore by his hapu’s pa and paddled many, many miles to the little island called Aotea. When he arrived he slept, for his old body was ready to return to the earth mother, Papatuanuku. As soon as he was able (and it was night-time again, by then) he climbed the nearest mountain and travelled along the ridges until he reached a place, the name of which he knew not, but it overlooked the sea, and he could go no further, had he wanted to.

Here, with his hands, he dug into the soggy earth beneath a ponga tree. When he reached the warm roots, he produced the bone carving from under his cloak. He uttered incantations to Tane Mahuta, god of the forest, asking Tane to watch over this treasure until the gods decided the world was ready. And then he wrapped the fishhook in flax, put it deep into the hole, covered it, lay down, and went to sleep for the last time.
In another time, a young man climbed up to the same ridge. He wasn’t sure why he was there, but the coolness of the forest air and the magic of its quiet soothed his soul. He had lived in the small bay at the foot of this mountain for his whole life, but somehow he had never been to this part of the ridge before. He arrived at an ancient ponga tree with magnificent silver ferns sprouting from its base. Also at the foot of this tree was a small, moss covered mound, and here the young man knelt to pray.

When he finished his karakia (it had not been an unusual prayer; this had just seemed like a nice, peaceful place to pray) he noticed a hollow in the ground between the mossy mound and the huge tree. He thought he saw a pale light emanating from the hole, but dismissed it as sunlight through the canopy playing games on him. When he thought he saw the glow again, a curiosity came over him (and it was not in his nature to be very curious) and he dug into the hole, finding that the earth came away easily. Soon his hands touched something that felt different from the moist earth. He grasped it and brought out of the hole a clump of rotted flax fibres. Not knowing what guided his actions, he pulled the fibres apart and soon held only a dirty, simply carved piece of bone. On his way back down the mountain he stopped to wash the bone in a creek. Now, he knew this creek to contain minerals which some claimed could do miracles—heal, purify, and cleanse—like no other water. As soon as he dipped the carving into the water, the young man could see that although it was simple, this fishhook was more precious than anything he had ever seen. He rushed down the mountain to show his family, but by the time he arrived he had changed his mind, for he realised that no one
would understand how he found it, or how he knew it was special, for he himself barely understood.

The young man grew to be a leader in his tribe, a kaumatua, an elder who people came to for advice. He married, moved onto the bigger island (where the master carver had lived, but the kaumatua never did know that) and had six children, and although they were Maori like him, they lived in a time when their people were in turmoil, and the kaumatua was wise enough to bring them up in the way of the Pakeha, the white people, so that they would have more opportunities in the new Aotearoa. But he never was able to bring himself to wear that bone carving, nor to show it to anyone else.

His children all had children of their own, and because by then the Maori way was being taught in the schools, the kaumatua also taught his mokopuna to live the old values. He watched his grandsons closely, to see which of them showed the most promise, but his eldest son's youngest daughter was the strongest.

In her education she made him proud. Her love for Maoritanga was greater than any other he had known, though to look at her you would not have guessed. The kaumatua's wife was Pakeha, as was his eldest son's. Because of this, outwardly the girl was more Pakeha than Maori. Her freckled nose was wide at the bridge, yet it protruded at the tip. Her bones were built large, but the skin which sheltered them was a shade pinker than ivory. And although her mouth curved naturally for the korero, her lips were thin and colourless.

Her spirit was Maori but her body was Pakeha. When she tried to take the native side on Maori issues, her brown-skinned people turned her away. "We don't
need your Pakeha help. What would you know, any way?” When she tried to live the ways of the Pakeha, and ignore her singing spirit, her heart cried, and her dreams were filled with war and pain. But she knew who she was, and so did the kaumatua.

One thing he could not doubt was that the girl had mana. They already knew it through his whakapapa—he came through a high bloodline—but she was the one who had proven it. The kaumatua never had to give her any lessons; the knowledge, understanding, strength, and love of her heritage was innate in her. (He thanked the gods many times for that.)

When her father had been honoured with a powhiri at a new job, the girl had represented the whanau in karanga. She entered the paepae alone, leading her family and demanding that they be welcomed onto this new ground. Even her mum had cried as the girl returned the call of the tangata whenua.

“... Nga mate o te ao, haere atu ra, haere ...”

The girl had later described to the kaumatua how the spirits of her tupuna had warmed her soul that cold morning. She knew that she was their voice, their instrument, the only way they could still have their strength present in her day. The spirits of their dead lived in her, she said, and the kaumatua realised that the pendant he had hidden for so long had been made for his girl-grandchild. It was time for her to see it.

For days the kaumatua prepared himself, then, when he felt strong enough he made the trip back to Aotea and up to the quiet mountain ridge. But it wasn’t the journey he had to be strong for; it was the blessing of the bone. He knelt at the same mossy mound and removed the tapu from the carving so that his mokopuna would be
able to wear it. As he did so, he felt the mound of earth move, almost breathe (and he
didn't know it, but it was the ancient master carver sighing in relief), and the kaumatua
wondered what connection the bone carving had with this place. When it was done he
returned.

In pure gentleness the kaumatua lifted the bone carving over the girl's head and
settled it on her soft skin. It was a new weight around her neck but one which she
treasured, fully understanding the mana this adornment held. She put her hand
protectively over the carving, pressing it to the hollow between her breasts as her soul
began to quench its thirst from the source therein. The gold chain she habitually wore
around her neck glistened beside the dull, hand-woven flax fibre that the kaumatua had
fashioned for the bone to hang from. The girl thought to herself that she might have to
stop wearing the gold necklace if it wouldn't sit comfortably next to the flax whitau, but
it had been a gift from her mother, so she hoped she wouldn't have to.

The kaumatua took the girl's hands in his and she knelt by his feet. She listened
as he recalled aloud, for the first time, how he had been led up the mountain to find the
bone carving. He didn't know who had made it, he told her, but he was sure that it had
been saved by the gods for only she.

So be strong and brave, aye girl, he said to her, kia manawanui, kia kaha e
moko, because you are the one our people need. And the humble kaumatua, in a
display of all love for his mokopuna, uttered the words slowly, inspired by the spirits of
his tupuna. This fishhook will guide you in the ways of righteousness. Treat it with
respect, and you will always have our spirits with you.
In a rush of tears her blue eyes had glistened as girl and grandfather met in hongi and embrace. Her pale Pakeha skin had felt soft to the touch of his weathered Maori face, then she returned with her family to their home across the island.

At times the bone carving around her neck would be a burden to wear, and the strong whitau would battle with the fine gold chain that wasn't content to share its place around her neck. The girl often had to spend hours untangling the mess which usually left the whitau worn, weakened, and twisted out of shape.

Sometimes at night she would see her koro in her dreams. He would come to her, urging her on to live in the ways of their people.

"I am Maori," she would then whisper to him as he listened, for her biggest struggle was over not being accepted by her own people because of the colour of her skin.

"Yes, you are Maori," he would confirm. "It is good for us that we have one like you. You will carry on when I leave."

Then she would wake, her pillow damp with tears and her head throbbing. "No Koro, don't leave me. You can't leave me," and the only way she could calm herself would be to sing his favourite hymn. "Whakaaria mai, to ripeka ki au. Tiaho mai, ra roto i te po . . ."

In the morning she would call him.

"I was thinking about you last night."

"I thought about you, too."

"I just wanted to let you know that I miss you."

"I miss you, too."
Her breathing would falter, then: "And I love you, Koro."

A pause, and, "I love you too, sweetheart." His aged voice travelled miles over hills and fields and lakes and streams to fill her head and heart with whatever it was that he had always given her. For a time it would be enough to ease her struggle.

She lay in bed one night restless and distant. Her karakia had been repeated, asking God to calm her, but to no avail. She didn't understand why she felt cold and alone in her Pakeha world, when nothing had changed to make it so. She sung quietly.

"... Kei konei au, titiro atu ai, ora mate, hei au koe noho ai..."

She woke from her fitful slumber with a start.

"KORO!"

He faded from the dream as consciousness invaded his image. Silently her soul poured out, "No Koro, no. Don't say goodbye. Don't Koro, don't leave me. I need you Koro... My Koro..."

At the same time, across the island, the kaumatua's spirit rose from his body. He was greeted in the after-world by his father and brothers, his wife, his grandparents, and the others who had gone before whom he had only ever heard about. And from amongst them all came one whom he had never seen before nor been told of. He was an ancient man, with mana the kaumatua could sense just by looking at his tattooed face. The two met in hongi and then the ancient master carver said to the kaumatua, "You found her. You made the one who will save our people." And both men smiled smiles which showed that the only joy that had ever eluded them in their lives had now been fulfilled.
When the girl and her family arrived for the tangi she once again stood as kaikaranga. Her call echoed out across the marae, her heart broken and her voice undulating as her soul weakened.

"Karanga mai ki te whanau o Ponga Kingi no Ngatiwai. Karanga mai, karanga mai, karanga mai . . ."

Slowly they all stepped. The others were holding each other but she stood alone. Even he was not with her. She remembered nothing except her koro. They entered the wharenui and she saw the now old kaumatua. There were pounamu patu and kauri taiaha lying on the korowai, with handles directed towards his face. Eyes closed. Lifeless. She wailed with more energy than even the kuia had ever seen, heard, or felt, calling for him, until finally she crumpled down by his heart.

The others left her. Even with their small understanding of the old ways, they knew this had to be done, and in her own time, too. With one hand holding the bone to her chest, the girl had leaned down slowly and kissed the aged cheek.

"E noho ra, e koro," she willed the words through closed eyes to his spirit. "Ka kite—ano." And it was done. The world which once belonged to the two of them was now hers alone.

The night after the tangi was over she lay in her bed at home and sobbed until her body could no longer resist lapsing into unconsciousness. She tore at the bed covers, dreaming of taniwha and pakeha grasping at her throat, but all the time she saw her koro and another, ancient-looking man, standing as kaitiaki, fighting off her tormentors with their taiaha.
When she awoke in the morning and lifted her legs over the side of the bed, something cold slipped past her knees, landing with a dull thud in a tiny, shining heap on the floor. She reached down to pick it up and found that it was her gold necklace, broken, twisted, and torn into two separate pieces. Instinctively she drew her hand to her heart. The bone carving was warm to her touch.

Well, so far things haven't gone as I expected. I didn't feel anything when Tupe got sick. I didn't know his heart failed last night. I don't feel like he's going to die now. But he's lived nearly a century—I have to be realistic. I may not be the one who's going to save the Maori race, but I should still know when my Tupe passes away. He's shaped me, and I'm sure his absence will shape me, too.
Three

We’re eating pizza in a hotel room in Whangarei. It’s close to midnight and finally all but one of Tupe’s children have arrived back in New Zealand. Tupe has made it through the day. We have all watched his eyes begin to sparkle again, watched strength return to his limbs and his presence of mind return with the gathering of his children. Kevin arrived first, early this afternoon, then Gaye and Mike soon after, and Syd and Dad about two hours ago. When we left the hospital half an hour ago Tupe was sitting up in bed. He should never have regained consciousness, but there he was drinking sips of juice and having coherent conversation. We’re not sure if the doctors have decided his strength should be the first priority, and they can worry later about the fact that it is irritating his stomach, or if they think that at this point they might as well give him what will make him happy in his last hours. Maybe they don’t know either. But we do know this: it doesn’t look like Tupe’s going to go anywhere until he’s brought all of his children together.

And he’s almost succeeded. I am surrounded by faces which only hours ago were lined and pale from worry and now are flushed with relief as they squabble over who gets the last piece of Hawaiian pizza. But they are all exhausted, and concern is crouching in the corners of their eyes. Nana, emotional at the best of times and beside herself often, has broken down repeatedly throughout the day as each of her children comforted her, removing from her the necessity of keeping up a strong façade. Tupe has slept on and off but has awoken from each nap with more to say to his children, more requests to be made and, it seems, more determination to live. He has asked after Bruce often, who is now expected to arrive tomorrow afternoon. My cousin Rachael, a
year younger than me, has requested to be included in this meeting to represent her parents. Lainn is asleep in a room across the hall, and now that we are starting to digest, the discussion starts. As the eldest, my Dad speaks.

“Well, we wanted to just take a few minutes to talk about what the situation is with Dad’s health, what, if any, are our options for his medical care, and what it looks like is happening from here on in. I don’t think I have much to say, but I wanted to make sure we all had the chance for input, and Rachael, we’re glad you’re here so that you can speak for your parents and report back to them what was discussed. Now Gaye, I think you know the most about Tupe’s health situation, so can you tell us all what you know?”

“Yes,” she says, “basically when the doctors were getting ready to do a laparoscopy to find out what was bleeding internally, his heart couldn’t handle the anaesthetic, so they stopped the procedure immediately. Apparently it weakened his heart so much that this morning his heart failed completely, and they had to resuscitate him. Now, it seems to have affected him like a stroke, with half of his body shutting down, but we’ve all seen that he seems to be growing stronger by the minute. He may recover, but I personally think he’s hanging on until Bruce gets here.”

There are nods all round and soft smiles directed at Rachael.

“So what happens now with his medical care?” Says Uncle Kevin.

“What happens now,” says Aunty Gaye, “depends on whether he keeps recovering by leaps and bounds the way he has done today. Right now all they can do is keep giving him regular transfusions of blood to replace what he’s losing, but they can’t do that indefinitely. If he doesn’t get strong enough for them to find out why he
is bleeding, then they can’t do anything to stop it, and it won’t take long before he weakens irreparably.”

I can see Rachael looking around the room at each of our aunties’ and uncles’ faces. “But they can’t just stop giving him the blood.”

We are all quick to alleviate her fears. “No, sweetheart,” says Gaye, “we’re not suggesting that at all. As long as they can keep giving him blood they will, but you can only bleed so long before your body just isn’t strong enough any more. And Tupe’s an old man. His body’s been getting tired for years and years.”

Dad re-enters the discussion. “No Rachael, don’t worry, we won’t ever decide to stop giving Tupe the medical care he needs to keep him alive. But I’m glad you asked that because we will need to address, at some point, whether or not Tupe should be resuscitated if his heart fails again.”

“I think we’ll have to ask Dad what his wishes are,” Uncle Syd speaks up in between mouthfuls of the last piece of Hawaiian pizza. “But if you ask me, I think we’re lucky to have had him around this long, and he’s been resuscitated once already. This is borrowed time now. Asking for more is just pushing it.” Many of us nod in agreement.

“He is almost 92 years old,” says Aunty Maureen.

“And he’s on oxygen,” says Aunty Gaye. “He’s not in pain but he isn’t comfortable, either. I think it would be selfish of us to want him to stay in that state for very long.”

“That’s right,” says Dad. “Now, is there anything else we need to discuss?”
“Yeah,” says Kevin, “Are we going to arrange shifts to stay with him during the night?”

“Yeah, thanks Kev,” says Dad, looking to the others for volunteers.

Aunty Gaye has been waiting for this. “I’ll take first shift.”

“And I’ll take second,” says Kevin.

“And I’ll go first thing in the morning,” says Mike.

“Okay, good,” says Dad. “You work out the times between you. Gaye, I’ll take you over there now and get Mum back here. She’s exhausted.”

“Let’s go,” says Aunty Gaye, and stands up. “Let me get one more piece of pizza and grab a drink to take with me.”

“So how are we supposed to have drinks without cups?” I ask, looking at my Dad as he pulls his famous “eeeerk” face. No way he’s going to drink out of a bottle anyone else has. I grab the nearest L&P bottle with a cheesy smile in his direction. As long as I drink first I’m fine.

“Oooh,” says Rachael, “Yuck, I don’t want your germs!” She smirks as she grabs another bottle.

“Oh, come on,” says Aunty Gaye, “what’s a few floatees among family?”

“Yeah,” says Uncle Syd, reaching for the bottle in my hands, “submarines never killed anyone.”

‘Cept a few Germans!” says Uncle Mike. The room echoes with laughs ranging from snickers to full belly laughs. The discussion is over. It’s time for bed.

I’m lying between the stiff hotel sheets listening to Kristi moaning in her sleep in the other bed and hoping she isn’t going to wake up Lainn in his cot across the room.
I listen and his breathing is still regular—fast and deep. I think about how Tupe is the last of his generation alive in his family. He is the oldest kaumatua in the Ngatiwai tribe. His last living sister died eight years ago, his other siblings long before that. I can see clearly in my mind the picture on the wall of the Homestead at Kaoa, the picture of Tupe with his grandmother and two brothers when Tupe was only a baby. He will be glad to join them, I think.

I remember staring at that photo as Tupe told us stories of his grandparents, our famed Tupuna Raihi and Tupuna Kino, who changed their name first from Rewiti to Davis, because they knew they were living in a changing world and wanted the best for their children and grandchildren, and then again, from Davis to Davies, because the Davis family in the next bay was stealing their groceries, and they wanted the orders to be separated.

Through them we are Ngati Porou and Ngatiwai. Through them we have a rich heritage of generosity and decency. When the SS Wairarapa sunk at Great Barrier Island in 1894, Tupuna Kino organised rescue parties, first to recover all the survivors, and then to find and bury the dead. I grew up visiting the white picket-fenced mass grave and hearing the stories of the mother who was found dead holding her dead baby in her arms so tightly they could not be separated, and the cabin boy who had held onto the mast so long that his fingers had to be chopped of with an axe so they could get him down. I heard descriptions of how Tupuna Raihi took the 78 survivors in and fed them and made clothes for them out of flour sacks and sheets. I read in history books of how the island got phone lines because the Union Steam Ship Company wanted to reward Raihi and Kino, and they wouldn’t accept the offered first class world trip.
This is who I am. Raihi and Kino's great great granddaughter. Tupe's granddaughter. A child, grandchild, great-grandchild and great great grandchild of those who were good and proud and strong, of those who had mana, and I have mana because of them. Because of their blood which flows through my veins. Because of their stories which live in my spirit. I have developed a sense of my identity through the stories that Tupe told me, through the knowledge that he passed on. We all did. Does he know that? Can he see it in us? Does he see how much of him is in us? I want him to be in Lainn, too, but now Tupe is lying in a hospital bed, and I don't know if he'll ever get up to walk away from it. Where does that leave us?
Four

We’re sitting in Tupe’s hospital room again and it’s early on Saturday morning. I feel like there are cobwebs behind my eyes. None of us has had enough sleep, but we are here and happy to see that after an uneventful night Tupe seems to be comfortable.

“Kev,” he says as he beckons towards Uncle Kevin.

“Yes Dad? What can I get for you?”

“I want a hair cut.”

A passing nurse shakes her head. “Oh-ho no you don’t,” she says, “You don’t need a hair cut right now.”

“And a shave,” he says, reaching out his hand to Uncle Kevin again. The nurse looks at Kevin, warning in her eyes. Uncle Kevin takes Tupe’s hand.

“How about we wait until you’re feeling a bit stronger, aye Dad?” He says.

“No, no,” says Tupe. “Kevin, I want a hair cut and a shave. Go on, you can do it now. I’m fine.” He’s getting agitated.

“Okay, Dad, I brought the electric shaver with me. I’ll give you a shave now, Okay? We can do the haircut a bit later after you’ve had a rest. How’s that?”

“Righto,” he says, and relaxes back into his pillows. I look at my parents and the others in the room who are flipping through magazines or looking down at their hands on their laps. Tupe wants to look good because he expects to be laid out at his funeral for all to see. He wants to go out with style. After his shave he goes to sleep with a sly smile on his face.

With Lainn I can’t spend much time in the hospital room. He’s doing amazingly well considering the huge amount of energy he has packed into his tiny body
and the confined spaces we keep forcing him into. Again we retreat to our sunny corner with Rachael, Andrea, Kristi, Lauren, Ammon and the two creaking leather Lazy-Boys.

“So, why do you call him Tupe anyway?”

“Aw,” Lauren says in her Australian accent, “Hees Dad was called Tupe first, because one of the little grandkeeds couldn’t say tupuna, so eet was just like ‘tupee’.”

We all join in, in our baby voices: “Tupe, Tupe!”

“Yeah,” says Rachael, “So then when Tupe became a grandfather we started calling him Tupe and his dad Old Tupe.”

“I want to go back to the Barrier,” I say.

Suddenly we are all talking over each other about our favourite place in the whole world: Great Barrier Island. Growing up, this was where Nana and Tupe lived, and where we all spent every holiday, a mountainous green protrusion in the sea off the East Coast of Auckland. It’s a place that takes hold of your soul so you lose part of yourself when you leave. Each house has to generate its own electricity by diesel engine, and the phone system is a party line, not like party, fun; if you’re on the phone, anyone on the same side of the island can listen in. The few roads are not sealed, and if it rains two consecutive days they become torrents of liquid clay which no vehicle can navigate, leaving each family isolated on its own farm. But the land is fertile, the native forest is lush and the coastline and cool sea are begging artists to capture them on canvas. It’s always been my very own place to escape to.

An image flashes through my mind of running between a crooked circle of tents around the bach on a moonless night. I can hear the sound of my cousins’ muffled
giggles, panting breath and footsteps behind me and I can see the beam of a flashlight dancing in and out of view. The next image is of the feeling of cool grass on my face, the hot burn of a tent-robe on my ankle, and tepid cow dung oozing between my fingers. I can’t help but smile. Suddenly we are comparing our favourite memories of the house, the bush, the legends . . . This was where we got to know Tupe and where we got to know ourselves: the Barrier.

This was always my favourite part, coming over the top of the hill and then winding down into the bay. Usually we would make the trip on an open trailer which was pulled along the clay road behind the old red tractor. It was certainly less than graceful—each lurch and turn would find you sometimes clinging to your cousins or the side of the trailer to keep from going over the edge, or other times desperately trying to push an over packed suitcase off your chest where it had just landed so you could breathe. No, not graceful, by any means, but fun. How can you be thrown by an inconsiderate rock on the road onto your cousin’s lap (well, second cousin, once removed) and not laugh? Especially when last time you saw him he had zits and pudgy cheeks and suddenly, in only a year, he has silky olive skin and blue eyes and not only cheekbones but an astounding jaw line as well? And you’re fifteen and you figure since he’s seventeen then your maturity levels are almost even—well, you’re not that far ahead of him anyway—and suddenly you’re sitting in his lap and you’re hoping you haven’t broken his knees at the same time as wondering how long you can linger in that position without making it obvious. What can you do in a situation like that but blush and laugh? I mean, with the tractor coughing out diesel smoke in between fingernails-down-the-blackboard gear changes it’s not like you could say something suave and
sophisticated—"Just thought I'd drop in. Hope you don't mind." So you climb off and try to squeeze into a space in between a tent, a kerosene lamp and bossy Aunty Kaye who you've been trying to avoid since the airstrip.

Oh, the airstrip! Those little six-seater Cessnas (or eight, if we were really lucky) had to make a low pass over the Okiwi airstrip to scare the sheep to one side of the paddock before we could land. We all have some hair-raising stories about those landings.

And those tractor rides were memorable. But sometimes, if we didn't arrive on the same day as everyone else, and if the jeep was actually working and it hadn't rained in the past week so the roads would be okay, we would cruise into the bay in all the heads-down-shoulders-hunched-bum-bruising luxury of the back of the jeep. Since we didn't have to work so hard at keeping ourselves alive, we could actually look out the windows (if you slid them open or scraped off the mud) and watch as the twinkling blue of the water slipped in and out of view between manuka trees and orange and purple clay banks as we snaked slowly downward into the bay.

Then, at the bottom of the big hill, after one last breath-holding strain of the engine we would make it up the small—but steep—hill to the homestead. (Usually, that is. Sometimes the poor old girl couldn't make it and we'd all have to jump out halfway up the hill to lighten the load, and maybe even push.) Nana would come trotting down the ramp from the veranda, wiping her hands on her apron, her cheeks, ruddy from cooking over the wood range, framed by a thin white home perm. By the time she reached us she would have tears running between the folds of her neck, which she would dab away with her apron. Everyone who arrives at the Kaoa Homestead gets a
hug they can sink into and a few love-drenched tears. I used to think it was the place alone that was so special.

Tupe would usually be sitting in his chair grumbling at all the grandchildren to stop jumping on the furniture or stop making so much noise. The living room would quickly fill up with people and luggage, so most of the bags, suitcases, camping equipment and boxes of groceries piled up on the veranda. If latecomers were lucky, there would be a pathway just wide enough so they could walk heel-to-toe all the way to the sliding glass door. If they were even luckier, they would get there without flattening somebody’s loaves of bread or having a close encounter with some tent poles. But we never stayed all together inside the house like that for long. The grandchildren would swarm into groups by approximate age and decide where they would go exploring first.

“Hey, Mum, can we go down to the beach to find crabs?”

“Mum, can we go swimming?”

“Nana, can we go see if the chooks have laid any eggs?”

But there was one place I always wanted to go first. “Mum, we’re going to the water hole, okay?” Of course, we were never allowed to leave straight off like that. Sometimes a group of little blonde heads would be bobbing through the rushes on the way to the chook run before someone would notice and there would be shouts of, “Andrea, Lisa, Kristi, Melissa, KARL!! Get back here!” And the heads would stop bobbing and turn to reveal pouting faces saying, “Aw, Mum!” and they would slowly wend their way back to the house. There were always responsible adult things to do like figure out who was going to sleep where, and then get settled in. The latest
newlyweds or whoever had the youngest baby would get the spare bedroom. Everyone else headed down into the main paddock to clear away cow-patties, lay out tarpaulins and set up flies. Only then could we head off to conquer our untamed country once again, to rule it for the holidays.

Being one of the oldest and bossiest, I would lead the party to the waterhole. The Homestead had a short supply of running water, so we were instructed to use the long drop most of the time and if we did have to go in the house then we were only to flush when absolutely necessary, and we knew what that meant. It also meant that while the adults could shower in the homestead, the kids all had to have baths every day in the waterhole. I simply had to lead the exploration party which would rediscover, and if necessary, do some reconstruction of our waterhole.

It was about a kilometre away from the house, and you had to walk through a paddock, a disused orchard, and a thin track between the manuka to get there. Well, you did until the year the whales were beached, anyway. Then you walked through a paddock and between the orchard and the big whale graveyard—a large clearing which oozed the foul-smelling decay of 160 whales for a couple of years before grass started to grow over it—and then along a clay road almost up to the waterhole itself, which the graders had cleared at the same time as they dug the grave for the whales. I always thought it was a shame the road was there. Making our waterhole more accessible made it less romantic and mystical in my mind.

Emerging through the manuka, we would catch our first glimpse. Here, the creek made a ninety-degree turn and in the elbow the water had dug deep into the clay banks and formed a pool about four metres in diameter. Its depth, however, none of us
could tell you—for two reasons. First of all, each year storms and flooding changed the shape and character of the waterhole, and second, none of us would venture all the way into the deepest part, right up against the bank, for fear of the prehistoric toe-biting eels our uncles were always warning us about.

From where we stood, you had to climb down a metre-high bank using the footholds and roots which had literally been used for generations before us. Then you would pick your way through a few ferns and try not to slip on the moss as you stepped down yet another bank, only about 30 centimetres high this time, onto the rocks which ran along the edge and extended into the water. We rarely ventured over to the side where the creek entered the pool, since that meant crossing the darkest water, but the outlet was subject to our imaginations every year. It was a narrow, shallow, but rapid stretch twisting to look like the eels we were so terrified of. We would move rocks to create waterfalls, build terraces, or see how long we could plug the flow before the water would burst through. Once I remember digging out a small pool in a ring of rocks and trying to coerce all my cousins into washing their clothes in it.

Most of our days went something like: wake up with the sun, help Nana milk the cows, separate the milk, feed the chooks, collect the eggs, have a feast of fresh butter-fried snapper for breakfast (graciously caught by some of the uncles or us if we were really lucky), then into our togs for a swim at the beach. When we were tired of swimming we needed to wash off all the salt, so we would traiipse off to the water hole. When we had dried off we were ready for a swim at the beach again. Needless to say, I remember sunburn blisters over sunburn blisters, and most of my blonde-and-red-haired clan now runs a high risk of skin cancer.
But no matter how many times we had been in and out of the icy mountain water in the creek, towards the end of the day before the shadows got too long, we would all return once again with our towels, soap, shampoo and conditioner, and when we girls hit puberty, razors to shave our legs and underarms. We loved knowing that literally for generation upon generation, our ancestors had come here to do the same things. We tried to imagine what they must have been like at our age. What clothes did they wear? What did they talk like? Did they fight with their cousins like we did? When they went home from the waterhole, what was home like? It gave us plenty of questions to go back to Nana and Tupe with.

Another thing we loved about it was the water itself. Nana always said that because the water came down off the mountains it was mineral water, having run over so many kinds of rocks before it reached us. I don’t know if there’s any scientific evidence to support that, but I do know my hair was never softer than when I washed it in the waterhole, and when we drank upstream, water never tasted so good.

I wonder if it tastes as good now. In fact, we are wondering, with Nana and Tupe not there, will any of it be the same? Will watering row after row in the garden be as satisfying knowing Tupe is not looking out over the veranda watching me, making sure the strawberries get enough water and the kumara doesn’t get too much? Will going up to the marae be as peaceful without Tupe walking beside us to tell us stories about every landmark we pass?

It won’t ever be the same. We know time is running out. We’ll never be those barefoot kids again and we’ll probably never have another Christmas in the homestead, or New Year’s bonfire on the beach. What will it be like with no Tupe? I mean, I
know he lives, will always live through the memories of him, but what will it be like to
be at Nana and Tupe’s house with big, warm, soft Nana to cuddle and no Tupe’s feet to
kneel at, no Tupe’s stories to listen to, stories that never end because one blends into
the next, no Tupe standing next to me on the veranda as I look out over the murky sea
and manuka-covered ridges, no Tupe pointing out with his walking stick who is buried
where, and what kind of life they lived. I close my eyes and I can see him, see the
view from the window, see his weatherworn hand pointing to the top of the ridge to the
east . . .

You know who’s buried up there, right up there above Onepoto?

My Aunty Raiha. She was Tupuna Raihi and Tupuna Kino’s eldest
daughter, and oh, she was beautiful. All the boys knew—even all the
boys on the mainland—that she was beautiful, and they would come from
all over to court her. Cah, yes, that’s her, that’s her picture on the wall
up at the house. She had long, straight, black-black hair that made her
look like an Indian princess. Oh, she was beautiful. But she died when
she was only young, oh, ‘bout 21 she must have been when she died, and
it was a big mystery, oh yes. Everyone in our family knows about her,
because you all see that photo up on the wall, but all anyone knows is
that she died young and she was very beautiful. It’s very mysterious, oh.
But Old Tupe told me once, I was probably about your age, oh, he told
me the real story.
When Raiha was oh, 'bout 21 years old, she got sick and just died. Cah, it was very sudden, and no one really knew why or what was wrong with her, she just took sick and died. I was very young but I remember when it happened. Oh, the old people, they mourned her. They couldn’t get over losing their beautiful Raiha. I couldn’t understand any of it. But then Old Tupe told what happened me because he wanted me to understand what kind of family I come from—what kind of heritage we have and what we believe in.

Oh, he said, one of those young men who came to the island to court my Aunty Raiha, one of them was young and handsome and educated and very charming, too charming, Old Tupe said, because he really caught Raiha’s eye. But before she knew it, he was gone and she was pregnant, and oh, in those days that was a terrible thing to have happen, not like now when all these young girls are having babies by themselves. Oh no, in those days a woman would rather die than be an unwed mother, and that’s what she did. I don’t know if she died of shame or of a broken heart. Oh it was terrible. All the old people watched her wither away. They said she just lost her will to live, so she died. Cah, imagine that. Dying of a broken heart.

I remember Uncle Syd taking me up to that cemetery, up there along the ridge of the hill, and I remember him pointing out her grave. It is hidden in the shadows of the pohutukawa trees, being reburied with their blood-red flowers at the end of every
summer. Her gravestone is cracked and I've always believed it was from the earth sighing. I think our whenua knows how sad she was and feels sorry for her. She lies there and her picture stays on the wall in the homestead while the whole family reveres her, this beautiful woman who died too young, who died from a mysterious illness.

And one story leads into another—they have no beginning or end, really—and Raiha's story leads to stories about burial grounds and the tapu land we were never allowed to walk on. I can see Tupe pointing again, this time below the ridge . . .

Oh, you never go on that tapu, no, because it is sacred to us. That Tapu over there towards Monono, you never go in there because that is where our old people are buried. There are graves all over the place in there and none of them are marked, cah, some of them we don't even know who is buried there! But the old chiefs were buried in there by the beach, Te Mariri, he was the last chief on the island, and up along the creek, there are others buried up there, and we don't ever want to disturb them. You leave them alone to rest and don't bother them, no. They lived their lives and earned our respect and we will give it to them by letting them rest in their graves.

Oh, and over here, this tapu below the schoolhouse, you never go in there either. Cah, you stay right away from there. Oh, an old woman used to live in there, Mere Tiaho, she was called, and she, she was a tohunga, a witch. And she could curse people—put makutus on them. Oh, this Mere, she had a beautiful daughter and she wanted Te Mariri's
oldest son to marry her. Well this son, he didn’t want to get married and settle down. He wasn’t ready yet, so he said he wouldn’t marry the daughter, even if she was very beautiful. And the old woman went and put a makutu on him, and he died! And then she wanted Te Mariri’s next son to marry her daughter, but he didn’t want to either, so she put a makutu on him and he died too.

Well, the young people of the bay, they were outraged. We’re not going to put up with this, they said, and cah, they rose up together and turned her curses back onto her and she died. Well, the daughter left and the house stood here untouched until it fell down. And we’ve never touched this land since. It is tapu, and you won’t go in there unless you want something bad to happen.

I had to go through that land once as we rounded up the sheep. I was about twelve years old, and I was furious at Uncle Syd for making me go in there. As soon as I stepped through the trees into the clearing I was sure I could hear voices whispering and see shadows moving towards me. I was barely breathing as I ran after those sheep, and I fell flat on my face as I tripped over the root of a pohutukawa tree on my way out. I was sure that Mere Tiaho had pushed me.

No matter how many stories he has told me, I will still never know them all. If only I can have a few more days with him, a few more hours, one more story. If only.
Five

Late on Sunday evening I call Clare in Hamilton. We’ve been best friends since we were ten so she’s known Tupe a long time.

“Hello Possum!” She says. “So how’s Tupe?”

“It’s amazing,” I say. “By Saturday night he was sitting up in bed and feeding himself soup.”

“And he couldn’t even talk when Aunty Maureen first called you?”

“No. We’ve just watched him get stronger and stronger, and by the time Bruce and Jackie got here we were all joking that he just pulled this stunt to get the family together again. Uncle Kevin cut his hair and if you ignore the IVs and oxygen mask, from the twinkle in his eye you’d think he was ready to head out for an evening of dancing or something. In fact, he’s been talking about working in his garden and going fishing. He reckons he’ll be home by Tuesday.”

“And what do you think?”

“I just don’t know. But he has been doing really well.”

“Oh, good. I’ve been waiting to see how he was. How’s Nana?”

“Relaxing a bit but still exhausted.”

“I can imagine. How about you?”

“How am I?”

“Yeah. Are you okay? I mean, it’s not as if you needed anything else to deal with right now.”

“No, I’m fine. Last night I went swimming with all the boys in the pool at the hotel. It was cool—we made big whirlpools. I haven’t done anything like that for
years. And then I just melted in the spa pool. It was good relaxation therapy. Actually, I probably haven’t been in a spa pool since your house in Feilding. It felt sooo good, just drew out all the tension and washed it all away.”

“Ooh, now I want one.”

“Take a bath.”

“Oooh. I just might, Sweetie. So are you going to stay up there much longer?”

“Well,” I say, “I want to stay as long as I can, just in case, but by this afternoon most of the family was ready to go home. It doesn’t seem like Tupe’s going anywhere in a hurry, and in any case everyone’s thinking if he does die now, we’ve all had a chance to spend time with him, you know? And my Aunties and Uncles all have jobs and things to take care of at home and my cousins have to get back to school, and being here any longer isn’t going to help Tupe. So Aunty Kaye and Aunty Maureen have both taken their kids home to Hamilton, and I could only convince Mum and Dad to stay one more night.”

“Oh, that’s good,” she says, “because I want you to come to the movies with me on Wednesday!”

“Thanks for the compassion, darling.”

“You know I’m kidding, Sweetie. I mean it’s good that you’re staying another night because what if he’s just been hanging on until he saw everyone together, and now he’ll be able to go peacefully?”

“Exactly. It might be tonight for all we know. We’ve all agreed that having his children here gives him too much strength during the daytime. If he’s going to die now it will probably be in his sleep during the night while only Aunty Gaye’s there—she’s
been keeping watch every night. I'm going to go up there soon and stay for a few
hours.

"Is your mum going to stay at the hotel with Lainn?"

"Yeah."

"How's he been?"

"Pretty good, really. Lots of cousins to play with him and take him for walks.
How are the girls?"

"Really good, but I stopped them watching *Teletubbies* because their language
development was regressing, so they're mad at me."

"I've vowed never to let Lainn watch *Teletubbies*. It drives me up the wall!
Kids love it though."

"Yeah, I know. I went to a morning tea for the Multiple Birth Society the other
day and we were all talking about it. I was talking to this woman who has twins
the same age as Holly and Dana, and she said putting *Teletubbies* on is the only way she
gets anything done, but I still can't stand the way they talk, and the girls were starting
to talk the same as them."

Aunty Gaye walks into the hotel room and gestures that it's time to go.

"Oh, hey, I've gotta go now," I say.

"Okay. Thanks for letting me know what's happening. So, movies on
Wednesday?"

"Deal. What are we gonna go see?"

"Who cares? I just want to get out of the house. Shall we do lunch, Possum?"

"Okay, Sweetie. Nachos at The Bank?"
“Absolutely, Possum. See you soon.”

When Aunty Gaye and I get up to Tupe’s room he is already asleep. Nana says he’s been telling stories today and I’m mad I missed them. We send Nana away to get some sleep and relax into the worn armchairs with our books. But we haven’t had time to catch up yet, not just the two of us, so we talk quietly.

“So how are you, Shelly?” I know she’s talking about the divorce.

“I’m okay, I think. I’m still just trying to put everything back together.”

“It’ll come,” she says. “I can see it in you, like we’ve all got it in us. You can’t avoid it—the Davies are strong whether we like it or not, you know.”

“Well, I don’t feel very strong right now. I hardly feel like I’m here at all.”

“But you did the right thing, Shel, you needed to get out of there. It wasn’t good for you.”

“I hope I did the right thing.”

“You did, I’m sure of it.”

“I still love Chris, but I wasn’t a functioning person with him. His problems were hurting me too much and he wasn’t willing to fix them.”

“I know. That’s why you did the right thing. It’ll be okay. Lainn will be better off with you when you’re a whole person again. You’ve got a long line of strong people behind you, and it’ll come through when you need it most.”

“Thanks, Aunty Gaye. I wish you lived over here so we could talk more often.”

“Yeah,” she says, “me too.”
We sit in silence for a while and then start reading our books. It is late, after midnight, when we watch Tupe writhe under the crisp hospital sheets. We look at each other; she puts her book down and walks over to his side.

“Dad,” she says, rubbing his hand, “Are you in pain?”

He opens his eyes and seems surprised to see her there. “No,” he says.

“Alright then, go back to sleep.” She touches his cheek with the back of her hand and sits down again as he closes his eyes. His breathing slows and I look back down to the magazine I’m reading. Aunty Gaye picks up her book but doesn’t begin to read. In minutes his breathing becomes erratic again. As he tries to roll onto his side he groans. Again, Aunty Gaye stands and takes his hand.

“Dad,” she says. “Dad, are you in pain?”

“No,” he says.

“Does it hurt? Here?” She rubs his stomach.

“No. No.”

“Well what’s wrong? Were you dreaming?”

“Yes.”

“Who’s there?”

“Nupere.” His uncle. Dead.

“What does he want?”

“He says he’s worried that some of my children and grandchildren are not living right.”
“Well you tell him everyone is doing the best they can. Tell him to stop bothering you because you’ve done all you can and everyone is fine. Tell him to leave you alone so you can get some sleep.”

“Righto.”

This isn’t the first time Nupere has visited my grandfather. But we think it will be one of the last.

Growing up, I wondered why it was so easy for me to believe in ghosts. Clare and her family had one in their hundred-year-old house in Feilding. He regularly climbed the stairs and walked the upper level, opening and closing the door to each room as he inspected (so the story goes) the construction of the house which was completed after he went away to WWI and was killed. I had no problem believing that, but I didn’t make a habit of telling people about it. Most people don’t believe in ghosts. But I did. I had grown up with Tupe’s stories of the Lady in Black—Mere Tiaho—and the Lady in white—Raiha—who walked in her flowing night-dress across the veranda in front of the house, sometimes in broad daylight while various relations watched—even my Aunty Linda who only married into the family, whereas I was born into it. If they could come to her, then of course they would come to me.

In the middle of the night one holidays Aunty Linda was going to the longdrop because she and Uncle Mike were staying in the bach. In the moonlight something caught her attention, something white moving across the paddock. As she watched she could see it was a woman, all dressed in white, running towards the schoolhouse. She wasn’t afraid. The next day she told Tupe, and he said he thought it was his Aunty Raiha. Others had also seen her, and he felt she was there to watch over everyone and
protect the bay; she died of a broken heart and she wanted to make sure everyone else was happy and safe.

I have heard the story so often sometimes I have to remind myself it wasn’t me who saw her. I can see her so clearly in my mind, night-dress flowing in the wind, long shining black hair trailing after her, it’s hard to believe this is not a memory from my own experience.

The night passes and at noon on Monday we have come to the hospital to say goodbye to Tupe. We’ve checked out of the hotel and the question to be answered now is, “What next?” Tupe wants to be up and dressed and out of bed, so we all get shuffled out of the room. When he is sitting in a chair by the bed wearing trousers and a checked shirt, he asks to see all his children together. There are things he wants discussed, and he is going to do it as the patriarch of his family—upright, strong, and without anyone holding him up or feeding him. He calls a family council.

We sit in the hallway and eat watermelon while we listen to their murmuring voices behind the closed door. After an hour and a half they emerge, smiling. They all know Tupe’s wishes now. He wants to be resuscitated if the need arises. “If the Lord wants me home then you won’t be able to resuscitate me,” he said. Dad will take over Nana and Tupe’s finances so that will reduce their stress. Tupe doesn’t want any changes made to the funeral plans he put in writing with Dad last year.

It is decided that Tupe should be brought down to the Waikato Hospital in Hamilton in a day or two, as soon as the doctors feel sure his recovery is permanent. Dad, Kevin, and Syd all live in Hamilton so they’ll be able to look after him better
there, and Nana will have plenty of children and grandchildren to look after her and take her to and from the hospital. Uncle Syd will stay to make the preparations and oversee the transfer, and Aunty Gaye and Uncle Mike will wait a few more days before returning to Australia.

With those decisions made, I kiss Tupe good-bye and tell him I love him. I look into his deep brown eyes and smile as he says he loves me too, and Mum, Dad, Lainn and I head home. When we arrive we walk into the musty house and inhale deeply. What a week. We’ll unpack and life will be back to normal now.
**Six**

The phone rings at 8:40am the next morning and I hear Mum answer it in her room.

“Oh, did he?” Pause. “Okay,” and she calls out to Dad as she walks towards him, the phone in her hand, “Hon, Tupe just passed away.” Tupe had been right. He was home on Tuesday.

Dad cries on the phone to Uncle Syd and Mum begins to cry in the lounge when she starts to phone around with the news, a hiccupsing kind of sobbing. I don’t remember her really crying before, and I have to walk away.

I feel nothing. I can’t cry. He’s dead. I didn’t know. He didn’t come to me, didn’t say good-bye, didn’t implore me to keep up the struggle, break the traditions, be Maori above all else, teach my children to love who they are. He died and I didn’t know it. He just left. He ate his Weetbix for breakfast, leaned back on his pillows, gasped, and died of massive heart failure. We got a phone call. Tupe’s dead.

The morning moves along in a daze. Uncle Kevin arrives and he and Dad hold each other and cry. They make plans and leave on their motorbikes to return to Whangarei. When Lainn goes down for a nap I stand over his cot and watch him sleeping.

And he sleeps. My son, with his golden hair, and I mean golden, because it’s a mixture of blonde and brown, my son with his brown eyes which may or may not hint at his heritage, my heritage, ours. My son is Maori, with his golden hair and creamy cheeks, more Maori-looking than me, in fact, although his blood runs from mine, me with my blue eyes and freckles, me, the Maori. The Maori from the people of Aotea
Ngatiwai, the people my son has never met, the people he is part of, yet doesn’t know. But I see them in him. I see in him every story I’ve ever been told, of the great chiefs who were brave, generous, wise, of the land which was good to our people, of the heroes who were buried in it, and the legacies they left behind. I see Tupe in him.

And I watch my son sleeping and see in his face the baby I wish he would stay, the only baby I’ve ever known, the one whose birth was spiritual to me because the discovery of his life was brighter and stronger than the pain. The pain. Tupe is dead, and Lainn will never know him. The only memory he’ll ever have of Tupe will come from the photo of the three of us, Tupe, Lainn, and me, in the hospital room, Tupe smiling but with tubes attached to his nose and hand . . . That’s not a memory. I watch him sleeping, watch his face and see the baby fading, pushing away from my breast, the infant, the toddler, crawling, stumbling, running away, running through the years to become what? A man. A Maori? A stranger? Without Tupe will he ever be the white skinned boy doing the haka I had always envisioned? If only we’d had a little more time. Just a few more years to get to know his Tupe.

So now it’s up to me. Can I teach my son to be Maori? Tupe’s not here but I do have all the other important things. I can take Lainn to the Barrier while he’s growing; that’s where I learned. It’s all waiting for him in those mountains, in the boughs of the ancient pohutukawas along the beach, under the gravestones on the quiet hill, or amongst the pebbles that run with the tide in the bay. Everything is there. Everything that is me can be him, too. No, it’s not too late for all that, but too late for something very precious. I stand and watch my sleeping son, trying to figure out how to teach him about his great-grandfather who has died. My Tupe. His Tupe. Our
tupuna, now joining the long list of tupuna gone before us, to make us who we are. When everyone else was so busy telling me who I was not, Tupe told me who I was. He taught me who I was. I always assumed he’d teach my son too.

I made myself a bone carving once. I was sixteen and a boarding student at Church College of New Zealand. Making bone carvings was the latest fad. Although I didn’t know the correct protocol, I had a sneaking suspicion this was one of those things women weren’t allowed to do. I specifically didn’t find out. I went ahead and carved it.

I got the bone from a butcher—pork bone, I think it was—and in pencil I drew the shape of a fish hook onto its the smooth surface. It was definitely no work of art, no sworls engraved into its face, no paua shell accents, but it meant a lot to me. It represented who I was discovering inside myself—a Maori—and even more than that it was a part of me, because I made it. I sawed it and filed it and sanded it and rubbed oil into its surface and I threaded the leather through it and hung it around my neck. I believed it contained in it some part of my spirit.

And I wanted it also to carry the spirits of my ancestors, of Old Tupe and Granny Waima, Tupuna Raihi and Tupuna Kino, of Aunty Raiha who died of a broken heart, of the generous tribe on the Barrier who rescued the shipwreck victims. So I went to my Tupe and asked him to bless it for me. I knew bone carvings should be blessed. I envisioned him, my great Kaumatua, taking it in his hands and mumbling in Maori, invoking gods and spirits, kehua and kaitiaki, to inhabit it and walk with me throughout my life. They would prod me in whichever direction I should go, whisper to me when danger was at hand, and especially make the bone carving glow or shimmer.
in some other-worldly way to show all unbelievers I was indeed a true Maori, despite my freckled skin and blue eyes.

But when I took the bone to my Tupe and he said he would bless it, he pulled a kitchen chair into the middle of Uncle Syd's lounge and directed me to sit on it. He stood behind me and placed his hands on my head. The only spirit invoked was that of the Christian God, the blessing given according to Mormon custom, not Maori tradition. He placed his hands on my head and directed me that this bone carving would remind me of who I was, that it would remind me that my ancestors watch over me always, that as long as I wore the bone I would be leading a life of righteousness. My grandfather instructed me, in the name of Jesus Christ, to be true to myself, to my beliefs and I would be successful in life.

I loved that bone carving. I never took it off. I also never took off the thin gold chain my parents had given me for my 16th birthday. I thought it was beautiful how it sparkled and it reminded me of how much my parents loved me—that I was important to them. But the leather and the chain were forever getting twisted, entwined around one another, and daily I would spend time unravelling them. I thought it would be very poetic to write a story in which the leather represented the Maori and the gold represented Pakeha, fighting and struggling against one another. In the end of the story the gold chain would break, with Maoritanga prevailing always. I went swimming one day and the leather strap broke, my bone carving lost somewhere in the Pacific Ocean.

My bone carving long gone, I now wear a piece of pounamu. It was given to me by friends before I got engaged to Chris. I've spent hours over the years, holding it, rubbing its smooth surface, and examining the veins of lighter jade which flow through
it. I've always believed that flowing through those veins were the souls of my ancestors, or at least the memory of them. Tupe should have joined them now, but I don't feel him here with me. I'm holding the pounamu inside my white-knuckled fist which is warm in the hollow between my breasts. We are being ushered into the bach were Tupe's body lies, but I don't know where he is. I thought he would be with me.

"Toia mai!" The voices of my relations are pulling us in. One foot in front of the other. Drawing us in.

"Te waka." I hear the swish of fern fronds in their hands, the stamp of feet. He's really dead. My heart is pounding, fist warm between my breasts.

"Ki te urunga!" Step. Into the resting-place. Tupe rests here.

"Te waka." Step. What will he look like? I've seen bodies before but they were just bodies. Not people I knew. Not Tupe.

"Ki te moenga!" Step. Into where he sleeps. Glimpse of a coffin in the back of the room.


"Ki te takotoranga i takoto ai!" Pulling us in, into the lying place to lie, lie beside Tupe, share the warmth of our breath and our bodies with his cold flesh.


I'm behind my parents and others who have formed a line to hug and cry with Nana, kiss Tupe or touch his face. I stand immediately behind my mother so I won't see the coffin, and I lower my eyes so I won't see the tear streaked faces of my cousins sitting on mattresses along the walls. As I reach Nana I glance at Tupe in his casket. I
am shocked by the pale skin and dark lips, the eyes closed to hide the absence of his spirit but it doesn’t work. Who is this man lying here? I don’t know this face. Where are you, Tupe?

I hug my ever-huggable Nana who sobs and rocks in her chair with her arms clasped around my neck so I rock with her, patting her on the back and feeling seasick, wondering why am I not crying? And as she releases me I kiss her cheek, “Love you, Nana,” stand, glance at the body, and sit on a nearby mattress. That’s when the rush of emotion comes—loss, absence, emptiness. Although I have told myself it’s okay for him to die, he was 92 years old, the pain is still very real. I am glad. I was beginning to worry.

Aunty Gaye, ever watchful, sneaks across the room and sits beside me, quickly pulling me to her. I hide my face against her shoulder and sob, trying not be heard, and stop myself as soon as possible. But then my cousin Rebekah is under Aunty Gaye’s other arm and she holds us close, and warms the sorrow out of us, her nieces, who are grieving at the death of her father.

When I can control my breathing I face forwards again but will not raise my head. Through blurred and puffy eyes I examine my pounamu. It is a rich green so dark it is almost black, like moss in the shade, and the veins look like of streams of lichen and bark flowing through it. Pounamu, Pounamu. I had always liked to write but it wasn’t until I was 16 years old that I realised I should write. In a sixth form English class we studied “The Whale” by Witi Ihimaera, and that was me in that story, me and Tupe. Never had I been so moved by a story and never had I understood how an author could capture and recreate emotions so real that as a reader, I could feel the
same emotions. I was there, on that page, the granddaughter who felt pulled between traditional Maori values and the big Pakeha city. That was my old Koro who sat me in the wharenui and let me see its lifeblood, told me repeatedly the stories of the ancestors whose photographs lined the walls. I decided that not only could I write like that, I had to, because maybe I could add my perspective to the dialogue. Maybe I could make the circle of discussion that little bit wider, allowing others to join who otherwise may not have.

Maybe there was someone else out there who also felt like they didn’t belong, and I could create a place for them. I’d had to create my own place. I remember coming to an understanding of my own identity. The process was gradual, but it started with a sudden discovery.

Mum was doing dishes and I went to her and said, “What tribe are you from, Mum?” I must have been nine or ten. What tribe are you from? I didn’t know. So she said, “I don’t have a tribe,” but she could see that I didn’t understand, and she knew she’d have to help me understand before I’d be satisfied. I would have looked up at her with a quizzical look on my face, my head leaning over to one side and my little eyebrows furrowed together. In my memory it is the same look as the one on my face in the photo of me in the kindy parade in Otorohanga, dressed as an Indian squaw, scowling, with my arms folded across my chest.

But then Mum said, “I’m not Maori,” and I said, “but Nana Dowling is,” and she said, “no, Shelly, Nana’s Grandparents all came from England.”

I know the look on my face would have changed when I said, “You’re not Maori?” But I can’t see what it would have changed to.
“No,” Mum said.

“But Dad is.”

“Yes.”

“And so am I.”

“Yeah.”

Oh yes, now I can see it. The look on my face would have said I felt sorry for her. I wonder if she noticed.

“Oh,” I said, “I thought you were, too,” and I walked away.

I thought about it for days afterwards. I thought she was Maori. I think I actually thought everyone was Maori. Did I really think everyone was Maori? Did I really think everyone was the same? Even though they looked so different? Well, yes. I knew I was Maori—Mum and Dad always told me I was—and I had white skin, but I knew that people with brown skin were Maori too. So why not think that anyone could be Maori, no matter what colour they were?

So I asked Mum one day, years later when I was living in Hawaii, if she remembered that conversation.

“Vaguely,” she said. “I do remember watching you discovering yourself, and seeing you almost consciously decide that being Maori was part of you, because I think you realised that you could choose not to include Maori things in your life.”

“But is it weird for you to see that in me when you’re not Maori?” I said.

“No, because even though it’s in Dad’s blood he usually seems about as Maori as I do, so I feel like this culture is something you’ve inherited that just skipped a generation, if that makes any sense.”
"It sounds like a disease or something!"

"You know I don’t mean that. Because being Maori has given you strength, sometimes made you like part of the group and sometimes made you stand out above the group. I think it’s given you a real sense of your own strength, because some people take a long time to find their inner strength, but you could pinpoint it, pretty much point to where it came from. Now, I don’t know if your strength came from being Maori or not, but the fact that you attributed your strength to being Maori meant that you found the strength, so I don’t mind how you did that, as long as you learned that you are a strong woman, and you have."

"Wow. Thanks, Mum." I didn’t know she had even thought about it.

For me, that conversation at the kitchen sink was the beginning of an ongoing process of self-discovery. Of exclusion from Maori culture performances in primary school because even though I had the strongest voice to lead the songs, how would it look to visiting schools if a Pakeha girl was out in front? Of lectures at Uni where the whole theatre hushed as I entered because what was a Pakeha doing in a Maori class, and it’s all your fault we’re here fighting for our language and our land anyway. I never thought about any of it in terms of finding my own strength as an individual. I though it was about proving to everyone that I was Maori. Tupe told me I would. Stand on the marae, he said, and tell them, “I am your rangatira!” Stamp your foot, he said, and recite your whakapapa. That will show them. But will I get to do that now, Tupe? Do I need to? And whether I do or not, will you be with me?

Eventually I move to sit with Andrea and Rachael next to the body. I’ve adjusted to the atmosphere of grieving now. I can look at Tupe more closely and work
up the courage to touch him. I know nobody will force me to, but I know I have to do it for myself. I've never experienced death before.

Nana keeps saying how beautiful Tupe looks, how lovely. He does look peaceful lying there surrounded in white, especially against the contrast of his korowai which is draped across the casket from his chest down. But I don't think he looks lovely. I agree, he could look worse, but I think he looks dead. His lips look like wax and I hate the tone of his skin. It looks like rubbery stone and this isn't my Tupe. I don't want to remember him like this. But I do want to spend time with him, because even if I don't like the way he looks, this is my last chance. I reach over and try not to cringe as I feel his firm, cold cheek.

Mum and I have made an arrangement. She knows how important it is to me to be able to give this experience my full attention. This is the tangi that marks the close of a generation. She knows I need to sleep in the bach with Tupe's body, share the communal grieving experience with my cousins and everyone who mourns him. It is healing to talk long hours into the night, remembering Tupe, what he means to us, and always, always laughing and remembering the joy of his life. I can't do this and take care of Lainn as well, so Mum has agreed to care for him completely, keep him away from me even, until the funeral is over and I have purged myself of all of this. Tonight she will sleep in the car with Lainn, since he won't sleep well in the big marquees full of snoring uncles. I will sleep in the bach.

We spend the afternoon greeting groups of visitors, listening to speeches and singing waiata. When bags of lollies are passed around, Tupe is apportioned his share
which is placed beside his robed body. Nana has placed a red rose in his hands, and one of my cousins slides a letter under the white embroidered sheath.

Uncle Syd greets most of the visitors in the traditional ways.

“E nga rangatira, e nga iwi katoa e noho nei, tena koutou, tena koutou, tena koutou katoa.” Distinguished elders and all the people gathered here, greetings, greetings, greetings to you all.

“Te marae, tena koe.” To the marae, greetings.

“Te iwi, tena koutou.” To the people, greetings.

“Nga matua, nga hoa, nga tamariki, tena koutou, tena koutou, tena koutou katoa.” Old ones, friends, children, greetings, greetings, greetings to you all”

The visitors nod at him, he clears his throat, and continues in English, telling stories of Tupe in his garden, Tupe helping people with their whakapapa, and Tupe’s secret past that none of us know anything about. And then he moves on to the fun things, the things that made Tupe Tupe, like his two-coloured house that was red if you came from one direction and yellow if you came from the other. Uncle Syd tells us what he learned from that side of Tupe, the resourceful side that could make do with whatever was on hand. Uncle Syd tells us how he built his own house and then, having forgotten to square it off as he went, tied a rope around the whole house and straightened it with the tractor. That was the Tupe in him, he says.

And Uncle Syd turns to us and we stand to support him in a waiata. We sing songs we all learned in Primary School, lively songs that remind us of love and life:

\[ Me he manu rere ahau e \quad \text{If I were a flying bird} \]
I would have flown to your bed
To embrace your body
Loved one turn back
The body is sleeping
The spirit is wandering
The heart is pining
Loved one turn back

And eventually as the day wears on we move on to English songs that only the old ones know. I can remember Tupe singing them along with everyone at the family reunions, “Pearly shells from the ocean, shining in the sun . . ."  

And always Uncle Syd finishes his speeches respectfully: “No reira, Tena koutou, tena koutou, tena koutou katoa; kahuri.” And so, greetings, greetings, greetings to you all; over to you.

And so it goes on, back and forth, tangata whenua to manuhiri, speech and song, speech and song into the night.
Seven

I love the warmth of a floor lined with mattresses and sleeping whanau. I love the hush of breath and snoring, the hum of voices and outbursts of laughter. So much for the young people being the rowdy ones; we are all exhausted and yelling at our aunties to let us sleep. “Oh, leave us alone aye?” They call back. “We don’t get together very often; we’ve got a lot to catch up on.”

“Well fine,” we say, “deprive us of our beauty sleep.”

“What was that? Your MUCH needed beauty sleep?”

“Yeah, whatever. Thought you had lots to talk about . . .”

As I drift off I remember a time when Tupe was at a tangi like this. It was 1973, the year before I was born, and again, I have heard this story so much I feel like I was there. Tupe was already an old man. In fact, when Nana gave birth to my Dad, their first child, Tupe was already forty years old. But at the age of sixty-seven, Tupe was not your average old man. He was off stealing bodies.

Tupe’s Uncle Toby died—he was Aunty Raiha’s brother—and his daughter Hine wanted him buried in Auckland where she lived. Some of the family disagreed, but no one took any action. No one, that is, except my Tupe.

Uncle Toby had spent his life working and living off the family tribal land on the Barrier, but during the last few years of his life he had lost his sight, and in general, his health had deteriorated. He avoided leaving his home on Great Barrier Island until he could fight it no longer.

Like so many of us, like me and like Tupe, Uncle Toby loved the Barrier, or, more specifically, Katherine Bay, because it was the land of his heritage. My
grandfather, and his father, and his, right back to the chiefs of the Aotea Ngatiwai, have lived off that land. It has been good to them and in return they stay. Even after they die, they stay.

I can understand that Hine would want to be able to visit her dad's grave often, and that it would be cheaper for everyone if he was buried on the mainland. But she didn't consider his connection with the land. The Maori believe in spirits living on after death, and so did she, but she hadn't grasped the fact that Uncle Toby's heart had always been on the island. The history of the two, man and earth, were intertwined. She should have known that if, in life, he had not wanted to leave his home, then surely in death he would not have rested elsewhere.

But Tupe understood. He took up his concerns with the family, but Hine was strong willed, especially in mourning, and who denies a bereaving woman her wishes? Without further discussion Tupe set about discreetly doing what, as far as he was concerned, was his only option. He made plans to steal the body from the family and to take Uncle Toby home.

This idea was in line with family tradition: Old Tupe, my Tupe's father, stole his wife's body from her family when she died. He rode for two days on a horse to her family's home and asked for permission to bury his wife elsewhere. Her family, seeing this lone man and horse, thought that even with permission he had no means by which to transport a body, so they consented. That assumption was the cornerstone of his plan. With the horse and some bushman's craftsmanship Old Tupe managed to drag my great-grandmother's casket to the nearby beach and into a small dinghy. A larger fishing boat was waiting out of sight around the point and in almost no time at all he
had the body in the ground on his own land. My father hasn’t ever stolen any bodies. But I’ll give him time—he is only fifty-two.

Uncle Toby’s tangi was held at his niece’s house in Penrose, Auckland. The night before the funeral service, Tupe and his younger brother, Uncle Bill, put their plans to action. Another brother, Taz, and Tupe’s brother-in-law Archie were also in on the scheme. At just after 3:00am Tupe rose in silence from his bed. He moved about the rooms of the house, waking the other men one by one. They had slept with their clothes on. In a corner they stood in a circle and briefly prayed. They crept into the living room towards Uncle Toby’s body. The room was warm with the regular sound of sleeping women, and condensation rolled off the windows onto the sills. Large breasts rose and fell, breathing a symphonic lullaby to their sleeping brother. The silent intruders stepped over and around the sleeping kuia as they made their way to the coffin in the centre of the room.

I’ve no doubt that even in their stealth these men followed tradition and kissed their uncle goodbye. As they began to close the casket, someone came to the doorway. Uncle Bill, with spur-of-the-moment ingenuity, asked him for a screwdriver. The sleepy-eyed relation retrieved one, helped screw down the lid, and promptly went back to bed.

One of the women asleep in the room was Tupe’s cousin, Aunty Ellen. My sisters tell me she was a formidable force, the iron lady of her generation. Even the men wouldn’t cross her. While Tupe, Bill, Taz and the rest prepared to take the body, Aunty Ellen awoke.
"What are you fullas doing?" Her voice was raspy with sleep. "Gordon, what’s going on, e hoa?"

Tupe didn’t need to say a word. He signalled to her that everything was Okay. They were good cuzzies, Tupe and Aunty Ellen, and she knew he was a good man. So she rolled over and didn’t interfere. Maybe she agreed that Uncle Toby needed to be taken home. Or maybe she obeyed only because she knew he was a stubborn man, and that once he got an idea in his mind he wouldn’t be stopped.

The non-commissioned pallbearers must have taken great care and effort to get the casket through doorways, along the hall, and down the front steps without being noticed. Either all the sleeping whanau were too drunk to be awakened or my Tupe and his conspirators were very skilful in the art of silence. Or maybe the angels were on their side. In my mind I’ve always seen the spirits of my tupuna sneaking into the rooms and putting their hands over the ears of everyone in the house so that the men could complete their task. I think they wanted Uncle Toby to join them at their resting-place on our quiet island.

Outside the air was chilled; the dew had fallen, and their footfalls made soft squelching noises on the damp grass. The casket was loaded into a station wagon and then into a waiting seaplane. In the still of the damp morning, waiting for daylight before they could take off, they sang hymns. I can hear my Tupe’s quivering voice as he sings the words of his favourite Maori hymn, a loose translation of the hymn known in English as "How Great Thou Art." Tomorrow we will sing it at his funeral.

"Whakaaria mai to ripeka ki au. Tiaho mai, ra roto i te po." Let me know your cross. Shine to me, like day in the night.
Tupe and his brothers sang hymns to their uncle, songs of the sweetness of life and the peace of death. They sang while they waited to take Uncle Toby home.

The exact thoughts that went through my Tupe's mind during the forty-five-minute flight, I can't say, but I do know he would have been concerned about what was going to happen after the burial. He fully expected to be arrested for his actions. On the flight he was probably wondering what his sentence would be. A fine? Time in jail? What would happen to Nana then? No matter what happened, though, he would not let anyone dig up Uncle Toby's body. This necessary disturbance to his rest was already too much.

The plane set down on the choppy water at Kaoa. By then the light had pushed almost all the darkness away, and as the plane neared the beach its passengers could see the silhouettes of people on the beach—about twenty of them. These were my more distant relatives, representatives of the local tribal committee. Tupe had made prior arrangements with them, and they stood on the shore waiting to help as pallbearers and to officially welcome the dead and the visitors. Men waded out into the water to meet Tupe. Brief but emotional greetings were exchanged with quiet words and pressing of noses before the casket was pulled from the plane.

The wail of the kaikaranga rushed out over the water to meet the men: "Haere mai, haere mai, haere mai": Welcome, I welcome you, come. With no woman to answer her call, and the men too busy with the body to reply, her voice echoed, strong but alone between the sheltering hills of the bay.

Across paddocks, along the sheep track through the bulrushes they carried Uncle Toby, past the garden he had tended and the rubble which was all that remained
of the house he had been born in. Up they marched, up to the schoolhouse where he had attended school, and then up a steep cattle trail through gorse and manuka to the clearing which borders the small graveyard. the graveyard where Uncle Toby had buried his own parents.

At this point Tupe bid them all "e noho ra" and left his brothers to run the funeral service and to put Uncle Toby into a grave which had been dug during the night. My Tupe left to play what I think is the most admirable part in the whole sequence of events. He went back to Auckland to face the wrath of the whanau. He didn't lay low for a few days; he didn't hide out; he didn't even wait until the burial was completed because he wanted to go and face up to what he had done. He had not taken the body to upset anyone; he had done it because he could not allow things to happen any other way. He rushed back to his sister's house so there would be no misunderstanding or misconstrued blame, and so that the inevitable hurt feelings would be as few as possible.

As he crossed the lawn back at the house, huddled groups of smoking relatives eyed him accusingly. As he opened the front door one of them confronted him.

"What the bloody hell have you done?" I can see fury and anguish burning in the man's eyes while his body trembled with barely restrained violence.

Screaming, Hine appeared in the doorway and rushed at Tupe but the kuia held her back. She swore at him, every insult she could come up with, they tell me, and then was reduced to sobs. "Toku papa. Toku papa." My dad. My dad.

"Why did you take him?" She cried. "You knew we wanted to keep him here with us."
"Yes," my Tupe replied. "but you know that land was Uncle's life. How could you think of keeping him away from the place his heart has never left?" He turned in disgust from her ignorance and entered the kitchen. There he found a policeman sitting at the table. With a resolute sigh, my Tupe walked towards him as the officer rose.

"I need to ask you a few questions, mate."

No charges were ever made. The prior arrangements Tupe had made with the tribal committee on the Barrier brought a certain level of legality to the whole matter. Eventually Hine accepted the situation as finished, though I don't know if she ever forgave him.

The bishop who was to have presided over the funeral in Auckland didn't even hesitate when Tupe told him what had happened; he just asked what to do with all the flowers. And my Tupe, with the same matter-of-fact attitude that had started the whole business said: "Take them to the hospital. Plenty of sick people there."
Eight

My aunties’ giggling voices have barely faded from my mind when the light is flicked on and Uncle Bruce’s voice booms out. “All right you lot, time to get up. We want the coffin closed by 8:30am, and if you want to have breakfast you have to have it by 7:00am. Come on sleepyheads,” he says as he comes in my direction, to where Rachael and Andrea, his daughters, are lying near me. It is still dark outside. He pulls the quilt back from Rachael’s face. “Get up. Get moving.”

“Yeah, alright Dad,” she says, and then, when he is out of hearing range: “Get lost.”

“Ooh,” says Aunty Marie as she strolls past us with a towel and a toilet bag, “looks like someone didn’t get quite enough beauty sleep!” It looks as though she hasn’t been to sleep at all. Rachael pulls the quilt back over her face and curls into a ball.

I watch my cousins as they each sit up. Like me, they all look towards the body before doing anything else. It is the sudden remembrance that we have spent the night in the room with a dead body, and is the body still there and does it still look the same? Does it look any more or any less like Tupe than it did yesterday? Some of us kiss him good morning before getting up and about, or touch his face and try to remember it as it was only days before, or all the years we grew up. I remember his face from a photo I took of him, sitting in his chair in the lounge at the Barrier. His face has a soft look about it, an inner peace kind of look. He’s wearing his red overalls, the fabric faded to about three shades lighter than the colour of the zip. His face is old, but it’s warm—not like the way it looks now. I don’t look for long.
We go across the road to the domain and use the campground showers. I stand in the concrete stall listening to my shrieking and giggling aunties in other stalls and letting the hot water stream over me, over my eyes that feel like sandpaper and down my aching neck. I dry myself, dress, and step out into the cool morning. The managers are complaining that we are using too much hot water, each taking ten minutes instead of three. I feel like saying to them, “Our Tupe’s dead. Who cares if we use too much hot water? We’ll pay for it after. Now just leave us alone. We have to bury him today.”

Those of us who are dressed in time for breakfast walk down to the old hall where we have had family reunions ever since I can remember. My cousins Rob and Mel are arguing over who should push Lainn’s stroller, and Lainn is giggling uncontrollably because of the ensuing bumpy ride he’s getting over the grass and around in mad circles. When we get to the hall they get him breakfast and I end up serving my Dad and some of my uncles their sausages and eggs. If Tupe were here, I would probably be getting a plate for him, setting it down in front of him, and putting my hand on his shoulder as I lean forward and ask him if he wants a hot drink. I can’t even remember the last time I did that for him. I never knew it would be the last.

Soon it is time to close the casket. I watch as members of my family say goodbye to their father, grandfather, uncle. For Uncle Kevin, goodbye is the touch of Tupe’s face and a kiss on his forehead. For Dad it is closed eyes, a bowed head and smoothing back Tupe’s hair; for Uncle Bruce, a face turned away and a few more tears. I kneel by the coffin, put one hand over my pounamu, the other on Tupe’s chest, and close my eyes, willing him to be there in my mind, in my soul.
What I like about the tangi as opposed to a traditional Pakeha funeral is the therapeutic nature of it. It makes me wonder if the ancient Maori were all very well-balanced emotionally because of their grieving process. The way Pakeha do it, they find out that someone has died and suffer that initial grief. Then they have a couple of days of numbness until the funeral, where they may or may not see the body and have a chance to say goodbye. They then bawl through the funeral and at the graveside (if they are comfortable with public displays of emotion), at which point they all go home and spend months or years dealing with their grief.

For the Maori, when someone dies his body is prepared for viewing, and then laid out in someone’s home or on a marae for three days. Not only is there a chance for anyone at all to see the body and reminisce and express their grief, they can join the immediate family in three days worth of crying, laughing, telling stories, singing, doing hakas and a myriad of other things to let out tension, frustration or just plain sadness.

We sleep close together and share each other’s warmth and comfort. Our breath flows in and around the dead, and his spirit flows in and around us. We prepare meals together, eat together and clean up as a united, concerted effort. In those three days we can be with the body as much as we want, either alone in our thoughts to process our feelings, or sitting with others who are experiencing the same emotions, and can talk them through with us. We get out all the tears and get back to the laughter, not only remembering the best of our dead, but also their worst times, and how we loved him for them.

And that is the point we have all reached by the time we make the one-hour drive from Whangateau to the chapel in Auckland for the funeral service. It is
Thursday, January 29\textsuperscript{th}. We feel ready for it to be over. We are ready, as a family, to share the grief of others attending the service. We feel peace in ourselves. There is no more need for sadness. Tupe has had a good life, and he will be with us always, even if I don't feel him here right now.

I'm standing at the front of the chapel to lead the opening hymn, “Come Oh Thou King of Kings,” and the chapel is full. I scan their faces and realise I don't even know most of them. Think how many people you come in contact with over 92 years! Most of these, I bet, are ones who he helped find their genealogy. He and Nana have been travelling all over New Zealand helping people with their whakapapa for my whole life. I wasn't the only one he gave an identity.

I'm looking at Lainn now, sitting on my Mum’s knee and he’s just realising it's me up here. He is beaming up at me, \textit{that's my mummy up there}, and I can't even sing I'm smiling so big. Oh well, there goes the grieving granddaughter image.

One of my Dad’s cousins, Margaret, stands, shakily, to read a letter from her brother Colin. He was almost brought up by Nana and Tupe, and had a special relationship with them. When he heard that Tupe was in hospital he faxed this letter from Utah. The letter never made it to Tupe in time, but now we can all hear what Colin wanted to say.

\textit{Dear Aunty Rene,}

\textit{Margaret called to tell us of Uncle Gordon being hospitalised. I wanted to write and let you know of my love for you both. Time and distance have separated us but I will always}
remember the love you showed to me as I was growing to adulthood.
You have both served your God and your family setting a worthy example for us who follow.

I still remember your superb apple pies served with lots of fresh cream Aunty Rene. I recollect catching spratts down at the bridge and you preparing them for me to eat. You have laid the foundation of a fine heritage—a legacy of love and service and of faith in God; a foundation that your children will build on; a foundation that will yet serve me and mine.

Please know that we love you and pray for you. Give Uncle a hug and tell him, I will remember!!

Colin

Colin didn’t know when he wrote that letter that he was writing a eulogy, but it perfectly sums up what we all want to say—thank you.

All of Tupe’s grandchildren now gather on the stand according to Tupe’s wishes to sing "How Great Thou Art." Because of Tupe, this has always been a hymn I could never make it through. I remember so many church meetings on Sundays on the Barrier when the weather was too rough or there were too many of us to get around to the next bay or across the island to meet with other church members. We would get all dressed up in our church clothes and gather in the living room of the homestead. And Tupe would always have us sing “How Great Thou Art” as part of the service. I can see his face now as we begin to sing,
O Lord my God, when I in awesome wonder
Consider all the worlds thy hands have made,
I see the stars, I hear the rolling thunder,
Thy pow'r thru out the universe displayed;

I can see his eyes filling with tears, and I can feel them rising in my throat. Tupe, you cried when you thought of the awesome power of God. How must it feel where you are standing now?

Then sings my soul, my Savior God, to thee,
How great thou art! How great thou art!
Then sings my soul, my Savior God, to thee,
How great thou art! How great thou art!

And I can see the tears rolling down his face, and I can feel them spilling over my eyelashes. All of your grandchildren, Tupe, look at us, all of us your flesh and blood, keeping you alive. We are here singing for you, Tupe, singing to know that God has taken you home.

When Christ shall come, with shout of acclamation,
And take me home, what joy shall fill my heart!
Then I shall bow in humble adoration
And there proclaim, "My God, how great thou art!"

Then sings my soul, my Savior God, to thee,

How great thou art! How great thou art!

Then sings my soul, my Savior God, to thee,

How great thou art! How great thou art!

And as we begin to sing the Maori verse the tone changes, the tempo slows, our voices combine and carry further, lingering at the end of each line:

\[\text{Whakaaria mai tou ripeka ki a au} \quad \text{Show me your cross}\]
\[\text{Tiaho mai ra roto i te po} \quad \text{Shine to me in the night}\]
\[\text{Kei konei au, Titiro atu ai} \quad \text{Here I am, looking out}\]
\[\text{Ora, mate} \quad \text{The dead who live}\]
\[\text{Hei au koe noho ai} \quad \text{Will always be with me}\]

We sing this and we know your spirit is happy, and we know you are home, and we cry because we know the Lord loves us all enough to take us home to him, and we cry because we miss you. And we cry because you made us who we are. And I cry because although I know all this to be true, I don't feel it. I just feel your absence.
Nine

I am standing with Andrea just inside the gates of the cemetery. Together, we are preparing to welcome Tupe and all those mourning. We will call out to them, welcome them, and guide them through the gates and to the grave. I’m nervous. The karanga is such a spiritual and emotional tradition. Before performing the call, a woman is supposed to appeal to the spirits of her ancestors to be with her, to give her strength so that she may be their voice. The sound of a karanga is like nothing else I’ve ever heard. It is the sound of mourning, of soul-wrenched wailing, and yet pride and honour at the same time. I don’t know how other women feel, but for me it is the strongest, most honest sound my voice can make.

Andrea and I walk slowly into the cemetery, looking back to the gate often to watch for when the pallbearers are ready to enter. We are both quiet, going over the calls in our minds, preparing our spirits, for this is the only chance we’ll ever have now to karanga for our Tupe. I am holding a piece of silver fern in my left hand. It has always reminded me of how pure our country was before the English came. As the Maori believe all living things have a spirit, this fern gives me strength.

And we see them arrive with the casket at the gate, our boy-cousins, carrying their grandfather. And we see them raise it onto their shoulders, and stand, and wait. And we turn, standing beside one another, to face them preparing to lead to way to the grave with our voices, our souls, and the gestures of our quivering hands. I call, and they step towards us.

“Haere mai, haere mai.” I begin walking backwards, facing my people as I show them to Tupe’s resting-place. I watch as the crowd flows through the gates like a
bursting dam in slow motion. Once they begin to pour through it seems never ending, more and more people coming around the corner, appearing from between the manuka trees and coming out of the ferns. And Tupe at the head.

"Haere mai e koro." Come to me my Tupe.

"Ki te urupa nei." Come into this place of rest.

"Haere mai." Let me show you the way.

"Haere mai." You are welcome here, both you and your people.

"Haere mai ra."

Never before has my karanga poured from my spirit.

Still walking backwards, still watching the wave of people roll towards us, Andrea takes up the call.

"Haere mai e koro e." Come, Tupe.

"Ki roto i te urupa nei." Come into your resting-place.

"Ki te takoto mai." Come, lay down to rest.

"Takoto." Lay to rest.

"Takoto." Rest.

"Takoto."

The grave is lined with ponga fronds. The weather is glorious. Most of us are wearing black. We are sweltering. I can almost feel my freckles getting darker as the rest of my face and arms get redder. Sweat drips down the backs of my knees. My forehead burns and my sunglasses aren't keeping the glare out my eyes at all. Lainn is complaining. Dad steps forward and speaks.
“Thank you all for coming to be with us here. According to Dad’s wishes, we will not be having a long graveside service. We will sing “Nearer my God to Thee,” then Kevin will dedicate the grave. If anyone wishes to speak after that, you will have a chance. But this is all that Tupe wished to be done, so feel free to leave after that, if you wish.”

“Nearer, my God, to thee . . .” Although we have made it through the funeral without many tears, I know it is almost my last chance to say good bye to Tupe.

“Nearer to thee!” As I get to the second line, I can’t sing.

“E’en though it be a cross That raiseth me.” But I want to sing to God and to Tupe. I know God lives. I know Tupe must still be with us. He will never leave any of us. He will watch over us and come to us when we need him, like others came to him, so I sing out with all my heart.

“Still all my song shall be Nearer my God, to thee, Nearer, my God, to thee, Nearer to thee!”

Though like the wanderer, The sun gone down,

Darkness be over me, My rest a stone,

Yet in my dreams I’d be Nearer, my God, to thee,

Nearer, my God, to thee, Nearer to thee!

There let the way appear, Steps unto heav’n;

All that thou sendest me, In mercy given;

Angels to beckon me Nearer, my God, to thee,
Uncle Kevin prays, and now it is time for the final goodbyes. Another goodbye? Haven’t we done this already? In turn, we each walk by the grave, bowing our heads in respect, dropping in a flower or token to remember him. I walk past and drop in my fern frond. Goodbye, my Tupe. Thank you. No, I haven’t done this. There is more to be said.

Thank you for who I am. For who you allowed me to be, and for how you made it so that your children would have the best in life. Thank you for making me understand I am Maori. I have mana. I am worthy no matter what colour my skin. Thank you for your knowledge of life, of God’s plan for us all. Thank you for your stories that taught me who I am. I know where I come from, and where I come from is you. You and Tupuna Kino, Tupuna Raihi, the Barrier and the Koa homestead. The ocean and the sand, the trickling creek and the graves of the chiefs. The children caned for speaking Maori and forced out of the schools. The humble ones who welcomed the missionaries and received their message.

All of this is me. I am who I am because of the people I follow, and now you are one of them, one of the voices to speak to me when my spirit cries for wisdom. One of the whisperings in my veins when I do something I don’t think I can do.

Thank you, Tupe, and Goodbye.

Andrea breaks into song, an ancient chant cried out the way songs were once sung by our people. She chants with vigour and spirit, working her way through our genealogy back to Paipea, telling the story of how the whale saved our ancestor when
called upon for help. This is where our people come from, and supported by the arms
or her friends, this is what Andrea chants to us. This is my final release. The farewell
to Tupe that I could not give, that I now experience vicariously through Andrea. The
rhythm, the chant with only slight rises and drops in pitch, her pukana, all bring the
tears from deep inside to release my final grief—the fear that I will not be strong
enough without him. The fear that he has truly left me.

**Ka hura, Ka hura te moana uha**  The calm and gentle sea

*ka hura te moana kore*  The broken sea

**Ko to manawa ko toku manawa**  Your heart, my heart

**Ko hou tina ko hou tae ki te ripia**  Make me strong so that the tide

won't cut me

**rae ana whakahutu nuku whakahutu rangi**  Throwing out the new net

**he roki he roki hau**  To make everything calm again

**he taketake he hurumanu**  Like the soft underfeathers of a bird

**te moana i rohi ai**  The sea is calm

**hoatu to kauhau taniwha ki uta**  Retell the stories of our people

forever

**Paikea riki e whanake nei**  Paikea calls to himself, move

onwards

**kei te kakahu kakahu kakau e**  Make your self ready

**e whainariki e whanake nei**  Follow the gods to move forwards

**kei te kakahu kakahu kakau e**  Make yourself ready
e hiki kakahu e hiki kakahu  
roti takotako  
te ungai o tane ki uta e  
Haere mai ana ki te ngaru nui  
tuahine ki te toki  
takahuri whenua ka puta to ngariki  
ko ngaru a whatu  
koia tahuti e  
tu te titi maurei e  
tu te titi puru maurei e  
ki a hikitia maurei e  
ki a hapaina maurei e  
e maurei e e taku mate  
E whakakau whakakau he tipua  
E whakakau whakakau he tangata  
E whakakau whakakau he taniwha  
koia e ki waenga te moana  
koia e ki te hukahuka awatea  
koia e Ruatapu turia mai te hoe  
i ere te panipani moe  
ki ahau ia whakatia te rangi  
he tama whakapurupuru  
no waho no whangara teteria hunua

Raise yourself up  
And the wave dunks him  
Get to landing place  
Big wave come and get me  
Like an axe  
Go out over the land  
The eye of the wave  
Hurry  
For your spirit to shine  
Let your spirit shine out  
Raise your spirits  
Lift yourself up  
Or else I will die  
Make the guardian spirit swim  
Make the person swim  
Make the mythical monster swim  
To the middle of the waters  
To the failing daylight  
For Ruatapu to stand the paddle up  
Or else spread sleep  
We vigorously paddled to the sky  
When the boy plugged up the hole  
Originated from little Whangara
When Paikea prayed to his tupuna, our tupuna, to save him from his murderous half brother, they sent him a whale to rescue him from the sea which ran red with blood from the massacre. Andrea’s ancient song tells us of Paikea’s struggles, of being thrown from the whale’s back by huge waves, yet he was able to calm and restore his spirit in order to survive. The song reminds us of the skills Paikea had that we also need to have if we are to survive our struggles. It reminds us that like Paikea, we also have the ability to overcome our fears and frustrations and helplessness because our tupuna are with us.

Tupe is with us.

And it is over. Now we go back to real life, having grieved communally, having had the chance to reconcile our feelings, and having expressed all but the dregs of our grief.

And now I go on with my life, not having to wonder any longer when Tupe might die, how it will happen, what will it be like for me, for the family, for Nana. Now I know, and life is still liveable. We will be okay. Now I go on with my life.
knowing that Tupe has joined that long list of ancestors who are on my side, who walk with me constantly. And he can, will, come to me when I need him. He will prompt me as I go on with my life.

He will come to me.
Three weeks later, on a Saturday morning, Clare calls me.

"Happy Valentine’s Day, Possum!" She says.

"Why thank you, Sweetie," I say. "I was actively ignoring that fact, and doing a pretty good job, actually."

"Oops. Sorry. Now that I’ve brought up that painful reminder, I’m calling to see if you need me to take Lainn today while you start packing. You are packing today, right?"

"Yeah, just the garage, so I think we can handle having Lainn around, thanks though."

"Are you sure? The girls would love to have someone to play with."

"No, it’s okay. He’s still really unsettled. He was just beginning to feel secure again here at Mum and Dad’s after Christmas and everything and then we spent all those nights at the hotel then in Whangateau... He’s really not handling it well. I need to keep him with me as much as possible."

"Alright then."

"Is Owen working today?"

"Yeah. Hey, have you put in your application for that job at Uni yet?"

"No. I’m waiting for faxes from the States—references. I’m so excited, though. It’s just the perfect job for me—part time, teaching writing—it’ll help me get my mind off everything and start living again."

"Yeah. The divorce papers haven’t come through yet, have they?"
"Oh my gosh, didn’t I tell you? They came in the mail the day after Tupe died."

"Oh, Sweetie."

"It’s okay. The way I was feeling that day, I just sighed and filed them away. Any other day I would have been devastated."

"Oh well, it’s finished now, so you can put it behind you."

"Yeah. I don’t really want to talk about it now, though, okay?"

"Okay. Hey, I’ll let you go now and get started on your packing. Dana and Holly are awfully quiet down the hall . . ."

"Okay then, I’ll talk to you later. Bye Sweetie!"

"Bye Possum!"

I didn’t really want to get off the phone. In the garage are boxes of my things from before I got married, even a box of wedding presents that Chris and I couldn’t take to Hawaii with us, and the box I’m sorting through right now is full of the love-letters we wrote to each other when we were engaged. I’ve realised a really great side effect of Tupe’s death has been my ability to block out the divorce. I’ve been able to focus on that grief instead of on my confusion over the disintegration of my marriage. But it’s not working now, so I detach myself, switch into my robot-mode; I’m getting good at it. I started practising when I was packing to leave the States, and now I’m refining the art. Keep this. (Wedding dress.) Throw this away. (Movie ticket stubs.) Put this into the box with all the rest of Chris’ things. (Photo of his mother.) I’m taking them to his sister this afternoon. There’s no reason I should look after them. But some things catch my eye, like the dull teal cover of the journal he kept while we
were engaged, and for a minute I become my weak, suffering self again. Hours before our wedding this is what he wrote:

*Please take my arm. Please take my ring, my love, and my soul. But be gentle. Because if you asked me to, I would bleed again. Just to colour your life.*

What happened to that? You’d go through all the pain of your life all over again if only it would mean that the journey would bring you back to me? I’d always thought Chris and I had a love that would conquer the grave. We’d always thought that. I never anticipated him forgetting his love for me. I never knew pain could overshadow love until the love would be obscured by the darkness of bad memories and a broken spirit.

Growing up in a broken home, Chris wanted nothing more than to have a beautiful wife, a family of his own, and to provide a sense of warmth, safety, security and wholeness for his children. The more afraid he became that he would fail, the further away he fell from becoming all he wanted. It was a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Chris’ father left his wife and four children when Chris was two. He came in and out of their lives amidst accusations of sexual abuse and charges of non-payment of family support. When Chris was 12 his family joined the LDS church and his mother soon remarried, adding three stepsiblings and eventually a half sister into the picture. His stepfather was physically abusive. By the time Chris was 14 years old his mother was worn out from abuse, poverty, poor nutrition, and too many children to take care
of under poor conditions. She was taken to hospital for an asthma attack and died. Chris decided to try living with his father. But when his father left his de facto wife, he also left Chris 15 years old and homeless. He dropped out of school and moved from one government work program to another.

Take that sad story and add in thirteen years of sexual abuse at the hands of eight different men, and you have the story of a little boy whose soul was scarred. Permanently. Chris could cope with the poverty, the loss of his mother, the abandonment by his father. He could even cope with the violent stepfather. But the sexual abuse never left him. He escaped his last abuser when he was seventeen and moved from New Plymouth to Hamilton, but the anger and the fear and the memories followed him everywhere. They bounced in the curls of his long brown hair, sat with the lint in the pockets of his denim jacket. He thought he was leaving them behind, but they stayed with him.

In Hamilton Chris began a whole new life. An English family, the Reads, took him in. He gave up smoking, drinking, drugs and wandering aimlessly along the path which had been leading to the reiteration of the cycle of abuse. He was determined to break the cycle. After he had served a Mormon mission in Christchurch and Wellington, he made contact with his father again, and returned "home" to Hamilton. They were able to reconcile their past before his father died of lung cancer a year later.

When I met Chris he had been home from his mission for three days. He stood on the steps of Boyack Dorm at CCNZ as I greeted the Dorm Father with a kiss on the cheek. Chris asked, “Where’s mine?” And I looked at him with one eyebrow raised.
He wore torn jeans and a leather jacket under a long tan overcoat. He was unshaven, and I wondered which biker gang he belonged to.

But it didn’t take long at all for his insane energy and little boy smile to win me over. Chris is a listener. During his long periods of lethargy and despondence we would spend hours talking about what we both wanted in life, and how determined he was to give his children a better life than he’d had. I probably should have recognised these solemn times as one side of his manic depression, but I didn’t. What I saw was a sensitive man. He understood me and he wasn’t afraid to show his pain—that had to be a healthy thing—and most of all, having me around made him happy. When I was with him he had more hope for life, more energy, and was even more determined to make his life good. He knew me, and he loved me, and our souls connected.

By the time we had known each other for a year, he was my best friend. When I woke up each morning it was him I would call, just to see how he was and what he was doing that day. If anything went wrong we turned to each other. When things went right we were always the first to know. We could have whole conversations without words. We would stand in the quiet Hamilton Gardens and hold each other, just memorising each other’s faces and reading our thoughts. I knew, without question, when his eyes were telling me, “I love you.” And he knew, when I brushed the back of my fingers from his smooth brow down and along his jaw, that I was saying, “You’re so beautiful,” despite the monster he thought his past wanted him to become.

When he was accepted to attend Brigham Young University—Hawaii Campus, it seemed like he was well on the way to achieving his dream life. He had cleaned up his life against all the odds, and was now getting an education. It was more than he had
dreamed. But what he still wanted was me. I wasn’t sure what I wanted. His tragic
life was so far from anything in my experience. I knew his difficulties were not over.
so how could I possibly know what to expect? Was I the right person to survive it with
him? He went ahead to BYUH and I stayed in New Zealand. As he walked through
the departure gate in the Auckland airport, he stopped, turned around, and said “I love
you” with his eyes. We had known each other for almost eighteen months. Twelve
days later I called him.

“Baby,” I said, “I haven’t stopped thinking about you since you left. I know
it’s right, now. I want to marry you. And that’s not a proposal.”

That was what he had been waiting for. He didn’t even hesitate for a second.

“Rochelle Anne Davies,” he said, “Will you please be my wife?”

“Yes . . . Yes, Yes I will!”

We cried together.

For nine months we planned our marriage and our life together long distance.
This box in front of me holds every letter we wrote. I’m tempted to throw them away
but something tells me I should keep them. He can keep the letters I sent him, I’ll keep
the ones he sent me. Maybe Lainn will want to read them one day. As I divide them
into boxes, Lainn tries to pull some of the papers out of my hands. I snatch them back.

“No, Lainn.” He smiles his cheeky grin at me and flashes his charming eyes. Chris.
I’ll never be able to get over you completely because Lainn mirrors you. Damn you.

And I look at the box full of what our love used to be. What a load of crap.
But it’s not crap. He still loves me; he has to. It’s just all the pain, the memories, the
fear of his monsters; they’re all confusing him. They’re blocking out the light of his
love for me. But it's too late now. He had plenty of chances. I couldn't stay there forever with him telling me he didn't love me. I deserve more than that. I flip back through the journal again. I want to convince myself it was real.

Journal Entry 28 February 1994

I remember how it felt to be locked in a bathroom when I was four years old, so why can't I remember the lingering taste of a kiss from the woman who I am going to marry?

I remember punching the edge of a door and breaking my hand, yet the safe comforting feeling that used to accompany Shelly as she took my hand in hers eludes me.

I remember at fourteen when I didn't have a home to go to, how desolate I was, so why can't I remember six months ago when I found that home to go to in the arms of the only person I have allowed to understand me?

Why can't I remember that?

Why should I remember the rejection and disappointment of years gone by and forget that which I value more than the entire growth through pain experience, that which has only been away from me for half a year.

Life. You may take away my heaven, but don't take the memory of it too.

That's Hell.
And I just want to remember paradise.

I can remember paradise, remember it as if I'm still there, sitting on the edge of the bathtub on our wedding night, and Chris is reading to me.

"Then cometh he to Simon Peter: and Peter saith unto him, Lord, dost thou wash my feet?" (John 13:6). We've been married for just nine hours. Chris' voice is low and smooth, peaceful and spiritual. He's reading to me from the Bible, and he's washing my feet. And he's not just cleaning off the dust and dirt either. Chris has silently taken me by the hand and led me into this unfamiliar room, stepping me into the shallow, warm water in the bathtub. I'm wearing my new, slinky lingerie, he's half-dressed in his tuxedo, and he's kneeling before his bride—me—to commit the greatest act of love he can offer.

The water is warm and so is the air, but a chill tingles over my skin so that the hairs on my arms stand on end. He looks at me, says, "I love you" with his eyes, and picks up the soap. His huge hands feel so gentle and the lather is silky as he rubs it over my skin. I am ticklish, and my natural reaction is to giggle, but I catch myself.

Look at his face! It glows! He pauses every now and then, dries his hands, reads aloud some more, then resumes his ritual. The viewpoint from where I'm sitting, looking down at him, is wonderful. I used to think Chris looked intimidating, rugged; he has a heavy brow, dark eyes almost to the point of being black, and a strong, hard jaw. From my perch on the tub, though, he looks like an angel. I swear—his gentle skin looks so pale and smooth, and his brow is soft and gentle. His hair is trimmed
short, away from his face, and I’m stroking those angelic features. He reads another
verse then looks up at me and I examine his soul through those shaded eyes.

"Jesus answered and said unto him, What I do thou knowest not now; but thou
shalt know hereafter" (John 13:7).

This is the night I’ve dreamed of since I was a wee girl with long blonde
ponytails: my wedding night, the close of the day which until now has existed only in
fairy tales and moonlit dreams. My friend, Chris, is now my husband. I am no longer
Shelly Davies, I am MRS SHELLY FANKHAUSER, and I have the rings to prove it.

He looks up at me. I’ve never seen him as happy as he was today. At times, he
was literally unable to speak. Seeing the disbelief in his eyes that finally, after all he
has seen and done in the past, he was marrying who he calls “a beautiful woman” made
me appreciate that fact a hundred times more. And then there’s what he’s doing now.
He is wise enough to know that these actions need not be accompanied by words of his
own. He trusts me to understand and to hear the love his soul is crying out to me, and
I do. I’ve been hearing it all day.

I think it’s every girl’s fantasy to be able to walk down the aisle with flower
girls and bridesmaids to her waiting handsome prince, and that’s just what I got. Tupe
walked me half way and then my Dad gave me away to Chris. When my gaze fell
upon him standing at the front of the room, everything else faded away. There was
only him. And then, before I knew it, “I do,” kiss, such a sweet kiss, and Chris is
picking me up in my arms and carrying me through the driving rain. We’re laughing;
who cares about rain? I am in the arms of the man whose image has become a cliché as
I grew up. But he isn’t a cliché, he is a real man, with fears, and imperfections, and
love that could not be imagined by a little girl dreaming of the man who she is going to spend forever with. He is real, and I have found him. And he is reading to me as he washes my feet.

"Peter saith unto him, Thou shalt never wash my feet" (John 13:8).

I feel immensely humbled, but I'm trying to hide the tears which have welled up in my eyes. This man, this strong young man with experience in life far greater than mine, has humbled himself before me, dedicating his love and his life to me! My mind is racing now. I feel as if never in my life has anyone done such an incredible thing for me. I don't remember ever having been made to feel this special, this important, this loved. Chris says he has always wanted to do this for me on our wedding night—well, this and lick my kneecaps. He says that the Saviour said we all need to serve one another, and so if the plan is for Chris to be the head of our home, then he wants to do that in the same way as Christ governed the church. He is washing my feet in a "type" of how he wants to be as my husband, he says. He wants to serve me.

So how does this make me feel? It shows me that he has undying respect for his wife, and he will always have that. He slowly rinses the soap from between my toes and around my ankles, never breaking the connection between his skin and mine. This act is setting a standard from which I doubt we will ever depart; it is creating a bond which I do not think will ever be broken. If, as a slightly nervous groom, he can be as bold and humble as to commit such an act, surely as a husband and father he will make this a way of life. And believe me, I will do the same. I'm hoping to myself that this is a good way to begin our marriage.
Chris takes a towel and dries my feet, dabbing at the droplets of water on my skin. Was this the way the disciples felt when their Lord, their master and Saviour bathed their feet with his own two hands? Amongst the turmoil of accusations and prophecies, Christ supped with his disciples. When the time was right he knelt at their feet, one by one. This man, who these mortals knew to be so much greater than they, taught through example the true meaning of service and leadership. Tell most people in this world today that the responsibility of someone in authority is to serve those under him, and you will be laughed at. And here, my husband—a good man, I tell him—understands. And he teaches me. The disciples did not want their Lord to lower himself before them, even so much so that Simon-Peter objected. I am not worthy of this, he said, and still the Christ bathed the feet of his followers. One by one he honoured them.

".... Jesus answered him, If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me" (John 13:8).

I don't deserve this. Still, if this is the kind of love we will share from now on, then don't stop at my feet. I will never doubt your love. I will always trust you. So please Chris, take all of me.

"Simon Peter saith unto him, Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head" (John 13:9).

My heart is screaming out to him and he's picking me up—maybe he heard—and carrying me to the bed. Oh so carefully he lays me down and kisses the tears from my eyes with his lips of suede. On my feet I can still feel the caressing of his hands, and the sensation floats through my body.
I slam the journal shut. I want to be sick. There is no way that love just died. I pity him the day he realises what he's done. He gave up on us. That was a lot to give up on.
Eleven

When I can’t stand the boxes anymore I bring Lainn in the house to put him down for his nap. I’ll have to rock him to sleep because I just can’t handle his screaming, not today. Besides, I’ve been watching him rubbing his eyes and yawning so it shouldn’t take me long. We go into his room and I close the curtains and cuddle him into me. He’s getting too big to hold like a baby now. Chris used to rock him like this. He should be here rocking him now. I didn’t get into this alone. I shouldn’t be alone now.

I can barely conceive of how strong our love once was. We were so sure it would last forever; we talked about it all the time. We thought that given the choice, we would rather die than be apart. We wrote it to each other in love letters, don’t ever leave me, I couldn’t live without you. And I even wrote a story about it, imagining what it would be like if Chris died. I wrote about us but gave the characters different names and changed some things about our lives so it would be more literary. But what I was really writing about was my belief that we couldn’t live without each other because we were so, so in love . . .

The Reunion

After the blackness, the first thing Aroha became aware of was the colour red. It smothered her, throbbed through her, searing her skin and filling her mouth until she choked on it. As she retched, the pain shocked her into consciousness. Sunlight scorched her eyelids when she struggled to lift them, and long minutes passed before clarity of sight came. She squinted upwards, eventually recognising trees looming over her with streams of light piercing the close darkness about her. Then she tasted the
strange thickness in her mouth. She looked down and watched dark liquid dribble onto her T-shirt but she couldn't think what it was.

Blood. That's blood.

Filled with terror, Aroha fought against the seat belt then the door to escape from the blood and the hurt and the confusion, but each movement brought new pain, searing through her chest and head. Her seat belt was jammed—she couldn't undo it and she couldn't move forward to reach the door handle. A chunk of muscle and skin hung from her left elbow where the bone protruded. She quickly turned her head, shutting her eyes until the nausea passed. She was covered with shattered glass. Bruises had begun to colour her swollen right forearm. In excruciating pain, she lifted it to her forehead. She gasped as she drew her fingers away from something sticky and sponge-like.

I don't want to die.

Only then did Aroha inch her head around to the right, seeing for the first time her husband in the driver's seat.

"Dean?" Her words gurgled as if it were someone else speaking. "Dean, are you okay?"

She knew he wasn't. He was slumped over the dashboard, his head where the windscreen once was, the steering wheel almost obscured by his upper torso, and his legs completely hidden from view.

"DEAN!!" Her scream sent fire throughout her chest and stomach, but still she screamed. "Oh, Dean wake up. Wake up! Oh God, help! Somebody HELP US! Please . . ." Aroha's voice faded into sobs. As she strained to touch her husband's
shoulder, her world faded into black.

Twigs and leaves slapped her face through the window. Dean was shouting. "AROHA!" Metal screeched against wood and stone. Aroha screamed as a branch shattered the windscreen.

*Her eyes flicked wide open and her chest was heaving. The sun was no longer beating down, but her throat was dry. With her head slumped back on her right shoulder, she could see dark clouds pressing down on her through the tall pines. Everything seemed so much clearer now, including her pain. She pulled again at the seat belt but it wouldn't give.*

"Dean? Can you hear me, Dean?" She focused her sight on his back until she saw it rise then fall—minute movements, but there, nevertheless. She thought of the Swiss Army Knife on his key ring, but there was no way she could reach that far. Every movement she made brought stabbing pain in her legs, her stomach, her shoulder, arms and head. She found, though, that she could lean far enough just to touch Dean. She shook him but he gave no response.

*Aroha thought if she could just undo the seat belt she could get out and then everything would be alright. A nagging thought told her she couldn't feel her legs, but she knew she just wanted to get the seat belt off. She scanned their surroundings, native trees mostly, totara, rimu, and kauri, including the one with the metre-wide trunk around which the hood was folded. There was a steep incline behind the car; she couldn't see far past the trees and thick undergrowth. Suddenly she remembered the glass from the windscreen that lay in her lap but found quickly that the pieces were tiny—far too small to cut into the seat belt.*
She began wondering then how they had run off the road; the last thing she could recall was her hand resting warmly on Dean's inner thigh as the two of them sung the party songs she had been teaching him.

They were on their way from Wellington to her annual family reunion at Whangateau—his first—and she had been trying to prepare him for the first night tradition: a rowdy all-night drinking session. Invariably everyone woke up the next afternoon with the hangover from hell which made everyone pukuriri for the rest of the weekend, but that was part of the fun. What would be the use of the whanau coming together if everyone was always on their best behaviour? Families just don't work that way. Anyway, she had been preparing him for all that, and the last song she could remember them singing together was an old favourite at any hui. She had giggled at him as he tried to remember all the words.

"Kei te pakapaka mai te haki—"  Dean sang.

"Honey—It's kapakapa. It means how the flag waves in the wind. You were saying that the flag is arguing with you!" Aroha laughed.

"Oh. Okay," said Dean, with one of those puppy-dog expressions which Aroha couldn't resist, and resumed his song. "Kei te kapakapa mai te haki, te haki, o Ingarangi runga o Tiamana e."

"Very well done, Sir," she said in her best British accent, and they had both laughed as the cool Taranaki air rushed in through the open windows.

They were making a detour so Dean could show Aroha where he grew up in New Plymouth and had ended up on a road which was marked as a highway on the map, but which turned out to be a one-lane gravel track winding precariously along one
side of a ravine through the most dense bush she had ever seen. The trees were huge, and everywhere she looked was lush green foliage, more rich than gold. she had thought.

But now she didn’t feel so appreciative of the view. Now they were trapped in their car, the roof metres behind them on the slope, Dean silent and Aroha bleeding. No one was expecting them at the reunion—she had wanted to surprise her grandparents—and no one in Wellington would be expecting them back for another four days.

What would Dean do if he were awake? Aroha listened intently, trying to take in any clues like Dean had taught her. The birds and cicadas were getting quieter as dusk came. A tui warbled intermittently. After a few minutes she heard an engine. Her hopes intensified with the sound as it came along the track slowly, heavily, like a truck.

"HELP!" She screamed, "Hey, can you hear me? HELP US!"

She continued to shout for help until the sound of the truck’s engine faded away, but then she stopped, knowing she had to conserve her energy. Her thirst consumed her, and the taste of blood burned at her tongue. In the failing light she almost felt joy as raindrops began to fall. She opened her parched mouth and drank it up, coughing, choking, gasping for air until she thought of Dean, unable to help himself, unable to drink the rain. Instantly, guilt brought the contents of her stomach to her throat. She vomited up most of the precious water in between calling out to him and shaking him when she could muster the strength.

As soon as the light was gone, the driving rain stung at Aroha’s skin, even
chilling her toes which until then she hadn’t been able to feel. Her heart jumped as the freezing rain roused Dean to a moan; her hope rose with each moan he exhaled, agonising as they were. She wanted to hold him, to wrap her arms around him and take his wounds away, but all she could do was painfully lean towards him and touch the back of his head to let him know she was there.

And there she sat as he moaned in the darkness, with the wind whipping strands of wet hair into her mouth and pelting rain into her eyes as Dean moaned intermittently and she said over and over, "I’m here, Dean; I’m here. Don’t worry, honey, I’ll take care of you. Just please don’t leave me. Please don’t leave me, Dean, I love you."

You can’t die.

She cried, shivering while she slowly stroked the back of Dean’s head like she always did when he was tired, or hurt, or upset. She whispered to him all the words of love they had ever shared, recalling the moments of intimacy, of playfulness, of sorrow. She thought about how far they had come—how some of her relations had tried to convince her not to marry him.

They said he was too different, that she should find a good Maori boy instead, and she had said there weren’t any. It was true. All the Maori guys she met at Uni were Pakeha trapped in dark-skinned bodies. They had no spirit to share with her. When she met Dean in an English class she knew straight away that there was more to this white boy than his skin. His perspectives on the literature they studied showed real depth of character and a sensitivity that drew her to him. He showed her that he didn’t need to be Maori to understand the world.

He even told her some Maori legends she had not known. He felt a soul-
connection with Mt Taranaki, in whose shadow he had grown up, like the mountain was
his grandfather, watching over him in his parentless years. He had told her how
Taranaki had fought with Tongariro for the love of Pihama and had lost, being
banished in shame, and how in the mornings you could still see his pink korowai of
Kiwi feathers, proving that Taranaki was still the rangatira of all the mountains. He
had always wanted to show her a sunrise over his mountain.

The rain was numbing in its intensity. Aroha was shivering almost to the point
of convulsions. She wondered how she would live through the night. To give herself
hope she began recalling how Dean had treated her when they were going out, how she
had hoped it would stay the same after they were married. It had. Even after three
years Dean still opened doors for Aroha, helped around the house, pampered her
whenever he got the chance. And held her when she needed him. She couldn’t even
count the times she had come home to find a huge bunch of flowers waiting for her.

She remembered when money was tight and she was upset because they didn’t
have money for rent. He was her only security.

"Aroha, I love you," he had said over and over, "We’ll get through this,
Sweetheart, it’ll be okay."

"Don’t ever leave me, Dean" She had said, "I couldn’t live without you. I need
you."

And he had promised that he never would.

As she thought these things she continued to smooth the hair down the back of
his head, even when the rain had subsided and the silence was broken only by heavy
drips from the trees and the occasional call of a morepork. She had wanted to soothe
him as he moaned, to let him know she was there, but as the hours passed and her thoughts enveloped her, the stroking soon became solely for her benefit; so that she would not lose his closeness; so that the warmth of his body would keep her safe. Even when he moved just that once, when he seemed to shudder—to tense and then release—she kept smoothing his hair, caressing his neck, refusing to let go. She was thinking that even with how wonderful she had once dreamed their love would be, it was better. She was thinking how their marriage was as close to perfect as it gets, when her hand slowly slid down Dean's back and she once again gave in to the darkness.

Dean was swearing. He slammed on the brakes but everything was spinning and they weren't slowing down. Aroha just wanted him to stop the car. Why wouldn't the world stop spinning?

Aroha awoke to the buzzing of flies and the occasional chirp of a cicada under the dimly lit sky. Dean had been looking at her instead of the road. He had turned to say, "I love you," and didn't turn back in time to see the corner ahead. He had tried to turn the car but it was too late. The road was not wide enough, and the edge of the road became a steep drop down into the bush before Dean could get control of the car.

The sky she could see through the trees was a rich purple, and she wondered if the mountain would be wearing his korowai this morning. She slowly arched her neck to see as much of the sky as possible, hoping that maybe they were close enough to Mt Taranaki to catch a glimpse. As the sky grew lighter she fixed her gaze upon a dark shape, silhouetted by the now pale purple light. Surely, she thought, this couldn't be the mountain, but she continued to focus on it. Minutes passed and the dark shape began to take on an opalescent glow, now obviously a snow-capped peak.
"Oh Dean," she tried to whisper, but her throat emitted only a grating sound which became gasps for air. "Dean," she struggled on, "it's your mountain, your rangatira. He still watches over you, Dean. He's still there." She felt the sting of tears on her parched lips.

This can't go on for much longer. Someone has to find us. We can't die here. It isn't supposed to happen this way! We're supposed to grow old together. We're supposed to retire on that little farm out in the bush and sit together in our Lazy-Boys in front of the fire at night. We're supposed to make love every day of our lives and have children and grandchildren. Our mokopuna are supposed to come around, asking for money and listening to our stories. We just haven't lived enough! God, don't let us die.

She watched Dean again for that slight movement, those shallow breaths. And she watched. And watched. And she strained her eyes knowing that the movement had to still be there. The life could not be gone. Not yet. Not yet.

NO!

Her mind screamed and her throat produced terrible sounds, the high-pitched, breathless sounds of a dying animal, of a mother who sees her dead child.

Don't do this! Don't you dare leave me! You promised!

Letting her fury subside into grief, her heart mourned him. Aue, toku hoa rangatira. You don't even know how much I love you. How could I ever tell you how much I love you. What words could ever make you know? What touch could ever really convey it? And now I can't even tell you.

But she told him anyway, whispered the last words she would ever will herself to
speak.

"I love you forever."

And with that, she closed her eyes. She thought of Dean's arms around her, of his chest warm under her hand, his lips on her forehead. What is life without these things? She recalled his last words to her before the crash, and let their warmth envelop her.

"I love you."

"I love you."

"I love you."

Soon the blackness crept in, warm, inviting when contrasted to the cold, empty life she foresaw without Dean.

So she thought, one final time, there is no life without you Dean.

And then, with his words carrying her, she relinquished her spirit to the divine seduction of his voice.

I thought I would rather die than live without him, and here I am, divorced. I'm without him and I'm still painfully alive. This is not the way it was supposed to happen. I guess it's time to say goodbye to the dreamer who wrote that. I guess it's time to admit to myself that the world is not the place I used to think it was. I guess dreams don't come true.
Twelve

Our first year of marriage was absolute bliss. We both worked part time, studied full time, and loved overtime. I had never felt so complete. We talked and held each other into the night promising never to leave each other, to always look after one another. After the first year, as I relaxed into the warmth and security of a safe, comfortable relationship, Chris started to be disenchanted with married life. He thought once you got married the right way, to the right person, you basically lived happily ever after. He put more and more energy into his writing and acting and less into his schoolwork. After a year and a half I became pregnant. By the time I was six months pregnant he told me he just didn’t feel any love for me some days. I thought he meant that was because the pain and memories were such a strain on his emotions. He meant he didn’t love me any more. He was so unhappy, he said, if I wasn’t pregnant he would leave.

I was sure things would get better once I had the baby. I would lose weight and have more energy to be the fun person he fell in love with. He still loved me; he was just struggling with what had now been diagnosed as clinical depression, then manic depression, and finally post-traumatic stress disorder. We both wanted to make it better and we would both do whatever it took to make it work. Not long after our three-year anniversary, when Lainn was six months old, Chris told me he didn’t love me and wanted to leave. I was shocked. I had no idea that was what he had been trying to tell me nine months earlier. I honestly didn’t know. He still said “I love you” every day. I had no idea things were that bad. I told him not to say he loved me if he didn’t mean it. He stopped.
I went on Jenny Craig and joined a gym. If he just found me attractive again everything would be fine. I tried to be the perfect wife. I kept the house spotless, cooked his favourite meals, tried not to complain when he stayed up all night and never went to school. We discussed how if he had counselling and finished his degree our whole lives would get better. He knew it was true. And yet, while I worked and worked, trying to improve myself and support Chris and reopen the lines of communication, he waited for our marriage to improve.

He wrote a play with his friend Wally, a one-act which eventually became a full-length play full of poetry and songs. The main character, Steve, struggled with memories of his abuse and fears that he wouldn’t be a good father. Steve stopped showing love for his wife because he was struggling so much within himself, but then, at the last minute, he saw what he had been doing wrong and rushed back to his wife, taking their baby in his arms so they could all sing about his dreams of happiness coming true. I watched as Chris and Wally and our friends prepared the play to be performed for the Rocky Mountain Theatre Association, with the hopes it would go on into a national competition. Every day Chris went over and over this story, lived it time and time again, but nothing was getting better for us.

On a Sunday afternoon in November of 1997, when Lainn was almost a year old and we had been married for three and a half years, I came home from church, put Lainn down for a nap, and told Chris we needed to talk. He was washing the dishes and I sat at the kitchen table, talking to his back.
“I can’t go on like this,” I said. “We’ve had all these discussions about what we need to do to be happier together. We’ve agreed on what we need to do, haven’t we?”

“Yeah,” he said. He wouldn’t look at me.

“I mean, I’m not imagining it, am I?” Please look at me. This conversation needs your full attention.

“No.” Slosh in the dishwater, wipe, put the dish in the rack to drain.

“We know that you need to keep having counselling, that we both need to be succeeding in school, and spending time together, talking about what’s going on, right?”

“Right.” Slosh, wipe, drain.

“So what’s going on?” My heart was beating in my throat. When did things get this bad? When did my warm, sensitive, attentive lover become this bare back and hunched shoulders that won’t give me more than single syllable responses? Please talk to me!

“I feel like I’m doing everything I possibly can to make our marriage better,” I said, “but you aren’t doing anything. I need you to be completely honest with me. Do you want to make this work or not?”

He stopped wiping a pot and turned to look at me. His eyes looked so empty. “I don’t know.” He sighed, dried his hands and walked over to me. “You’re not going to like this,” he said.

“I need to know,” I said.
He took my hand and led me to the lounge. We sat on the couch with his legs wrapped around me. “All these things are broken in my life, and they’ve left this great gaping hole. I tried to fill it with drugs and drink, but that didn’t work, of course. So then I thought that the church would fill it, but that hasn’t worked either. And I thought if I married you and we did it right, I went on a mission and we got married in the temple, I thought for sure that would make it all better. But it hasn’t! The hole is still there and I don’t know how to fix it!”

What is he telling me? I couldn’t slow my heart down. “But surely the church and me together, if you’re doing everything right and you’re getting help then the pain will go away and you’ll be able to love me again... Surely a combination of those things will fix it, fix you.”

“I don’t know.” His head hung down. He wouldn’t look at me.

“So now what?” I said. “What does this mean? I can’t keep living with a man who not only doesn’t tell me he loves me; he tells me regularly that he doesn’t love me. I need you to make a decision. You know how much I love you. I’ll love you forever. I’ll never give up on our marriage. But you have to tell me: Do you want to stay married or not?”

“No.” I couldn’t believe what I was hearing.

“What does that mean? Do you want to get a divorce?”

“Yeah, I guess so.”

I was stunned. It took me minutes to formulate a reply to that. “How dare you! How dare you just give up on us?” I was gasping for breath, on the verge of
sobbing, tears already rolling down my face but I was too angry to just cry. “You promised.”

But he had nothing to say. I wanted to hit him.

“You promised,” I said. “What about the promises we made?”

“I still believe in them. I just think maybe we made them with the wrong people.” That was when I stopped believing him. I knew for a fact we were supposed to be married. It was right, I had no doubts. When he said that, it became suddenly clear that this was not Chris. This was not the man I fell in love with, this was the monster who had taken over, the monster who was now admitting to me, “Shel, I’ve been fucking you for two years. It hasn’t been making love; it’s been satisfying an urge. You wanted complete honesty. I’m sorry.” When did this monster come and carry my love away? The sweet, sensitive man who promised to love me forever and never leave me? How could I not have noticed? And then suddenly it wasn’t just about the two of us.

“What about Lainn?” And he looked at me and again I saw in his eyes the love through the pain, just barely. I could see, just barely, the perfect soul that joined with mine.

“I’m afraid I’ll hurt him.”

“Well that’s it then,” I said, and he left. It was over. I knew that no matter how hard I tried, I couldn’t make him happy. He had to do that for himself.

That was three months ago. Chris was positive our marriage was over, so I figured there was nothing I could do but start over, even if I didn’t believe he didn’t love me. I spoke to him about a week ago because I’m waiting for him to forward
some mail. His life seems to be on a downward spiral. I feel sorry for him and I wish I could fix it but I can’t. This was his decision and he’s going to have to handle the consequences. He misses me. I miss him more than anything, but I’m protecting myself. I switched off. Detached. Switched on the robot. I can’t tell him I love him because that would be opening myself up to be hurt again. He said, “I miss you.” And I just nodded. “Yup.”

This is too much. I haven’t given the whole situation this much thought the whole time I’ve been back in New Zealand. I finish the sorting and packing and drop the box off at Chris’ sister Katrina’s flat. On my way home I stop at Clayton Howard’s house. Clayton has been one of Chris’ best friends since Chris came to Hamilton ten years ago. He was one of Chris’ groomsmen at our wedding. We hug and catch up on family, school, work.

“So, you say you’re doing well,” he says, “but can I ask you how you feel? Do you mind talking about it?”

“No, Clay, I don’t mind. I’m glad you asked. I wish everybody would ask so they wouldn’t wrongly assume what happened and all that.” I think about it for a minute as I watch his infant twin boys and formulate the conclusion I’ve slowly been reaching, although unconsciously. “Umm, I think I’ve reached a point now where I’m hardly even mad at him.” Is that really true? Is that really how I feel? “He hurt me, you know? And he’s been a real jerk to me. But now I hardly even feel angry at him any more. I’m just sad.” It’s true. I feel relief to say it out loud. “I miss him so much, and I’m so sad that he’s screwing up his life. He’s not in school, not working, he’s got no money and nowhere to live. He’s lost all direction because that was what
Lainn and I gave him. And he’s my friend, you know? And I still love him. I’ll always love him. And I’m sad to see him in so much pain. There is definitely still some anger, but there’s much more sadness, by far. I have to get on with my life for me and for Lainn, and we’ll do the best we can. I can’t let myself worry about Chris. This was his choice.

“Yeah, I’m not even mad at him any more at all.”
**Thirteen**

Mum and I walk into the house the next evening after having been to Dad’s office to see if my references have been faxed yet. They haven’t. If they don’t arrive by tomorrow I’ll have to make some phone calls to chase them up. I need to get the job application in.

The evening is warm and we go into the kitchen to get Lainn a drink of milk before he goes to bed. Dad is half-dressed, sitting on the couch in the living room engaged in what looks like a serious conversation on the phone. Nothing unusual. But now he’s walking into the kitchen, still on the phone, and he says, “Okay, Wally.” My heart drops. Mum and I look straight at him. There is absolutely no reason for Wally to call here. Something has happened. My mind is racing—Chris is hurt—he’s been in a car accident. He’s always a reckless driver when he’s down on himself. I want to scream at Dad, what’s happening? Everything moves in slow motion.

“Okay Wally,” says Dad as he takes a step towards me. My eyes are opened wide and my breath is shallow. “I’ll just give her some warning and then I’ll hand you over to her.” He takes the phone away from his ear and holds it out towards me. “Chris is missing, presumed drowned.”

Oh, God, he can’t be dead. No. No, Chris, No. Oh God. The pain, the physical pain, I can’t formulate a sentence, a word. Lainn is terrified, get him away from me, don’t let him see me, oh, God, Chris, Lainn will never know you, Oh Chris. Dad tells Wally we’ll have to call him back.
Don’t leave me, Chris, you promised, no, Chris, don’t be gone, how do I live without you? Why did you do this? You weren’t ready to die, oh Chris! The whole concept is too huge. My mind can’t get around it.

I can’t stand the images of you, not being able to breathe, being dragged under, the terror, the fear. The thoughts bring physical pain, I can’t stand it. I can’t even stand. I love you. I didn’t say I love you. I love you! Chris, do you hear me? Did you even know? Did you even think of me? As you went down, as you realised you weren’t coming back up, as the water filled your lungs was there any place for me in your heart?

And Lainn? Did you think of us? Were your last fleeting thoughts memories of the happiness you had? Of your wife who loved you and of your beautiful son? Or did it break your heart to think you had hurt us, had given us up?

Oh, Chris, you can’t be dead! No, not Chris. Oh, Chris, Lainn will never know you! You’ll miss out on everything! He needs you! He’ll never know you! How can he grow up without you? Oh, Chris, the water pulling you under and you can’t breathe. Was terror the last thing to fill your mind? Did you struggle? Did you fight hard enough? Were you afraid to die or were you glad to know it was over and you didn’t have to fight anymore? Were you at peace or were you afraid? Oh, God, please let him have had peace. Please don’t have let him have suffered. Oh, God. Chris. I can’t live without you! You were never supposed to leave me. I shouldn’t have let you leave!

The pressure in my head is too much. The pain in my chest is tearing at my soul. I can’t stop crying, can’t stop realising, over and over again, that he is gone. I
will never see him again, never hold his hand, never feel his arms protecting me, or
smell him or feel his silky lips on my eyelids. I'll never look into his eyes again, his
eyes! And I can never tell him what I kept from him as I walked onto the plane, what I
withheld during our phone conversations. I love you. I love you. I love you forever
Chris, and I should have told you again, one last time.

You shouldn’t have left me! I shouldn’t have let you leave! I could have lived
with you for three more months, I could have put up with you sleeping all day and out
all night, not coming to church or talking to me, I could have lived with all that for just
three more months and that way I could still have had you holding me, still have felt
your touch and heard your voice and been with you! I’ll never be with you again! I
don’t know what life is without being with you, without simply having you there.
Damn you! I want to be your widow! I don’t want to be your ex-wife! You are my
husband and you’re dead! I want to be your widow, damn you! Chris, don’t leave me!
Oh, Chris, you can’t be dead. People don’t live through what you have only to just die
like this! You live through all this shit and then you die when you’re swimming?

I can’t stand this. I can’t stand it; I can’t take it in. I feel like my brain is
going to explode. This can’t be happening; it can’t be real. Make it go away. I want
to curl up in a ball in a dark corner and not wake up until everything is the way it
should be—me and Chris and Lainn all together. Happy. And alive. Chris, I can’t do
it this way. This is not what we planned. You promised. You promised never to
leave.

What am I without you?
And the numbness seeps in, creeps under my skin like an anaesthetic, separating my spirit from my body.

I can’t speak, can’t move, can’t complete a single thought. I just cry, howl, wail to God and for the pain of losing Chris. I was wrong. This, not the karanga, is the most honest sound my voice can make. Mum rushes Lainn up the road to Aunty Kaye. Dad holds me and holds me, holds me up, in fact, then walks me down to his bedroom, holds me some more. He is trying to soothe me, trying to ask me questions but I can’t even hear them, it seems like he’s speaking another language. He walks me to my bedroom and lays me on the bed, wiping my face with tissues and smoothing the hair back from my face.

“Now, I need you to calm down for a minute. Can you stop crying? Just breathe slowly.”

I shake my head. He continues to calm me until I’m only sobbing breath, not voice.

“Now,” he says, “I need to ask you this: Is there any chance that Wally isn’t telling the truth?”

I shake my head and begin to lose control again.

“Okay, it’s okay, I just needed to be sure. He wouldn’t do something like that?”

I shake my head again.

“All right. Now can I leave you here for just a minute? I’ll come right back. Will you be okay for just a minute?”
I just look at him. All right? How the hell do I know? Don’t ask me to think straight. I don’t know! I don’t know anything! Chris is dead! I shrug and cry.

“Okay, I’ll be right back.” He gets up from kneeling on the floor by the bed and leaves the room. He doesn’t know what to do with me, doesn’t know how to handle a daughter in this much distress. This is a man who, as a Traffic Officer, has been on the scene of more road accidents than I can imagine, has seen the dead bodies of children and the sorrow of the drunk child driver who killed them, has washed blood off his hands and his clothes, yet he feels helpless here with his grieving daughter. He’s gone to get Mum who soon arrives in his place. By the time she arrives I’m staring at the wall. I haven’t moved from the awkward position Dad lay me down in. My breath is still ragged and I feel like I am outside of myself, looking down. The real has become surreal. The anaesthetic has taken effect. I am completely numb.

Mum speaks to me but I don’t even hear her. Is she saying it’ll be okay? How can it? He’s dead! Is she asking am I okay? What does she think? Do I look okay? I can’t even look at her, just stare at the opposite wall and the set of drawers piled high with books, with the few papers and memories I brought back from the States—the only things left of me and Chris. Suddenly the numbness is gone and waves of pain drag me down from the ceiling and back into myself. Suddenly, like a breaking wave, the realisation returns. Chris is dead. And again I am sobbing uncontrollably, and Mum, the practical “I want to fix things” parent also feels helpless. She doesn’t know what to do, feels she can do even less than Dad because at least he can hold me.

“Shall I go and call Clare? Do you want her to come over?” Do I want Clare to come over? Do I? Don’t I? I have no idea. I just look at Mum.
“Yeah, I guess. I don’t know. I don’t know!”

“I’ll go and call her.”

I’m still in a daze when Clare arrives fifteen minutes later. I can almost see the adrenaline through her skin. In the thirteen years I’ve know her I don’t think I’ve ever seen her face so pale or her eyes so wide with shock. With her hand on her chest she rushes to me.

“Oh, you poor thing.” She hugs me and again I’m sobbing, sobbing, trying to fight the pain but in the end, letting it wash over me. “You poor thing. I can’t believe it. I’m just shaking. I can’t believe it.” Slowly I cry myself out until I don’t have the strength to cry any more. Mum offers to put Lainn to bed but I tell her I’ll do it. He’s always so intuitive to my emotions. Seeing me break down has set him on edge. If I put him to bed he will know everything is normal—I’m still here, life is still the way he knows it. I read him a Disney book, skipping five pages in the middle, and lay him down in his cot, kissing him goodnight. I can see in his eyes that he’s questioning me; he’s trying to read me, to figure out what’s going on. I say goodnight and close the door.

I sit at the breakfast bar and Mum brings me pain relievers; my head is throbbing, and she’s trying to settle my nerves. I begin to think whole thoughts again.

“I have to call Wally.”

Wally is Chris’ closest friend in Utah. He was in the delivery room when I had Lainn. He ate at our house and he and Chris would have long discussions into the night as they worked on their play together. He witnessed the birth of my son, and now he’s going to tell me about the death of my husband. I can’t decide if that’s ironic
or just horrible. Dad gives me the number and I call the hotel. Chris was in Los Angeles with Wally and the cast of their play, which had made it into the national competition and had to be performed in Orange County. They had done very well—received a standing ovation—and then were spending the next day sightseeing. Half the group went to Universal Studios, the other half to the San Clemente State Beach. Some of them, having grown up in Utah, had never seen the ocean. Chris had no money to go to Universal Studios and had grown up in New Zealand, surrounded by beaches. He hadn’t been to one since we left Hawaii almost two years earlier. When they arrived at the beach he ran towards the waves, stripping down to his red shorts as he went. “It looks just like home!” He said.

What he didn’t notice as he ran out to the water were the signs warning against swimming due to stormy weather and unusually violent surf. El Nino had been wreaking havoc up and down the coast. No one had planned to go swimming, so the others stayed on the beach. Chris swam out and body surfed back in a couple of times, and the others moved further down the beach. The waves were furious, not like the romantic visions of white horses galloping into the beach; it was as if the whole ocean was an animal raging into the shore and dragging everything back out to sea with it. In between the creamy froth, the green water reflected the dull grey sky.

When Chris called for help our friends on the beach thought he was joking. Chris was a funny guy. But then he kept calling out. They rushed into the water, some of them fully clothed. Sand filled their clothes and slowed them down. There was debris in the water from the storm. One of the women was hit on the leg by a piece of wood in the surf. Three of our friends, Bob, Rucker, and Chad, got close to him in the
pounding waves. They said he looked so calm. He wasn’t thrashing around, wasn’t panicked at all. His face looked peaceful. They said it was as if there was a wall between them and him. The water seemed to pull them in every direction but closer to Chris. Bob got about six feet away from him, close enough so that if Chris would just reach out and grab Bob’s outstretched hand, he could have pulled him to safety. But Chris didn’t reach out. He looked straight at Bob and shook his head.

The next wave dragged them all under. Chris didn’t come back up.

Someone ran to call 911. Lifeguards arrived and had to rescue some of the group who had also got into trouble in the rough water. Boats and Helicopters searched until dark. He hasn’t been found.

I can’t believe it. I’ve given up trying to get my mind around it; the whole concept is too huge. Now it’s time to shift into action mode. Chris’ family needs to know. Mum offers to call for me, but I need to do it. I call his brother Tim in Brisbane, Australia.

“Tim? It’s Shelly.”

“Shelly? Man, this is a shock. How’s things? Are you in New Zealand?”

“Yeah. Umm, not very good actually. I’ve got some bad news.”

“Yeah . . .”

“There’s been an accident, and Chris is missing. They think he’s drowned.”

Silence.

“I’m sorry—I just found out.”

Silence.

“Are you okay?”
“Ahh, yeah. Umm, it’s just taking a while to sink in, aye. Look, to be honest, I don’t even know how I feel about this.” He’s been mad at Chris for the divorce.

“Yeah, I know.”

“Well, what about you? Are you okay?”

“No, not really.” I start to cry again and Clare puts her arm around me, rubbing my back.

“What happened?”

Here I begin what we will soon call the recorded message. “He was in California because the play he wrote was being performed in a competition. They went to the beach and he went swimming and the weather was really rough. He called out for help but they couldn’t reach him. They haven’t found his body.”

He wants to talk about responsibilities, finances, and plans for a funeral but I can’t deal with it. “I can’t think about it right now, okay? Just give me some time. We can’t do anything until we give them some time to find the body anyway.” The body. This is Chris we’re talking about! I don’t want to get comfortable discussing him as an inanimate object.

Chris has two sisters. We decide not to tell the older one, Vida, until there is absolutely no chance Chris will show up alive. I know he won’t, but she won’t handle the news well, so there’s no rush to let her know. The other sister, Katrina left with her husband for a holiday in Rotorua yesterday after I dropped the box off. The box. I have to get the box back. That’s all I have left of him. No one knows how long
Katrina will be gone or how to get hold of her. Tim will be responsible for getting in touch with all the Fankhauser side of the family.

Next I call Clayton. I can’t believe it. I just spoke to him yesterday, and now I’m telling him this? Jennifer answers the phone. It’s after 10pm.

“Jen? It’s Shelly. I’m so sorry to call you so late.”

“No, no. It’s fine, Shelly. Anytime. Is everything all right?”

“Ah, no. Is Clay home? I think I’d better talk to him.”

She sounds worried. “Yes, he’s here, I’ll just get him for you.”

“Oh, and Jen? Stay with him, okay? I think he’ll need you.”

Clay comes on the phone. “Hey, Shelly, what’s up?”

I don’t want to say it. It was hard on Clayton when Chris left New Zealand, and he’s been missing him for four years. Now I’m about to tell him he’ll never see Chris again. “Clay, I’ve got some bad news.”

I can hear in his voice the smile he gets on his face when he doesn’t want to believe something. “How bad?”

“Really bad.” My voice breaks. “Chris has drowned.”

“What?”

I can’t just sit here, wait for it to sink in, so I repeat myself. “Chris has drowned. He’s dead.”

“What? No!” I hear tears in his voice and release mine again. “You’re kidding me.”

“No. I’m sorry.”
“You’ve got to be kidding me. No. No! You can’t just do that! You can’t have someone live through all of that and then just die! No. That’s not fair! You can’t do that!”

I have barely got my own grief under control; now the rush of his is overwhelming. Clare holds me tight and Mum pats my shoulder while I listen to him trying to process it.

“You just can’t do that. People like that don’t just die after they’ve been through so much. They just don’t.”
Fourteen

Clare, Mum, and I sit in the dark dining room. I have no idea who else to call. No one. Everyone. “Hey,” I realise, “At least now he doesn’t have to pay off his school loan.”

“Yeah,” says Mum, “not the one in the States or the one here!” We laugh sadly, uneasily. “But isn’t this just typical of Chris. He had to make a grand exit—dying on Valentine’s Day.” She smiles at me.

“So typical,” I say. “How very tragic and poetic. Way to ruin my Valentine’s Days for the rest of my life, Chris.” He always had to be so dramatic.

Aunty Kaye and Uncle Kevin arrive. Aunty Kaye tells me that my cousins played with Lainn and he drank some juice. Uncle Kevin hugs me tight, like Dad. It’s going to make me cry again. “Oh, Shel,” he says, “So life had another surprise to throw at you, aye? It’ll be all right. We’re here for you.” He opens a King Size Milky Bar.

“Here you go,” Aunty Kaye says, pointing at it. “A king-size pain-killer!”

Everyone laughs. I’m reaching the point of not feeling again. We all go into the lounge and Dad puts the TV on. He never has been able to handle silence. He brings out some glasses and bottles of sparkling grape juice and starts passing them around. None for me, thanks. It’ll make me be sick. What, are we celebrating or something? Should we make a toast? Everyone begins to talk. I look around me in amazement—such trivial, mundane things! The dress Aunty Kaye has bought to wear to Lauren’s wedding next weekend. The latest Star Trek episode. Clare sits paralysed beside me. We have nothing to say. I can’t believe life can return to such everyday
things so quickly. Surely it will never be the same again. Life is going on around me but my life has stopped. I feel like I’m the one who’s dead. I can’t even cry.

For the second time in three weeks one of the most important people in my life has died. Until this month, I had never experienced death. And for the second time, I have found out by phone. Chris has drowned. It happened eight hours before I found out, and I didn’t have the slightest idea until Dad came into the kitchen with the phone. I lived, blissfully unaware, through those minutes as Chris struggled in the waves and called for help, those moments as he went under and didn’t come back up. I felt nothing as his spirit left his body, felt no strange emptiness or nagging feeling that something was amiss in the hours that followed. He certainly didn’t come to me in a dream as I napped this afternoon. He didn’t come and tell me he loved me and would be with me always. He just died. How could he? This is not how I thought it would happen. In fact, I thought I would die if he did. Why am I still breathing? How can my soul live without his?

Before long it’s midnight, then 1am and 2am. Kevin and Kaye leave, and Clare decides to stay the night. Mum and Dad go to bed. We go to my room and make the spare bed. I’ve reached the nauseous stage of overtiredness and worn nerves, but I can’t sleep. We lie in the dark and talk. Clare wants to get straight to the point. I love how she can do that unashamedly.

“So how do you feel?” She says

“Numb,” I say.

“Yeah. I don’t know what to say really. I wish I could help. I just feel so sorry for you.”
“Me too.”

“Yeah.”

I feel bad, making conversation difficult for her like this, but I can’t bring myself to be helpful. I know she’ll keep trying.

“So,” she says, “I mean, what are you thinking? I just can’t even imagine how I would feel if I were you. What’s going on in your mind?”

“I don’t even know. It’s like nothing and everything all at the same time. Or maybe the nothing is in my heart and the everything is in my head. I can’t think straight. I can’t feel straight.”

“Yeah.”

“I mean I’ve already gone through this huge thought process, if you can call it that the way my thoughts are screaming from one side of my head to the other. I’ve already gone from, Oh my gosh, Chris is dead, No, don’t be dead, I can’t believe he’s just not alive anymore, to, Well, this makes things easier on Lainn not having to grow up with divorced parents. I just don’t want to keep thinking at all because I’m afraid of where my thoughts will take me, where I’ll end up, you know?”

“Is that what you’re thinking about now? About how his death actually makes things easier in a lot of ways? Because I’ve already thought that.”

“No. What I’m thinking now is purely selfish. Just about me.”

“You’re allowed to think about yourself, you know. This is the perfect excuse for anyone to be just a bit self-involved.”

“Great, just what I need—a reason to be more self-involved than I always have been.”
“Shut up. So what are you thinking now that’s so selfish?”

“Well, it’s been in the back of my mind since Chris left, but I haven’t had the guts to think about it.”

“Yeah . . .”

“I just don’t know what I am without Chris. I don’t remember what it was like to be without him. I feel like I’ve loved him for as long as I can remember. I mean, I can see in my mind the times before I was with him, but I have no idea what that felt like or what living was like then.”

“Yeah, I know. I’ve thought about that with Owen sometimes. I just can’t remember, aye.”

“Yeah. So I’ve been avoiding it since I came home but now I have to face it. All I can remember being is a wife and a mother, and now I’m not a wife anymore, and although I’m still a mother, that’s just not anything like what it used to mean to me. I was one of two parents. Now I’m it. I don’t know how to do that.”

“It’s not like we ever expect anything like this to happen.”

“So who am I now? I really don’t know.”

“Me either.”

“I just miss him so much.”

We lie in silence for a while and then I tell Clare I need to go to sleep. I roll towards the wall and silently cry as the overwhelming realisation of utter loneliness returns. I can’t believe Chris is gone. I don’t know how to live in a world that doesn’t have him in it.
It’s not long before I hear Clare’s steady, regular breathing. I get up and walk out of the room, stopping in the middle of the near-pitch-black hallway. The sound of crickets is thick around me. The night is warm and close. I close my eyes and try to summon an image of Chris and me together on a warm Hawaiian night. It comes, but only fleetingly. Memories of happiness, completeness and togetherness make me feel like I’ve been punched in the chest. I walk into Lainn’s room and open the curtain to let the moonlight in.

Am I having déjà vu?

Again, he sleeps. My son, with his golden hair like Chris’ hair in his baby photos, my son with his brown eyes like his father’s. Eyes that will look back at me for the rest of my life and be Chris’ eyes and yet not be. My son is part me, part Chris, and yet he’ll never know Chris. He’ll never remember bouncing on the bed with him, or being walked and sung to sleep by the wonderful, warm, caring father who struggled with his past until it killed him. I treasure the traces of Chris in Lainn’s forehead and hairline, and his chin, of course, and his dimples. Chris will never be gone completely because our son is with me. I’m so grateful. I see Chris in him when he dances around the living room stamping one foot and looking at me to see if he’s getting the attention he wants. I see Chris on stage rehearsing his latest play, doing his Sean Connery impression for the girl behind the counter at Blockbuster Video, or grunting at hotrods. I look at my son and it tears me up to think he’ll never do those things with his Dad. He’ll be a little Chris and yet he’ll never know him.

Again, I watch my son sleeping and see in his face the baby I wish he still was, the baby Chris and I knew together, the baby I thought was born into a secure, eternal
family. The one whose birth was spiritual to Chris because it cleansed him of all the wrong he had done and all the wrong that had been done to him, because this baby wiped the slate clean, this baby gave him the chance to redeem himself by being a great father and protecting him from any harm.

It was amazing, Lainn’s birth. I was in labour for twelve hours from the time I was induced to the time I started pushing, and that’s when Wally arrived. “Tell him he can come in if he wants to,” I said. I knew Wally could handle it; he’s mature enough, and besides he wants to make movies and I figured he’d better produce really realistic birth scenes after this. So I was pushing and Mum and Chris were on each side of me holding my legs and Chris was holding my hand while Wally fanned my face with a Reader’s Digest and fed me ice chips. After an hour I was telling the nurse I was too tired, I couldn’t push anymore and Chris was saying, “Shel, you’re doing so good. You can do it, it’ll be okay,” and Wally was saying, “You’re a champion pusher, man! This is awesome!”

And then the doctor was there and trying to turn the baby around, he’s posterior, he said, but Lainn was stubborn even then, turning back the wrong way every time. So out came the forceps and the doctor said, “One big push and we’ll have the head out, okay?” And I said, “I can’t push any harder.” Was this guy an idiot? Didn’t he think I was already pushing as hard as I could? But with the next contraction I pushed with everything I had and then suddenly the doctor was dropping the forceps to catch the baby in his arms, a purple-grey slug, saying “It’s a boy,” and I was just so amazed at the sudden release of all the pressure that I didn’t notice and Chris turned to me, “It’s a boy.”
"A what?" I said.

"A boy."

"A boy?" It can't be. Chris had told me my whole pregnancy I was having a girl. He was sure! He knew. A boy?

"A boy." Amazement on Chris' face, sheer joy and amazement.

And then Chris was cutting the cord and I had a glance at the tiny bundle before the nurses started working on him, clearing the airways, checking his APGAR score while Chris hovered around them.

And then Chris came towards me, chin quivering, jaw clenched, shaking his head. I opened my arms and held him and he sobbed, no words, just sobbing. This was Chris' absolution. God had given him a son, a son to love and teach and protect, a son who would give Chris the opportunity to be the good father he never had and knew he had to be. This boy was a gift from God and it terrified Chris.

"I love you, Shel," he said, "I love you so much." Wally was filming us with Mum's camcorder. I know Chris meant it. I saw it in his eyes.

And then the self-fulfilling prophecy fulfilled itself. And Chris did one of the things he always dreaded. He left his son without a father. One day I'm going to have to explain all this to Lainn and I don't want to. And again, like déjà vu, I just stand and watch him sleeping, watch his face and see the baby fading, pushing away from my breast, the infant, the toddler, crawling, stumbling, running away, running through the years until before me is . . . what? A boy without a father? A teenager with no identity? A man like Chris? I don't know, but not the baby. Never again the baby
once I tell him. One day I'll have to try to make him understand. His father left to protect him. It'll be a long time before he'll understand.

And how will he know who he is? This son who is supposed to be both Chris and me? How will he know who he is if he doesn't know that which he comes from? I want him to learn to be Lainn because of who Chris is. Was. No, is. I want him to know all the wonderful and good things his father is, so he knows he can be strong and talented and loving and wonderful, too. I want him to know Chris so he knows himself. And now the only way he can know Chris is through me. I can't do this alone. I'm not strong enough.

First Tupe and now Chris. It seems like it was just days ago I stood here thinking how much you would miss out on by not knowing your great-grandfather. And now it's your Daddy. It's Chris. Dead. Now all you have is me. I am the only one who can help you discover yourself. I'm terrified.

I want him to sleep forever. I want to be able to stand here always and look down on his face, peaceful as he dreams of sweet baby things. I don't want him to wake and grow and have to live without knowing his father, his wonderful father who was so imperfect and screwed up, but wonderful nevertheless. You'll never know him, Lainn, not like I do, and it breaks my heart.

Morning is closer now, and I don't want to face the daylight. With daylight comes life, and I am retreating from life. I don't want to shower, dress, eat, feed Lainn, wipe his tears, I can't even stop my own. I want to remain in this dark world, suspended in time until it doesn't wound me quite so mortally to think of Chris. Lainn sighs in his sleep and I touch his face. I close my eyes and smooth his hair, trying to
recall the feel of Chris’ hair in the days when we would sit and gaze at each other. It won’t come. Oh, Lainn, I’m so sorry. This is not how it was meant to be. You should have grown up with him. He loved you so much.

Through blurred vision I walk back to my room and climb back into bed as the sky glows the deepest purple of dawn.
Fifteen

It’s been five days since Chris died, and I’m on the plane to Salt Lake City via Los Angeles. Each day has blended into the next. It’s all so hazy; I think there are gaping holes in my memory. I feel like I’ve called half the world this week, letting them know my husband is dead. And he is my husband. I couldn’t care less about the divorce. He wasn’t himself, everybody knows it, and it never happened. But I still wish I had stayed, just tried a little longer. It still hurts.

Monday was a day of waiting, feeling helpless while we waited to see if his body was found, but not being able to get hold of anyone because it was Sunday in the States, and Wally and the group were already on their way back to Utah. Francie came down from Auckland and took Lainn back to her house. I could barely keep myself breathing and I certainly couldn’t look after him. I called the Coastguard, Police, Fire Department, and finally in the early hours of Tuesday morning, the California Lifeguards. His body had been found twenty-four hours after he went missing, five miles down the coast by passing tourists. They wanted me to identify him over the phone. Did he have any tattoos? Scars? What colour was his hair? Blue eyes? Was he circumcised? I felt like I was taking a test. What if I answered wrong? I got off the phone and cried in my Dad’s bed. It was him; of course it was him. Now we had to decide whether to bring him home.

That afternoon we had a family meeting. The Read family, the ones who took Chris into their home all those years ago, rushed to help me with the details. I felt so overwhelmed. Not only had I lost my husband but now I had to make decisions about his burial and funeral? I sobbed as Simon Read arrived from Taumarunui two hours
away, sobbed as I was held by the man who had performed our marriage ceremony.
and who now would probably conduct Chris’ funeral, too. His brothers Graham and
Mike also came, armed with research they had done on the prices of funerals and
transporting bodies into the country. Chris’ stepsister Nicole, who I had never met,
travelled four hours from Dargaville to represent the Fankhauser family.

We sat around the dining room with cold drinks in our hands and discussed the
options. Chris had been found; we now had a body to be buried. So do we bring him
home? It costs $10,000. None of us have that, not by any stretch of the imagination.
Chris had no medical or life insurance. I have nothing.

Well, where would he want to be buried? In the States or at home? Home.
Okay, then, what about cremation? Everyone nodded, murmuring agreement. It
seemed to be the only option. I sat and stared at my glass. Simon knew I hadn’t
responded.

“Shelly, you’re quiet. What do you think?” He said.

The bubbling L&P began to blur. It was a choice of speak my mind
immediately or bawl for ten minutes before I could talk again. “I know it’s the logical
choice,” I said, the pitch of my voice rising, “but I don’t like it.” He called me over to
sit by him so we could talk quietly together.

“What don’t you like about cremation?” He said.

“It’s his body! I just, I can’t . . .”

“It’s okay,” he said, “Well, what can we do to make it easier for you?”

I shrugged, but I knew what I needed to happen.
"What if we send you over there so you can see him before he is cremated—if you had a chance to say goodbye—would that help?” He said.

I nodded. That would make it okay. The discussion continued with the rest of the family.

What part of New Zealand would he want to be buried in? Not with his mum in New Plymouth, where he grew up; too many bad memories. Not with his dad in Wanganui; that place meant nothing to him either. So Hamilton, then; that’s where he was happy. We were happy. What part of Hamilton? How do we get a plot? Simon suggested the small private cemetery where his mother was buried, at Kawhia, an hour away. Yes, Chris would love that. He was a pallbearer at her funeral. She did a lot for him. He would love to rest out there in peace beside her.

We made tentative plans for my travel and for a funeral when I get home. Wednesday I booked flights and made contact with the San Diego County Medical Examiner and a mortuary who would do the cremation. Todd and LaRa Brewster, good friends Chris and I have known since we lived in Hawaii, called me from Utah and offered to pay the USD$850 for the cremation. I broke down. That would be $1700 for me, and the only way any of this is being paid for is on my credit cards and by my parents with some help from the Reads. I’m just amazed that they’re doing this for us.

But it makes sense when I think about it. His whole life Chris had barely anything to call his own, but what he did have, he would give to someone else without question. He wouldn’t even hesitate. He was such a generous man that it shouldn’t surprise me if people want to return the favour. In Hawaii he was always fixing
someone’s car, so much so that people would give their completely broken down cars to him, saying If you can fix it you can keep it, and that’s how we got our car, and then another one but we didn’t need another one so he fixed it and gave it to a friend who did. Most people would have sold it but he figured, hey, we got it for free, so let’s just pass on the good fortune. Sometimes it drove me mad—we would stop at an intersection and he would wind down his window and empty his pocket into the hand of a man holding a sign that said, “Will work for food.” And it was always our last $1.27 or $2.34, five days to go until payday and he would hand it over to a man I assumed was probably just lazy. But I could never convince Chris not to give the man the benefit of the doubt.

It was the same with the play, his and Wally’s play, People Become Real. “People become real through their sorrows,” one of the characters says, and Chris lived with his sorrows day after day after day as he watched Wally on stage acting out Chris’ struggles with abuse and abandonment. It would have been easier for him, for our marriage especially, to step away from the play because it caused him so much pain. He could have left it in Wally’s capable hands and got on with living his own life, his own present, not his past. It killed him. He couldn’t sleep, couldn’t feel love, couldn’t see the goals he once had for his life and his family. But he couldn’t let it go. He had to make sure this play was the best it could be because it was his story and the only reason he was allowing it to be told was so it could help other people. He said so himself. “They get up there on stage and I’m taking it in the ass again, every night. But it’s okay. I’ll do it because this play is saying something to people. And maybe no one else can say it like I can.”
And he’d live it all over again every night and he couldn’t sleep but when I went to bed every night he would come and lie with me. His body curled to meet the curves of mine, and he would hold me until I fell asleep. He would hold me until I fell asleep because he knew I couldn’t be alone.

And now it’s Thursday, and here I am on the plane. Alone. Through all of this, Mum and Dad have been trying to move house, so today I helped them pack up the last house and left them at the new house as they were about to start unpacking. I stopped in at Francie’s house in Auckland for a few hours before I caught my flight so I could be with Lainn, but he’s confused and upset that I have left him with Francie. He basically screamed at me for four hours straight. I wish I hadn’t even seen him. I also wish now, after days of wishing I could stop crying, that I could feel something. I think of Chris dead, of how I’m going to see his body, and it’s like watching a movie. I want to feel because Chris and memories of him seem billions of years away. I don’t want to lose the pain of remembering his love.

I take painkillers to help me relax. I have to sleep. Since Chris died I’ve had about 3 hours’ sleep a night, and I have so much to do this week; I don’t expect I’ll get much more. There’s so much to do and I can’t believe I am doing this on my own. No one else can help me, I know, but I’m still amazed that my parents let me just come over here alone to organise everything, sort through Chris’ things, dress his body and have him cremated. I wonder if I’ll still be the baby in the family after this. I may have finally graduated into adulthood.

Crying again, and I’m not old enough. I’m not old enough to be divorced AND a widow. I’m not old enough to be facing the grief of a life alone without the person I
love most in the whole world. We were supposed to grow old together. We were supposed to survive all of those parenting struggles together: teenagers, broken hearts, even our grandchildren’s struggles. We were supposed to spend so many more years making love every day and writing poetry for each other. This can’t be the way it was all planned.

And yet everything points towards the fact that it was planned. I was home with my parents where I could cope with Chris’ death, even if only just. The day he drowned he was happier than he had been in months, everyone said. He was the only one to go swimming. None of them saw the signs, none of them. No Swimming. Danger. They moved down the beach and he moved along with them in the water. He probably walked right into a rip without knowing it. And they all ran into the water. And they all swam out to him, but they couldn’t reach him. The water pulled them in every direction but his, they said. It was like there was an invisible wall between them and him. Bob grew up on those beaches but he had never, never known the waves to be that powerful, that vicious. And Chris looked at them and shook his head. He didn’t reach out to take Bob’s hand. He looked peaceful.

What does that mean? Had he given up? Had he lost the will to live because he thought he’d wasted every chance he had at life? Or was he calm because he knew his time had come and now he wouldn’t have to live with the pain anymore. He wouldn’t have to wake up at night with the smell in his nostrils of a huge, sweating man grunting over his four-year-old body. It was merciful for God to take him now. He’s lived through so much. I’m so glad he doesn’t have to live with it anymore. So glad.
And yet, selfishly, I want him here. For Lainn, for me. I'm too young to have to live with missing you for the rest of my life. But everything says this was meant to happen. So was it meant to happen so you could be my own personal guardian angel? Are you sitting here in the aisle next to me, wishing you could wipe away my tears? Then do it! Let me know you're here! Hold me, and though I won't feel your arms, I will feel the warmth in my chest. I will close my eyes and feel the silhouette of your skin against my cheek. Stay with me! Help me! I can't do this alone, and you promised to be with me. I love you forever, you said, and I know you meant it. I refuse to believe anything you said or did in our last months together. I know you loved me!
Sixteen

I'm sitting on the floor of Wally's tiny basement apartment with Chris' whole life in boxes all around me. I slept almost the entire flight, then spent three hours in the LA airport loathing the city that took my husband from me. I sat at a bar to order a coke and was asked for proof of my age. I looked at the bartender with disbelief. Could I really still look like someone young? I guess the years my soul has aged these past months haven't yet manifested themselves on my face.

Before I knew it I was walking out of the gate at Salt Lake City and Wally was walking towards me. He looked exhausted. He hugged me and I began to feel real comfort because being with Wally was like having part of Chris with me again. If I can't be with Chris, being with Wally is the next best thing for now because besides me, Wally knew Chris best. We walked towards the baggage claim with our arms around each other while he told me how he almost got arrested for bringing a gun and loaded clip into the airport. He'd had them in his jacket for weeks to take them to a pawnshop for his brother. When the metal detector sounded he realised what it was and very quickly had to explain, arms up in the air, there's a gun in my pocket, my best friend just died, I'm here to get his wife, I totally didn't realise these were in my jacket . . . They took the gun and told him to collect it when he left the airport.

He cursed and abused the drivers on the I15 all the way back to Provo like only an ex-Navy man can. It's 11:30pm Utah time now, still Thursday, but don't even ask me what time or day my body thinks it is. I have three days to get everything done, but I've decided I have to sort through Chris' things now, tonight, or I won't be able to function. Tomorrow I have to arrange the memorial service for Saturday, take care of
some things at school, settle Chris’ affairs, and Sunday leave for San Diego. I’m sure there’s more but I can’t even think straight. I have a list somewhere. But I have to do this now, so I can wake up tomorrow with this one huge task behind me. Besides, I might as well do it tonight, because I know I’m not going to sleep. I’m surrounded by Chris’s clothes and books and whole life, basically. They are all the things I packed into boxes and suitcases two days after he left me. I have so much regret now.

After I went home to New Zealand, Chris was evicted from his apartment because he hadn’t paid the rent so he lived in his car for two days before Wally found out. Then the two of them had lived together in this tiny space for two weeks and now I am here with Wally instead, the only echoes of Chris his boxes of clothes, books, and his dirty laundry in a bag beside me. I force my breathing down to my steady desensitised robot pace and begin to sort Chris’ belongings into piles: things to take home; things to store; things to give or throw away. I can’t take it all home with me. I refuse to read old letters or look at photos for more than a moment. But I do bring his T-shirt up to my face, closing my eyes and feeling the soft cotton on my cheek, burying my face in it and breathing the dregs of his life into my lungs and my heart.

And suddenly I have images in my mind of the two of us rushing late into the final exam for a theatre class we took together the first semester after we got married. We are rushing into the auditorium, my cheeks flushed and Chris’ eyes sparkling. We’re fifteen minutes late. I’m never late for anything, especially something as important as an exam. I should be freaking out but we’re giggling, holding hands as we grab our test papers and find seats, and of course Chris doesn’t have a pencil so I find the spare one in my bag.
I had been trying to get Chris out of bed for an hour when he pulled me onto him, a devious look in his eyes, and started unbuttoning my shirt, kissing down my neck. “Oh, my gosh,” I said, “we can NOT do this now. We’re going to be late!”

“Go on,” he said. “We haven’t had a quickie in ages!”

“You’re so bad, Chris. We have to be at the exam in seven minutes.”

“And your point is . . .?”

I’ve never looked at young couples rushing late into classes the same again. We were so happy once. The fact that he loved me, wanted me, wanted to be with me forever made me feel so good about myself. I felt like I could do anything and so I did, did everything I wanted to do. I taught, wrote, went on to do my masters, kept going to school and working even when I was pregnant and then with a new-born baby because I knew I was capable of it so why not keep going? Why not do everything all at once if I could survive it?

He made me believe in myself. He gave me so much strength but when he left he took it all with him. If the man who promised to love me forever gave up on me, then all the stuff I thought was good about myself must not be true. I must have been imagining it. I *know* that’s not true, but I don’t *feel* it. I don’t feel like a strong woman anymore. At best I feel like a robot, shutting myself off from any emotion. At worst I feel like a snivelling little girl with pigtails who can’t make it over the vault in gym because it’s too big and scary and I’ll never be able to do that—it’s too hard. For now the robot seems the best option, so I put Chris’ T-shirt into the throw away/give away pile and keep sorting.
It's around two thirty when I find Chris' wedding ring in what used to be our spare change tin, and slip it onto my finger. I suddenly remember Chris' greenstone and ask Wally if he knows where it is. For Christmas of 1993 when we were engaged I sent Chris a beautiful pounamu patu, about four inches long, and he had worn it ever since. Chris was famous around Utah Valley State College for threatening to kill people who asked him why he was wearing a shoehorn around his neck.

Wally looks up at me from his laptop computer as if he had forgotten I'm here. "Huh?"

"Chris' greenstone," I say. "Do you know if he was wearing it when . . ."

"Oh, yeah. I think he must have been wearing it because none of us know where it is, and he was wearing it on the trip."

"That's okay," I say. "I thought so. I was just wondering." And then I remember. I dig through my suitcase until I find a small black velvet pouch and climb up onto the bed beside Wally.

"I brought you a present."

He opens the pouch and slips out a pale, patu-shaped piece of greenstone on a thin strand of leather. He looks up at me in amazement. "Oh my gosh, Shelly. I don't know what to say. I can't even tell you what this means to me."

I take it from his hand, lift it over his head, and settle it around his neck. We hug for a long time and cry together. "I wanted to get you something to say thank you for helping me through this, and I thought of pounamu—greenstone—because it would remind you of Chris. I thought you could wear it and it would help you feel him with
you. And then I realised, if Chris had had the chance, he would have given this to you a long time ago."

"Oh man," he says, "Thank you just doesn't even say it. Wow. I can't believe it. Tell me again, tell me what it means? I mean, I pretty much know, but tell me again?"

"It means you have mana. If you were wearing this in New Zealand, people would see it and know that it was given to you by someone who loved you, because you are important to them. You have mana, Wally; you are worthy of respect. So you can wear this and know that I love you, and know that Chris loved you. And as long as you're wearing it, it can help you remember that he's here."

"Mana," he whispers.

He keeps looking at it and holding it to his chest and he's just speechless.

"Wow." he says, over and over again. "Thank you."

He reminds me of Chris when I gave him his pounamu. I sent it to Hawaii in a Christmas package with strict instructions to only open it while he was on the phone to me. I heard him tearing the paper open and pulling out a cotton shirt. "Oh, thanks!"

He said. "It's cool!"

"There's something else," I said.

Rustle of wrapping paper. "No, there's not."

"Keep looking." And then he felt the weight in the shirt pocket.

"Oh, no way. No way."

He couldn't believe I'd given him a gift that meant so much. For me, the theory was that part of my job in our relationship was to build him up because he'd hated
himself for so long. I wanted to do everything I could to show him how much he was worth, how much he meant to me. I didn’t think I needed any building up. I felt fine about myself. But ultimately Chris showed me how I could be so much more than I’d always planned on being. He gave me the courage to do what I dreamed instead of what the practical side of me thought were realistic expectations.

You helped to shape me in so many ways, Chris. Who is going to do that now? Who is going to tell me I can do it when I’m scared? Who is going to push me to do more than I thought I could? Who am I without you?

And that’s all I can think as I go back to my boxes on the floor until I switch back into robot mode, but it’s getting harder to keep up. At around 5:00am I close the last box and climb onto the couch. At 7:30am one of my friends is picking me up to go rent a car.
Seventeen

After those two and a half hours’ sleep and another two the next night, I’m standing at the door welcoming people into my husband’s memorial service. Somewhere in the back of my mind I have a feeling the widow shouldn’t be greeting people at the door, but there’s no way I’m going to sit there at the front and have people staring at the back of my head as they arrive.

The memorial is being held in the Black Box Theatre at UVSC, where Chris performed most of his roles: *As You Like It, Star Spangled Girl, People Become Real*. He was in the middle of rehearsals for *The Royal Gambit* when he died. It’s the best place for us to remember him. Just last night I came here with Wally and all of Chris’ theatre friends to watch a performance of *A Comedy of Errors*. For almost three hours straight we laughed hysterically, tears rolling down our cheeks, telling Chris he’s an idiot for missing it. He should’ve been here laughing with us. But he would rather have been on stage. He always had to have an audience.

And what an audience he has today. The chairs we have set up are filled and we are bringing in more until they are filled and people are standing along the walls. He would have loved all this attention. I know most of the people here—friends from church, people Chris was in plays with, teachers, friends we knew in Hawaii, people from my department at BYU. But in the back there is a group of people, almost two whole rows, who I don’t know. They all look very gothic in black hair and draping black clothes, and I think to myself, these people were the cause of some of our problems. Wally comes and whispers in my ear, “Check this out: those guys all knew Chris at Denny’s. People loved him everywhere, man! Denny’s!”
Immediately I don’t like them. I hold their relationships with Chris against them. They took some of my time with him away from me. But I don’t have the chance to think about it for long, greeting everyone as they enter the theatre. I watch them enter, faces drawn and pale or maybe eyes red from crying already, like Jason Peery. Jason was the editor of the newspaper at BYU-H when Chris worked there. Just minutes ago I realised I hadn't told him so I called his house. A babysitter explained that he and his wife had gone to a funeral and then I looked up and he was walking in. He looks so sad, so shocked. I remember how that felt, but I'm past shock now. I hate the fact that I am beginning to get used to it.

In the door walks Randy Allred, who we also knew in Hawaii. He is currently teaching at BYU for a year, and it seems like it was just last week I went to his office to tell him about the divorce. I knocked on his office door and stepped inside.

“I just came to tell you I’m getting ready to head home to New Zealand.”

“Oh?” He said.

“Yah,” I said, “just me. Me and Lainn.”

“Why, Shelly? What’s wrong?” Both Chris and I were close to Randy in Hawaii. I taught part time in the English department, and Chris was a student of his. He shut the book on his desk and put down his pen, leaning forward, waiting. I was trying not to cry.

“We’re getting a divorce,” I said.

“No. Oh, no. Well, why? I mean, was this a mutual decision?”

“No. I don’t want it at all. Chris says he doesn’t love me anymore.”

“I don’t believe it. What a fool. And so Lainn will be going with you.”
“Yeah, I wouldn’t be going if there was any question about that.”

Randy ran his fingers through his hair and down his neck. “I don’t believe it. After all those hours he would sit in my office with me and talk about his Dad, how he left him, and how he never wanted to do that. He used to talk to me about it all the time! And now he’s just decided this?”

“Yup,” I said, swallowing. “He just says he hasn’t loved me for a long time.”

“Well I don’t believe it. I think he still does love you, Shelly. I can’t believe how selfish he’s being.”

“Thanks. Me either.” We sat in silence for a minute. ”He’s moved out, so I can give you his new number if you want to reach him.”

“Well, I don’t know if I even want to talk to him. I’m so angry I don’t know if I can even talk to him. What a fool.” He shakes his head and then sighs, “but I guess I’d better get that number in case I feel differently later.”

I gave it to him and began to say goodbye.

“Well I’m so sorry, Shelly, and I wish you the best of luck in going back to New Zealand. You’ll be going home to family then?”

“Yeah, Mum and Dad will be there to help me.”

“That’s good. I’m so sorry. I can’t believe it. Good luck.”

I remember the conversation clearly because it felt so good to have someone else be angry with Chris. But here he is walking towards me with his wife, Ann, and I can see the pain in his eyes; I can see the regret. He loved Chris and now he’ll miss him forever. Ann hugs me first, “We’re so sorry, Shelly. We were so shocked when we
heard.” She holds me at arm’s length by the shoulders, looking at me out of the top of her eyes. “Are you okay?”

I shake my head, and Randy steps in and wraps his arms around me.

I try to laugh away the sobbing which is threatening to take over, but I don’t have the strength. “I’m just not old enough, you know?”

“I know.”

“I’m just not old enough to be doing this.” I haven’t been crying so far, but now the pain takes over. No more brave face for me, not today.

We start late but no one cares—we all knew Chris, and Chris was never on time. Randy King, the Director of the UVSC Theatre Department, is reluctantly conducting. He loves an audience, he says, but not something formal like this. It’s not that formal, Wally and I try to tell him. We have organised only a short service: two speakers, two songs, and time for others to get up and say something if they want to. We can think of a few people who will get up, and we want to give everyone the chance if they have something to say. Wally keeps asking me if I want to sing or speak, and I’m adamant. No way. If I stand up there I won’t be able to utter a single word. No one needs to see me stand in front of them and bawl.

We have an opening prayer and then Amber, who was in People Become Real, sings “You’re Not Alone.” If I could have, I would sing it, but I can’t, so I’ve asked her to. Chris used to play it on the guitar and sing it to me.

You’re not alone.

Even when you’re feeling on your own,
You are loved in ways that can't be shown;
Your needs are known;
You're not alone.
And when you cry,
You're just letting go a heartache deep inside.
And tomorrow there'll be sunshine and sky
And love close by;
You're not alone.

Well I feel alone.

Now Laurie Petty walks up to speak. I can see her hands shaking. She has known Chris longer than anyone in this room, including me. When he was seventeen she was on a mission in New Zealand and she helped him clean up his life. He had a crush on her for the longest time.

"I first met Chris on April 4, 1988, almost ten years ago. It was in Hamilton, New Zealand, in a small parking lot in front of some shops and flats. I was a twenty-one-year-old Mormon Sister Missionary who was in great need of meeting a kindred spirit. Chris was a needy, kooky young man in gumboots. In my journal that night I wrote: I shared laughter with people I loved today and I met one of them tonight. When Sister Kimball and I went back to the flat we just sat in the car for a while. All of a sudden something prompted me to open the car door. There was a young guy walking by and he rushed up to us, "Sisters!" We then met Chris, a seventeen-year-old guy.
He is the coolest. He just clicked with me. It was just instant love, nothing bad, but I've finally found someone I can relate to and love easily.

"There were so many coincidences with us; there was just instant understanding, love, energy. We ended up having Milo with him and I was listening to Mozart in the car before we left. His mother died three years ago. He said that his mother used to listen to Mozart. He called the colour of my skirt swamp colour. I liked that. At the end of the evening he said, 'I love you guys already.'"

"This morning I wear the same outfit I wore on that evening almost exactly ten years ago when I met Chris. The swamp-coloured skirt, that's what he called it. While I was on my mission, I derived strength from Christopher John Fankhauser. He provided me with support, love, encouragement, and friendship. In my life I have felt love as strong as Chris' from few people. From the moment Chris told me that his mother died, I felt a commission, a gentle nudging from a loving woman I have never met to see that her beloved son would get his life on the right track.

"I was privileged to see Chris' growth towards his spiritual goals and I was privileged to help him. This was a big part of my role in Chris' life. Chris was one of the few truly kindred spirits I have come to meet and love in my life. For this priceless eternal friendship, I am grateful.

"Chris is alive and I don't just mean in my heart and in yours. He literally lives on in spirit form, and he looks like Chris Fankhauser, although maybe he wishes he looked like Sean Connery.

"Chris always said to me 'Stay crazy.' Actually, the whole phrase was 'Stay crazy, I love you.'"
“Chris, stay crazy.”

Randy King gets up and announces that there is time, now, for anyone who wishes to, to come up and speak. Randy Allred walks straight up to the pulpit.

“I always think of Chris as ready to do battle,” he says. “Those of you who know him would agree, the way he stood he was always ready to fight somebody. And he often did, whether it was doing battle with a dirty carburettor or some difficult lines in a play . . . or the shadows in his own soul. I believe he has won many of those battles. And I also know that he is now where he will no longer have any doubts as to who he is, and the glorious being he is in God’s eyes.”

Next Laura Hamblin, one of Chris’ teachers at UVSC, comes up to speak.

“The first time I met Chris he was in a literary criticism class I was teaching,” she says. “On that first day there were five girls in the front row and Chris, way in the back. And he just sat there in his leather jacket and his white T-shirt with his arms folded, you know. And I thought to myself, as I do of all my students, who are you?

“And one of the things I said in that class was a definition of literature. I said that you can tell a piece of writing is literature if your understanding of the world is larger because of it. Chris told me that when I said that, he decided to take the class, because he was actually out scouting for classes.

“What is interesting to me is, after knowing Chris as I did—because he would come to my office often to talk, to share his writings—was that knowing Chris enlarged the world for me.”

She steps down and more people come up to share how they feel; first the ones I expected would have something to say and then more, and more until over thirty people
have stood in front of us and remembered Chris, their love for him, the things that
drove us crazy, what they learned from him. And each comment they add is another
piece of Chris’ story.

“He was a young man who just had the ability to reach into your heart and tug
at your heartstrings.”

“One of the best things about him was that he just wanted to make you smile.”

“Only the Lord knew everything he struggled with.”

“If I learned anything from Chris it was that people mattered. He wanted
nothing more than to take the pain from us on himself.”

“You were his anchor, Shelly.”

“I’ve never seen anybody so proud of their child as he was of Lainn.”

We might not be having a tangi in the traditional sense, but we’re benefiting
from this in the same way.

One of the Denny’s people comes up, and I brace myself. I don’t like you. I
don’t want to know what you have to say. I don’t care what you think of Chris. He
was my husband, not anything of yours.

The young man who stands in front of me seems jittery and I wonder if he’s on
drugs. “I don’t think I ever met anyone that ever amazed me the way Chris did. We
had a lot of similarities we shared and talked about—childhood and stuff. And the thing
that always got me was that he’d come over and he’d just be there. Or he’d pick up his
guitar and play and I’d just listen.
“He had the most profound effect on my life. He believed in me. He believed in me and he’ll never know how much that meant to me. In the short time I knew Chris he became one of my closest friends. And he always will be.”

And as I listen to him I begin to realise that I can’t hold it against Chris. He would go to Denny’s and write, eat, and just talk to whoever was around. And he would listen to their problems and show them he understood; he had been there for them. And he gave them hope that they would be okay. He literally changed this guy’s life.

I can’t blame Chris for not being able to sleep, and I can’t keep being angry with him for not being at home with me and Lainn, because look at the good he was doing when he wasn’t there. He was helping these people see their own worth like he helped me see mine. I have to be willing to share him because I can’t wish his kindness away from them. Far out. He meets a guy at Denny’s and changes the guy’s life. Only Chris.

David Petty, Laurie’s husband, a New Zealander, also speaks. “I think one of the great tragedies is that he can’t be here now because he’d love this. Dying young, the whole romance, the whole tragedy of it all. . . He’d just love it. He’d just love us all here crying.”

And we’re all crying laughs and laughing cries and nodding; Chris would have loved this—a whole room full of people talking about how great he was. We’re laughing and we’re crying for you, Chris. You jerk. We could have done this with you here, if you’d asked. I spent our whole marriage trying to convince you how
wonderful you were, and you never believed me. Do you get it now? You idiot. You’re so important to me. To all of us. Why did you have to die to see that?

After three hours I can’t take any more. It has been wonderful. There has been so much love here, so much grief, so much comfort. I have reconciled some of my feelings. But now I want to throw up. If I hear one more person cry, one more person say how much Chris means to them, I will be sick. I can’t take any more. I signal to Randy King to please finish it up. He stands and announces that we will finish the program now by hearing from Wally and then listening to a piece of music chosen by Chris.

“Shelly,” Randy says, as he looks into my eyes, “thank you for sharing him with us.” I feel like my heart has been torn in half.

Wally walks up to the pulpit. I know he’s been scared of doing this.

“I don’t know who I am that I got to have my name on the program . . . “ He is shaking his head and wiping his eyes. “I told Chris in the car on the way over here that I wasn’t gonna cry. But you all destroyed that for me!” We all laugh and Wally is looking at the framed picture of Chris which sits, surrounded by flowers, on the table beside the pulpit.

“I guess I’m just the person he came up to, and he had an idea for a play. He shared an essay with me, shared a lot of his life with me and I said Hey, we could make this into a play, and he goes I know. So we started writing it together and of course anytime I’d write anything—you know him with words—he’d always come up and correct my English or correct the way I’d turn a phrase.”
“And he told me that Americans weren’t funny.” I don’t know if I’m laughing more or crying more.

“And every time somebody would do something for him he’d say, Cheers, mate, and I’d say, you know, you’re in America now. You need to say Thank you. And he was like, Why? And I’d be like, You know, ‘cause you’re in America and if I was in New Zealand I would say, Cheers, mate. And he was like, No you wouldn’t, ‘cause I wouldn’t let you. You’re not a New Zealander.” We can’t believe it. This is why I wanted Wally to speak; he captures the essence of people.

“So anyway, I don’t have much to say because you’ve all said it, and it’s all true, especially the bad stuff. But we’ve gotta love him. I feel like one of his greatest struggles was using the bad from his life and turning it into something that would be positive for all the rest of us. And he was terrified that it would turn out wrong and be negative instead of positive. And I just watched him struggling, trying to find that balance.” Wally looks upward, “Well, it worked, Chris, because look at us all here,” and he looks back at us again. “I can just see him, sitting up there smiling, not because we’re saying nice things about him—okay, so he would have loved that—but he’s smiling because he can see that he made a difference. Because here we all are, remembering him in a positive way.”

I’m so glad Wally is the last person to speak. He has said all the things I needed to hear. He says Goodbye to Chris and then sits down and I put my arm around him.

Early in our marriage Chris and I talked about our funerals, what we would want them to be like. Chris wanted a song by Queen to be played: “One Year of
Love.” Now that we’ve heard what everyone else has to say, we sit in the Black Box Theatre at UVSC and listen to what Chris wanted people to remember about his life.

*Just one year of love*

*Is better than a lifetime alone.*

*One sentimental moment in your arms*

*Is like a shooting star right through my heart.*

We made love to this song once. Chris put the CD in and put this song on repeat and we danced in the living room of our apartment in Hawaii, slow, close, feeling each other’s hearts beating through our own chests and slowly undressing each other. I kept freaking out because a breeze was coming through the open louver windows and blowing the curtain open. If anyone walked past they would be able to see right in but Chris kept turning my face back to look at him, look straight into his eyes as he ran his fingertips up and down my back while we stood together naked. And he took my hand and led me into the bedroom and lay me down on the bed and told me I wasn’t allowed to do anything because he just wanted to worship me. He wanted to worship me.

I’ll miss you Chris. I’ll love you forever, but I will hold onto what we had. You’re right. My few years, my few moments with you have been enough. My life is better because of you. You made me become the woman who is surviving this. You made me become a woman who can be a student and have a job and be a mother at the same time. You made me be the best I could be. Were you preparing me for this?
Even when you left me you were making me strong enough to live without you. But I still don’t know if I can. I still don’t know who I am without you.

*Just one year of love is better than a lifetime alone.* I wouldn’t change what we’ve shared. I couldn’t have asked for more, not really. But it still hurts. I’ll still cry for you like I am now, eyes closed, shaking my head. I don’t want this pain, but I’ll take it if it means I have memories to cherish.

After the song and a prayer, people begin to clap. They stand, one by one and in groups, and applaud Chris. Soon the whole audience is standing and clapping, applauding Chris, his life, what he meant to all of us and how he left us all changed because of him. They are applauding my husband while I sit and sob exhausted sorrow. No, I can’t do this, I can’t clap for you and stand because that would mean the show is over and it was good. Well I’m still mad. You left me, Chris, and I’m not going to applaud you for it. You hurt me, you bastard, and I don’t want to clap for you. I want you to be here so I can still love you. I don’t want to clap. I don’t want to participate in a communal recognition that your life is over. It’s too much. I can’t take it. I can’t do this! I’m hiding my face with my hands and my head on my knees. The pain is physical. Wally puts his arms around me and helps me stand. So I stand for my husband, and cry. And Chris receives his final standing ovation.
Eighteen

Wally and I are driving up a slow curving road into the Greenwood Mortuary with Chris’ brother Tim. We met him at LAX and drove two hours in a rented minivan to find a hotel here in San Diego so we could spend the week taking care of the cremation. I’m actively avoiding Tim. He ticked me off at the airport and that was his one and only chance to get on my good side. We had arranged to meet him at the baggage carousel and when I saw him I walked up to him.

"Hey Tim."

"Whoa, Shelly," he said, "You’ve put on a bit of weight."

I wanted to slap him. Get him away from me. What kind of person could even think about saying something like that? Does he think I’m family so it’s okay to be tactless? Well, I was never close to him while Chris was alive, so we’re certainly not going to be affable now. I’m enduring his presence this week but that’s all. I understand that he wants to say goodbye to his brother, but having him around is driving me up the wall. He is the same as Chris in so many ways and yet he’s nothing like him! He has similar facial features but his expressions are not Chris’. He has a similar build but is smaller and shorter. He says the same kinds of things but not with the same speed and suave, and his voice just isn’t Chris’ voice. It’s like I have to spend the week with a badly mutated version of my dead husband. I’m keeping Wally between us whenever possible.

And we’re surviving so far. Yesterday—Monday—we filled out paperwork and arranged to come and dress the body today. So here we are, parking and getting out of the van, all of us feeling sick to our stomachs. I have told Tim and Wally that although
I want to do this, I am completely aware of the fact that I might not be able to handle it, and that will be okay. Wally has warned me that in order to get through it, he will probably switch off and just get it done. Another robot. He doesn’t want me to think he doesn’t care if he’s not showing any emotion. Tim needs to make peace with his brother who he’s been mad at but who he loves, even if they haven’t seen each other for years.

We walk into the reception and see Thad Pugmire, the man who is helping us. I don’t even know what he is—an undertaker? Is that the politically correct title? Probably something stupid like "Caregiver to the Recently Passed Away." Oh well. He takes us into his office and asks us again if we are sure we want to do this. The body is not in good condition. It was in the water for twenty-four hours, and was damaged during that time. And that was 10 days ago now. No, we want to do it. This is the whole reason I have come back to the States. I have to see Chris one last time. I have to say goodbye to him.

Mormons traditionally clothe their dead in sacred robes in preparation for resurrection at Christ’s Second Coming. We want to do it. And besides, he is our friend, husband, and brother. We need to see him. Thad Pugmire directs us down a hallway, and, seeing that none of us is willing to go first, he walks and we follow. We walk down the long, plush hallway to a door at the end. Thad Pugmire opens the door and the three men walk in ahead of me. As I go to step through the doorway I catch a glimpse of the body in the back of the room. I immediately turn back into the hallway. That is not my husband lying there. It’s hardly a person. Maybe I can’t do this.
Wally comes back out and asks me if I’m all right; am I going to come in? I’m trying to control my breathing. I tell him go ahead, I’ll come in when I’m ready. I take deep breaths and flash a smile at someone walking past me to another room. When my heart isn’t pounding so hugely in my throat I step through the doorway without looking at the body. There is a vinegary odour in the room. I sit in a chair near Chris’ feet. Wally asks me if I’m okay and I nod. Do I want to come over and help dress him? No, I’ll stay here and hand you the clothes.

Eventually I look up. Eventually I stand and walk a wide circle around the room. Eventually I begin to take quick glances at the body, my eyes darting from it to my feet, back to it and to my feet again, until I can look at it for a few seconds at a time. He is in a plastic suit that goes from his neck to his wrists and ankles, to try to keep in the smell of his decaying flesh. The skin on his feet and hands, the hands that I once held and kissed, is white and spongy like fungus. His hair is matted and has been hacked off in large clumps, I assume for one of the post-mortem examinations. But it is his face that is the most disturbing. The whole right side of his head is swollen, a dark purple mass like hideous scar tissue. I try to look only at the left side of his face, but I can see, even though his eyes are closed, that something in the sea has been eating them. His lips, his lips that were once so velvety on mine are cut and swollen on one side, and just look waxen on the other. His face is scratched and from the smell that comes from his head, I think there is more damage underneath. I can’t stay near him. I’ll throw up. It disturbs me. It disturbs me that the last time I see my husband will be in this state. He is disfigured. I can hardly reconcile all my memories of him with this stinking body on the gurney in front of me. How can I lovingly say goodbye to this?
Think happy thoughts. Think of Chris’ face when it was beautiful. I close my eyes and see Chris’ face with half a beard on it. In fact, I can feel the bristles on my fingertips as I shave the beard off with clippers. We were at the cast party for *Much Ado About Nothing* and he had just finished playing the role of Don John. He’d had the beard for almost two months and we were both dying for him to be clean-shaven again. I loved shaving him and watching the big clumps of ginger curls fall away from his face, leaving only soft shiny blonde whiskers. Probably half the cast had a turn with the clippers, the girls giggling as they shaved stripes up and down Chris’ cheeks. We took photos. We were smiling, laughing, and I remember kissing him and getting tingles across my shoulders from the softness of the short whiskers.

Then he disappeared off to a bathroom and returned a few minutes later smiling angelically after looking like a bushman for so long, his cheeks glistening white, his cheekbones and jaw prominent again. And he came to me smelling of English Blazer aftershave, and brushing his cheek against mine, uttering in his sexiest voice, “Smooth enough?” And I almost melted because of the chills that ran down the backs of my thighs. His skin felt like silk and hot chocolate and I wanted to kiss all over his face, from his lips up to his forehead and then back again.

I take a deep breath through my mouth—not my nose—open my eyes, and sit in a pink arm chair to hand the clothes to Wally, underclothes, shirt, trousers, socks and slippers. As each layer of white clothing covers him he seems to become a tiny bit more like Chris. A tiny bit more of something I can stand the presence of. When he is dressed Wally asks me if I want a few minutes alone with Chris. I nod. They all leave the room. I walk around him and touch his hair while I hold my breath. I stand by the
least disfigured side of his face and put my hand on his chest. It feels heavy. Cold.

"You were so beautiful. Damn you Chris! Damn you!" I can't even kiss him goodbye. Just before I walk out the door I turn back. "I love you. I love you forever."
Nineteen

At just after 9pm Wally and I leave Tim watching TV in the hotel room. We have been shopping and then to see *Goodwill Hunting* at the movies. Wally had already seen it and told me I should really see it because it dealt with similar issues to *People Become Real*. He said I would love it because all the emotion was the same. He was right. The movie cut into me and when it finished I got mad at Wally.

“So, what’d you think?” He said.

“I hated it.”

“You hated it? Oh my gosh! Why?”

“Why do you think? It had a happy ending! I don’t want to watch crap like that! Where was Chris’ happy ending? Where’s mine?”

After that we decided we needed some good old-fashioned mind-numbing action and violence, so we watched *Replacement Killers*. After the first ten minutes of pathetic script and worse acting, I lifted up the armrests of the two seats beside me and slept through the next hour and a half of karate chops, gunshots, explosions, swearing, and I assume, gratuitous sex.

Now, through the exhaustion, I am beginning to feel relief. This is coming to an end. The hardest part is over. But there is something else I have to do while we are still in San Diego. I have to face the water.

Because of the weather I can’t swim at the beach—not that I would be able to bring myself to step foot in the water that killed Chris. But after we left the mortuary today we visited a beach at Coronado where Wally went through Navy Seal training, and we saw how furious the waves were. All around us the ocean had risen beyond its
tidemarks and damaged homes and buildings. We parked the van in a flooded car park. I stood on the rocks above the waves and closed my eyes. The wind cut through my clothes and salt stung my face. Those were among Chris’ last sensations. The sound of the crashing waves was one of the last things he heard. It was painful but healing to feel the same things. We came back to the hotel and tried to sleep in between phone calls from friends and family who want to know how everything is going, but we’ve given up. Wally is sick of hearing me explain to people what we have been doing, telling the same story over and over again, and I am sick of telling it.

He goes downstairs to work out in the weight room and I put on shorts and a T-shirt and climb over the locked gate to the hotel swimming pool. I’m glad it’s closed because I don’t want anyone else around. I have to do this, and doing it alone in the dark suits the way I feel. I always thought I was a person who needed other people around, but lately I feel so much stronger, so empowered when I face things alone and conquer what I’m afraid of. This is definitely something I’m afraid of. Less than a month ago I was in a swimming pool at another hotel, allowing the water to soothe me, envelop me, heal me of all the tension and exhaustion. Now as I step down into the pool I’m terrified. Now the feeling of being enclosed in water is suffocating me, but still I step forward, down, further into the pool. El Nino has brought another storm and rain is pelting down, making me numb so I don’t feel the chill of the air. It comforts me.

When the water reaches my waist I’m finding it difficult to breathe. My chest is beginning to feel tight. Rain is streaming down my head, through my eyebrows, into my eyes and off my nose, and I feel like I’ll choke on it. I drop down into the water
until I am fully submerged. Suddenly it is silent except for the hum of the pool filter and the steady pelting of raindrops. Is this what it was like for Chris? Head above the water deafened by the crashing waves and then pulled, dragged under into the muted hush of the crackling ocean?

I look above me and watch the raindrops splashing into the surface of the water. I feel the weight of the water crushing me and I'm terrified. I break the surface and gasp, crying, Chris, I'm so sorry. I'm so sorry the last thing you ever knew was the terror of water filling your lungs, of the absence of air. You couldn't breathe and it kills me to think of that. I go under again and will the fear to leave me. I look around me at the water. I am in control here, not you. I come up again, take a breath and dive under, swimming the length of the pool in one breath. I stand and raise my face to the sky, my arms outstretched over the surface of the pool. The rain washes over me and I breathe in the night air, breathe out the fear and the pain, let the rain wash the grief off my skin.

Think happy thoughts. Think of a time when water was good, when Chris and I were in Hawaii. We used to go spearfishing at night. I remember standing on the beach, listening to the waves, smelling the salt, and then Chris helping me keep my balance as we walked into the water, through the first set of breakers. We would lean against each other as we put our flippers on and then laugh at the way our faces looked in the masks and snorkels. We would hold hands as we went under and the sounds and feelings of the water were exhilarating and calming at the same time. I would stay close to Chris until I got used to the dark and the pull of the waves and then I would be brave
enough to go off on my own a little, following the reef for a way but always making sure the beam of my torch could reach Chris.

But the clearest image I have of those night is of one night in particular when the moon was full and it shone so bright that the palm trees made shadows. When we got out into the water we realised it was so light that we could turn off our torches and still see, so Chris and I held hands and swam around, watching the moonlight dance through the water and onto the sandy ocean floor. I can still see it.

I fall back and float on my back looking up into the sky between the raindrops.

Where are you Chris?

As I'm floating I hear through the water the clink of the gate rattling and the soft thud of footsteps. I sink under the water and come back up with my eyes open through the water to see Wally standing at the edge of the pool.

"How're ya doin?" He says.

I nod. "I'm okay."

"Yeah?"

"Yeah. Ready to hit the spa pool, I think."

He nods and takes his shirt off. I sit in the driving rain on the edge of the pool and watch him dive in. That's it; get it all over and done with in one go. He doesn't come up until he reaches the other end, and when he does, he comes up gasping. I leave him alone and step slowly into the steaming spa. The heat rises through my body and the raindrops send chills back down towards my toes. After a while Wally comes over and sits down across from me. I've become so close to him this past week. We
are sharing emotions so similar we can't help but experience them together. It is nice to be able to sit in silence together. But I watch his face and see pain in his eyes.

Here comes the question women love to ask and men hate to answer. "What are you thinking?" I say.

He looks at me. "I could've saved him. I should've been there."

"No you couldn't. You weren't supposed to be there. You saw how it all worked out."

"But out of all of us I am the strongest swimmer. I trained on those beaches. If anyone could have saved him it would have been me. I should've been there."

"You don't know that. You heard what Bob said, and he grew up on those beaches. It was like there was a wall between Chris and them. They couldn't reach him! They weren't allowed!"

He doesn't say anything, just stares at the raindrops splashing on the surface of the water.

"I know," I say. "Don't you think I've wondered? What if I didn't go home. What if I didn't let him leave me? I could have fought it, could have tried for just a few more weeks. And then what? Would he even have come to California? Would I have been with him? Would I have been swimming with him? We don't know. You weren't there, and we don't know what would have happened if you had been. All we know is that he died, and we can't do anything about it. We just have to live with it."

Wally looks at me with tears in his eyes. Or maybe the tears are streaming down his face with the rain. "I don't know how to do that."
I move across the pool and wrap my arms around him. "I love you, Wally. I couldn't do this without you. I'm so sorry that you weren't there and that you'll always have to live with it. I'm so sorry."
Home again, in Mum and Dad’s new house, and I’m on the phone to Clare. Today is my twenty-fourth birthday. Tomorrow we bury Chris’ ashes.

“I miss Wally,” I say.

“Yeah? Already?” Clare says.

“Yeah. I miss sharing our grief because now I’m back here, back in New Zealand, back in a country where I’m surrounded by people who may love Chris, but they haven’t known him for years. They don’t know all the talent he had and all the good things he did. I miss Wally because together we could grieve over the man that died, not the boy who became the man that died, you know?”

“Yeah. I never really thought about it that way. But you know everyone here still needs to have their chance to say goodbye.”

“Yeah, I know. I’m just jealous of Wally that it’s all finished for him now. I don’t want to go through another funeral. I’m too tired to keep being sad.”

“Don’t worry, Sweetie. It’ll be all over soon.”

“I know.”

“So how was San Diego?”

“Oh, we actually had a great time. We went shopping and bought these rocking sunglasses—totally expensive—don’t tell Mum and Dad. We ate at Planet Hollywood and visited the San Diego temple. It’s so gorgeous.”

“Yeah?”

“Yeah. It looks like a fairy castle. We took pictures everywhere we went. I specifically wanted to make good memories of the city so that I wouldn’t hate it every
time I heard its name for the rest of my life. Now Francie thinks I’m heartless because when she asked me how it all went, I said it rocked. Oh well.”

“Oh well. I’m jealous! I want to go to San Diego. I want to go to anywhere, in fact. It’s not fair.”

“You wouldn’t want to do what I did.”

“What was it like?”

“If I ever see anything more horrific in my life, I’ll be surprised.”

“Oh, Sweetie. Are you okay?”

“Yep. Don’t want to talk about it.”

“Okay. So what are you doing now?”

“I bought a little camphor wood chest to put Chris’ ashes in, and I’m about to do that.”

“Oh, it sounds beautiful. What did you bring his ashes home in?”

“A cardboard urn. It looks like a big Milo tin. We weren’t going to pay hundreds of dollars for one of their ugly brass ones.”

“I reckon. Like you can afford that.”

“It was really funny, actually. It was kind of nerve-wracking having a dead man’s remains in our carry-on luggage. I almost slapped this black woman working on the x-ray machines as we entered LAX. She was just like, ‘Eeow,’ over and over again when we explained what was in the container. I just wanted to say, You stupid cow, I know you’re freaked out but have a little consideration, that’s my husband. If she had any brains at all she’d have realised it was a sensitive situation.”

“Oh my gosh, I can’t believe she would be like that. What a cow!”
“Yeah, but anyway, I didn’t say anything because I have a policy of never ticking off anyone who can stop me from catching a plane.”

“Good policy.”

“Yah. Oh, and then when Tim and I got on the plane we couldn’t decide whether to put Chris in the overhead compartment or under the seat in front of us, but we had these images of this big Milo tin full of Chris rolling up and down the aisles, so we put him in the overhead.”

“Another good call.”

“I thought so!”

“So how’s Lainn now?”

“He seems to be doing pretty well. He came home from Francie’s just a couple of days after I left, so he’s been here with Mum. He was pretty excited to see me when I got home, so I guess he still loves me.”

“Of course he does!”

“How about you guys?”

“Nothing new. Hey, I have to go get groceries now. Wanna come?”

“No, thanks anyway. Lainn’s out with Mum and I’m going to have a little quiet time.”

“Alright Possum. See you tomorrow?”

“Only if they force me to go.”

“See you then.”

“Bye.”
So now I'm kneeling on the floor of my parents' new house, alone, Chris' ashes and the small camphor wood chest on the floor in front of me. He would have liked it, the ornate carving, the smell of the wood. But I'm terrified as I open the cardboard cylinder. I'm terrified because I can't forget the smell of his dead body, and I'm afraid of his burnt remains. What will they look like? Smell like? But when I open the plastic bag inside I find they are harmless. Just ashes. I try not to think about his body. I don't cry over the paper inside which certifies these are Chris' remains. I don't cry over the small numbered metal tag that falls with a clink into the chest as I pour the ashes into it. And then I realise I can't let him be buried alone like this.

I need a photo of the two of us, of when we were still happy. I find one from when we were engaged. It was the day after he came home to me from Hawaii. There is love glistening in our eyes and we are holding each other, smiling. We're both wearing denim shirts and jeans. I also find a photo of Lainn. He is sitting in a toy car outside our apartment in Orem. He has one hand on the steering wheel and one on the door of the car, just the way Chris drives. He's smiling at Chris, who's behind the camera. I kiss both pictures and put them in the chest on top of the ashes. We'll never leave you, Chris. You'll never be alone.

I don't want to shut the lid. It's too final. But I cry as I do.

But I don't cry for long because I just don't have the energy. It has all gone on too long. I don't have anything left to give. I lie on my back on the floor and pull the little chest over to me, no, pull Chris over to me so I am lying with my arm around him. And I close my eyes and let the tears drip down into my ears until I drift off into another place, into the past when we were in love, when we would be together forever.
I drift off to the place where I can still feel what I loved about Chris, how he gave me confidence in myself, how when I told him that I wanted to write he said, “So write,” as if there was no other option. How when I couldn’t decide to enter a story or an essay into a competition he would say, “If I can do it, you certainly can. Go on, Shel, you know you’re a good writer. But no one else will ever know if you don’t get your stuff out there for people to see. What have you got to lose? Send it in,” so I did. And I won again and again and suddenly the dream I’d always had became something I could work towards, not just wish about.

And when I started teaching at BYU-H and I was only 20 years old he would build me up so I could get over my beginning-of-semester jitters. I would wake up in the morning for days before classes started saying, “I’m having naked dreams again.”

“Cool!” He would say, and move in closer to hold me. “So where were you naked this time, and was I there?”

“Everyone was there. I was walking around campus completely freaking naked.”

“Cool. Everyone was there?”

“Everyone.”

“Did we do anything kinky?”

By then I would hit him. “Chrii-iis.”

“I’m sorry. I’m sorry, baby. You know you’ll be fine. You’ll walk into that classroom and you’ll have all your clothes on and you’ll be awesome like you always are. And your students will love you and my mates on the rugby team will be telling me how awesome you are for teaching them the way you do, and you’ll come floating
back home to me, three feet off the ground and bounce off the walls for the rest of the night because it makes you feel so good to teach an awesome class.”

And I would pout at him, begging for more like a puppy dog with her tongue hanging out, ha-ah ha-ah ha-ah, slobber, go on, go on, tell me more.

“You’re an awesome teacher, babe. Although I admit, some of the guys might appreciate it if you did arrive naked.” And I would slap him and he would tickle me until I forgot about everything I was afraid of.

I take a deep breath and consider getting up and doing something else; I’m sure there’s lots to do for the funeral tomorrow. Too bad. I am too happy in my dream world lying here on the floor with my eyes closed. I can see Chris next to me, in bed one morning. I’m watching him and his eyes open and I think to myself, “Oh good, he’s awake!” And then he says, “Honey, I just bought an elephant,” and I think, “Or maybe not . . .” So I decide to keep talking to him. I might get some good info out of him if he’s talking in his sleep.

“So you bought an elephant?” I say.

“Yeah. I dreamed I bought an elephant.” Damn. There goes that idea.

“Oh really? And where are we going to keep it?”

“In our parking space. Or in the bathroom.”

“Or maybe we already have an elephant in our bathroom. That would explain those noises I hear in there every night after dinner!”

“No, no,” he says, “those are the barking spiders.”

“Right.”
I open my eyes and hate my parents' ceiling, hate the air I'm breathing, the clothes I'm wearing, especially the wooden chest under my arm. I push it away. I hate reality; I love the dream.
Twenty-one

It is Saturday February 28, 1998. I don’t want to go to the funeral but every time I suggest that I might stay home, people are horrified. Once again I put on my black skirt, black blouse, black stockings and shoes. It is the third time in a month, and I vow to burn them after today. I don’t want to be in mourning any more. I don’t want to cry today. So I show up at the chapel—the same chapel we were married in—and act strong because it’s easier than feeling the pain today. I greet people who are just now facing the reality of Chris’ death. They’ve had the luxury of avoiding it for two weeks, letting it sit in the back of their minds behind those overdue bills and problems at work.

Again, I have been asked if I want to say something in the service. Is that normal? I said no. Print the program without my name on it. I have nothing to say that everyone needs to hear. But just as it’s about to start, late again, just for you Chris, I go to Simon and tell him I would like to sing a song after the scheduled speakers.

“Are you sure?” He says, “Will you be able to handle that?”

Dad is standing with him. “Are you sure you want to?” He says.

“Yep. It’s not on the program, so I’ll let you know if I change my mind, but I expect I’ll be able to do it.”

“All right then,” says Simon, and makes a note on his program.

Dad and Simon sit on the stand. Mum sits with Lainn and Francie on a pew towards the back of the chapel. Again I sit alone to mourn my husband. I let his
brother and sisters sit in the front row. I sit in the second. Clare comes and asks if I’d like her to sit with me. Yes, I would.

I feel at peace as we sing the opening hymn.

Each life that touches ours for good
Reflects thine own great mercy, Lord;
Thou sendest blessings from above
Thru words and deeds of those who love.

When such a friend from us departs,
We hold forever in our hearts
A sweet and hallowed memory,
Bringing us nearer, Lord, to thee.

I’m lucky to have had him. He taught me that I was strong, pushed me to see what I could be. And besides, he’s still with me; he’ll always be with me. If I ever need his help, I just have to ask. He promised he’d stay with me, and I know he will. It’ll be okay.

Tim speaks of a brother he hardly knew and Katrina reads a poem she has written for him. Then Clare’s husband Owen speaks. Ever since the night Chris died, Owen has refused to face it. He hasn’t talked about it and definitely has not allowed himself to feel anything. He had trouble making it through the hymn, and now he walks up to the podium looking uneasy in his navy suit and purple tie.
"I've known Chris since we lived together in the dorms after his mission. We used to, you know, play our guitars together all night and try to write music to go with the poems he wrote." He is trying not to cry, wiping tears from his eyes before they spill out of the corners of his eyes. "And come on," he says, with a smile, "we all know some of Chris' songs were atrocious." He shakes his head and cries as he laughs, and we laugh with him.

"I have this photo at home of when we lived in the dorms and we did over one of the other guys' cars. You know, we took off the wheels and put them inside the car and then toilet-papered the whole thing. And I had this camera with a timer on it so we set it up just right on the car in front and then jumped into the photo. And me and Chris are in the front of the picture with big cheesy smiles..." He shakes his head and pauses.

"You know, my training is in film, and so I was thinking. A film has a beginning and an end, you know? It starts on the reel, and goes through all the way till it gets to the end. Now, a film is made up of twenty-four frames per second. That's how many frames pass your eyes in one second so that our brains don't see the separate pictures, just one continuous image. And each frame is a photo just like the photo I have at home. And each of those frames is joined together to make this one story. And I think those stories are like our lives. Some people's lives are short films, like Chris's, and others are longer, like Blockbusters, you know what I mean?

"Well, in my film that one frame where Chris came into my life was at a crucial part of the film, one of the turning points. You know, there's always a basic script to a film—an intro, turning points—basically each film has a goal to get from A to B. Well,
in my film, my life, Chris wasn’t there at the beginning, and he won’t be there at the end, but he was there at that crucial turning point, in that crucial frame which helps decide what the end will be. Because it all joins together, you know? Each of these experiences we have, people come in and out and are not there the whole time, but they help you build towards the end, help you develop your life." He’s crying.

"And who knows what my film would be like if Chris wasn’t there for that one frame, you know?"

So much for not crying today. What would my life be like if Chris hadn’t been in it? I would never have published anything, never have written in fact. I wouldn’t have gone to BYU-H, wouldn’t have taught at two universities, wouldn’t have trained to be a high-school teacher. And I certainly wouldn’t have done my master’s degree in Creative Writing. Because of Chris the unimaginable seemed possible. He gave me just those few minutes of film. What a difference they have made.

And now it is my turn. Can I really do this? Dad and Simon give me encouraging looks as I pass them. I take a deep breath and look out over everyone. The chapel is only half full. “Now that we’ve bashed Chris’ song writing abilities, I’m going to sing one of his songs. This is a song he wrote for our son.” I have no accompaniment; no one knows this song. It is Chris’ song, and it will survive him forever. I know I won’t be able to sing in a strong voice so I just concentrate on making the notes clear and true, but I break down by the end of the first line.

*If I had a wish*

*If I could have one single wish*

*It would be that never never land*
Was real and was forever and
The happy thoughts that made us fly
Would never never leave
And children would not forget how to believe

And I would wish my happy thought would never leave.

If I had a wish
Was just allowed a little wish
Then I'd see the sadness in your eye
And wipe it clear before you cry
Wipe a cheek upon a sleeve
To make it worth your while
So you would not forget how to believe.

And I would wish my happy thought would never leave.

If I had a wish
Was given just one simple wish
I'd reach into the days that you will live
And take the hurt that they might give
Before they stain your little soul
Before they could conceive
To steal the diamonds from your coal
I’d never let them breathe

And I would wish my happy thoughts would never leave
And I would make it so your happy thoughts would never leave

It kills me to sing Chris’ words, to sing of the things he wanted most in life, the things he never did achieve. You had this one wish, Chris, and what did you do with it? You wrote this poem to your son but now you’re not here to follow through. More than anything in the world you wanted to protect him. Is that why you died? So that you could watch over him and keep him safe forever? So you could make it so our happy thoughts would never leave? I hope you do, Chris. I’m going to hold you to it.

My Dad speaks next, another addition to the program. I asked him to speak when we originally organised the program, but he didn’t want to. He had nothing good to say about Chris, who he had watched hurt me so much. Now he sees that Owen is right. There are too many good things to ignore. He watched Chris make me happy long before he watched me get hurt. He watched Chris love me and watched that love build me up so that I was brave enough to do more with my life.

He speaks of a son-in-law who turned to him as a son to a father, of a young man struggling to make good of his life, a man who needed help and asked for it. It was just a shame, Dad says, that Chris couldn’t have had longer to solve his problems. “I have lost a son,” he says, “and I will miss him dearly.”
Clare rises to conduct the closing hymn—the hymn I chose. There are four beliefs I am clinging to in order to preserve my sanity:

1. Chris loved me.
2. God loves me and he has a plan for me. And it better be good.
3. Chris will always be with me.
4. Chris is with God now, in a happier, peaceful place where all his pain will be gone.

So I have chosen this hymn so I can sing to God and to Chris:

*God be with you till we meet again;*
*By his counsels guide, uphold you;*
*With his sheep securely fold you.*
*God be with you till we meet again.*

And to myself, as if from Chris:

*God be with you till we meet again;*
*When life’s perils thick confound you,*
*Put his arms unfailing round you.*
*God be with you till we meet again.*
And the whole congregation sings out to the boy we knew, the man we loved, our brother, son, friend, husband and father:

*Till we meet, till we meet,
Till we meet at Jesus' feet,
Till we meet, till we meet,

*God be with you till we meet again.*
Twenty-two

I drive with Clare and Owen out to Kawhia where the cemetery is. They have sent their twins home with Owen’s mum, and I put Lainn into his car seat in my mum’s car and then jumped into Clare and Owen’s. I just have no patience right now, probably because I have no emotional energy whatsoever. So we’re cruising along, trying to keep up with Dad driving Mum’s car in front of us, and singing along to the Eagles at the top of our lungs. We’re having a ball. I can almost imagine Chris is in the seat beside me and we’re all on the way out to Raglan to go swimming. If only.

After an hour we pull off the road and drive though two gates, two paddocks full of cows, and up the side of a hill. The view from the top is stunning. The other side of the hill drops down to a glistening bay. The water is pale blue-green and peaceful, nothing like the water I watched in San Diego. It is peaceful here, and natural—barely touched. I can see that Chris would have loved it up here. He told me so many times of the rainy day they pushed the jeep up the hill in the mud to get Simon’s mum’s casket up to this cemetery. If he’d had the chance he would have sat on top of this hill and played his guitar or written poems. Now you can sit up here and do whatever you want forever, Chris. I’m happy to leave you in this place.

In the hot sun and a warm wind I’m standing inside the gate of the cemetery. Three weeks ago to the day I stood inside another cemetery and gave this honour to my Grandfather. Now I give it to my husband: the honour of one who has mana, who lived through hell and survived it, being welcomed into his resting-place. This time I do it alone.
“Haere mai, haere mai, haere mai.” Come with me, Chris. Take my hand and enter this place.

“Haere mai toku hoa rangatira ki te urupa nei.” Walk with me, my love, into this place where you can sleep. You can have the rest you never got before. You will have peace here now, Chris. Hold my hand and I will bring you into a place that will be safe; a place like my heart once was to you.

“Haere mai.” I’ll look after you Chris.

“Haere mai.” I’ll never leave you.

“Haere mai ra e.” I love you forever.

Never before has my karanga bled from my soul.

We stand in crooked circles around the grave, clothes slapping in the wind, hands shielding eyes from the sun. Lainn wants to climb into the grave.

Owen steps forward, guitar in his hands. He announces he has one of Chris’s songs to sing, too. Graham Read calls out, “For someone who wrote atrocious songs, we’re certainly hearing a lot of them today!”

I kneel in front of Owen and hold the music for him. It is as if Chris left this message for us, like he’s saying goodbye. I smile as I listen to words he wrote before he had much training in writing. He would hate some of these clichés now.

_Tears, falling._

_Tell me you love me._

_As rain falls from the sky_

_Like you, calling._
When you're thinking of me,
Leaves me with tears in my eyes

Then I get a small message from heaven,
Saying you're not far away.
Sunlight dances so softly, on those raindrops,
Chasing those rain clouds away.

Sun, brightly,
Shines through the rain,
Leaving a rainbow above.
Like you, kindly,
Wipe back those tears.
You wipe them away with your love.

You, smiling,
Send rays of sunshine.
To brighten a cold weary heart.
And me, flying.
On magic and moonlight.
To dreams that will never depart.

Then I get a small message from heaven,
Floating down from the sky.

As you tell me you'll love me forever.

Leaves me with tears in my eyes.

It leaves most of us with tears in our eyes. It would have made you cringe if you read it now, Chris, but I still feel like you’re sending me a message.

I nod at Clayton because I know he had something he wants to say and I don’t want him to miss his chance. He steps forward, hands in his pockets, looking uncomfortable.

“Chris was a really good friend of mine, a really good friend. And his death has been hard for me to come to grips with because I said goodbye to him, you know, five odd years ago, and I didn’t know if he’d ever come back. And then he came home and got married and left again, and then I really didn’t know if he’d ever come back home. So now I know I will never see him again, and that’s really difficult for me to come to grips with. I keep having to remind myself that he’s not still just somewhere in the States. He’s dead.

“So it’s been really strange for me but peaceful at the same time. Because, you know, you have all these friends who die and it’s like, Hey this is really uncool, there was so much I wanted to say to them, and I never had a chance to say goodbye. But I talked to Chris just before Christmas, and we got to talk about a lot of things. I got to say what I wanted to say to him, and we made our peace, if you like.

“Chris was my best friend and I always had hoped to keep his name alive. I named one of my little boys after him, and I wondered if I’d ever get the chance to tell
him. I’m happy I had the chance to tell him he has a namesake. I’m happy that he knew I’d always remember him.

“Shelly, I want you to know that even with everything that went on, he loved Lainn absolutely 192 percent. When I called him, prior to when he died, he’d been sitting there watching Lainn sleeping. And I also want you to know he still loved you. He all but told me, you know? He gave me the feeling that part of him still loved you, but the other part was leaving anyway. It was as if he loved you but he knew he had to leave.”

Why do I have to keep hearing this from other people? I know it has to be true. I know you loved me, Chris, but why couldn’t you have told me? Why can’t you tell me?

“But anyway, I just wanted to tell you that, Shelly, and I wanted to say that he was a really great friend and I miss him.”

There are a few more tributes and now it’s time to go. Everyone drops a flower or some earth into the grave and Lainn wants to join in. I give him a daisy and carry him over to the grave so he can drop it in. It breaks my heart. My son is saying goodbye to his father and he shouldn’t have to. And even worse, he’ll never remember saying goodbye to him. I can’t watch as they fill in the grave, but I listen to the tumbling dirt fall onto the wooden chest, listen to the shovel scrape the soil off the top of the grass. This really is the end. So much I haven’t said and now it’s too late. The rhythm of the spade, the swish of footfalls as everyone walks past me away from the grave, the sting of the wind, all bring the tears from deep inside to release my final
grief—the fear that I will not be strong enough without him. The fear that he has truly left me.

Four years ago to the day, Chris wrote in his journal about not being able to remember the happiness and wholeness of being with me. Today I feel the same. This is hell. I want to remember paradise.
Twenty-three

I got the teaching job and found a tiny one-bedroom granny flat which backs onto the Waikato River. Mum and Dad wanted me to stay at home so they could take care of me, but I told them as long as they’re there to do that, I will keep needing to be taken care of. I had to get out on my own, look after myself. The teaching is a good distraction and Lainn has begun going to crèche a few days a week. It’s a nice break for me, so much so that on Wednesdays, like today, he goes for a few hours when I’m not even working so I can have some time to myself. It’s been five weeks since Chris died, and I’ve been listening to Counting Crows for days.

Chris loved their music, and now I can’t pull myself away from all their images of water, rain, the ocean, and drowning—even California, ironically. It’s supposed to be my day to relax and have time to myself, to rejuvenate, but I always seem to just sink into depression. I keep slow-dancing alone around my flat with my eyes closed, remembering sitting in the dark with Chris listening to the same songs, his arms around me, his lips slowly moving up and down my neck. And I’m remembering the Counting Crows concert we went to in Utah, where I jumped up and down and screamed with the thousands of other people there while Chris stood beside me, hands in his pockets, head to one side and eyes narrowed. When I asked him why he wasn’t getting into it he said, “I’m listening.” He told me the concert was a spiritual experience and it made some things really clear to him. I never did ask him what those things were.

Every time “Long December” comes on I lose all self-control and sob into my hands the whole way through the song, swaying to the music. Chris used to put the song on repeat so it played over and over for hours. I can see him sitting at the
computer while it’s playing. It begins with piano music, strong, steady chords until it pauses and the vocals and drums come in together. The voice sings words I could have written.

_A long December_

I said Goodbye to Chris in December

_and there’s reason to believe_

_maybe this year will be better than the last._

It better be. It has to be.

_I can’t remember the last thing that you said as you were leaving_

_and the days go by so fast._

I don’t remember what you said. I made myself forget and now it’s slipping away.

_The smell of hospitals and winter_

_and the feeling that it’s all a lot of oysters but no pearls_

You loved how poetic that was. Did you think your life was all oysters and no pearls?

_And all at once you look across a crowded room_

_to see the way that light attaches to a girl_

You loved that image, related to it personally, you said. And you looked straight into my eyes when you said it. You said you knew exactly what the song was describing.

_And it’s been a long December and there’s reason to believe_

_maybe this year will be better than the last._
It was December when I said goodbye to you. What I would give to be able to
go back and do it again. Or not to do it. What will this December be like? Please let
it not be as painful as the last one. I can’t live through much more.

_**I can’t remember all the times I tried to tell myself to hold on**_

_**to these moments as they pass**_

It’s too late. I can’t hold on to them. They’re gone.

_AND it’s one more night up in the canyon_

_AND it’s one more night in Hollywood._

_It’s been so long since I’ve seen the ocean._

_Guess I should_

But I won’t.

I won’t go to the ocean, won’t think about the fact that Lainn has no fear of
water, in fact he is drawn to it so much he fell in the river when Mum took him to feed
the ducks. I’ve faced the water but I don’t know if I will ever be able to swim
anywhere but a swimming pool. The water took Chris and I’ll never trust it again. But
I’ll send Lainn to swimming lessons every summer. And I’ll walk beside the river
every morning, five kilometres each day, watching the green-black water swirling
silently by, reminding me that its beauty is deceiving. My cousins invite me jetskiing
but I never go. I can handle a pool but I won’t go near the river. The water is too
powerful, too unpredictable.

And it seems like every time I go to a movie I am reminded of that. I cried
through _Titanic_, jealous of the love story and horrified by the sight of people drowning.
My parents convinced me not to watch _Amistad_ because of the drowning scenes. But
the movie that tears me apart is *City of Angels*. In the movie everyone has an angel with them, watching over them. It tells me that Chris should be with me, in the room with me, protecting me like he promised. And the angels go to the beaches every morning and night to listen to the music of the sun as it rises and sets. They are the same beaches Chris was swimming at. At the end of the movie a man strips down to his jeans and runs into the surf, and it’s Chris, running into the water, never to return. There are underwater shots of the waves breaking over him. That is the last thing Chris saw. I sat through the credits simply unable to stop crying. I felt like I had just watched Chris leave me again, and I couldn’t stop him.

Maybe I’ll stop listening to Counting Crows now and cry to the *City of Angels* soundtrack instead.

I put it on and call Clare. I need to get out of the house. She quickly arranges to leave the girls with a friend and we go and get greasies to eat them by the lake.

“Thanks, Clarey,” I say through a mouthful of hot chips. “It feels good to be out in the fresh air.”

“Oh, for me, too! I mean, it’s so inconvenient of you to give me a good excuse to have a break from the girls.”

“Happy to oblige.”

We sit and eat, throwing chips to the ducks and seagulls for a while before I admit what I need to get off my chest.

“I just don’t know how I’m going to get over everything, Clarey.”

“Me either. I don’t know what I’d do. You’ve been through a lot. Maybe you just have to give it time to heal.”
“You know how impatient I am.”

“Maybe you don’t have a choice.”

“Well that sucks.”

“I know. Found a man yet?”

“Ha ha. Actually, I am lusting after one of my students.”

“Ooh! What’s his name?”

“Caleb. He’s got this incredible stomach.”

“Shelly! And how do you know what his stomach looks like?”

“It’s a long story. Anyway, it’s only lust. I’m not going to do anything about it.”

“But still . . .”

“No, I’ve been thinking . . .”

“About?”

“Well, maybe this is supposed to be good for me. Maybe it’s about time I figured out who I am really, just me, not me with somebody.”

“Isn’t that scary?”

“Terrifying. I mean, ever since I discovered boys, there’s probably never been a time when I wasn’t either with a guy or pining after one. Isn’t that pathetic?”

“Well, when you put it that way—“

“Shut up. It is. So I’m thinking maybe this is the time for me to figure out how to be Shelly without a man.”

“But I know Shelly without a man.”
“But I don’t, and besides, I don’t have much choice. I can mope around like I have been, or I can make the most of being alone.”

“I don’t know if I’d know how to do that.”

“Me either. So let me think this through out loud, okay?”

“Okay. What are we thinking?”

“I need to figure out what I’m struggling with if I’m going to solve it or get over it.”

“Okay.”

“Okay. So I miss Chris.”

“Alright. What does that mean?”

“It means I don’t know who I am without him. I don’t know what my life is supposed to be like now. I don’t know how to be everything that is expected of me if I’m all alone.”

“Okay, is there anything else?”

“Yeah, I’m confused. Confused about whether he loved me or not—”

“Well, he did. So you can stop wondering about that.”

“But if he did love me, then he should have kept his promises. If he did love me, why isn’t he here? Where is he?”

“Okay, so you need to keep trying to figure those things out. Anything else?”

“Yeah. You know, I honestly believed our love was so strong that I couldn’t live without him. I thought if he ever died then my soul would be broken, and I’d die, too. So I know it sounds stupid, but I want to know why I’m still alive.”

“Because you still have a life to live, Shelly. And Lainn needs you.”
“Yeah, well I don’t know if I can be what he needs.”

“Well, you have to be.”

“And that terrifies me.”

“Oh, Sweetie.” She wraps her arms around me and I cry.

When I stop and wipe my eyes, we look at each other. “CHOCOLATE!”

“Must . . . raise . . . endorphin levels,” I say. “MUST FIND CHOCOLATE!”

Smiling again, we clean up our rubbish and walk back to the car arm in arm. I wish we were still the little girls we once were, walking arm in arm to the dairy to buy lollies, because that was all we needed to make us happy.
Twenty-four

I can’t pray. It’s been over two months now, and I’m trying to reconcile my current situation with the dreams I’ve always had for life. I was married to the man I wanted, the man I chose, the man I loved who loved me in return and promised to do so forever. We were supposed to live happily ever after. How can ever after be only three and a half years of marriage, to be destroyed first by divorce and then by death? I am twenty-four years old. I am a single mother, a divorcée, and a widow. But I still make it from sunrise to sunset each day. I still wake up breathing, even if I do fall asleep crying. I spend my days either teaching or with Clare, to avoid the emptiness. I turn the lights out every night only when I can no longer keep my eyes open, and then I have music playing because loneliness thrives on silence like the fern in my bathroom thrives on the steam from my shower.

I know that God loves me and that he has plans for my life, even if I don’t know what they are. But I can’t pray. I can’t begin or end my day with a conversation with my Heavenly Father because when I try to talk to him I always feel that much closer to Chris. I have to believe that wherever Chris is—because he’s obviously not with me—he must be close to God. So when I try to pray I just want to ask God to tell Chris how much I love him, and how much I miss him, and how I’m not mad any more, and eventually I give up on the praying altogether and lie in bed and talk to Chris.

I only want to talk to him. I only want to tell him how I feel and how much his absence hurts me. And then I cry to him. And then I shout at him. And then I beg him, “Please, please Chris. come to me. Just let me know you’re here. You’ve got to
be here with me. Please talk to me! Whisper to me. Help me sleep! Hold me while I cry! You said you would!” The whole process is too painful. I can’t pray.

So I spend hours into every night chatting on the Internet or surfing web sites, and I read a novel every couple of days: Ihimaera’s *The Dream Swimmer*, Roy’s *The God of Small Things*, Card’s *Stone Tables*. I have long phone conversations in the evenings with whoever will talk, and always, always put off sleep until I can’t ignore it any longer. I am quickly becoming an expert at escapism. And every night I sleep dreamlessly and alone.

But each day is moving the pain slowly further to the back of my mind and my heart, until I can go for a day and not cry. I can go grocery shopping for forty-five minutes without thinking about Chris even once, unless I pass by the Coke or Mars Bars and get nostalgic over his staple diet. Maybe life will get easier. Maybe, eventually, I will be a normal, functioning person again.

I always manage to teach my classes and grade my students’ assignments. I even manage to shower every day and keep Lainn clean and fed. But he drains me of the tiny bit of emotional energy I begin each day with. Ever since we came home to New Zealand Lainn has had a lot of trouble sleeping. It’s understandable; his whole life was turned upside down and one of the most important people dropped out of it. Since he was a small baby Chris and I gave Lainn a good sleep routine and helped him train himself to go to sleep alone. But since we left the States he screams for hours on end whenever I try to put him to bed. I’m hard on him; I always have been. I believe he needs consistency not leniency to get through this. But it’s wearing me down. He puts on such a good show of being desperately sad that I have left him alone in his
room to go to sleep. You know, Chris was a wonderful actor, so why not Lainn, too? But I know he understands. He’s very intelligent and very, very stubborn.

Over and over and over again I go into his room. like now, sing him a song, say prayers with him, lay him down with his blanky and say, “Goodnight Lainn. Have a good sleep. I’ll see you in the morning. I love you.” He screams louder. I wait, go in again, and lower the pitch of my voice.

“I’ve had enough. You know it’s bedtime. You’re a very clever boy.” He smiles and claps his hands. “That’s right, very clever. And that’s why I’m not giving in. You can do this. Goodnight.”

After fifteen more minutes of crying I go back in, lay him down roughly and say, “Go to sleep. NOW. Goodnight.”

It’s been over an hour and a half since we began this process. He’s so stubborn and it’s breaking my heart to hear him crying, sobbing now. I storm back in, mad at him for making this so hard. I’m shouting.

“Lainn! Honey! Why won’t you just go to sleep? I can’t stand this, don’t you get it? You’re not hungry or dirty or hot or cold and I KNOW you’re tired. WHY WON’T YOU GO TO SLEEP?” He stops crying and his eyes are wide with fear.

Fine then. I’ll rock you to sleep. So I pick him up and wrap him tight in his blanky so he can’t struggle and I try not to let my tears fall onto his face. Damn you, Chris, Damn you for making me do this by myself. So if you’re here, like you promised you would be, why can’t YOU rock him to sleep? Why aren’t you standing over his cot and singing him “Happy Thoughts?” If you’re supposed to be our guardian angel, we need you now! I haven’t got the strength to do this. I’m so tired.
My soul can’t stand his cries and my body can’t stand rocking him for hours on end.
Please, Chris. Help your son sleep. Whisper to him so he hears your voice and feels your strong arms holding him so he’s not alone. Tell him you’re here with him and you love him. He misses you, Chris. He misses you and you’re not comforting him.
Please, baby. Please, please be with him? Look after him. I can’t do it alone.

Finally Lainn gives in and relaxes. His eyes close slowly and his breathing gets quieter. I lay him in his bed and his eyes blink open wide again. No, no, don’t do this. I can’t take it. Chris! It’s not fair!

Thanks, Chris. Really appreciate your help. We start the whole process again.

When Lainn is finally asleep I read for hours and still don’t reach my point of exhaustion. I can’t sleep yet; I’m too strung out. At 2am I realise it’s 8am for Wally so I call him. When he answers he sounds awake and I had expected to get him out of bed. He’s a theatre person. They rarely rise before noon—or at least that’s what I tell him when I want to tick him off.

“Oh my gosh,” I say. “You’re already up?”

“Haven’t been to sleep yet.” I should’ve known.

“Are you okay?”

“Yeah,” he says, “just writing. How about you? It’s so good to hear your voice. How are you doing?”

“Usually, okay. Right now, not very good.”

“Why? What’s up right now?”

“Just everything getting to me.”
"So tell me about it," he says.

"I just can’t get the image out of my head—the image of Chris in that room in the mortuary."

"Why? Why are you thinking about that? You should be remembering Chris the way we knew him, not like that."

"I know. But I just can’t get it out of my head."

"So why are you thinking about it?"

I’m crying because I’m afraid to actually voice my regret. “Because every night I lie here by myself and wish I was back there.”

"Why? Why would you want to be there with his dead body? We both know how hard that was."

"I wish I was there because I’d rather be there with his stinking, rotting flesh than here alone. I’d rather have anything than this. I wish I had stayed in that room with him longer because that was the last chance I’d ever have to be in the same room as him and I don’t care what he looked like, I wish I had stayed with him. I don’t want to be alone, can’t you see? I can’t be alone."

"And you’re mad at him."

"Hell yes. I’m mad at him because he promised me. He promised he would never leave me, and then he wanted a divorce. And you know, that was bad enough, but he was still Chris; I still knew that somewhere deep inside there was still my best friend who had promised to look after me forever. It wasn’t really over, not really."

"And then he died."

"Yeah."
“But you know, he’s still with you. I mean, a few weeks ago when we were recording the CD of the songs for the play we all just stopped at one point and looked at each other and knew that Chris was with us, right there in the room with us while we sung his songs. He was there! You must feel him there with you.”

“I have always believed in things like that. I totally grew up thinking that is how things worked—“

“So don’t you ever feel like he’s there with you? Don’t you feel like he’s telling you what you should be doing, helping you with Lainn? Don’t you ever dream about him?”

“NO! I always thought I would but he’s not here! He’s supposed to be here to hold me while I sleep, and bring me sweet dreams. He’s supposed to let me know he’s here and he still loves me. But he’s not here! He doesn’t come to me! He’s left me all alone and I’m mad at him. I’m angry with him for leaving me! Why isn’t he here?”

“I don’t have that answer, Shel. I’m sorry.”

“I feel like I have to be all these things, mother and father to Lainn, still finish my degree, work, do all the church stuff. I just don’t want to be this person all alone.”

“I know. Chris was crazy to leave you. You know I told him that. He would tell me how unhappy he was and how he wished he could have the freedom I had, and I’d tell him what an idiot he was. Sure, I might get to date all these girls and stuff, but I’d give anything to be able to come home and know there was a wife like you and a son like Lainn waiting at home for me.”

“So he was an idiot.”
“Sure. But you still love him. And so do I. The question is how do you live
with it all now? Especially if he’s not there with you?”

“Well, every time I feel like this I think if I just had a guy here, a man who
loved me here to hold me and help me with all of this, then it would all be better. But I
know it’s not a matter of having a guy at all. It’s a matter of my whole life plan falling
through—life with my soul mate, you know? So the question is where do I go from
here? It’s a question of Can I do this alone? Yeah, like you said, How do I live with it
all now? And the answer is, I don’t know.”

“Maybe you’ll only know if you keep trying to live with it. Maybe you just
need time.”

“That’s what everyone keeps telling me. I just don’t think you could call what
I’m doing living.”

“Sure you can, Shelly. I know what Chris loved about you. He loved how you
could do anything you wanted to, and how you made him believe he could, too. You
can do this.”

“Thanks, Wally. I’m sorry to unload on you, but I can’t talk to anyone else
about this. You were there. You knew us.”

“Hey, it’s okay. You call me anytime you need to talk. Anytime. But for
now, I’d better get to sleep. We’ve got rehearsals at 10am.”

“Wally! Get some sleep. Far out.”

“Okay, see ya, Shel.”

“I love you, Wally.”

“I love you, too.”
It'll be 3am soon. I'm going to regret this if Lainn decides to get up at 5:30am. Oh well, another hour isn't going to matter now. I need to write some things down, think this through. What do I need to do to figure this out? What exactly is the emptiness I'm feeling, and therefore how do I fill it?

I open up a new file on my computer and start to type.

When Tupe died I was all worried about being Maori without him, and then Chris died and that was so all-encompassing that nothing else mattered. Now I think my Maoritanga can help me overcome this grief, but I don't feel it like I used to. Why don't I feel it? What don't I feel?

I don't feel the mana, the pride in my beliefs because it seems like my beliefs have failed—that's what it is. Being Maori gave me strength because I knew I had my ancestors with me to keep me strong. I thought I had mana because I believed these good things about who I am because of where I come from, but now I'm doubting my beliefs. And the doubt is making my self-confidence slip away.

So the answer is that I just need Chris to come to me. Chris or Tupe, but preferably Chris because honestly, my relationship with him was more emotionally intense that my relationship with Tupe. I'd rather see Chris but Tupe would be okay, too. Just something to show me that what I've always believed in is true. Just a sign to show me they are still
with me. I’m not alone. If I knew that for sure then I could figure out
all the rest.

If Chris came to me and told me he loves me and that he’s here to
help me, then I could figure out who I am and how to live this new life
that wasn’t what I planned. So there it is. I know what I need now.

I save the file, shut down the computer, strip off, and climb into bed. Okay,
Chris, now I know exactly why I need you here. If you just come and hold me, tell me
you love me, tell me everything is going to be alright, then I can get on with my life.
But I can’t get on with it until you come, Chris, so please come. I’m going to sleep
now. Lay beside me, hold me. Tell me you’re here. Please, Chris, please. You
know how much I need you. Please.
Twenty-five

Today would have been our fourth wedding anniversary, and still no Chris. He died over four months ago. I got up this morning and went for my walk without even realising what day it was. Clare reminded me a few days ago but I managed to forget. When I got home there was a message on my machine from Mum.

“Hi Shel,” she said. “I just wanted to let you know, I don’t know how you’re feeling about it but I wanted to tell you that I know it’s your anniversary today. Give me a call if you need to talk.” Why does everybody keep reminding me? Can’t I live in blissful ignorance?

I showered while Lainn slept in his stroller then went out to take him to crèche. When I got home there was a bunch of yellow roses on the doorstep from one of the tutors in my department. The card read, “Shelly and Lainn, our thoughts are with you. Alison.” That started me crying and it’s been two hours now. I’m sitting on Lainn’s toy box flipping through our wedding album. I can’t believe how much has happened in four years. Even though I’ve lived through it, I can’t conceive of how a love that was so strong, so perfect, so all encompassing could get so confused and messed up. I can’t believe my happily ever after is gone.

I’ve been blasting every sad song on my stereo that I can find, and now I’m back to Counting Crows again. I’m so lonely. I’ve never been good at being alone, and I don’t know if I can take it much longer.

I don’t ever want to go to church anymore; I don’t feel like I fit in. Being a wife, part of a couple, gave me a place in the church family. Now there is no group for me to fit into. How could anyone understand how I feel and what I need? I also
don’t want to go because I don’t think I see things the same anymore. I used to believe God was looking out for me, that he had a plan and even this must fit into it somewhere but I don’t know anymore. I’m surrounded by people who tell me how everything will be okay if I’m just patient; God will take care of me. Well, I don’t feel like I’ve been taken care of so far. I did all the things I was taught about as I grew up. I thought that meant I would be blessed. I don’t feel blessed.

I call Andrea to avoid thinking about it. I want to follow up on our conversation from the hospital.

“So how do you feel now that we’ve had five months to deal with it?” I say.

“Where I stand now?” She says.

“Yeah,” I say. “I was just wondering, I mean we all wondered then how would we feel about being Maori if Tupe died. So how do you feel now?”

“Well I don’t know about you guys,” she says, “but I think we make out of it how we make out of it, you know? I mean, for me, because I’m living in the culture all the time, I’m studying it every single day, I’ve thought about it a lot. Tupe guided us, you know? I think about it all the time, like if I asked him about a problem or something, I think about what he would do, what he would say to me and all that. And I know now that although I started this originally for Tupe, now I’m doing it for all of us as a family.

“Where I stand? Our great-grandparents had it running through their veins fully, and I don’t care if I’m an eighth, a sixteenth, or whatever. Just because our grandparents didn’t marry a Maori doesn’t mean we’re not Maori just because of
inbreeding. It’s still in me and I don’t care what anyone says. It makes me strong as a person. I’m sure it does that for you, too.”

“Sometimes.”

Next I call Nana, who tells me that Tupe has been visiting people up north, helping them with their genealogy. He has been whispering a name to them or coming to them in dreams with another person, a relative who says something that jogs their memory and they suddenly remember a story, a missing name, a missing link to complete a genealogical line. Tupe is here. He is doing what I always believed he would, just not with me. Well that’s fine; those people need his help more than I do, I’m sure. He is helping people in a work he spent much of his life doing. Maybe he will come to me at a time when I need him.

But I admit it is not Tupe I need right now; it is Chris. I need Chris to come to me, to comfort me when I’m lonely like he promised. I need him to whisper to me and allay all my fears and confusion and guilt. I need him to tell me he loves me, so I can know above all my self-doubt and anger, that he does. I’m really beginning to wonder.

“So how are you,” Nana asks when she calls me. She feels a new-found affinity with me because we have both lost our husbands. She is open with me in her grief because she assumes I will feel the same. “Are you thinking about Chris?” She says. “I never let myself think of Tupe in the grave, sweetheart, if I do that I just push that thought right out of my head and see him on the other side in his whites, helping all those people. And you can think of Chris looking down on you and Lainn, looking after you, because you can be sure he is, my darling. You’ve got to know he is.”

I don’t.
I thought I did, but I’m starting to give up on him. Maybe I was imagining it all. Maybe I wanted the fairytale so much that I was unwilling to see reality. There is no such thing as a love that lasts forever and keeps lovers together, dead or alive. Maybe I have lived a lie my whole life.

But I don’t believe that. I can’t believe that. I can’t deny what I have felt, and what I have felt is Chris’ love, again and again, constantly, in fact, for years. It’s all so confused, so fuzzy. I can’t complete this thought process because there is never a conclusion to come to. So every night I will put Lainn to bed, like I will tonight, I will read him books, have him kiss a picture of Chris goodnight. “Goodnight, Daddy,” he will say, “Love you,” and we will say prayers together and I will think every night, like I will tonight, oh Chris, you would have been so proud to hear him saying these whole sentences he is coming up with now. And that will make me feel sick to the stomach so I will go and hide in a book until the night presses down on me, and then I will turn out the lights and go to bed, but I won’t turn the music off. I will never turn my music off, because I know what I won’t hear whispering to me out of the silence.

Chris.
Twenty-six

Six months now. Six months I have been without Chris, well, longer really if you count the six weeks I was in NZ before he died, and the month before that when he had moved out, but whatever, six months without his face, his voice, his arms around me. Six months of going to sleep alone and waking up another day further away from him. No dreams, no whisperings, no feeling he is sitting in the armchair across the room, sitting, watching, protecting me. Six months without him helping me with Lainn. Six months to make me believe I imagined it all, and six months of still not knowing how to live without Chris.

I’ve moved into a bigger flat and my cousin Lisa is living with me while she goes to Uni. Her company is helping with the loneliness and she baby-sits Lainn when I need a break. Instead of listening, alone, to sad music for hours on end, together we dance around the living room to the latest releases, blasting them as loud as we can.

“Man, man, man, check this out. You’ve got to hear this,” she says as she twists the volume knob. “It’s like a reggae-hip-hop-gospel-choir sort of thing!” We dance around, bottles of water in our hands, and I forget about my broken dreams for days at a time. But we have been talking about Tupe and the Barrier, and now I’m thinking about Chris again.

“You know how we come from Ngatiwai and Ngati Porou,” she says, “through Tupuna Raihi and Tupuna Kino? Well, did you know that both of those tribes were known for their dominating women? I mean, the chiefs were still men and everything, but it was well-known that the women had a big say in everything.”
“Really? I didn’t know that. But it makes sense, like Tupuna Raihi was a princess and owned the whole Barrier at one point, right?”

“Yeah,” she says. “But so what does that say about us? We’ve got domineering women on both sides of our Maori heritage. It doesn’t leave us much chance to be, like, snivelling submissive wives.”

“So what you’re saying is we’re destined to be control freaks!”

“Pretty much, yeah.”

“That rocks!”

It makes me start thinking. I come from a line of strong women. That should tell me something about myself. I call Nana.

“Nana, Ngatiwai and Ngati Porou both had really strong women, right?”

“Yes, that’s right.”

“So what do you know about them? Can you tell me anything?”

“Well, Ngatiwai is one of the only tribes who has traditionally allowed women to voice an opinion on the marae when given opportunity by the men.”

“Yeah, I thought so. What about Ngati Porou?”

“I’m not sure about the tribe as a whole, but Tupuna Raihi, for instance, was a very notable woman.”

“Notable? Why, because of her bloodlines?”

“Well yes, it was her lineage that allowed her to have a moko on her chin and her lips, but just as a woman she was notable as well.”

“Why? I mean, she was a princess or something, right? And she owned most of the Barrier?”
“Yes, her father was a great warrior, and so she was known as a princess, and she did own most of the Barrier at one time. In those days most of the decision making was done through her, well, her and Tupuna Kino.”

“Was she like the matriarch of the family?”

“Yes, you could say that. When the Wairarapa shipwrecked and Kino brought all the survivors back into the bay she is the one who rounded the families up and organised who would cook, who would tend to wounds, who would make clothes to keep them warm. And she cut up her own sheets to clothe those people, and you can be sure they would have been fine linen.”

“And it was her who got the phone lines to replace the pigeon mail.”

“That’s right. I think we still have some of those pigeon mail stamps somewhere.”

“So, is there any other woman in my history who was strong like that?”

“Oh, plenty, I’m sure. I can look them up if you like. There was Aunty Ellen, of course, Tupe’s cousin. A lot of the family would go to her with their problems so she could settle disputes and make decisions, give advice, things like that. Sometimes it would upset Tupe because he was the kaumatua and he thought they should come to him. It doesn’t really matter.”

“Yeah, I heard about Aunty Ellen being a force to be reckoned with.”

“Is that enough my darling? Why did you want to know?”

“Oh, just thinking, Nana, thinking about me and what I’m going to do now.”

“You know what you need to do, sweetheart, and we know you can do it.”

“Thanks, Nana.”
I hang up the phone and remember Aunty Gaye at the hospital, taking charge of Tupe’s medical care, keeping watch every night and never sleeping, and again at the tangi. I remember her wrapping her arms around me when I cried and then she had one niece under each arm, both of us sobbing against her, her wings over us like a mother hen protecting her chicks. Maybe Aunty Gaye will be the next generation’s matriarch. Or maybe we won’t need one.

What I’ve been for six months isn’t good enough, and I can’t survive this way. Lisa’s chatting on the net with some guy in the States, and I grab a piece of paper out of the printer and slouch into the couch.

THINGS TO DO TO SO I WILL BE HAPPIER:

Where do I start? Exercise. I’m not happy with the way I look and I haven’t been walking much lately, so I’ll get back into that. Should I join a gym? Do aerobics? What about martial arts? I did karate for six months when I was fifteen. I loved it. Yes—Martial Arts. I need to be fit so I can feel good about myself. That’s enough on the physical side. What about things I love to do? Writing? No, I’ll wait a while yet. It’ll come. Singing. Yes! I haven’t taken singing lessons for years! And this time I’m older and I know what I want. Last time I just wanted to be taught how to sing properly. Now I want to get my voice in shape, get control over it, make it strong, and then I can find out how I sing. I’m getting excited now—martial arts and singing!

So what else? What about for my mind? I’m wasting so much time every day watching TV to avoid life. How about improving my life instead? From now on I will
go to the library and read a book each week on a topic I want to learn about, like body language, improving my memory, salvaging my French and Maori.

What else? Appearance. Take better care of my skin. If I want to be happy when I look in the mirror I have to like what I see. And iron my clothes! I've got an iron and ironing board but I don't think I've ever even used them. If I look in the mirror and see a well-dressed person who looks like she is in control of her life, maybe I'll become that person. This is good.

Is there anything else? I could add more, I suppose, but I think this is enough for now. Oh, but one more thing: as soon as I'm up to it, I need to go through Chris' box again. I need to face it all so I can deal with my emotions. I can't keep shutting them out.
Twenty-seven

Today I have walked five kilometres, roller-bladed for half an hour, swum thirty laps, ironed some clothes, and read half a book on body language. I've been living by my list for a month now, and I can say one thing: it's been keeping me busy. I look in the mirror on Lainn's wall as I undress to get in the shower and try to decide if I can see any positive changes. Nope, I just look tired.

But I have to admit I've been feeling better. I'm not sitting around being depressed because I'm too busy, and I haven't been lonely because I haven't had time. Since I don't feel ready to start writing again for real, I've started keeping a journal. Sometimes I just write what I've done for the day; sometimes I put my thoughts about Chris on paper so they don't have to stay in my head. Or sometimes I make notes of images I'd like to include in my writing someday. After my shower I have to remember to write down the image of a big crystal vase full of flowers, but with a goldfish swimming around between the stems. I love that, but I have no idea how I'll ever fit it in somewhere. That's okay.

Lainn is at crèche so I'm going to take a long shower. I watched an Oprah show the other day where they were talking about dealing with grief. They suggested setting aside ten minutes a day for grieving, and I think I'm going to give it a try today. It makes a lot of sense to me. If I choose to grieve for a certain amount of time each day then I control the grief. It can't take me over completely or overcome me when I'm not expecting it if I'm giving it a chance to be expressed everyday. I think it sounds like a good idea, even though I'm nervous about voluntarily opening myself up to feel the pain. I'm so used to pushing it away until it forces its way out.
So I've decided to try grieving for ten minutes in the shower each day, because sometimes it's the only time I have to myself, and besides, it'll be almost like crying in the rain, which I find, of course, unfailingly romantic. So I turn on the shower and let the water run over my hand until it warms up and then I step under it and close the door. I breathe in the steam and let the water run over my head. I take a deep breath. Here goes. I picture Chris' face in my mind and wish that the image wasn't so surreal. I want to open my eyes and see you, Chris, see you, not remember you. But if this is all I can have then I'll just have to hold onto it. I'll hold you close to my heart like I always promised I would.

If only I had known, Chris. I would have done things differently. Here it comes; crying in the rain. If only I had known my time with you would be so short. I would have made it more precious. I would have engraved your face into my memory so deeply that it could never fade. But now I feel like I'm clutching onto your shadow. If only I'd known, Chris. I wouldn't have left. I wouldn't have left you there and taken your son away from you. I would have stayed so we could have just a few more days with you, just a few more precious minutes. Another smile, another kiss, another night of drifting off to sleep in your arms.

I can't believe how much it hurts to let it all out like this. I don't think I can handle doing this on a regular basis. Maybe there's something to be said about bottling it all up. I start to wash myself but I end up banging my forehead on the wall. I wouldn't have left you, Chris, I shouldn't have left! I should have known! I cry and gasp for air, giving the pain a voice, and the voice scares me, threatening to become
again the screams that I cried when I found out Chris had died. But I let it all out. It has to feel better when it’s out.

So I stand with my forehead against the wall while the water massages my back until I’m breathing deeply, not calming myself but having a calmness enter me because there is room for it now. My head hurts but the pressure is gone. It’s okay to regret what happened. It’s okay to have regrets.

But Chris, I wasn’t a functioning person. We just weren’t happy together at the end. If you couldn’t feel love for me then part of that was because I wasn’t being the person you had always loved. I wasn’t being myself; I was being someone who I thought would make you happy. I wasn’t living for myself, I was living for you and that was destroying me. When I came home to New Zealand I started to catch glimpses of who I used to be—who I should be. And that person was someone who loved living, who did what made her happy and put energy into the things she loved. I’m starting to do that again, Chris, and it feels so good! I don’t know if I would have known what I had to do now if I hadn’t left you then. I had to see who I really am so that I could become myself again.

So it was okay for me to leave. It was okay for me to leave! Oh my gosh, it’s okay. It was the right thing to do, coming home, I knew that then and I’m realising it again now. It was the right thing to do for me and for Lainn, so I could at least start to create a new life without you before it became so ultimately permanent. It was like dipping my toes into the pool before diving in with all my clothes on.

So that’s it, then. I’ve worked out one of the things I haven’t been able to face all this time. I’m one tiny step closer to understanding.
I finish washing and then turn the shower off. I wonder what I'll come up with tomorrow? When I'm dried and dressed I start singing as I brush my hair. The singing lessons are really helping. Although I really want to sing like Whitney Houston or Mariah Carey, I can't get this Italian canzonetta out of my head. It just speaks to my soul.

Ridente la calma
nell' alma si desti
nell alma si desti
ne resti un segno
di sdegno e timor
Ridente la calma
nell' alma si desti
ne resti piu segno
di sdegno e timor

The calm is pleasing
In the spirit I am destined
In the spirit I am destined
About me there is no sign
Of sorrow and fear
The calm is pleasing
In the spirit I am destined
About me there is no sign
Of sorrow or fear

I love it because the words are so powerful, speaking about being calm and in control of my emotions, and yet the tune is so happy, excited, even challenging, as if to say, this is how I feel, just you try to prove otherwise. I feel so light.

I sing as loud as I can in my best opera voice with my best diva face on. Chris loved my singing but this would crack him up. I look in the mirror. I'm almost happy.
### Twenty-eight

Lainn and I have just got back from our walk and Lisa is about to go to school. I put Lainn in his highchair in front of *Teletubbies*. Wasn’t I dead set against them once? Oh well, these days it’s whatever preserves our sanity. I kiss him on the forehead. “Aye, Sweetie.”

“Aye, seetie,” he stares blankly at the screen. Good. I’ll have a whole half-hour to shower and get dressed.

I’ve only been doing the grieving sessions on and off for a couple of weeks and already they are only lasting a couple of minutes. I’m running out of issues to go over. I guess that’s what’s supposed to happen.

In the shower, I start to think about the divorce again. I feel a sickness in my stomach but I don’t cry. I already know the answer to this problem. This is just reaffirmation type stuff. Maybe I should become a psychiatrist if I survive all this.

So what is the question? Did Chris love me. And the answer? Yes. There is just way too much to remind me that he did love me. I saw it in him and I felt it and we promised together and it was real. It was REAL. Chris loved me.

So did he fall out of love with me? No. I don’t even believe in that whole concept. People don’t fall out of love. Chris stopped feeling the things he used to feel but that’s not because they weren’t there. The other things he was dealing with were just so huge. They were like the ash from a volcano that wasn’t fully erupting. Just because everything was covered with a thick, grey, choking layer of . . .—I don’t know, just gunk—doesn’t mean all the good stuff wasn’t still underneath. And I think it was still alive under there.
In fact, I know it was. All this time I’ve blamed myself for leaving but Chris sent us away. I talked to Wally about it. He said it didn’t matter what anyone said or did, no one would ever be able to convince him that Chris didn’t send Lainn and me away purely because of his love for us. He said Chris had to deal with all the crap, all the memories, the shadows. He had to battle with his past and he didn’t want us around while he did it. Well, I wish he would have let me in on that when it was happening, but it doesn’t matter. Maybe he consciously didn’t know that. It doesn’t matter. All I know is that Wally said Chris sobbed all the way back to Orem from the airport when they dropped us off. He said he could almost see Chris’ broken heart, but Chris couldn’t allow himself to ask me to stay.

He sent us away because he loved us. He loved us. It was real. And knowing that doesn’t mean I can’t love again, doesn’t mean that if I love again my love for Chris will diminish. I actually think my love for others will be richer, fuller, because I can still love Chris.

And Chris was not my only chance at love. It’ll come again.

This is not a grieving session. It’s like a “build Shelly up” session. That’s cool, I can handle that.

By the time I’ve thrown on some track-pants and a sweatshirt Lainn is calling, “Maaah-maay. Get out. Get out. Maaah-may.”

“Shall we go and see Aunty Clare?” I say.

“Unca Owen,” he says.

“Oh, I think Uncle Owen is at work. But who else is there?”

“Owee Daa-na!”
“Okay then! Let’s go see Holly and Dana.”

When we get to Clare’s house we send the girls outside to play and sit on the floor of her lounge in the sun.

“Can I bounce some ideas off you?” I say.

“Bounce away.” She gets us both a glass of water and then starts to file her nails.

“I’m trying to figure out what to do now. You know, I mean I’ve basically just survived the year so far, and then I realised I needed to start living again.”

“Yeah, so you started Aikido and everything.”

“Yeah, and it’s all been great. But now I’m thinking more practically, like future, security, money, stuff like that.”

“Yuck.” She stops filing and looks up at me, grimacing. “You mean like pretending to be an adult.”

“Yeah. Yuck.”

“So what are you going to do?”

“Well, we need financial security, and I think I expected not to have that until I got remarried. But who knows when that will happen. And besides, that’s pathetic.”

“Absolutely pathetic.”

“Shut up. It is pathetic because why have I been working my butt off all these years at Uni getting all these degrees and stuff if not to use them?”

“Of course you’re going to use them.”

“So why did I only just figure this out?”

“Don’t worry, Sweetie, you’re just a little slow. Not enough sex, you know.”
I slap her arm. "Shut up. Of course, you're probably right."

"Absolutely. So what now then? Find a job?"

"Yeah, because part time at Uni just isn't giving us enough money. I need a full-time job. Lainn can handle full-time day-care; it's good for him, in fact. So I'll start looking as soon as the semester finishes."

"I don't know if I could be everything for my kids like that. I don't know how I'd cope without Owen."

"Yeah. I think about it a lot. I know I can never be both his mother and father, but I can teach him so much about Chris that he feels like he knows him."

"I just don't know if I could be strong enough."

"I didn't think I could be, but I think I'm getting there. Luckily he doesn't need everything from me all at once. I'll be growing while he does. We'll figure it out together."
Lainn is sick. Stomach bug, poor thing. It’s funny: when he starts to get sick he’s all ratty and grizzly and I can’t stand him, and then he gets really sick, like throwing up this time, and my heart just pours out to him, oh, my little angelic baby. You poor thing.

So I’ve been cuddling him and walking him around because he won’t go to sleep alone, and I’m not in any hurry for him to sleep, actually, because it’s not often anymore I get to just hold him like this. He’s not a snuggler anymore; he can’t stay still long enough. So this is precious. He’s looking up at me with those wide brown eyes, even if they do look desperately sad: “Why don’t I feel good, Mummy?” And I’m looking down at my sweet baby who puts me through so much stress because he’s strong willed and too clever and always pushing me, pushing, pushing. And I’m looking down at him and forgetting all of that because he’s so beautiful and he needs me. And he loves me.

I’ve been singing “Happy Thoughts” to him, telling him, “Daddy used to sing this to you when you were just a little baby and you couldn’t even walk yet. He would wrap you up in your blanky—“

“Banky,” he says, in his softest, sweetest, saddest voice.

“That’s right, in your blanky, and he would walk you down the street and sing to you until you fell asleep. And then when you were asleep he would put you in your bed—“

“Bed.”

“—and he would watch you because he loved you so, so much.”
“Daddy.”

“That’s right, Sweetie, Daddy. We love Daddy.”

“Daddy Mummy.”

“That’s right, Daddy and Mummy. We love Lainny.”

“Lainny.

“Is that you? Lainny?”

“Lainny.”

“And do you know where your name comes from? Mummy and Daddy wanted to give you a name that meant something, so you are named after a hero.”

“He-wo.”

“A big, brave hero from Ireland called Cu Chulainn. He was so brave he protected all the people from all the bad things. And that’s what Daddy does for us now. He’s always with us and he’ll look after us and keep us safe.”

“Daddy.”

“We love Daddy.”

“Daddy.” He’s just looking up at me with those sad I’m sick eyes and I wonder if he even knows who Chris is. Does he have any concept of any of this? I just keep walking, rocking, and talking.

“You were always very special to Daddy. You know, before you were born, even before we knew who you were, you knew when Daddy was around. You used to get the hiccups when you were still inside my tummy—“

He pats my chest. “Tummy.”
“Good boy, Sweetie. You used to get the hiccups when you were still in my tummy and I would get mad because I wanted to go to sleep. Then Daddy would come and just put his hand on my tummy and your hiccups would stop. And he would whisper to you, but I was never allowed to hear what he said because it was just between you and him. Does Daddy talk to you, Sweetie? Do you see Daddy?”

I just don’t know if he does. I’ve waited all this time for something, anything, to hint to me that Chris is still here. I think he should be, but I just don’t know.

“Daddy,” Lainn says.

I can’t keep this up right now. What else can I talk about? “I know, I’m going to tell you a story.”

“Sto-wee.”

“Yup. this is a story about Mummy and Tupe.”

“Tupe,” he says. “Nana Tupe.”

“Good boy. Nana and Tupe. Well, when I was a little girl I used to go for long walks with Tupe on The Barrier. You don’t know The Barrier yet, but we’ll go there one day, okay?”

“Okay Mummy.” He catches me off guard. I guess I thought he wasn’t really listening.

“Okay, Sweetie. We’ll go to The Barrier one day. I used to go for walks with Tupe and he would tell me stories. And my favourite one was about a beautiful lady called Raiha . . .”

This is why I’m still alive.
This is why I didn’t die without Chris. Only Chris and I know what we wanted for our son, for him to grow up to be a good man, a man of strength and integrity, a generous man, a man of wisdom, a man who is kind and loving and selfless and brave, of course, brave, just like his Dad. And only Chris and I know all that and if Chris isn’t here to do it then this is one of the most important things I’ll ever do in my whole life. I will bring Lainn up to be what we wanted him to be.

This is why I’m still alive.

And I can see now how being Maori is all part of this. I am part of Tupe, who is gone, and I am also part of Chris. And Lainn is part of all of us. I come from a long line of strong women—not just women, strong people—and their blood flows in mine. And the strength has been passed on to Lainn. We have a rich heritage of love and understanding of ourselves and the world because we are Maori and added to that is Chris’ legacy, a legacy of pain and struggles and courage and most of all joy. There were more times of pain in Chris’ life than times of joy, but the joy was greater and brighter by far. It is the joy that will continue for generations, the joy that Chris brought to us, the joy that he taught us how to see.

Thank you, Chris. This is why I’m still alive. You need me to do this because you can’t do it yourself.
Thirty

It’s pouring down outside. Lainn is taking his nap. Lisa is at her parents’ place. I don’t want to watch Oprah, and I’ve already finished this week’s book, a book about single parenting. It’s been eight months since Chris died. I look at the clock and wonder if Wally will be home. I dial his number and he answers.

“Surprised?” I say.

“Yeah,” he says, “Haven’t heard from you in ages. Are you okay?”

“You know what? I am actually. I really am. I’m getting there.”

“That’s so good. I think you’re incredible, you know.”

“Yeah, me too.”

He laughs. “Way to go! So what have you been up to?”

“I started going to Aikido”

“Really?” He says. I knew that would impress him. “That’s awesome.”

“Yeah, man, it rocks! I was so nervous the first night because there is all this protocol with bowing and backing off the mat and stuff, but it’s not too hard to pick it all up, and then the techniques we’re learning are awesome. I mean, it’s empowering.”

“Why, because you can beat up on men now? Oh yeah, that’s just what you need.”

“No, it’s empowering because it’s self defence, and it’s all about centering yourself and using your opponent’s energy against him.”

“That does sound pretty cool. So how often are you going?”

“Three nights a week and Lisa baby-sits instead of paying rent.”

“What kind of stuff do you do?”
“Well, we start off each night with a warm up and then we get shown a new technique and then get with a partner to practise it. You totally have to fight to get to a senior person so you can learn as much as possible. It’s weird at first. But that’s what you spend the whole night doing. Oh, but the break-falls are the coolest part. You learn how to fall safely and how to let yourself be thrown. At first it just freaked me out—just doing a forward roll from standing up was so out of my comfort zone.”

“But that’s all it was though, right? Comfort zone. Not anything you weren’t physically able to do.”

“That’s right! I’m so excited. Oh yeah, and Mr Mechanical?”

His voice drops. “What.”

“I changed the brake pads on my car last week.”

“What do you mean, you changed them?”

“I mean I changed them! Me, personally!”

“And the wheels haven’t, like, fallen off or anything.”

“Now you just watch it or we might have to bring up the story of the guy who had to pay the mechanic $20 to find out he had run out of gas . . .”

“Shut up.”

“What? It’s just a story I’ve heard.”

“Shut up.”

“Ohh, is poor Wally’s ego being damaged? I’m so sorry. I’ll never mention it again.”

“Thank you.”
“But I still think it’s hilarious that you thought it was the alternator and Chris and I tried to convince you it wasn’t because the starter motor was turning over—”

“Now, didn’t I say shut up?”

“Ah, yes. So you did.” I hear Lainn knocking on his bedroom door. “Oops, the boy’s awake. Hey—good to talk to ya. Gotta go. Bye!” He he! I love being a woman.

I open Lainn’s door and he has a huge smile on his face, his cheeks pink and streaked with pillow creases. “Mum-may” he says in his best kiwi accent. I was right about me finding myself without a man. I’ve accomplished so much in my life, and although it helped to have Chris with me, I know some of it came from inside myself. I was the first in my family to get a bachelor’s degree, and I graduated when I was only nineteen. Then I was teaching at university at twenty at the same time as studying full-time, and then I was doing a master’s degree and teaching while I was pregnant. And then I had this beautiful boy in front of me and kept doing it all. I’ve never let anything stop me before. I should be able to do whatever I choose to do with my life, Chris or no Chris. Husband or no husband. I’m sure I can find it in myself again.

“Lainn,” I say as I pick him up, “can you hear the rain?”

“Raining!” He says with wide eyes.

“Do you want to go outside in the rain?”

“Go oud in-ah-ah-RAIN!!!”

“Come on, then!”

It is pouring down, has been for days. There are big puddles in the driveway and even bigger ones in the lawn. I put Lainn’s gumboots on him and we go outside,
me in my bare feet. “Come on, Sweetie. Can you feel the rain on your face? It’s wet!”

“WET!” He’s so excited. I run over to a puddle.

“Look, Lainn, a puddle.” I start jumping up and down. There is already water dripping off my eyelashes and the tip of my nose. He giggles and squeals, trying to splash me like I’m splashing him. He just ends up falling over, which he thinks is even funnier. A rumble of thunder passes over us and he scrambles to my leg, almost knocking me over.

“Did you hear the thunder?”

“Yah,” he says, looking up at me with wide eyes again, this time combined with a worried forehead.

“Was it loud?”

“Loud.”

I pick him up. “We love thunder. Thunder and rain,” and I start to dance around, “Thunder and rain. Thunder and rain!” Me singing, Lainn giggling, the rain falling and the two of us dancing in it.

When we are both completely drenched and starting to shiver we go inside and shower. Lainn playing with empty shampoo bottles at my feet while I let the water stream over my head. I watch it cascade down to the stainless steel floor. I don’t think I need to have my grieving session today. I just don’t feel any need for it. I feel like I’ve alleviated the backlog of grief and now I’m all up to date. That’s hilarious. I always know I’m on top of things when I feel all organised and up to date. But I think
this means I’m ready to face Chris’s box again. I can do it now. I guess that’ll be a whole new kind of grieving session.

I fill in time all afternoon with Lainn. I can’t bring Chris’ things out while Lainn’s around, so it’ll have to be tonight. We play with playdoh, draw pictures, read books, watch *Teletubbies*. Spaghetti for dinner, put Lainn in his toy box to play for half an hour, clean the house, and it’s time for him to go to bed. I put him in his bed with his blanket over him and ask him what song he wants to sing.

“Wah-wah,” he says, doing the actions for “The Wheels on the Bus.”

I sing and he does the actions and finishes off each verse, all around the . . .

“TOWN!!”

“OK, fold your arms,” I say. “Prayer time.”

He folds his arms and squints at me, and we go through the prayer. He tells me to say thank you for Grandma and Papa, Mummy and Daddy, Nana and Tupe, and everyone at crèche, who he lists one by one. He’s stalling. He asks for a cuddle, which I give him, then asks for another.

“Nope,” I say. “You’ve had cuddles and milk and songs and books. No more now. It’s bed time.”

“Cuddle,” he says, “milk, wah-wah!”

I kiss him on the cheek. “It’s bedtime, Sweetie. Goodnight.” As I walk out and close the door he is sliding his feet over the edge of the bed and down onto the floor. But this is how we do things; he can’t open the door. Often he will get back into bed in a few minutes and be asleep before too long. Not tonight, of course, because tonight I actually want to get something done.
After half an hour of him thumping on the door and calling “Maaaaah-maaaaaayy” in between high pitched screams at the top of his lungs, I open his door.

“Lainn, bed. NOW.” He puts on a great act as he waddles back to his bed and it sounds like real crying until he turns and asks for a cuddle with a smile on his face.

“Okay, Lainn, it’s bedtime. Goodnight.” I lay him down and go to kiss him but then he’s sitting up and pointing at the posters on his wall.

“Tubby-tubbies!”

“Oh,” I say, “can you see the Teletubbies? Do you want to kiss them goodnight?”

“Yah.” He nods. I hold him up to the wall and he kisses them one by one, then I lay him back down again. He’s still pointing at the wall.

“Ah-da-ah-Elmo.”

“Yes it is Elmo. Goodnight.”

“Big bird.”

“Goodnight, Lainn.”

“Cookie Munda.”

“Lainn, stop changing the subject.” By the time I close the door behind me he is already halfway across the room. Thump, thump, thump.

I smile. “I can keep this up longer than you, Lainn.”

I drag Chris’ box in from the garage and open it. On the top is lying the glass chess set Chris gave me on our last wedding anniversary. He said it represented all the difficult things I had accomplished since he had known me. He told me how proud he
was of me. I set it up on a shelf of my entertainment centre. I’m proud of me too, Chris.

It sounds like Lainn is going to sleep now, so I begin. I probably should be doing this while Lisa is here. No. I’m tough, remember?

I asked him once why he kept so much junk—so many letters and programs from shows, birthday cards and bad poetry he had written. He said there was so much of his life he wanted to forget that when he was seventeen he started his whole life over. He wanted to be able to look back though all that stuff and see a whole life without any of the bad memories in it. I thought he was hoarding too much. Now his whole life is in one box in front of me, literally everything from birth certificate to death certificate. His whole life. Everything we have left of him, everything Lainn has to learn about him. And now I’m going through it to see if it will come back to me—the love, the promises, the knowledge without a doubt that what we had was strong enough to conquer anything. Just to set it in concrete, once and for all.

And what I’m finding now, as soon as I open the box, is testament after testament of what we had. There are pages and pages of poetry—love poems to me, to Lainn, poems to exorcise old ghosts, poems to ward off monsters.

Dear Shelly

I finally figured it out.

I realised that

It wasn’t a punishment, though
It felt like one at the time:
I don't remember ever hurting as much
As I did then.

I wondered why
They would let it happen like that.
I couldn't think of what I did
That made me deserve it.
That was so bad.

But I know now
It wasn't because of what I had done,
But what I might do.
I shudder to think who I would be
Without it.

So it wasn't
A punishment, it was a test.
I had to show them my worth. Prove I could handle it.
I think I passed because they gave me
A prize.

And the prize is you.
And the prize was worth every second of it.

I love you.

C.J. Fankhauser

I remember crying when I first read that. It cut right into me to think that his abuse had been somehow connected to our destiny of happiness together. And it humbled me to feel so overwhelmed by his love. This time I can barely control my sobbing because no matter how much I’ve prepared myself, how much I’ve convinced myself that it’s all okay, it was all real and it will last forever; none of that stops my heart from aching, just hurting because I still miss him so very, very much. I want to close the box and never open it again. Who needs Pandora’s box when I have Chris’s?

Maybe I’m not ready after all. Maybe avoiding this part of my grief would be a better idea. Why didn’t I do this when Lisa was here? I can’t stop crying. I call Dad, who is home alone while Mum visits Dione in Australia.

“Hello,” he says in his ‘my, what a surprise to hear from you’ voice. “How are you?”

The girls in my family are famous for not admitting there is a problem until it is dragged out of them. “I’m fine,” I say, “What are you up to?”

“Oh, I have to clean the house before Mum gets home, and I have a few other things to do. I have to fix the computer because I killed it.”

“You killed it? How?” Come on, Dad, notice. I’m sad here.
“I overfilled the hard-drive and it died. It wasn’t pretty.”

“Better fix that before Mum gets back.”

“Yeah, I know. Don’t tell her.”

“So,” I say, “have you had dinner yet?”

“No,” he says, “what did you have in mind?

“I made a yummy cottage pie for dinner, and there’s way too much for us to eat.”

“Hmmm.” Damn. I don’t think he’s going to come over.

“And rice pudding, too . . .”

“Mmmm. It’s very tempting, hon, but I think I’d better stay here. There’s lots I have to get done. Thanks though.”

“That’s okay,” I’m almost crying. “Just thought you might be getting sick of bachelor food.”

“Yeah, but I’ll survive a few more days.” He pauses and when I don’t say anything he says, “Is everything alright?”

“Mm-hmm,” voice rising, now he knows I’m lying.

“So what are you guys up to?”

What a stupid game I have to play every time. Why can’t we just admit we need help? “I’ve been going through Chris’ things.”

“Hard, aye.”

“Mm.” Now there’s no more pretence. I’m just crying.

“Is Lisa there?”

“No.”
“So how about I come over for dinner?”

I curl up in my bed and cry until I hear the car in the driveway, then I quickly clean up my face and meet Dad at the door. We hug and he rubs my back and I melt against him for a few seconds until I push away and wipe my eyes again.

“So, let me get you some dinner.”

Lisa arrives and the three of us sit around the living room and talk about nothing, everything, watch TV. There's no need to bring up what I'm trying to do and how hard it is. I just want moral support. When it's late Dad announces he should leave. He moves to the edge of the couch.

“You okay?” He says.

“Yeah, thanks Dad,” I say from my cross-legged position on the floor.

“You know how proud we are of you, right?”

“Yeah?”

“Yeah! You've done so well making it through everything. We were really worried about you but there was nothing we could do except be here for you. All we could do was watch, and we like what we've seen.”

“Really? Why?” I know I've been doing well the past two months but on the whole I don't think I handled the year all that well.

“Of course! Because you're strong. You've always been strong. You see what you want, what you need to do, and you go for it. You left our house, got out on your own, got a job. You're a mother all by yourself and you're doing it. You're making it. I'm so proud of you.”

“Thanks, Dad.” I'm picking at my fingernails.
“You know,” he says, “I’m not even worried about you any more. I was very afraid for you to begin with and even wondered if you’d be able to make it on your own but I shouldn’t have worried. I’m not worried about you at all now.”

“I feel like you would be if I was still in your house, under your feet all the time.”

“Maybe so, but I still think you’re doing great!”

“Yeah, me too, actually. Now, at least. In fact, I think it’s been a really good year for me.” Did I just say that?

“Really? That’s great!” He opens his arms to invite me over for a hug. I shuffle over on my knees.

“You know, I’ve had so much time to look at myself, figure out how I feel and why I react the way I do. And I’ve had time to see what I really want. It has been a good year.”

“Good for you, Shels. Good for you.”

We hug and then he gets up to leave. “Love you,” I say.

“Love you too. Give me a call if you need to.” I stand at the door and watch his BMW back out of the driveway before I sit back down on the floor in front of the box. Lisa is back on the net. I mock her about having a cyber-boyfriend and she says, “Bite me.” I stick my tongue out at her, turn back to the box, breathe deeply and pull out a journal Chris kept in our first couple of years of marriage. I can do this. I didn’t even need Dad here with me to do it, just a little pep talk.

I start flipping through pages. When Chris and I had been married for over a year he wrote about how wonderfully his life was going. He had just got a job writing
for the *Ke Alaka‘i*, the campus newspaper, got the part of Don John in *Much Ado About Nothing*, and won a prize in a writing competition.

*Friday 13 September 1995*

... I feel real big.

Then I remember the outside world, the sea that this little bubble floats around in. I remember the long lonely times that I thought I was useless and unimportant and a total loser, and I wish that I could have changed that.

Some part of me says all this success is for nothing cause one day I’ll screw everything up and I’ll be nothing but a bigger loser who drowns in his memories. Fortunately this image doesn’t come too often.

The one thing that I wish and hope I never become a loser at is being a husband to Shelly. Being a father to my children. If I’m successful at that, then all the plays, papers and prizes don’t really mean a thing. They’re all just badges for old crippled men to wear, compared to you Shelly.

I love you.

You know, it’s you that makes me so whole.

CJ
“Drowns in his memories.” It’s eerie. “Drowns in his memories.” Is that what you did, Chris? “It’s you who makes me so whole.” But that’s what you did for me, made me whole. I haven’t forgotten that, and I know you didn’t forget either. I know you meant it. But you spent so much time being afraid of what you might become that you didn’t do enough to stop it from happening. You never learned what to do to avoid it. I can’t change that now; I just have to live with it. I can. I can get on with my life and stop living in the inadequacies of yours.

I put that journal aside and pick up the one he wrote while we were engaged.

_Thursday 7 April 1994_

_I have said that without you I would die. If I prove not worthy to be your husband, then the only result would be that I would die._

_I would actually die without you._

He did.

I always thought it would be the same for me, but now I understand why it didn’t happen that way. I am alive because I still have a life to live. I have our son to love and teach and guide until he becomes a good man like you wanted to be. I am alive because I am strong and I can live without you Chris, even if it’s not what I wanted to happen. I am alive because everything, every minute every day, has shaped me into this woman who can not only survive my losses but can be stronger because of them.
Lisa shuts down the computer and announces she’s going to bed. “Are you coming?” She says and we laugh—we’ve had discussions on how we’re beginning to sound like a married couple. I look over the mess on the floor around me and decide I need sleep too. “Actually, I am.”

I put everything back into the box, journals, newspaper articles, Chris’ BYU-H Pain Barrier T-shirt I wore the day after I gave birth. I go into the bathroom to brush my teeth and stand in front of the mirror looking into my own eyes. It’s not often I look at myself and actually see that they are blue, blue with navy around the edge and yellow around the iris. Chris loved looking into my eyes. I loved looking into his.

Sigh. I might be a single mother but I have an education and I have skills and experience and everything behind me that points towards the fact that I am in charge of my own life. I can do whatever I choose to do! I can go anywhere in the world and be whatever I want! It’s such a new concept.

And who I am, who I want to be, is Shelly, the woman who will always love Chris, who has a lot of painful memories but more happy ones. I am Shelly, the woman who can do whatever I set my mind to. I can do it by myself. I am enough by myself.

I lie in bed for ages but my mind won’t stop going over everything, my newfound strong woman self, the few small nagging regrets about Chris, my plans for the future. These are the things I would have talked to Chris about if he were here. I need to write him a letter. I go back into the lounge and sit down with a piece of paper and pen.
Hey Baby,

I'm going to forgive you, okay? I'm going to forgive you for all the dumb things you said because I know you weren't yourself; I know you didn't mean them. You were in so much pain you couldn't see straight, so it's okay. I understand.

I miss you but it's okay. It's okay because I can hold on to all the good things: your smile, your poems . . . your son. And I'll always remember the love and I'll stop begging you to come to me. I'll stop begging and just know that you're there. I'll just know that you're there and maybe you can't come right now; I don't know what it's like for you out there.

So you just come when you can, okay? I can wait. And I can live without you holding me up, see? I'm doing it. So just come when you can because I miss you. But in the meantime I'll keep loving you, and I'll keep forgiving you, and I'll keep on living.

I'll do good with Lainn, okay? I'll bring him up to be a good man, and don't worry, Chris. I'll protect him like you wanted to. And I'll teach him all about you. He'll love you just like I do, don't worry.

You'd be so proud of me, Chris. I've finally found who I am. Who you saw but I never could. And you gave me the gift of finding myself because you let me be alone. I know who I am now, without you or anyone else, just me. And me is damn good.

You'd be so proud of me.
I love you forever, Chris.

Thank you.

I wipe the tears off the page and rub the indent in my finger from holding the pen so hard. What do I do with the letter now that I’ve written it? I look around the room: wedding photos, framed pictures of Chris and Lainn together, books of Chris’ writing, and the box on the floor. The box that holds his whole life. All the things he treasured. I walk over to it and dig down about halfway into one of the piles of old letters and cards.

“Here you go Chris, another memory to hold.” I slip it into the pile. Another piece of paper falls off the top of the pile, so I pick it up. I remember this poem; Chris wrote it for me when we were engaged and he was in Hawaii. I read it, smile, sigh, and walk back to my bedroom, sticking it on the wall above my pillow before I climb back into bed.

Dear Father,

Please bless her while she’s sleeping

that she might have sweet dreams

with every breath she takes

And Dear Father,

Please bless her in the morning

and make the sun shine brightly

as she wakes
And have the gentle moon watch over her

when she walks within its light

and when the stars see her smile

may they live to shine half so bright

Dear Father,

Please bless her as she travels

through this life reaching every

single goal she sets

And Dear Father,

Please let her know I love her

and that you love her too,

lest she forget.

Please Father give her every reason

to believe that she is worth the sun and skies

and let her know that I see heaven

for heaven is within her deep blue eyes

And Father,

Please hold her when she cries.
Thirty-one

I dreamed of Chris last night. In the blue of the night I woke and his face was still with me, his smell, and most of all the taste of his lips was still on mine. I closed my eyes and begged for him to stay with me, pleaded for those sensations to stay, not fade behind my rising consciousness. My chest ached with the memory of his warmth and I closed my eyes to breathe it in.

I was standing outside a concrete building and Chris was walking towards it across a big car park. There was a large green field on the other side of us. His face was not hurt like in the mortuary. His hair was short and messy, the way he liked it if it had to be short. His face was pale and drawn. He looked tired. He looked sad, oh, so sad. He was limping, walking on crutches, and there were two men helping him walk. Tupe was one of them, but he was young, more like in the wedding pictures I've seen, white haired but strong and upright. He and the other man (who was he? I can't see his face) supported Chris, one on each side.

He looked ashamed to see me, tried to avoid making eye contact, but as he reached me I quietly said, “I love you.” I had to tell him. I hadn’t told him before he died and I had to tell him now. You have to know, Chris, I love you. I told you so many times before but this time is the most important. “I love you,” I said quietly, quietly because even though I had decided that I knew in my heart that he loved me, when it all came down to it, face to face, I didn’t know what his reaction would be.

He stopped. Tupe and the other man stood with him, still holding him by the arms, but not looking at me, as if they wanted to give us an amount of privacy. Chris turned to look straight at me, lifting his eyes to me with one of those deep forever
looks. And there it was in his eyes, “I love you, too.” In the soft half smile, “I love you, too.” In the creases of his brow, “I love you, too.” And he took my face in his hands and raised it up to him as he kissed me, so softly brushed his parted lips against mine and closed them on my upper lip before backing away and looking at me with his intense black eyes. And then he turned, and Tupe and the other man helped him walk the rest of the way into the building. And I woke up and cried.

I cried and cried, bawled, because of the lump in my throat and the ache in my chest. Cried as I tried to summon the velvet of his lips, the taste of the tip of his tongue. Cried, bawled, because I had prayed so many times that he would come to me in my sleep, that he would talk to me or hold me or make love to me. And it wasn’t until now, when I had decided I could live without all that, that he came.

And now I know he is here. And I know that he loves me. And I feel that he loves me. And it makes everything else that little bit easier to live with.
Acknowledgements

