

Roimata

A Novel

"Childhood decides."

Jean-Paul Sartre

"The only professionals of any use now are doctors and firemen. "

Martha Argerich, concert pianist, after 9/11

1.***London 2009***

"You remember your promise?"

"Promise?"

"Yossi, I am moving to the other end of the earth, with my precious daughter, to a place I hate, in order to be with you. You need to promise this for me."

"Ok."

"My family is off limits. It's all I ask. You promise?"

"I promise."

"Cross your heart and hope to die?"

"What does that mean?"

2.

New Zealand 1970

You don't know why you pick the girl up. You don't even know why you're there, just south of the Bombays. Driving, just driving, through lush green land scarred by straggly barbed-wire fencing. Trying to drive the draining voice of your wife out of your head. You should be on your way to work. But the other woman, the sweet, compliant one is there at work, eye blackened by her husband, looking to you for answers. She worships you.

The girl shines in the distance. She looks like Raquel Welch, hair teased and pushed high on her head with some kind of band. She's walking along the hot raw road, wiggling her hips like a film star, sticking out her thumb. Looks like a mirage. They're running wild, these young girls. You wouldn't want your baby daughter hitch-hiking like this when she's older. Better you pick her up than some crazy bastard.

She gets in the Kingswood. You offer her some beer, from the crate you'd stashed in the back of the car to hide it from your wife. Her huge painted eyes are bewitching and she flirts like crazy while you're driving. Really flirts, grabbing your arm when you make a joke, holding your hand while you light her cigarette, even brushing her arm across your groin on purpose when she reaches for your bottle of beer. She swears a lot. You've never known a woman behave like this. She wants a ride all the way to Taumaranui. You should be turning around, getting back to Auckland. She wiggles over to sit hard up against you on the big bench seat and you drink and she laughs and the miles of fertile country flash past and she flirts and you drink some more.

When you can't stand it any longer you turn down a side road but she doesn't say anything. You stop. You'll have to let her out and drive back to your life. There's a paddock full of that lush, green shag-pile grass beside you and you see a big mean looking bull so you point out the beast and she laughs and squeals. You kiss her. She responds at first, like no woman you've known before. You kiss the downy skin behind her ear that's been torturing you since Pokeno and you cup your hand around the tiniest point of the sweep of her waist. She goes a bit stiff and still. But you're really turned on and you've had a lot of beer so you go a bit harder, coaxing her, telling her she's lovely and then all of sudden she's screaming and fighting. You grab her arm to calm her down and you tell her that you won't hurt her and you mean it, you would never hurt her, but she wrestles it away and she's opening the car door and climbing out. Then she's walking away in her red dress down the tar-sealed road that is sticky in the heat. She's swaying and stumbling, running from you. Then she stops in the road and looks back at you, seeing what you are going to do next. And that's it. Just like that. Your life, ruined.

3.

Starship Children's Hospital, Auckland

January 2010

A few hours after Yossi asks her to marry him, Claire hurries to theatre for an acute trauma case, a three-year-old hurt in a road accident. A man, obviously the father, stares at her as she walks through the bright aqua corridor. He's slumped against a doorway, horror in every muscle, rubbing his eyes, his daughter's blood on his shirt. The accident's his fault, she can tell straight away. But she can't talk to him now. She leaves him to the garish cutouts of Mickey Mouse.

She slices the wee blonde girl from nipple to navel and it's messy and bloody and slippery. Surgery takes absolute concentration. Observation, logic and experience. That's all she has at a time like this. The girl's abdomen is full of blood and Claire is soon up to her arms in it. Every body is the same but every body is different. Claire had been amazed to realise, early on in medicine, that every person's internal organs are just as individual as their faces.

Children as young as this take real dexterity. Skinny baby birds, no room to move. Even working out what is what inside a belly is an art. Never share that with parents though; they are sure it's pure science.

Claire pokes her fingers deeper, locating the bowel, looking for the source of the bleeding, trying not to think about the father outside. Unravelling, no doubt. He hasn't had a chance to ask anything, understand anything. She'll talk to him as soon as she's finished.

The nurses start to talk about the fact that it's the father's first access visit to

the child since his separation. Claire asks them to be quiet. She doesn't care about that. Running her fingers along the loops, she thinks she finds something. Leaning right in to try to see the delicate meat in her hands, her cheek is almost brushing the skin on the child's belly. There it is, another tear. She shows it to her registrar and nods to him to start stitching.

After her shower, there's a phone-call from Yossi. He and Roimata will head over to Waiheke Island straight after school. She should try not to be too late because it is going to be a beautiful evening and he's bought salmon. Sounds like heaven.

"Claire, I am so happy. Do you feel happy?"

"Well, Yossi, I ... I have to go. They're waiting for me up on the ward."

Yossi loves Claire's bach in Pearly Bay. They spend every weekend there and have made it theirs, cleaning and restoring things. The bach has sat empty for seventeen years while Claire's been in London. Her mother inherited it from her family but never liked it there and left it to Claire when she died. When she left Auckland, as soon as she could after medical school, she'd put the bach, and indeed New Zealand, to the back of her mind. It sat there, the rates paid from her mother's estate, empty and, like her childhood, undisturbed. Put it behind you was Claire's motto. Move on. She'd never brought herself to sell Pearly Bay. Perhaps she should have sold it. Yossi likes it too much.

Every weekend she and Yossi have laboured, knocking down walls, opening the bach up to light and sunshine, lifting lino, sanding and polishing floorboards,

painting. It's tranquil and silent there, and the views from the little bach are stunning. She's not yet convinced it was worth it, though, coming back to this backwater country with far too many bad memories. She would never have come for Pearly Bay alone. She's done it for Yossi. A scary thought, that she's allowed love to make her so vulnerable.

Up on the ward, she discharges little Eli Tipene. Checking the fine red line of scar where she has operated on his diaphragmatic hernia, admiring her own neat stitching, she tells the baby's shy fifteen-year-old mother,

"He's doing so well. Babies heal very fast. Try to relax and treat him normally now. You're doing a great job."

Before she hands him back she gives him a cuddle, his fat little baby smell delicious, his rabbits' ear skin soft on her cheek. So robust, so chuckly. Only last week she'd been fishing his organs out of his chest cavity and stitching them back where they belonged, repairing the hole that allowed them to grow through into the wrong place and crowd his lungs. Four hours of risky surgery.

There's no father in evidence. She hopes she's not getting complacent about teenage mums, like some of the other staff who barely seem to notice that the girl's fifteen, the same age as her own daughter, still a child herself, texting away on her mobile phone the whole time Claire is talking to her. Still, she's hung a bright bumblebee mobile over his cot and surrounded him with photos of smiling whanau, many of whom have visited Mum and baby. All her family and friends have been polite to staff, tender towards the baby and very warm to the other

patients on the ward. This is more than she can say for many patients.

This baby was seriously at risk at birth. Now that she has done her work with the scalpel, the love he gets will determine his outcome.

“Where’s your aunty?” she asks the girl.

“Gone to get the car.”

“Ok. Sorry I missed her. Say goodbye from me.”

Claire’s lying. She’s not sorry she missed the girl’s elegant and beautifully spoken aunt. A strong and sensible presence, she’s been there every day. A conversation yesterday, though, had been worrying. Rachel Rakena had seemed distracted, even disturbed.

It’s possible she’s nervous about taking Eli home? Maybe, but it felt more personal. She becomes conscious of her tight breathing and a slight tingle in her hands. It’s sure to be about Claire’s own father.

The next patient is in the bright pink room next door.

“Hi sweetheart, I hear you’ve got a grumbly old appendix. How old are you?”

“Six,” says the little girl.

“Six. Wow! You don’t need your silly appendix. We’ll take it out and your tummy will feel much better.”

The little girl holds out her doll, pointing to the scar drawn on its tummy. The Play Therapists have been, then. All a bit airy-fairy. Play Therapy seems a bit of a luxury. Hard to collect hard data about whether it works or not. In the past, parents comforted their own children in hospital, explained things to them.

Couldn't they use the money in their lives outside hospital? It would be good to look at the research and challenge their priorities; she's seeing too many children whose illness has been left too long before they see a doctor.

She's beginning to be known for her grumpy opinions. Her friend and colleague Sam has warned her to be careful. Only a few months back in New Zealand after seventeen years at Great Ormond Street, some staff think she's arrogant and patronising, because she won't join in banal talk about fate, karma, a universal plan or other superstitious nonsense. She has a habit of looking worried, too. How many times have people told her she'd be pretty if only she didn't look so serious. Why did they feel free to say this? Wasn't it an insult? Her sarcastic sense of humour doesn't help.

Another thing she'd used to try to dissuade Yossi.

"We're dour people, New Zealanders," she'd told him. "Gloom with a view. Think Scots with water sports."

"You're lovely," had been his reply.

"I'm Claire Bowerman. I'm the surgeon that will be operating," she says to the girl's exhausted parents, wondering whether they, too, are noticing her surname. She could change it when she marries Yossi. Then people like Rachel Rakena will never connect her with her notorious father. She tries to imagine introducing herself to this family as "Dr Shalev." Too weird. Getting married was something she never thought she'd do, let alone taking her husband's name. Maybe she'll just make up a surname.

"You're pretty. You look like a princess," the little girl is saying. Claire blushes.

"Thank you, darling."

The parents both laugh and Dad, holding her on his knee, cuddles in tight.

It must be grumbling appendix day. Three appendectomies later, at about two that afternoon, she's still worrying about Rachel Rakena. The Charge Nurse is in the staff room hiding from a demanding young nursing student. Over the last two months, Claire has watched Janet deal with devastated families, egotistical surgeons, a dangerous scarcity of resources and rampant political correctness with aplomb, humility, and a cheerful common sense that can't be taught. She's small, and she smiles a lot, but people tend to do what she says. She's married to Sam, a Pediatric Oncologist; Claire's closest ally amongst the mostly older, male doctors at the hospital.

Janet has been the one and only person to mention Claire's father to her since she'd been back. On meeting Claire she'd remembered working with her when they were both training.

"Your father was Patrick Bowerman, right? I remember because my family vaguely knew Kathryn Phillips' family. What happened to him?"

"I have nothing to do with him."

"Fair enough."

Janet had accepted it. Some people can get away with this sort of directness. At least the air was clear. Claire had no feeling of being judged, nor, way worse,

being seen as titillating, exciting somehow, which was the way some people reacted. She felt closer to Janet than anyone else at work. Which might explain why she felt ok about mentioning the taboo subject now.

“ Janet, Eli Tipene’s aunt asked me some questions yesterday about my family. Do you think people notice? Do they connect me with my father? ”

“People ask me all the time.”

“Really?”

“Oh yeah. You’re worth gossiping about.”

This is why she had left New Zealand and lived happily in London for the last seventeen years. She’d dreaded coming back but Yossi had persuaded her, well, forced her into it, actually. She’s agreed to a year here, though he wants to settle forever. It’s going to be a lot easier if she swallows her feminist principles and changes her name to Shalev. Or she could just insist they move back to London. Tomorrow would be good.

What will she do about Roimata’s name? Roimata has always been Bowerman, like Claire. Since Yossi has been a father to her since she was three, perhaps she will want to become Shalev too, so that they can all share a name? It’s actually a nice thought. Claire finds she secretly likes the idea of getting married. What has happened to her? Never, she’d said when she was young. One in a million chance of that ever happening.

“Let’s do it soon,” Yossi had said over breakfast that morning. “I don’t want to wait until next summer.”

She’s not sure she wants Yossi to gain his residency, the real reason they are

getting married, but she is sure she wants to marry this tender, clever man she has learned to love dearly. He's so effortlessly accomplished, so knowledgeable about music and the arts. She's always running to learn, to keep up. After a year, he may get sick of it here. With a bit of luck.

4.

When she gets back to her office, there's a card waiting. Claire opens it sitting at her desk at the hospital, listening to a medical student who is asking her advice about a patient. A photo and a letter fall out as she tears open the envelope.

The young woman is too hesitant and indecisive and Claire tries to gently put the questions back to her, force her to make some decisions on treatment. The poor girl is struggling.

"You can't leave it to others all the time. You may as well not be there if you are going to do that."

Now she has been too harsh. The girl looks tearful. The phone rings but Claire ignores it. If they really need her, then her pager will go. What she wants to say is "get hard" or "toughen up," but she needs to be kinder.

"I'm sorry. Male doctors, and the nurses too, they just disrespect women who are indecisive. We need to be twice as male as the males. You'll be fine. Just get more confident."

The girl gone, Claire can look at the photo. It's an old black and white studio photo. The woman is about twenty and the resemblance to Roimata is startling. Gazing at the camera, thick black hair piled up on her head, she looks stern, as Roi often looks in photos. The look on her face, that confident warmth that resides somewhere in the tilt of the head, the broad straight shoulders. It's Roimata.

Torere

30 March 2010

Dear Dr Bowerman,

Thank you so much again, for the excellent care you took of my great-nephew Eli Tipene.

When I was in your office, the name Roimata on your daughter's drawing caught my eye. It is not a name I expect to see in a Pakeha doctor's office. Then I saw the photo of your daughter and the likeness to my grandmother made me catch my breath.

The picture is her, Roimata Te Hira. She was an amazing woman, a leader among Ngaitai. She brought me up. She died ten years ago and we all miss her very much. You will see the resemblance.

I thought her name an extraordinary coincidence. I can't help wondering whether there is a connection.

I know this might be a painful and difficult matter. I 'm going to be back in Auckland in a few days, when I have settled my niece and Eli here in Torere.

Na mihi.

Rachel Rakena

Brent Te Hira was his name. Her holiday romance in Italy; what a cliché. She'd let herself go that night and she hated herself for it; he was married and he'd made no secret of it. She blamed the charged ambience of the War Graves Cemetery, his emotion at seeing his grandfather's grave, hers at seeing hundreds of New Zealand soldiers, so young and buried so far from home.

She has little visual memory of him, other than powerful arms, soft skin. She

remembers her shock, on entering the graveyard on the banks of the Arno, with its cypress trees and rows and rows of white crosses, at hearing someone singing *Me he Manurere* over by the New Zealand section. Their simple lunch in the open air nearby, his funny stories, and easy laugh. The way he'd looked down at her in the middle of the night in her little *pensione* and told her she was beautiful but that he couldn't spend the night, couldn't see her any more and him walking out the door.

She had told no-one and had thought no-one would ever know. Bloody small world, bloody New Zealand. One degree of sepa-bloody-ration.

Claire looks up at her office wall at the traitorous framed picture of a sunflower painted by Roimata when she was little. A teacher has written ROIMATA in neat handwriting at the top right hand corner of the page. She'd known it was a mistake to call her Roimata. Stupid, sentimental fool. Named after the grandmother the man had talked about so fondly. A way of giving her baby one little piece of him, somehow, since she was not going to tell him she had fallen pregnant. She'd felt guilty enough, without disrupting his whole life.

Next to that picture hangs a favourite recent photo of Roi, playing her violin, her face rapt in concentration and beside her, one of Yossi, standing outside his Camden record shop.

Claire sits with her head in her hands for a long time. She'd not expected this, coming back here. She'd expected her own background to trip her up, her notorious father to haunt her.

But Roimata's background she had thought safe. They are a family now, she, Yossi, and Roimata. The last thing she needs is this bit of the past coming to

threaten them, to trip them up. She won't let it happen. She's resolved to lie. They have no other family. They have no religion, no tribe, and no group. Never needed one. All she wants is to be left alone. She's a survivor and other people just complicate things.

By the time she gets down to the ferry she's exhausted. It's warm enough to sit upstairs, out on the deck. Seagulls hover and wheel, their screeches loud even above the noisy motor of the boat. The wharves of Auckland shrink and disappear. Claire looks at the skyline, much changed in the twenty years she's been away. She tries to remember what it looked like when she was young, with no Sky Tower, no skyscrapers. Even with all the change, the city looks tiny, with the Hauraki Gulf licking at its rim.

Her hand fiddles with the letter in her pocket. Most people are down in the carpeted cabin, sipping wine or beer. Laughter drifts up. It's Friday night so the ferry is full of tourists, looking forward to a weekend of sun and wine tasting.

Yossi picks her up at Matiatia in their little tinny. He's brown and barefoot, his long hair is messy, and there's stubble on his chin. He's so at home here, delighting in being scruffy and earthy.

"Isn't it gorgeous? Sorry I had to stay so late at work." She climbs into the boat.

"It's going to be a busy weekend," he says, looking at the lines of four-wheel drives meeting the ferry. The rich have moved onto Waiheke Island while Claire has been away, planting vineyards and olive groves. There are cafes and gift shops

now. She left it a real frontier-land with makeshift baches, the odd hippy commune, and a raft of sickness beneficiaries living cheaply. Never mind, at least there's good coffee and good food on the island now.

As they leave the chaos of the wharf behind, Claire catches Yossi's eye and laughs out loud at the way he's looking at her.

"I know you want to know about the wedding," she says, "I want to marry you, I do. It's just, what happens if I don't want to stay here after a year and you do?"

"I thought of a date. Saturday April the 14th. Eight weeks from now. Should give us time to prepare and it should still be warm, too. I think we'll do it at Pearly Bay. Maybe on the jetty."

She'd assumed it would be a quick trip to the Registry Office. The last thing she wants is a fuss, people. She'd thought a posh dinner, with just the three of them.

"I think we can feed everybody at the bach. Maybe Island Thyme would cater for us," Yossi is saying.

"Everybody?" Claire laughs. "Where is this cast of thousands coming from?"

"Ha. You're right. There's Debs, of course, and Charlotte. I thought you might want to ask Sam and Janet. I might ask Arie, that Jewish guy I told you about who works at Marbecks."

Yossi is still very cautious in the boat. He steers well away from the rocks, even though the water's flat and calm tonight. They round the point and see Pearly Bay. It's on the unfashionable side, reachable only by boat or a half hour walk through bush. Still just the six baches, all along the one track up from an old jetty.

The only difference is that on summer weekends like this the bay is full of millions of dollars worth of boats.

Tonight there are five enormous luxury boats moored a way from the jetty, tied together. Yossi gives a low whistle.

“Unbelievable,” he says. He’s amazed at the money tied up in these things. All the toys are there, jet skis, kayaks, windsurfers. Claire hopes there won’t be a party tonight. When boats such as these tie up, that’s when it can get noisy.

Claire and Yossi enjoy the influx of boats, though. The happy voices drifting across the water, the winking lights on the masts at nights, the constant movement in and out of the bay.

The warm air is thick around them. People are still swimming and the smell of cooking comes from several of the bigger boats. There it is, the blue corner of the little house peeping at her through the huge pohutukawa tree. The rundown jetty. The deserted pebbly beach with the four or five rowboats that have always been there, paint peeling, solid wood, many homemade. Peace and sanctuary. Though she hates New Zealand there is something about aging that makes her find a deep love for this bush, this sea, the plants and birds and skies of her childhood. Weird. As if she cared about landscape when she was little. She was always studying, eyes on the prize. Study, qualify, and leave. As long as she can remember, that was her agenda.

Yossi ties up and his bare feet nimbly jump onto the boards of the jetty. He holds out a thin hand to help her.

Now she can see Debs, in togs and bright red and white sarong, coming down the track to help them carry stuff. Getting to know their neighbour at Pearly Bay has been an unexpected pleasure of returning. Thanks to Yossi.

When they'd arrived from London a couple of months ago, before she started work, they'd had Pearly Bay to themselves for the first few days. Then on the Friday at teatime, a woman and a girl had rowed in and carried gear past their bach and on to the next one up the track. The woman had come up to her while she was sunbathing the next morning and introduced herself. Debbie Johnstone. She recognized Claire. They'd played together as kids at Pearly Bay, the few times that Claire had been there.

On that first morning, Claire had been short with Debs, pissed off that, on her fourth day back after seventeen years, already someone had recognized her. Typical. Then bloody Yossi had come along and invited Debs over for a drink.

"Claire you poor old thing." Debs is saying now. "You must be exhausted. You're an absolute hero you know. I've poured you a wine. I've got a better idea. Let's set you up with an IV wine drip."

Recently divorced, Debs comes to Pearly Bay almost every weekend. Even better, she has a 14 year old, Charlotte, who has become firm friends with Roimata.

They walk onto the deck of the bach and Debs hands her a drink.

"Sit down . . . what a long day. I put your salmon on when I saw you come into the bay."

She bustles around, grabbing a plate and cutlery and dishing up salmon and salad.

It's a beautiful night. Cicadas clatter and hiss and serene water laps indolently against rocks underneath the house. Yossi has citronella candles burning against the mosquitoes and the smell is exotic. It's getting dark now and they can see the lights of Auckland coming on in the distance. Claire realises she hasn't eaten all day and the salmon and salad taste delicious. She's trying not to eat too fast.

"This is so good. Thank you both. Are the girls up at your bach?"

"Yep – watching the telly."

Yossi tells Debs the news about their wedding.

"You're the very first person invited," he says.

"I am honoured. It's so exciting. Congratulations."

She gets up and hugs them in their chairs. Claire remembers Debs' recent separation and feels a pang. But if Debs is thinking about it, she's not showing any sign.

"Can I do the flowers? Let's see, late summer. I think you should carry tiny red tulips. They mean true love, you know."

Do flowers have a meaning? How sentimental. Who made that rubbish up? True love. Would Claire call it that?

More fuss. Yossi and Debs start discussing the wedding. They're making Claire dizzy with all the decisions she'll have to make. Who will marry them? Will they have a best man, bridesmaids?

Claire holds up her hands.

"Slow down, slow down. No-friends, grumpy, 40-year-old Kiwi atheist marries secular Jew. Attended by their 15-year-old and one neighbour. Eight

weeks to plan, people. Let's not get carried away with romance and wedding-y things. A party, yes. We'll write our own vows later. I'm too tired now. Not vows, actually, more like statements of intention."

Yossi and Debs laugh.

"I'm going to promise to love you forever. It's simple." Yossi says, flinging his arms around her from behind her chair and nearly knocking her dinner off her lap.

Finishing her salmon, Claire goes into the kitchen to clear up. She needs to think about Rachel Rakena. No way is she going to admit that Roimata is indeed Brent Te Hira's daughter. She needs to protect her family.

Rinsing her dishes, Claire can see her own slender reflection in the window, floating against the dense whorls of bush outside, her thick blonde hair lit by the naked bulb in the kitchen. Is she denying Roimata something? For Claire, life comes back to survival. She just needs to rescue herself, Roimata and Yossi. They will be fine as long as the rest of the world leaves them alone. She wipes the sink, rinses out the dishcloth, and grabs the bottle of wine from the fridge to take back out to the deck.

5.

Yossi did not like himself a great deal just now; he felt like a bully. That was probably what started it all.

After Claire left for work on the Monday morning, the week stretched out before him. He sat at the wooden table in his study, reading The Times on his iPad. Martha Argerich, his favourite pianist, had cancelled yet another concert. You had to love that diva behaviour. But even daydreaming about his tempestuous Argentinean idol didn't stop him thinking about Claire. How lost she seemed, how diffident about everything here.

Had he been wrong to push her so hard to come back? In Camden she'd hung a tapestry her mother had made, a view of Pearly Bay, on their lounge wall in pride of place; some part of her must want to return, he'd been sure, in spite of her protests.

She'd be fine once she settled. She always coped, always knew what to do. She filled every moment. Even when he met her, although she'd already been in London seven years, she'd still been like a new young traveller, grabbing all the opportunities offered; the National Theatre, lectures at the Royal Society, concerts at St Martin-in-the-Fields and the Wigmore, exhibitions at the Saatchi gallery. Even if she did tease him that Martha played too fast and was a drama queen, normally her taste was perfect. All the time working long hours too. And being a wonderful mother to Roimata. He envied her drive. Not here, though. She seemed tired and sad.

He tried to imagine what it was like for her, coming back. To him, it was

about safety. New Zealand was the most peaceful place on earth. There was even a popular song back in Israel. He hummed it now while he tidied up the kitchen and made himself a flat white with the curvaceous, lustrous La Pavoni. So pleased he'd brought it with him.

Sometimes I think to myself

It might be worth it to live on a green island in a distant ocean

To grow up in a quiet town

Without wars or forced loans to pay for tanks or guns

To live in New Zealand, and only hear artillery on the Queen's birthday

We will sort it out if it's hard

What a beautiful day

Birds chirping, there's a reason to live

God, I want to live like a human being

And to die of old age at 120

I want to be able to read a newspaper in quiet

Without headlines screaming about the deceit of the heads of state

I want to live without confrontation

Yossi felt overawed by the landscape here. Vast, impenetrable ranges of hills. Bush, sea, birds, space. No corruption, not much violence. Admittedly, he found it hard to find a decent conversation. You could sit down and talk to a New Zealander for two hours and still not have really talked about anything. Yet they were so moderate. Fair and simple and generous. Middle of the road.

He took his coffee back to his desk. Savoured its delicious creamy bitterness

and the fact he could enjoy it without rushing. He'd go for a walk in the park soon, then head to the fish shop in Mt Eden, call at Time Out books, buy some vegetables at the Chinese market. How he loved having the time to shop each day and cook with care. He'd been pampering Claire and Roimata: fish broth with dumplings, pasta with goat's cheese and rocket, spicy lamb with artichokes. This was the life.

The sunshine beckoned and, when he'd finished his coffee, he grabbed his stuff and walked across the road to Cornwall Park, listening to The Strokes on his iPod. He'd walked miles since he got here, exploring the city. No dark, smelly underground, jostling with a million others, claustrophobic tunnels and paranoid glances at dodgy looking characters with backpacks. Sometimes he'd see only four or five other people all the way around this park.

It was quiet and warm and he felt his soul fill with well-being as he walked through the trees with their gracious English feel, then over the cattle stops and up One Tree Hill, smiling at dogs and young children and gorgeous women running and walking in groups of two and three, looking prosperous and healthy and fit. From the top of One Tree Hill, just fifteen minutes walk from their home, he could see the whole Auckland isthmus, where he and more than a million others lived on a giant, volcanic field. Fifty-six cones, any of which could, in theory, spew basalt magma at any time.

He loved it up there. 360 degree views. The extravagant blister and burst of explosion craters, scoria crowns, and hardened lava ridges. Green everywhere, swathes of parks and gardens. Woven among them in the distance, would-be skyscrapers that came nowhere near the sky, straggling motorways, ugly industry,

toy-town housing, striding bridges, sentinel islands. Not to mention water, water, water. Two sprawling harbours and countless bays and inlets join with the sky to dwarf the little bits of land and human endeavour in between.

And, although Claire feels her country lacks history, up there, amongst the grass, he can touch and stand on the mossy, sun-warmed remains of Maori fortifications, which once must have had the best view of approaching enemies. Not ancient, but worth understanding.

The restless feeling hadn't completely gone though. He needed a bit of excitement. The manager he'd appointed at Blue Bike, his music shop in London, was brilliant, running the place effortlessly. The website was sorted. Weekends in Pearly Bay were wonderful: swimming, fishing, reading, and fixing up the old bach. But in town, stuck in their lock-up-and-leave Epsom town house, Claire at work, Roimata so grown up now that she didn't need him all the time, Yossi had begun to want more to do.

What did he used to do before the shop took over his life? Write, of course. In an earlier incarnation, he'd written for *Gramophone*, *Music*, and *Rolling Stone*. Perhaps he could start some freelance work again.

He'd started an article years ago about the concert in Israel where his parents had met. The editor of *Granta*, a fellow music fanatic who often came into the shop, had waxed enthusiastic, said he would be interested in publishing it. Claire had been nagging him for a while in London. She couldn't understand why he didn't get it done. Laziness, that was why. She didn't understand self-indulgence or procrastination. It wasn't in her DNA.

He set off down the hill again, having caught his breath. Every person he passed smiled and said good morning. It reminded him of home, of Israel. Lovely.

He instructed his iPod to play Bernstein conducting his Jeremiah Symphony. Tried not to waggle his head too much and look weird. Da da dum da da dum. Perfect, beautiful. Lamentations for the destruction of Jerusalem. They played this at the concert that he was keen to write about. Outdoors on a hot summer night in 1947 at Kibbutz Ein Harod, near Gideon's Cave, where ancient and modern armies had gathered, sustained by the fresh water springs feeding a cool pool in the parched valley.

People drove from miles around in trucks and farm vehicles to hear Bernstein conduct; he was like a god to that generation. Yossi's mother Frieda was sixteen, his father David eighteen. Parked next to each other in the summer dust, their parents began talking, weeping when they realised that they came from nearby villages in devastated Poland. Frieda and David lay next to each other on a blanket and looked up at the stars while the music played and their parents talked about home.

They'd all had to sleep in their trucks after the concert because of security restrictions on travelling. A year later, when Israel became a state, Yossi's parents declared their love and became engaged during the celebrations.

And had a long, settled life together.

He wanted to settle like this. To offer Roimata the stability he had had. He wanted to spend the rest of his life with Claire.

He could go deep with this article, if he had the courage. The contrast

between the socialist, secular dream his parents had cherished and the Israel they now had. Growing up under siege. The hard work that had transformed the arid land where they had listened to Bernstein into a lush valley, with its fragrant eucalyptus trees.

When he got back to Epsom he put in the fridge: fresh snapper fillets, crisp iceberg lettuce, redolent tomatoes on the vine, red onions, feta cheese and a pottle of wicked Simon Gault ice-cream. He resisted tearing a bit off the crusty ciabatta, instead putting it away in a cupboard. He had no e-mail, no phone messages, and no mail in the box. Taking out of his desk drawer an old programme from the Ein Harod concert, which his mother had cherished, he carefully unwrapped the tissue paper. His dearest possession. Yellowed, ragged, well thumbed, the thin paper was getting brown spots. The lovely, old-fashioned Hebrew. In an old black and white photo, Bernstein smouldered like a pin-up. So young, with his brooding good looks, his impossibly long, slender fingers.

He wanted to write about the selection of music for that night, using his parents' personal story as a vehicle.

How he missed his dear parents. David, killed in the Yom Kippur War. Frieda, dead five years later of cancer she believed was caused by heartbreak.

If he talks about these things, perhaps Claire will open up too. Maybe she will tell him about her childhood. If he is thinking and talking about why he left Israel, why he is so afraid of returning there, whether he ought to feel ashamed, maybe she will feel it safe to talk. A person needs to deal with such issues, face

them, and learn from their history, before they can go ahead with their lives.

He will start today.

London 1995

Claire has never felt love like it. In snatched moments of sleep she dreams she's a snarling tiger, making a burrow under their Camden house, lining it with blankets, filthy smelling and rough on Roimata's downy skin. She doesn't want clean at first. Doesn't want fresh or new or shop-bought. Just close. And natural. Natural, a word the old Claire had hated. An over-used, misunderstood, advertising-mangled word. The new Claire is over-awed by natural.

About this time Claire read a fable about a Japanese gardener who grew five thousand orchids and, on the day the Emperor was to visit, cut them all away to reveal the perfect one. What a silly story. But when she protects Roimata beneath her shoulder while she suckles, Roimata is like that one orchid; she would step over five thousand babies to save this one. A fierce war-like Claire emerges each day, dressed for battle in huge vomit-stained t-shirts and floppy track-pants.

Claire has always found intimacy tiring, like speaking a foreign language. Not with Roimata. Deluged with hormones, every molecule receptive, she drinks in the baby's jungle smells, duckling-fluff skin, umami tears. One sight of Roimata's fat little wrists wiggling their way out of the tight, soothing wrap after sleep can inspire a whole frenzy of cleaning, washing and imposing order on their lair; all the while Roimata and she carry on this ancient dance of eye-contact: gaze, chuckle, gurgle, flirt, cheek-suck, murmur, belly-laugh. Back and forth. She could do this for

ever.

Never has she heard herself saying anything so worth saying as that operatic dawn “helllloooo,” her attuned voice finding the perfect pitch for love, sending Roimata the message: trust me, trust the world.

The old Claire does eventually emerge, after about six months, when she has to go back to work. She wriggles back in to her composure, pulling on her “Doctor Bowerman” thick black tights and giggling when they make her think of stretch-and-grows.

No one seems to notice the change in her. She’s not going to announce it. When other staff kindly enquire after her baby they’re met with a dismissive “she’s meeting all her milestones” brush-off. She finds it embarrassing, this overwhelming love for her baby. Why be so moved by something so common, so ordinary?

Work was difficult at first, cutting in to perfect skin, especially if the child was a similar age to Roimata. And she felt overwhelmed a few times by the pain of the parents, but just taught herself, all over again, that she could help them most if she remained detached. The last thing they needed was her empathy. Her kindness, yes. All the energy of her intellect beamed on finding a surgical answer, yes. Her emotions? Not helpful.

Later, when Roimata was older, she never tired of hearing how much she was adored.

“I love every molecule of you.”

“My snot? My vomit?”

“Even the gunge between your toes.”

or

“I love you so much I could pop.”

“Go on then, pop.”

“Cheeky rabbit.”

6.

Auckland 2010

The lift from the surgical ward up to oncology is bright yellow with lots of glass. It lifts off, up through the soaring atrium, passing levels that are baby-boy blue, Barbie pink and sickly apricot. They got the apricot wrong. No-one's liked that colour since her Nana's generation. Claire can look down on a scruffy rainforest-themed playground on a bed of leaf-covered lino but, having accustomed herself to that view in the last few months, she is looking at some patient notes instead.

Her friend Sam Rose, a paediatric oncologist, has asked her to see a family this morning. As Claire reads she remembers Sam saying,

"They're serious bloody hippies. Well, Mum is. We had to work very hard to get them to consent to chemo but he's had ten weeks of it now. The tumour has shrunk well."

Sure enough, she notices the child hasn't had any immunisations and hasn't even been allowed his Vitamin K injection at birth. This illness is serious but relatively simple so he should be ok. She stops in the corridor to take one last look at the CT scan. Wilms Tumour, a tumour on the kidney. Horribly frightening for families, of course, but one where they have huge success with surgery. If you have to have a child with cancer, this is the one to have. She will only have to remove one affected kidney.

She pauses outside Sam's door and shuts the blue folder. There's a yellow post-it note on the front, on which the department secretary has scribbled, "Rachel Rakena rang, Please call her back." The number's an Auckland one. She'll worry

about it later. Claire takes the note off and puts it in her pocket.

Sam, normally upbeat and cheery with patients, is a bit subdued when he opens the door.

“This is Claire Bowerman. Claire, meet Rory. And Kate and Isa’ako Peteru.”

Claire smiles a practised smile, warm enough to inspire confidence, but rueful enough to assure them that she knows it’s a terrible time for them. Two-year-old Rory is clearly not well, sitting on his mother’s knee and leaning back against her, half-heartedly fiddling with a glittery My Little Pony.

“Hey Rory.”

Claire stops beside the child and tucks a loose brown curl behind his ear on her way past to sit next to Sam. He hardly moves, just lifts his huge brown eyes up to his mother’s face. Mrs Peteru has corkscrew blonde curls that bounce around as she talks. Too tall for the tiny child’s seat she’s sitting in, all four of her slender limbs seem to grasp Rory. Her long lean body wraps around him in a combative pose. She shrinks back into the chair when Claire touches the child and Claire knows she’s made a mistake. She answers Sam’s questions with the poshest vowels Claire has heard for a while. A private school girl, used to getting her own way, entirely at ease in her own skin.

Dad is Samoan, tall and solidly quiet. He, at least, has an adult’s chair but he still looks acutely uncomfortable, wriggling and clearing his throat a lot. His huge hands fiddle with the fluffy daffodil-yellow bear the hospital gives every child.

“Now, Claire’s a surgeon. She’s here to talk about the operation.”

“Taking his kidney out? I told you yesterday, we don’t want that. We’re

praying and using massage,” says the mother.

Claire stays calm. Years of practice mean she can talk normally to patients and families even when they’re aggressive or hostile. Or stupid, for that matter.

“Mr and Mrs Peteru, the chemo has shrunk the tumour well and that is great, but it will grow back if we don’t cut it out. The good news is that this surgery is ninety percent effective.”

The father listens, frowning, twisting the fur on the bright bear between two massive fingers. He still hasn’t spoken. He looks to his wife.

“No. How can we put a 2 year old through that? We want to try waiting. We believe in natural healing and prayer. He might be able to keep both his kidneys.” Kate Peteru says.

Sam breaks in here. “I understand how hard this is to accept. But acting quickly is important, while we have it small.”

“Please trust me. I would not even agree to do surgery unless I was sure it was best for Rory.” Claire says. She turns to the father deliberately as she asks if they have any further questions. He looks down at the floor still.

Someone has to say it.

“There is one more thing. You mentioned massage. Deep massage, such as traditional Samoan massage, on his tummy,” she mimes deep tissue massage, “We don’t recommend that for this kind of tumour. It’s a lump, you see,” she cups her hands in a shape like an orange, “and we don’t want it to rupture. If this tumour breaks up, it can spread the cancer cells around in Rory’s tummy, perhaps spread it to his other kidney.”

The phone is ringing as she reaches her desk. She picks it up, hoping it's Sam to say he'd got consent. But a woman's rich voice says, "Claire, it's Rachel Rakena here."

Shit. Claire puts the blue folder on her desk and sits down in her chair, bumping her leg hard on her desk as she does so.

"Yes."

"Did you receive my letter?"

"I did."

"Claire, I am not trying to be pushy here. You must have noticed how much she looks like my Nanny."

"I think it's a coincidence," Claire was willing her voice to sound casual but it was betraying her, coming out high and weak.

"I would like to meet with you to talk about this."

Claire's office door opens and Sam bounces in, pretending to tear his hair out as he sits down in the chair opposite her desk.

"Please, come to my house. Can you give me your e-mail address?"

Sam starts playing with the bright yellow felt gerbera that sits on Claire's desk. He's agitated, pulling hard on the petals, while the leg he has crossed over his knee jiggles rapidly. Claire puts out her hand and takes the flower from him, widening her eyes and smiling over the phone at him to try to calm him down.

"Um, ok, Claire dot Bowerman at xtra dot org dot nz. I have to go now."

Claire presses the END button, holding on to it for a few seconds. Now the

woman has her e-mail address. Why did she give her the home one? Stupid. She rubs her leg where she hit it.

Sam bursts out talking as soon as she has hung up.

"The woman's a nutcase."

"Sorry, pardon?"

"Mrs Peteru. She's saying no to Rory's surgery. There's some alternative guy she wants to talk to."

"Did you get a chance to talk to the Dad?"

"He didn't say a word. She's a fruitcake. She's like a born-again. You should have heard some of the things she said."

"Sam, I know how you feel, but she thinks this is best. She loves that boy. People do far worse things around here."

"She's a bloody fruitcake." Sam said.

"She is."

It's Sunday night, eight weeks until the wedding and Claire still doesn't have her head around it. Yossi cooks a delicious barbeque for them in town when they get back from Waiheke. What will happen when she wants to go back to London at the end of the year and he wants to stay here?

"I want to be a bridesmaid," Roi says. "I want to dress up and stand beside you. I've never been a bridesmaid." Claire is struck again, as she has often been, by Roimata's ease with this sort of thing, the "girly" stuff, the "social" stuff. Didn't get that from her mother.

“Well - ,” says Claire. Jesus. Bridesmaids? But she sees Roimata’s happy face. Why not?

“When can we shop for your dress? We need to choose that first, before Debs and I pick our frocks. ”

“God knows. Do we? Hey Yoss, shall we just wear sarongs? Beach clothes?”

“No way. Debs and I have decided. You’re wearing a special, elegant dress. We both want a new dress too.”

“I am having nothing to do with it. I’d marry you in your jeans,” says Yossi.

It’s something to do with being in survival mode, this not doing things like this. There always seemed to be more important things than getting dressed up. She must be a serious and boring person. She has never felt she suited her looks. In her next life she plans to be dark and interesting, with beautiful clothes, but there’s never time. Other women envy her blonde surfer-girl good looks, but she feels as though she landed in the wrong body. She wants people to take her seriously as a surgeon, plays down the good looks handed to her by some fate.

“Debs and I think you should wear cream or buttery yellow. You’re so brown and slim; you’ll get away with it. We both look good in green. I love that dress of Keira Knightley’s in Atonement.”

Claire laughs.

“Hey, I want to wear that dress, if anyone is going to. Not sure it’s very Waiheke though. Now get to bed, miss. Wedding or no wedding. You’ve got exams next week.” She has to reach up to cuddle her beautiful daughter these days.

While the kettle boils for her cup of tea, Claire checks her e-mail.

From Sam. *Re: Peteru case. (Wilm's tumour.) Mother more hostile than ever. No plans to make appointment.. Whole family angry over the Samoan massage thing. I think I've persuaded her to come in at 11 in the morning. Hope you can be there too. Help.*

Another from Rachel Rakena. She was not taking no for an answer and was insisting Claire meet with her. This woman is a force of nature. Still, no match for her. Toughness is what she prides herself on.

Claire deletes it. She's going to have to deal with this because she shares this e-mail address with Yossi. Thank goodness she got to it first. She'll see this woman, see what she thinks. Can't think of any good reason to let her into their lives. She'll see her face-to-face, deal with it, get it over.

7.

The first time was innocent. A harmless flirtation. Scratching a little itch. Yossi had no intention of going behind Claire's back, or of hurting her.

He was working on his Ein Harod article in the hushed New Zealand room on the second floor of the Public Library, away from the noisy café and the chattering schoolchildren on the ground floor. He needed a break from Israel, from Hebrew, from thinking about his parents' dreams. He began to think about Claire's father.

It was simple to find a book. On the front a young woman's laughing face was arresting, her hair an iridescent halo. She was super-imposed on a sketch of a car and a shadowy man on a lonely road, the unimaginative title *Into Thin Air – Famous New Zealand Disappearances* blazoned across the bottom.

There it was, *Chapter 1, Kathryn Phillips (Cover story)*. Of course. He looked again at the cover. The murdered girl. The buried secret.

Few unsolved mysteries have captured the public imagination in New Zealand as much as the disappearance of pretty hitchhiker Kathryn Phillips on 27th February 1970.

17-year-old Kathryn, a bubbly blonde from Manurewa, was on her way to her sister's 21st party in Taumaranui. Her brother describes watching her set off in a red dress, with a backpack, relaxed and excited about her trip.

Kathryn's first ride was with a woman travelling to a rural farm near Pokeno, who dropped her at the side of SH1 when she had to turn off down a private road. An hour later, two kilometres down the road, an elderly couple, sitting on the verandah

of their house, saw a girl with striking blonde hair climb into a gold Holden Kingswood. The retired farmer remembered part of the registration, EN, because they happened to be his first two initials.

While not a confirmed sighting, police believe it is likely to have been Kathryn Phillips, who was never seen again. She seemed to vanish into the summer air. Her body has never been found. Nor have any of her possessions or other traces of her. The search for her was one of the biggest-scale missing persons cases ever seen in New Zealand.

Retired Detective Paul Royal, who led the investigation, has said he will go to his grave thinking about this case.

"It is a classic mystery I guess, the way she just vanished. People all over New Zealand looked for her. We had reports of people as far away as Invercargill out searching their sheds and their land."

Police, in an unprecedented move, checked every gold Holden Kingswood in the country and interrogated owners of those with EN in their number plate.

Print shop owner Patrick Bowerman, who owned a Holden Kingswood station wagon, registration EN998 was charged and convicted of the murder in 1975. He was sentenced to life imprisonment but in 1978 the Court of Appeal ordered a retrial and freed him on bail. Convicted again and jailed again twice, in 1979 then again on appeal in 1981. A Commission of Inquiry freed Bowerman in 1983 amid accusations police had falsified evidence and conducted a biased investigation. The public and media, however, remained convinced that he was guilty and he became arguably New Zealand's most hated man. Bowerman has always maintained his innocence, but has

never accounted for his movements that fateful day.

Kathryn Phillips and Patrick Bowerman have become household names in New Zealand. In the 1980s, a radio host started a trend to talk about the 'Bowerman' instead of 'the Bogeyman'. The Holden Kingswood featured in a song about the disappearance released by the band Darkness in the Paddock, with the chorus "Golden Holden. On a hot day. On a hot day."

"I think it marked a sort of end of innocence," says retired Sunday Times editor Bob Sanders. "In the years before this murder kids used to go out and enjoy themselves; it seemed such a free and safe country."

Yossi had stopped hearing anything. Gradually the noises of the library swam back into his consciousness. For the first time, he has had a peek of something, some flesh to the story. His poor Claire. So private, such a low-revealer.

It had never seemed real to him; now it seemed real. My poor Claire. It's the not knowing that's hard, she'd told him. Now, as he reads, he is already trying to hold two possibilities in his head. What must it be like to have two versions of everything? Not knowing something so fundamental. Nothing anchored. Guilty or not guilty. Imagine viewing your family life as two scenarios, through two sets of filters: not guilty, in which case Patrick had suffered unjustly, or guilty, which makes him a murderer and a liar. Claire, then, had a choice of two equally unpalatable roles: conspirator in ruining the man's life or sharing the genes of an evil bastard.

How to help her? How to fix this? He closed the book and felt a slight flutter

in his chest.

Claire will put an end to this; she, Roimata and Yossi do not need anyone else interfering in their lives. They are fine as they are. She will accept Rachel Rakena's invitation and put her straight once and for all, face to face.

Rachel's Mt Eden villa is crammed with books and Maori artifacts. Patu, taiaha, kete and waka huia pose on tables and shelves, alongside travel mementoes: a little concrete Buddha, a terracotta army soldier and Venetian masks. Framed family photographs stare out from the long narrow hallway. Rachel explains that she has been married but divorced a long time ago and has no children of her own. She's a high school principal. Even at home in the evening she's well groomed, her grey bob swinging in perfect shape, her solid body sheathed in a flattering black dress. She has kicked off her shoes and her plump brown legs and feet are bare. A couple of regal cats lope about.

Claire feels scruffy and sweaty and worn. She mumbles an apology, explains she's come straight from work.

The dark red lounge has doors that are open to a small but glorious cottage garden. She and Rachel walk around it, Rachel picking a bunch of flowers for Claire as they go. White camellias tangle with bright yellow hibiscus and jumbles of yellow dahlias. Blue lavender, Queen Anne's lace and tiny white Alyssum fill in the gaps. It reminds Claire of her piano teacher's garden when she was a child. There's no lawn, just a riot of flowers with a sweet little path of pebbles meandering through, which make a glorious crunch as Rachel and Claire wander.

"You must be so busy in your job. How do you keep a garden like this?"

"I love it, it's my stress relief. And I get the kids from school here weeding. It's great for naughty kids to work in here. I have heaps of whanau staying with me too. I put them all to work," Rachel laughs.

Claire finds herself sipping a glass of wine in the lounge. The smells of the garden surround them. At one end a wall is covered by an enormous framed poster for the Te Maori exhibition at MOMA, featuring a huge glowing greenstone tiki that seems to jump off the wall and hang in mid-air. On another, a black and white photo of an old woman dominates. Rachel tells her it's her Nanny Roimata.

She needs to deny the truth and get out of there. But Rachel is charming and the house is welcoming and restful. Claire's tired. Rachel's way of putting her at ease brings memories of the easy conversation she'd had with Brent Te Hira in Italy. A class act, this family. Yes, and look where that had got her. But she doesn't regret Roimata. How could she?

Rachel is subtle with Claire over the Roimata issue. Claire had expected a lecture about Roimata's Maori background and her need to know her whakapapa. Instead, Rachel doesn't mention anything like that.

She talks a lot about her grandmother, the other Roimata, who had been a community leader in Otara during the sixties and seventies. She'd started an urban marae, been active in the Maori Women's Welfare League. She shows Claire a pile of photos. Nanny with Norman Kirk, with Dame Whina Cooper, with Ed Hillary. With a Governor-General, receiving a medal. She'd also brought up Rachel's brother Brent, Rachel, and several other grandchildren. Rachel doesn't say why. Claire tries

not to show any emotion at the mention of Brent's name.

"Boy she could be bossy. But she was a strong woman." Sounds like her Roimata. "I assume you think there's at least a chance Roimata is related to me or you wouldn't be here?"

"Roimata's father came from up north." Claire lies.

"Claire, I know more than you think. My brother, Brent, who lives in Germany told me he'd met a woman at the *urupa*, the graveyard where our Papa Donald lies, right?"

She hands Claire a photo of a young man with a Spandau Ballet haircut, in a white shirt with a thin black tie, standing in front of the Eiffel Tower.

Claire stares at this man that was so big in her life, that she thought was dead to her for ever.

"He was very confused. Wondered if it meant he no longer loved his wife, Marita. They were having a hard time. I looked after Marita and the kids in Berlin while he went off to Italy for the rugby trip actually. He was stressed out."

Claire says nothing. Deny it. Get out of here. But she can feel the inertia in her muscles and bone. This woman has a lot to offer her daughter. She likes her very much. And Roimata has made a few comments about being Maori since they'd been back. Claire didn't know how to help her. But surely it can only lead to trouble, complications, tears?

"He described you to me, Claire, to a T. Petite. Pretty." Holding her hands in front of her, with each word, she taps a different finger, like a lawyer arguing a case. "Intelligent. Serious. Sad. A doctor. Living in London."

A mosquito whines and it prompts Rachel to shut the doors as dusk hovers. She switches on a lamp. The red walls glow and the rose and gold Turkish rugs make the room feel like a cocoon. The garden has disappeared and the doors reflect the room now.

“Why did you call your daughter Roimata?” She was so kind and warm and her house was so welcoming and calm.

“He talked a lot about his grandmother Roimata. And his grandfather, Donald, buried there, was only 17. Left her pregnant back here. I had a very irrational thought about giving the baby this name while I was pregnant, and it just stuck.”

“What have you told her about her father?”

“I’ve tried to tell her the truth. That it was a holiday romance. In the last few years, I’ve explained that he was married and that I didn’t want to hurt his family. That I am so pleased she’s here and I love her so much. That Yossi loves her like a father. It’s the parenting that matters, not the genes.”

“True. But blood is thicker than water.”

Regret begins already.

As she leaves, Rachel hands her the flowers she’s picked and tells her she’d love to meet Roi.

“I’d like to tell Brent about your Roimata. He still lives in Germany. He’s an engineer.”

“No, no. What about his wife? I don’t want to cause any trouble. It’s pointless to hurt their marriage after all these years.”

“Marita died six years ago from breast cancer.”

Claire’s shoulders tense up. That wife was the reason Claire didn’t have to tell Brent about Roimata, the reason Roi would never need to meet him. She realises she has lost control of this. It’s all going to come out. Brent is Rachel’s brother; he’s going to be told.

“Still, I’d rather you waited. Please don’t tell him. I’m not ready.”

“But this is his daughter, Claire. His own flesh and blood. Roimata is our whanau. We’ve already missed 14 years.”

Claire thinks fast. If she seems to cooperate, it’s more likely they will be respectful. She’ll stay onside, plan her strategy later. Even more reason to return to London. As far from this complication as she can get.

“Ok. Tell him. But please warn him to keep his distance. I want to take it slowly with Roi. She’s at a vulnerable age. I haven’t even told my partner, Yossi, that I am meeting with you. He’s been a father to Roi. Please, give me some time.”

She drives the few blocks home through streets familiar from a long time ago, past her old school where Roimata is now a pupil, past rows of wooden houses with leafy gardens, shadowy in the dark. The smell of the flowers on the seat beside her fills the car, almost too sweet. She winds down her window. Tries to imagine telling Roimata. Tries to have the conversation. It feels wrong. Anything I have to do with this family leaves me out of control, she thinks. This bloody country leaves me out of control.

8.

Auckland 1978

After biking home from netball, Claire runs a bath because she hasn't had one for a while. Mum's crying again, but she'll talk to her later. She's reading a Famous Five book and can't wait to get back to it. She loves George so much. George is like her best friend. She almost drops her book in the bath as she tries to keep reading and take off her netball top at the same time. When she turns the tap off, she can hear Mum crying again. Poor Mum.

When the book's finished and the water's cold, she picks her favourite butterfly dress and her yellow shorts and top off her bedroom floor and puts them in the washing machine, so that she can wear them to school this week. Mum is wailing, louder and louder. She wants Claire to go in. She will. In a minute.

She's hungry. She makes herself a peanut butter sandwich. Yum. Fresh bread she biked up and got this morning. She can't cut it very well but she quite likes the look of her uneven thick bits. She can pick the middle out. Mum won't tell her off because she's in a crying mood today.

What does her mother like? Cheese and pickle. Yukko. Her Mum loves it and it might cheer her up. She makes her a cup of tea. As she opens her mother's door the sobbing gets so loud it hurts her ears.

There's a new axe beside Mum's bed. It has a shiny red handle. The old cricket bat and the carving knife are still there too. Mum's standing on the window seat fiddling with the string trap she's set up so that if a man comes in through the window a big pile of books will fall on to the floor and wake Mum. What's she doing

now? Making the string a bit tighter.

There's a knock at the door.

"Hello Claire, how are you? You all ready to come with me?"

It's a lady. Does she know her? She is wearing high purple platforms. Claire wants some platforms.

"You're coming with me to visit your dad."

The crying starts up again. Poor Mum.

"Hello-o. Mrs Bowerman? It's Joan Holt, from Social Welfare."

The lady steps inside. Her mother just carries on howling.

"Claire, your mother is very unhappy about this I know. The court orders say your father is to spend some time with you. He's waiting at a nice place where parents and children can spend time together." She speaks louder. "I'll be with her the whole time to make sure she's happy and safe, Mrs Bowerman."

Court orders. Doesn't he want to spend time with her? Are they ordering him to?

"Watch out for her. She's on his bloody side. Don't listen to that murdering bastard."

Claire goes over and cuddles her. "It's alright Mum. I'll be fine. Don't you worry. I will make you a nice dinner when I get home. I'll cook that roast chicken we got. You have a rest. Shhhh! I'll be fine, Mum."

Rita is yelling so loud that Claire quickly shuts the front door behind her in case the neighbours hear. Poor Mum. But she shouldn't swear so much.

Claire can't remember going over the Harbour Bridge before. The city looks like Toy Town once they're right out in the middle, as they swoop over neat rows of boats, then little toy boats bobbing. Makes her feel a bit sick though, looking down so far.

"I feel like I'm flying all the way to Australia," says Claire.

"No, no Australia's on the other side, out the west coast. This sea is the Pacific, and it goes all the way to South America."

She should have known that. She can feel her cheeks burning. She'll put a map of the world on her wall tonight and learn it all. She hates getting things wrong. Hot tears prickle.

Her father has tears in his eyes, too, when he first sees her. He should be happy to see her. To distract him she sings, *"It's time to get things started on the most-sensational, inspirational, celebrational, muppetational, this is what we call The Muppet Show."* He laughs.

They play Last Card, putting the cards on a sticky coffee table. Her father is no good at cards. She beats him every time.

When she goes to the toilet the smell of wees is awful, the water runs all brown and it looks dirty so she runs out again. She'll just hold on until they got home.

"Now let's read about our favourite silly bear."

"I want to hear about Eeyore's birthday and the balloon."

Claire runs up the driveway, not stepping on the cracks, wondering whether

her mother has stopped crying yet. She finds her in the kitchen. The chicken is in the oven, making the house smell yum.

“Hello darling. Dinner’s all ready. Let’s sit down together after that and watch some telly. Get Smart’s on at 5.30. And I’ve made the trap better so we’ll have a good sleep tonight. The night visitors won’t bother us.”

9.

Auckland 2010

“There are cases where surgical intervention is rather a subjective decision, but this is not one of them,” Sam is saying as Claire nudges her way into the small meeting room which is bursting with people, some leaning against the walls.

Sam is sounding defensive. Claire doesn’t blame him. Instead of the usual four or five people at the case meeting, everyone wants to get in on the Peteru drama. There are clinical leaders, managers, extra social workers, the communications manager, cultural advisors and lawyers for the hospital.

Mele, the Samoan cultural advisor, stands and talks about the Peteru family’s faith and their dignity. Finally, she makes a relevant point.

“In the case of Samoan families, it may not be Rory’s parents making this decision. Older family members may be in charge.”

“Have you had a chance to talk to Isa’ako or any of the extended family members? Can we get them all together to get to the bottom of this?” Sam asks her.

“The Palagi mother is very strong. She is determined she does not want Rory to be operated on. In the wider family, I would say there is disagreement. They are confused because the Palagi doctors say one thing and their Palagi daughter-in-law says another. There is a very powerful Minister in their church in Kelston who is going to cure Rory by laying on hands.”

Jesus, laying on of hands. Sam leans over as he whispers, “Bit hard to do randomized double-blind controlled trials on this one then.” Claire fights back a

giggle.

“Can Sam and I meet with some of the family members?” she says.

“The *Palagi* mother is determined Rory is not having the surgery and so she says there is no point in any more meetings. “

“What does the Dad think?”

“It’s hard to say. With all these women in his ear.”

There is laughter.

A Pakeha social worker with thinning mousey hair and a mean little mouth introduces herself in a long Maori greeting, telling them her name, her origins, her mountain, her river. Get on with it. You don’t have your own bloody river. Claire cannot bear this sort of person; self-assured, self-righteous, believing she has a monopoly on enlightenment. It’s fine when Maori do this sort of introduction but Claire can’t bear the reverential earnestness of Pakeha doing it. It’s so fake.

Sam is naughty. “Love the earrings,” he whispers to Claire. Claire frowns at him. He’s right, her earrings are hilarious. Bright plastic beads in a huge cascade. This and her baggy t-shirt and elastic-waisted skirt, are not screaming at her to take this woman seriously.

Mean-mouth’s argument is circular. If you don’t agree with the family decision, it must follow that you don’t understand.

“Samoan people believe-” She is speaking very slowly and looking pained, as though she is talking to two year olds, or perhaps talking about a sacred text delivered to her personally on a mountain by a fiery angel, “that illness is caused by evil gods.”

She struggles for words. It is too complex a concept to put into words. Too precious. She is the only one who could possibly understand it, clearly.

Preserve us. Claire would far rather be able to communicate with the parents directly.

“And if we don’t force them to do surgery?” a manager interrupts. Thank goodness, someone here is being practical.

“Based on observation of animals and on children in Third World countries with untreated tumours, it will almost certainly grow back. It can be fatal.” Sam says.

Claire’s pager buzzes again. She looks at her watch. They need her upstairs. She stands and apologises that she has to go. Speaks before she thinks.

“The actual issue, for me, is who gets to make the decision? I have no doubt as to Mrs Peteru’s sincerity and love for the child, but she is making an irrational decision. It is a life and death matter for this boy and I think we should compel the family to come in for the surgery. The parents should be able to be with him but be temporarily relieved of their legal custody, just for the few hours of the surgery.” She’s on her way out. She’s told them what she thinks. It’s not her decision.

The social worker jumps to her feet again, full of moral indignation.

“Well I think that would be a real mistake. The public would be outraged. Who are we to know what is better for him than his own parents?”

Claire’s at the door. As she leaves, she can’t resist a parting shot.

“Weighing up the harm of being seen as arrogant and of Rory dying, I’m willing to look bad.” She could have said that more kindly.

The best thing for everyone will be if Sam can talk Rory's parents into having the surgery. Sam asks whether Claire has time to go and visit the family at home, as they hadn't turned up to their appointment today. Just before lunch, they head out there. Meet her on her own turf and make her see reason. No one wants to involve the law.

The Peteru house is a 1920s bungalow in a long flat street of similar houses in Point Chevalier. When Claire left Auckland, this was a poor white area. Now it's full of young families, middle-class, and fashionable but not ostentatious like some nearby suburbs. People here eat organic food, drive mid-price cars, join babysitting clubs and cycle to work. The bungalows are mostly painted designer colours, like this one and, although they still look like small worker's homes from the street, most owners have pushed the back out to add light-filled kitchens and family rooms, with children's pictures stuck on the fridge and decks for barbeques in summer. It's all a bit bloody community-vibe for Claire. Maybe she's just not that virtuous or nice. She'd rather keep her distance from her neighbours, although she can understand the theory.

As they draw up outside and park on the street, Sam comments on the shared driveway. Infill housing has squashed an ugly modern kit-set house right behind the homely little green bungalow. The driveway goes on past that house to even more houses. She and Sam look at each other, knowing they are thinking the same thought. Paediatricians hate in-fill development. Too many children run over in shared driveways.

As soon as Claire and Sam step onto the property a little girl wearing only

knickers and a helmet in the bright sunshine drops her plastic bike where it is and runs around the back of the house. They step on to the porch with its neat white balustrade.

“You do the talking. She likes you better,” Claire says as she knocks.

Kate Peteru is barefoot. She has tied a bright lava-lava around her waist and she wears a plain t-shirt but still manages somehow to look haughty. Her bouncy blonde curls frame her patrician bone structure. Perfect teeth.

“Hi, Kate. You didn’t come to your appointment. How is Rory doing?” Sam says.

“He’s fine.”

She stands in the doorway, one hand on the doorframe, the other firmly on her hip. No invitation to come in.

“Can we take a look at Rory while we’re here?” Sam says.

“No. We’re trying other treatments.”

“Mrs Peteru, can we please talk. We might be able to reassure you.”

“My naturopath’s got a machine that uses Rory’s natural energy, it boosts it, increases the healing. I don’t believe in the surgery. I don’t want you cutting into Rory.” She begins to shut the door.

Claire steps forward, holds the door open.

“Has he shown you any evidence? Rory is more than eighty percent likely to recover and lead a normal life for the rest of his life with this operation. If you don’t consent, we will have to start proceedings to force you to do so. Please show up at the hospital at seven tomorrow morning. Rory should eat a big meal soon and then

eat and drink nothing but water until his surgery is over.”

Driving back to the hospital, she and Sam talk the case over and work out their plan of action.

“Thanks, heaps, for your support Claire. Lots of surgeons wouldn’t get involved like this,” says Sam.

“We’re doing the right thing. It won’t come to taking him off his parents. There’s no way I want to do that. They can be with him; we will simply make them bring him for treatment. “

Yossi is always on her side. He makes hot chocolate after dinner, tells her he loves her.

“That woman’s not bad,” he says. “She’s just ignorant. She believes in natural things. She doesn’t know you or what a good person you are. She’s angry at what is happening with her child.”

“Why do people romanticise nature? Nature can be brutal,” says Claire. “Cancer is natural. It will kill this wee boy. And bloody flaxseed oil will not help. I don’t care what she thinks of me.”

She is so glad of Yossi’s support. He has always had a commitment to her that feels so total, loyal. He’s always on her side. It’s when she understands unconditional love.

Her fingers have healed tumours like this before. That experience is all she has to go on. She doesn’t know for sure whether she is doing the right thing by Rory, who knows anything for sure? She refuses to do nothing.

Surgeons have to believe in themselves. They have to be confident. How else would you cut into other's bodies?

10.

Claire can't sleep. Two things are going around and around in her head.

Brent Te Hira, and the Peteru case.

She'll have to tell Roimata. There's no way around that. How will she react?

She has been involved in one case against parents before, in London. They'd forced a blood transfusion on a three year old from a Seventh Day Adventist family. But Claire hadn't run it, just observed and offered her support. Her mind goes over and over the horrible scene ahead of them. She just can't switch her brain off. She doesn't want to have to force a mother to let her do something to her child.

What will Yossi feel about Brent? Should she just refuse to have anything to do with them? His name is not on the birth certificate. He has no rights. God, he could probably get a paternity test or something hideous, if he really pushed. Yossi has never formally adopted Roimata. Perhaps they should do that.

Kate Peteru's objection is based on some anti-scientific, airy-fairy notion of "natural." Ridiculous. The father's harder, though. He says little. His English is not great. He seems powerless and vulnerable. In broken English, he talks about prayer and about God's will. It's been very hard to talk to him at all. Are they being racist? Paternalistic?

Yet, if taking the tumor out is the right thing to do, it is the right thing to do. Cultural traditions are not necessarily more rational nor in any way more "sacred" than silly New Age beliefs. Worth understanding, yes. Culture is just what we do, just who we are. It's visceral, instinctive. We can get things wrong, thinking they are rational, when they are merely conditioned. Perhaps it is arrogant to think you

know what's best. Science, surely, is all we have. Certainty, not faith. Or is Western science just another faith?

Will Brent come here? Will he try to get to know Roimata? What will he be like? He could be a flake. She tries to remember him. How could she sleep with someone she knew so little about?

What will he think about her father, who her father is?

And Roimata, her darling. What will this mean? Confusion? Danger? Divided loyalties. All things Claire has tried to protect her from.

About five in the morning, still unable to sleep, Claire creeps out of bed and pulls on shorts and a t-shirt. She's decided to run to the hospital. She can shower when she gets there and wear scrubs. A run will clear her mind.

She leaves Yossi a note. "Yoss, do you want to meet me for lunch? That café over the road from Starship at one o'clock? Text me if you can't."

Birdsong and bright early sun pierce her tired brain. In the dry gardens there are hibiscus flowers in a stunning variety of colours opening up to the morning sun. Purple hebes and yellow daisies are improbably showy. God she hopes that the family will turn up for surgery. She knows these cases can explode.

As she runs along Gillies Ave, past her old high school, Epsom Girls, she thinks back to her school days, inextricably linked with her father's notoriety. She'd had some fantastic teachers. They'd picked up early her ability at science, inspired and encouraged her. Mrs Springford, Mr Peters. She still remembers the names of the ones who helped her to fall in love with learning. From a very young age that

was her escape.

Some of the families at school had been snotty. One or two girls had told her straight out that their parents banned them from being friends with her. Some of the mothers had been fascinated, she remembers. They'd been ingratiating, over-friendly, excited. Being close to notoriety seemed to feel good to some people, as though they were close to fame. Looking back, she's not sure which is worse, the shunning or the perverted thrill.

One had even grilled her; trying to sound casual, she had asked for lurid details. Where was her father on the day? Did her mother believe he was guilty? Even did Claire think he was guilty? Claire remembers thinking; I'm 14, not 4. I know what you are up to.

She had ended up lying. "He has an alibi, that is why the police had to free him." This had shut the woman up, and the many others after her when Claire began to repeat it often. She even told her friends this, sometimes.

She remembered a mother stopping her in the car park once,

"Claire, I'm psychic. I know the body of that poor girl is buried in a paddock with cows. I see it all the time. And if you bring me something of your father's, a piece of his clothing or a book of his or something, I will be able to feel the vibrations and tell you whether he did it or not."

She'd been freaked out, transfixed with shock and embarrassment. Her friend had saved her, pulling on her arm.

"Claire's been told not to talk about the case." And walking away. Good old Anna, she'd been brilliant.

The run's helping now. Oxygen, endorphins.

They'd run all along this avenue when she was young. Groups of young girls, full of potential. Chattering like birds.

This horrible transparent fascination that women had shown. It was always women. Was that because men were not there, they were at work? Or are men just better at minding their own business? Or perhaps men don't give a stuff about anyone else, only things that affect them? Some women had been kind. But there was a lot of, what was it called? Schadenfreude.

This had made Claire forever monitor her own behavior. It was useful as a doctor because she was always dealing with families under stress. She was forever checking herself. Were her lips smiling? Was her heart rate up? Was she enjoying the tension, the stress, and the undeniable excitement? She was very clear from the start that the most helpful doctor, was not the caring, sharing, and warm doctor, rather the up-front, informative, objective one. She knew people found her cold at times. However, she would much rather that than voyeuristic.

At seven parents start arriving for simple, day-stay surgery. A couple of hernias. All she can think about is Rory Peteru. If the family arrives in the next half hour, she will do his surgery herself. She listens to her registrars talk to five different families, gently reminding them to remember that, even though to them these are everyday procedures, it's not simple for the parents, it's frightening. She double checks her Registrar's plans for each child, concerned that in the stress of this case, she will make a mistake somewhere else.

It's eight o'clock and the Peterus have not shown up. The ward clerk tells her they are not answering their phone. She and Sam have a quick consultation with hospital management and clinical leaders. They will call the police.

At twelve, when they have finished rounds and theatre, she and Sam drive back to the Peteru house. No one answers the door. This does not feel good. Claire has to get back. She has two children to check on and she's asked Yossi to meet her at one. She needs to face up to this Rachel thing. She'll have to deal with the Peterus later.

The café's noisy and busy but the smell of coffee and home baking beckon. She's running late. Yossi has ordered Pad Thai noodles for them both. He's just cycled through the Domain and is glowing and raving about the gracious old trees. He's been working on their wedding vows and he unfolds a scrappy bit of refill and begins to read. She doesn't have time for this; it will have to wait. She interrupts him, ignores his hurt look, and tells him there is something she wants to discuss without Roimata around. She tells him about Rachel Rakena, showing him the photos of Nanny Roimata and Brent.

The coffee machine spurts and hisses. Claire's squashed into a chair with her ear right beside the noisy beast. The barista clatters and bangs as he performs his show. Lunchtime traffic screeches and roars outside each time the lights change to green, just a couple of metres from the open door of the café. She has to strain to hear Yossi.

"Of course, we must tell her. She has the right to know. It's simple," says Yossi, then, catching the waitress walking past, "excuse me, this is not hot. Please get them to heat it up. And we ordered coffee. Where is it? We will tell her tonight," he goes on.

"Can't it wait? She has exams next week," says Claire, smiling at the poor harassed waitress. Sometimes Yossi, so patient and kind with his family, can seem rude and demanding by reticent Kiwi standards.

"It's too important to wait."

"Why?" Claire asks him. "I don't know a thing about this man. He could be a paedophile." Why does everyone assume family is so important, so good?

Yossi ignores her negativity, something he often tried to tease her out of when they first met.

"It will be great for her to get to know her Maori side. I was thinking of following it up, but this is better. Her own family."

He sounds like the bloody social workers at the hospital. Does she have a Maori side? Is she missing something? Does it matter?

"She's been asking me a bit about it, actually," Yossi said. "It's been an issue at school. They keep asking her to join some group. A few things have happened. Everyone she meets comments on her English accent and her Maori looks."

"She hasn't told me any of this."

"I think she thinks I may have some understanding. Because I look different and speak with an accent too. She's questioned me a lot about being Israeli since we got here. I think this will help her, Claire."

The noise of the café grows even louder as a group of theatre nurses Claire knows from Starship come in chattering and laughing. She sees one of them looking at Yossi with curiosity. They're probably amazed anyone can love her; they think she is so hard. Let them think it. She needs them to follow her instructions.

"Aren't you worried at all? You're her father, not him."

"Of course I'm worried. Of course I don't like it. All I can do is control myself. I know I love her and she loves me. I don't want this man coming in. It would be easy to feel jealous of him and not just about Roimata."

Claire feels weak. She's lost herself, somehow, since they came back here. Was she losing her Roimata too? Where was the cynical, tough, certain person she'd been in London? Yossi sounds so different too. At the hospital they spout all this stuff. Why does she feel so unsure of herself? She longs for London, for the familiar street names, the joy of discovery of places so familiar from her reading. She longs for it to be just Yossi, Roimata, and her, playing on Hampstead Heath. Her little family, safe in a bubble. Without all these others trying to get in on the act.

"It's not one of those bloody shows on television where they connect people up with family they have lost. Where it always ends with the meeting and we're meant to think it's all happy ever after," is all she can muster, trying to sound like the old Claire, the London Claire, the sceptical Claire. But she just sounds bitter. This is just the start. There'll be a huge bloody family and they'll all want stuff from them.

"We'll tell her and give her a choice," says Yossi. "We'll be there for her and we'll back her up whatever she decides. Don't worry, Claire. It's going to be great."

He's always so bloody optimistic. Never takes her caution seriously. He cancels out her negativity. In another way, it annoys her. Someone has to warn sailors to take life jackets. She's let him have his own way too much lately. He might be leading them further down the path towards disaster.

It's only romantic ideas about family that are driving him. She has no such romantic ideas; Claire prefers what she can touch, the rational. She, Yossi and Roimata are good together. Ties of blood are not necessarily any better. Human instinct can be very wrong.

Her mobile phone rings. It's Sam.

"Where are you?"

"Why? New case?"

"No. The Peterus. They've gone into hiding. The CEO wants to see us in her office. I'm on my way now."

"See you there in a minute."

11.

After lunch with Claire Yossi cycled, in congested lunchtime traffic, across Grafton Bridge, where workmen were building new high sides to prevent suicides plunging to the motorway below, past the leafy old colonial graveyard, where the homeless gathered to drink, and down into the city to the cool, air-conditioned library, listening to Tchaikovsky on his iPod. Roimata's birth father. Whoa! He could feel threatened, but he didn't, he decided. He wouldn't. He loved Roimata and knew she loved him.

The agony he had felt when Roimata was due to be in Kings Cross Station on the way to a violin lesson, just an hour after the bomb exploded, was no different from than if she'd had his blood running through her veins. He had wept for what might have happened and resolved to move his family to a peaceful place. He would throw himself in front of a train for this girl, take on a lion. That makes him her father and he feels confident she knows it.

About these random things, Claire was so rational. Hated how irrational everyone else was.

"But an hour is no closer than three hours or thirty hours. She wasn't there. Our chances of being in the wrong place at the wrong time are negligible."

Yossi felt differently, perhaps because he had himself picked up the remains of children blown to smithereens. He'd wanted out of London. Besides, anti-Israeli feeling was fermenting and, wherever he went, he sensed resentment and hostility.

It will be fascinating to meet Brent. How much will she want to be close? How much will Maori culture come to mean to her? Another whole world might be

opening up for them here.

He headed straight up the escalator to the New Zealand room again. It was easier to work there, away from the temptations of the Internet, of cleaning the house, washing clothes, shopping for food, cooking. These things provided too many pleasant distractions.

It's such a minefield, this article of his. How to write the truth, without further stirring hatred for Israel? How to stay loyal to his parents' vision of Zion, while explaining why he left Israel forever? Would his audience judge him for not staying and fighting?

At the edge of his focus, stirring slightly, disturbing his calm, were thoughts of the book he had read last time he was here. There would be more about the Patrick Bowerman case in here, he knew. He kept glancing over to the shelf where he had found the book. He wanted to read more. Would it be breaking his promise? Not really. It didn't count as contact with her family, did it? Just learning something about Claire.

He sees her hurt, the way she holds it like a highly volatile chemical, never disturbing it even by a breath. Some of his friends think her cold; he thinks her resilient. If she could only find out one way or the other about her father, she wouldn't need to be so strong in her personal life all the time. If he could only tell her that her father was innocent.

He drifts over to the desk and makes a half-hearted enquiry of the plump woman with enormous fire engine red glasses tapping away on her computer. Without saying much, she leaves and, ten minutes later, brings back two cardboard

cartons. The much-handled boxes have ripped corners. They're stuffed with file boxes, scrap books, battered ring binders with stiff fastenings and decaying corners, rolls of microfiche, typed indexes.

The original newspaper reports are there. And hundreds of stories since. Every time a girl goes missing, it seems, journalists re-hash notorious cases and this one always comes up. Anniversaries of the disappearance: five years, ten years, twenty years then thirty years. Psychics search for the famous missing. Policemen retire and remember their most intriguing cases. He decides to start at the beginning. The clippings spill out of a scrapbook. 1970. The year Claire was born.

It had clearly been a huge case. Story after story about the disappearance, many calling it the end of innocence. No more hitch-hiking. People searching all over the country. No body. Opinion pieces debated whether she contributed by dressing provocatively and hitchhiking. Reported rumours that she was a sexually disturbed girl. Some, in those days, even went so far as to say 'asking for it'. Others argued that women should be free to dress as they like and go where they like and arguing any different was oppression.

There were clues that turned out to be red herrings, property discovered, none of which turned out to be hers and rumours of bodies found, which went nowhere. Police appealed to the public for sightings of cars, bags, information. Pleading, could the caller who kept anonymously accusing the Mongrel Mob contact them if they had real information? Could the person who told people drinking in a pub in Hamilton that he had given her a ride after she was meant to have disappeared contact them? Journalists were questioning the competence of the

police. Why had they not found her? Were they covering up something?

Then, in 1975, the arrest of Patrick James Bowerman. Sensational. Why had it taken five years? Police said they had identified him as a suspect just a few months after the disappearance, based on his owning a gold Holden Kingswood with the letters EN as part of the number-plate, but had been unable to find any evidence. Why now then? His wife had come forward and accused him of confessing to the murder to her daughter, of coming home hurt on the day concerned, and of having not turned up to his business that day on that day under strange circumstances. Poor Claire.

Journalists tried to investigate all sorts of allegations against him, such as the theory he had been having an affair with his receptionist, which his wife had discovered around the time of the disappearance. He was an alcoholic, claimed one newspaper, who regularly drove up and down to Hamilton on business. If that was evidence, thousands of people could be tried for the murder, claimed another.

There was extensive coverage of the trial. The prosecution case was weak, according to the media. The woman he was rumoured to have had an affair with, Moira Paterson, denied the affair in court.

Patrick Bowerman chose not to appear and offered no alibi for the day in question. None was required, his lawyers argued. The burden of proof was on the prosecution.

The jury was out for a sensational three days and came back with a guilty verdict. The Commissioner of Police said the streets were safer for young women after this conviction. The moral right argued New Zealand was going to the dogs.

Yossi sat, trying to imagine Claire's early life. More than ever, he admired her strength and resilience. He also understood why she never wanted to talk about it. There had been enough talk about it. It was over.

12.

The CEO's office is in the old part of the hospital, but still has a view of the harbour. It has a big meeting table and eight chairs. Meryl is a capable, pleasant woman in her 50s. Claire and Sam don't need to say much. They've already briefed the CEO and the Head of Paediatrics.

"We've been fielding calls from the media. The Peterus contacted them this morning, saying they've gone into hiding because doctors are forcibly treating Rory. Just as you predicted, they've spoken of arrogant doctors and bullying. They have refused to talk to any of us. They've got it in for you two. The media are being their usual sensationalist selves. I have banned all media from the hospital grounds. We will work on our media strategy. Who's best to front for the hospital?"

The Communications Manager seems about twenty-five and she oozes confidence. Claire wants to remind her that they must, in every interview, show compassion for the family, who are doing what they think is right, but she can't think how to say this without seeming patronising. This young woman, in her Karen Walker suit, with her iPhone and perfectly ironed hair doesn't immediately inspire confidence in her ability to convey compassion. Could she even spell the word?

Anyway, Claire knows she's not the best one to front. Her phone beeps a reminder about a meeting. As she hurries out, she undertakes to discuss with her Head of Surgery and their staff, the need to prepare and be ready to operate on Rory. That's her job.

The next meeting is about a little boy called Che MacKenzie so she changes her focus to that as she grabs a coffee on her way there. Four admissions to hospital with suspicious injuries. This last one, she'd removed his spleen after trauma to his abdomen. A punch or a kick, she'd bet on it. The mother said he'd fallen down some stairs. Possible, but unlikely. Old, untreated fractures on the x-rays told a different story. Claire hasn't met the mother; the boy has been alone whenever she's seen him. They need evidence though. Proof.

On the way from her office to the meeting, she flicks through the pages, the sick feeling coming in waves. Aged six, he has moved around from family member to family member to friend. Now back with his parents, they probably hardly know him. Of course, they'll disapprove when she points this out. They're always quoting cultural difference at her.

A physio had told Claire that when she'd asked for Che's date of birth, the mother had looked at her blankly, before saying she really must find out because the other day he'd asked her why he didn't have a birthday party and she realised she didn't know the date.

When Claire had tut-tutted and rolled her eyes, the social worker turned on her. Are birthdays that important? Isn't it cultural? Fair enough in that instance, she supposed. Doesn't it say something though? Do they celebrate anything with him? It doesn't have to be a birthday.

"If this was a Pakeha baby, or an Indian child, would we have acted by now?" Claire had retorted.

Shit, they all lived in fear of accusations of racism. She'd had a good moan to

the Paediatrician after the last meeting.

“Meeting after bloody meeting. If this whanau had the answers, they would have been sorting it by now, like the other whanau we deal with. He has glue ear, he’s not immunised, and his language is delayed. What do people have to do to kids in this country before we do something?”

The paed had been sympathetic, she knew, but had warned her.

“Careful. You’re in danger of being seen as a bit arrogant, coming back here from Great Ormond Street and throwing your weight around. These families are bloody complex.”

“All families are complex. We can’t just let them keep hurting this little boy. Someone has to do something.”

“I agree. But we don’t have a great record when we take them away either. If we thought we had somewhere perfect to send him - ”

This was true too. Involving CYFS was no guarantee of improving life for the child.

Claire doesn’t get the chance to decide whether to say her piece or not. Just ten minutes into the meeting, her pager summons her to theatre. Acute surgery on a child that has been run over in her parents’ driveway. Another one. Horrible, but she’s relieved to focus on the part of the job she loves. As she scrubs, she sheds the outside world and focuses on stopping bleeding, mending, repairing, delicately stitching in the clean, hygienic, controlled theatre. This is the reason she chose surgery. It’s real, tangible, measurable, evidence-based. She’s not a bloody social

worker. What would she know about family? Let the rest of them decide.

On the news that night, the Peteru family going into hiding is the lead story. Claire is rushing to get to Sam's birthday dinner.

Some gentle, weird-looking guy hooks Rory up to a ridiculous machine he calls a "booster". In the next scene, the family prays with their Samoan minister.

"Didn't God give him the cancer in the first bloody place?" Claire says to the television.

"Western medicine is just one more belief system," some academic is saying.

"Yeah, yeah, let's get a nun to do your surgery."

There's a shot of Claire driving her boring dark blue Audi out of the hospital, with sunglasses on. They manage to make her look like a celebrity appearing in court or something. The commentary says she has no comment.

Roi comes downstairs with a bag.

"Mum, I went shopping without you. Don't be mad. I saw this dress for you. For the wedding. I really love it. Don't worry, they were nice. If you don't like it I am allowed to take it back tomorrow."

It's a gorgeous buttery cream dress with a little embroidered yellow jacket that sits over the top. It's shaped to show off her slender waist.

"Roi, it's gorgeous. Thank you so much. It even has sleeves to hide my old arms! I love the little jacket."

Last thing she wants to think about but Roi is so excited.

“Try it on. Try it on. Go on. You have to get changed anyway.”

Roi comes upstairs and supervises her, picking out tights and shoes. Then she bans Claire from looking in the mirror until she has done her hair.

She pulls out the clip holding Claire’s hair up, brushes and straightens her hair expertly, massaging her scalp a little to cheer her mother up. Claire is soothed and manages to forget for a minute about the Peteru case.

“Now, look in the mirror,” Roi says, with a final flourish of hairspray.

Who is that slim, sleek creature staring back at her? The butter colour is perfect with her tanned skin. She looks great. Roimata has transformed her. Where did she get this mature, composed, sophisticated daughter? She takes the suit off before hugging Roi tight, then grabs a blue cotton summer dress to wear to the party and she and Yossi leave.

But not before Roimata says, “Mum, isn’t there anyone in your family you could ask to the wedding?”

“No, I’ve got you and Yossi. You’re all I need. We’re late. Clean your teeth, remember. And have you got clean PE gear for tomorrow?”

As they wait to turn onto the motorway at Gillies Ave she begins to worry herself sick about Roi taking on all this. Does this stray into dangerous territory?

“Roi was so excited about the dress. She said I was not to come near you while you tried it on,” says Yossi.

“She’s gorgeous, that girl of ours. Yoss, I always had to be the mother, when I was little. I always had to be the calm, sensible one. I just want Roimata to get a chance to be a kid. All this chaos I’m in at work. Her buying my dress. It’s not her

being the mother is it?"

"Darling, she loved buying it. You never give a toss about your clothes. She's excited about the wedding. She's happy."

"She's so self-contained. I never know what she's thinking."

12.

It was a stolen conversation, a harmless question. Janet raised the subject; he wasn't looking for anything.

It was at Sam's thirty-seventh birthday dinner at the French Café in Symonds Street. Mostly doctors, there was lots of talk about the Peteru case. Claire looked striking in the flickering candlelight in a simple summer dress, plain pale blue cotton with thin little straps. Her shiny hair fell onto bare brown shoulders, drawing attention to her strong, wide shoulder-bones and hollow clavicles.

While she talked, she moved her hands for emphasis, unaware of how this made her graceful collarbones dance, so close to the surface they stretched her skin taut. He loved seeing her with her hair down. Yossi could not stop admiring the sweep and shine and texture of it.

How he adored the way she looked and, even more, the way she was so unaware of it. Other men at other tables looked at her too and Yossi imagined he could see the yearning in their eyes but Claire was oblivious. She was listening intently to all the arguments against compelling this family. Every so often she would repeat.

"Someone has to advocate for this child. He will die without this surgery."

When Claire excused herself and went to the toilet, the woman sitting next to Yossi said to Janet,

"I've always meant to ask you. Is Claire related to Patrick Bowerman?"

Janet did the right thing and nodded, then firmly changed the subject.

Yossi felt a stirring. Here was someone who had been around when Claire

was young. When Janet brought it up herself again later the temptation was too great. Claire had moved away to talk to some people at the other end of the table. Janet spoke softly, conspiratorially,

“I am sorry about Rosie being tactless. I’ll tell her Claire doesn’t want to talk about her father.”

“That’s ok. Why do people have such a strong memory of it?”

“I think it was the fact the police might have lied. My mum said the whole of New Zealand was shocked at that.”

“The police might have lied?”

“At one of the trials, a young policeman testified that Claire had told him her father had confessed to the murder. Claire denied it. Her mother argued that Claire had said the same to her. The final judge ruled that the mother and the policeman had concocted the story together to implicate Claire’s father. Claire was only little, about six or seven when they first said it. My Dad was a policeman, not involved in the case at all, but he said it was never the same again. There was a fuss about evidence from children, apparently. There was an internal inquiry which said the police had been over-zealous in their questioning of Claire.”

“Did your father think Patrick was guilty?”

“Yes, but he thought they’d never proven it. Most people seem to have believed he was guilty. In those days, they really cared that he’d get a fair trial. I’m afraid he is rather a despised character. Poor Claire.”

Yossi is beginning to understand his darling Claire’s passion for facts. Gossip, innuendo, guessing, opinion, belief, all must have swirled around her

throughout her life.

Has there been anything his Claire can trust?

Me, Claire. Marry me. I will be trustworthy.

Up on the lime green surgical ward, the sickest child is three-year-old Triumph.

“Hi, I’m Claire. Another doctor. I’m sorry, I know you’ve met heaps of us but Triumph has complicated problems and we all specialise in different bits.”

“Hi.”

“Sorry – your name is?”

“Patch.”

Mum’s voice is deep and raspy, the shy smile revealing missing top teeth in a generous mouth with blue-black lips. The shapeless red jersey, pillled and covered in lint, and her tatty black woollen hat lend her a comical look. She fidgets with her little boy, licking her delicate fingers and shaping his fringe into a quiff, picking fluff off his clothes, giving him frequent sips of water from the glass on his bedside table.

“Did he have a settled night?”

“Yeah.”

“Did you get any sleep?”

“Mm.”

“I’m a surgeon, so I’m the one that will actually operate on Triumph and try to fix the blockage in his bowel giving him so much pain. Here’s a drawing of the bowel and intestines. I can show you what I am going to do.”

Patch's head goes down. Claire tries hard, making eye contact, re-assuring, making jokes. But there is so much pain in Patch's eyes. She can't even try to listen.

"You just do what you want, doctor."

Should she even be trying to explain? Patch nods and smiles, not comfortable with voicing her opinion on anything at all. She fusses over the boy all the time, stroking him, straightening his blanket.

Crude blue tattoos decorate her coffee skin. A blue cross has been drilled so close to her right eye that Claire cannot help envisioning, with horror, the scene of its execution. A spider's web gloves her left hand up until the knuckles, above which float four spindly letters, L O V E, each at the top of a finger on her left hand. A wobbly swastika scars the milky underside of her right arm.

"Are you going to be in the room for a while?" she asks Claire.

Claire nods.

"Cos I'm dying for a ciggy. But I don't like to leave him. If you're going to be in here, I might just go down and have a quick smoke."

"Yeah, go ahead. If I get called away I'll tell one of the nurses."

A man comes into the room and, seeing Claire, scoots out again to wait in the corridor. The other mothers look at each other with slightly raised eyebrows. He's a stocky bulldozer of a man, wearing a Mongrel Mob leather jerkin over a red jersey and ripped jeans. He's trying to hide in the corridor but the slaverling bulldog emblazoned on his back is causing a frisson throughout the ward.

Patch looks at him and giggles.

"That's the father."

“He’s welcome to come in and hear this too.”

“Oh nah! He’s too shy, eh?”

“Go on. I’d like to meet him. He should be in on this.”

Patch grins and uses her eyebrows and head to summon the man, who shakes his head several times.

“Hi. I’m Claire. I’ll be doing the surgery on your son.”

She has to avert her eyes from the tattoo on his neck, a dotted line with the legend CUT HERE right on top of his Adam’s apple. It makes her slightly queasy.

He squirms a few times and hardly acknowledges she has spoken to him. Patch comes out and says to him.

“Knockers, get that patch off when you talk to the doctor.”

He takes off the sleeveless leather jerkin, turns it inside out, and puts it back on again. They go off outside for a cigarette.

Claire’s dreading the dinner party. Yossi’s told her to leave it to him. She ventures into the kitchen after work. The smells are glorious. Layer upon layer of sticky garlic, zest of lemon, roasted nuts, almond paste. In the oven, tomatoes are shrivelling and bursting, spilling sticky gooey seeds down their sides, full of promise. On the window ledge behind the sink, armloads of pungent fresh herbs: feathery coriander, lush basil, and grassy parsley. On the bench, yeasty dough thrums with elemental smells. Yossi’s going all out.

Roimata’s into it too. Yossi’s teaching her to make almond crescents, which he calls *rugelach*, and as the two of them dust the little cookies with billows of icing

sugar, the powdery sweet residue lands on their eyebrows, elbows, ears.

Izthak Perlman playing klezmer music fills the house, at once exuberant and doleful. Their favourite cooking music. Claire feels homesick for London, when Yossi would listen to this music while he cooked for his sharp, argumentative Israeli friends. Claire had loved their opinionated discussions. She'd felt exotic, clever, alive.

Yossi and Roimata are dancing around the kitchen, each trying to out-silly the other. Claire wishes they weren't going to so much trouble. Making Rachel feel so welcome will only encourage her.

"Can I help?"

"No, no," says Yossi. "You've been working. Enjoy yourself! Relax."

Enjoy herself? She can't seem to focus on anything. There is always work she could do, notes to write up, journals to read, and reports to write. However, none of it is urgent. She puts on a load of washing. She checks the bathroom is clean for the thousandth time, but Yossi has the place spotless.

Perhaps she needs sunshine. It usually helps. With an hour to go, Claire sits out in the last of the evening sun with the morning newspaper she hasn't had time all day to read but finds no interest in any of it. Shark attacks, boating accidents, the Prime Minister holidaying in Hawaii. She listens to the birds with her eyes closed. What does Rachel want from them? How much does she remember of Claire's past? Has she even realised who Claire is? What will she tell Roimata?

It's time to get showered and dressed ready for their guest. She can do this.

“Ohh – I’m sorry but whoa!”

Even though Rachel has seen a photo of Roi, she seems overwhelmed by her likeness to Brett and to Nana Roimata, weepy just moments after Roi answers the door.

Claire offers to take her coat but Rachel is too busy staring at Roi, then taking her by the shoulders, staring at her, leaning in and giving her a long hug.

“You have your father’s nose.”

He’s not her father. Well he is, but what does that make Yossi?

“Rachel, this is Yossi, Roimata’s father.” A bit pointed but she needs to make it clear right from the start.

“Tena koe,” Rachel says as she kisses Roimata on both cheeks, saying “Mmm,” tears streaming.

Claire invites Rachel into the lounge.

“I have presents.” She reaches into her basket. She hands Claire a bottle of designer looking olive oil. For Yossi, a book on Maori music. He looks delighted. They’ve been talking on the phone, then. She kisses Yossi too and then Yossi disappears to the kitchen. Roi’s present is a framed photo of Brett. Goodness she moves fast.

Rachel has photo albums under her arms and Roi asks as soon as they’ve sat down,

“Have you brought more photos of my, of Brent? He’s very good looking.”

"Let the poor woman have a drink and something to eat first," says Claire.

Rachel pats the seat beside her on the couch and Roimata obeys and sits beside her.

"There he is about the time your Mum met him. She looks on the back.

"Yeah, Italy 1995, Siemens Social Team."

"You chose good genes for me, Mum."

That's a bit flippant. He was married. It's something to be ashamed of, not joked about. How it would have broken his wife's heart had she known. She's glad Yossi's in the kitchen.

"Here's Brent's family."

Claire's sits on the couch opposite. Roi hands over each photo to her when she is finished. So that's his wife. An angular, laughing face, fair hair, bright floral dress. She looks quite a lot like a young Claire. Shit. His two daughters look a lot like Roi too. Long forgotten guilt swamps Claire. How could she have?

"Marta and Maddy speak German of course, but they're very good at English too. Their Maori is bad. It's a crack-up hearing these two brown nieces of mine speaking German. Always takes a while to get used to it. It's going to take a while to get used to your accent too, you Londoner," she says to Roi.

"That's me in my uniform for high school. I boarded at Queen Victoria Maori Girls School in Parnell. I loved it. What's it like being Maori at Epsom Girls?"

Roi looks confused. Claire doesn't know what to say to rescue her. Is she Maori?

"It's ok."

“Are there are other Maori girls there?”

“There are. They’re nice to me – “

“But?”

“Well, you know. They’re not really my friends. They like hip-hop, and rap, and stuff. I’m into indie bands. They’re mostly really sporty. I’m into chess.”

“But you seem cool with it?”

“Yeah, it’s not a problem. We’re all friendly, our whole year. I’m scared in case people expect me to know the language and stuff.”

“I hope you like Israeli food,” says Yossi, motioning them all to sit up. Hummus made from scratch, fava bean spread, falafels, grilled chicken, homemade pita bread, the best garlic sauce in the world.

“It all looks delicious. Thank you.”

“Claire, would you like some of this wine Rachel brought? It looks lovely.”

“Can’t, sorry. I’m on call tonight.”

“Shall I say grace?” says Rachel.

Now what are they going to do?

“Sure,” says Yossi. Neither Claire nor Yossi incline their heads, but Roimata does.

“I can’t believe people here don’t all learn Maori in school,” says Yossi, a few wines later. “It’s just ignorant.”

“They do a bit, these days,” says Claire. “I learned it. We had it as an option.”

“No, I mean, bi-lingually, “ says Yossi, “not token stuff. Have lessons in English and Maori, until everyone speaks it.”

“I agree,” says Rachel.

“I just can’t see why it’s any different from Sweden and places like that. Who could object? Why would you want your kids only speaking one language?”

“Thousands object. They feel very threatened even when newsreaders pronounce some words correctly,” says Rachel.

“It’s a whole lot better than it used to be, though,” says Claire.

When the delicate *rugelach* arrive with a sweet sticky wine, Rachel says to Yossi,

“Can you adopt me?”

Everyone else laughs. Claire thinks it a bit insensitive. She’s watching Roimata, but Roi seems fine with all this.

“Claire, I saw on television you’re involved with that little boy with cancer, the one whose Mum doesn’t want treatment.”

Here we go. Another lecture. No doubt we’re being paternalistic. Based on what she’s seen on television. Great. Claire braces herself. She can’t talk about it anyway, it’s confidential, why don’t people get that?

“Gosh that must be hard. Of course that boy needs surgery. You’re doing the right thing, Claire.”

“It’s great having family here,” Yossi says to Roi as they see Rachel out. “That

was so much fun.”

Can't he see the danger?

13.

It's 1.30am. Just as well she didn't drink at dinner. Trying to wake herself by winding down the windows, Claire seems to get every red light on her way to the hospital, even though the streets are empty. She winds the windows back up when she sees a homeless man drifting along Park Road towards the Domain and then chides herself for being nervous of a pathetic vagrant. The man lifts his arms and crosses them, protecting himself, as if under attack, from a loud thudding and a high whine. It takes Claire a moment to see the red lights of the Westpac rescue helicopter swoop low and disappear over the tall hospital building. That will be her patients. Victims of a serious road accident up north. Two adult fatalities and three seriously smashed-up children for Starship. Why three young children are even out in a car after midnight, no one has told her. It's no-one's job to ask. It's all hands on deck.

While she parks her car and walks carefully across the uneven asphalt to the Emergency Entrance she steels herself. Accidents at this time of night usually involve alcohol. Facing relatives can be horrible. According to the paramedics attending the crash, the baby she will work on is young and seriously hurt.

But the Charge Nurse tells her that her baby is on the next helicopter and it could be a while. She heads to the deserted mock-rainforest atrium, picks her way through the fake log seats that are like an obstacle course in the dim lighting. The recorded chirping of birds, someone's idea of a soothing sound, is unsettling at night. She glides in the yellow lift up to the hushed, semi-dark ward to check on her other charges.

Triumph is on his side, sucking his thumb, fast asleep.

In the bed opposite Che McKenzie is awake. He is whimpering. A dark shape by the bed holds him and Claire, as her eyes adjust, sees it is Patch, Triumph's mum.

"Hi, is he ok? It's Claire Bowerman."

"Oh hi. Yeah. Sorry. He had a nightmare. No one is ever here with him. I felt sorry for him. I know it's not my business."

"I'll get him a hot chocolate. Would you like a cup of tea?"

The hot chocolate and the cuddles lull Che back to sleep. He looks cherubic, long, wet eyelashes resting on downy skin. Patch and Claire sip their hot drinks and speak softly in the semi-darkness. Patch's voice is rough; the result of too many cigarettes and, Claire has no doubt, a life with too much struggle.

"I feel so sorry for this kid," says Patch.

Claire has to be careful what she says; she can't talk about one patient to another.

"Have you talked to his mother?"

"She's hardly ever here. She's got some horrible man. He's a Pakeha dude. Knockers wants to smash him because he thinks he did this to the boy," she giggles. "I'm terrible, I just want to take them all home with me. There's others here too. I want to adopt them all."

"How many have you got?" Claire asks her.

"Just Triumph now. And we've got another boy where Knockers is the father. He's 15."

Claire is glad her face can't be seen. Knockers only looks in his twenties himself.

"How long have you looked after him?"

"His mother left him with us when he was eight. She didn't want him any more. We never see her. Knockers didn't know about him. He was just a kid. He's a good boy. Helps with Triumph."

"Has he joined the gang?"

"No. We're not going to let him. Knockers would give him a hiding if he showed any sign." Patch leans over and strokes Che, who has stirred a bit.

"My other boy died."

"What happened?"

"He lived with my Nana. Got meningitis. Down Porirua. Some of these kids though, like Che. No one wants them. Arseholes of men looking after them. Whoops, sorry."

It's hushed and dark on the ward. A few minutes go past. In the dimness, Claire stares at Che, wondering what it is best to do. His mother is failing to protect her child. What can they offer the little boy?

She's almost forgotten Patch is there when the husky voice says,

"Best thing I can say about my childhood is, I survived it. Hope he survives his."

They sip their tea.

"You're pregnant again? Is this one going well?"

"Oh yeah. I can't wait. But I want to get Triumph better first, before this

baby arrives to worry about.”

Claire’s pager buzzes even as she and Patch hear the roar of the helicopter landing on the helipad outside the window. She heads downstairs, where they tell her the baby did not survive the flight. She hurries to theatre to help with the sicker of the other two children.

After rounds that afternoon Claire sits down with Patch. Triumph is a bit flushed and grizzly. Patch is worried.

“It’s probably ok, just a little setback.” Claire tells her.

The nurses are letting Patch do more for her son. She is proving capable and sensible. Claire watches her sponge his face deftly.

“How prem was he?”

“24 weeker.”

“As little as they get.”

Claire considers mentioning that, pregnant again, Patch should not be smoking. But she resists. She doesn’t want to risk her relationship with Patch. Patch is a good mother. She won’t stop smoking just because Claire points out something she already knows; no doubt it’s one of few comforts in her life. On balance, it’s better to just support her. Many of her colleagues would disagree, of course, especially those likely to end up treating a tiny, fragile baby in NICU.

In the bed across from them, the little assault victim, Che, is playing on a Game Boy that Claire has given him, an old one of Roi’s. He looks up in pleasure

when his mother's voice booms out at reception outside. Everyone can hear Heaven saying,

"Yes, I am allowed to see him."

Claire notices Che look down at the game in panic, looking for a place to hide it. She goes over.

"I can look after your game for you if you like. I promise I'll give it back when Mum has gone."

He hands it to her and she puts it in the pocket of her white coat just in time as Heaven makes her entrance. "My baaaaay beeeeee" she shouts theatrically and hurries to his side. Claire sees his face. Sometimes they love their useless parents so much it could break your heart.

Heaven squashes Che's face to her chest, against her synthetic animal-print coat. She yells out to the room, "How is he please?" so Claire goes over but Heaven scowls at her and turns her back. Still squashing Che's face with her hand, she says

"Oh never mind, darling, that mean doctor doesn't like Mummy. She's trying to take you away from Mummy but she's not going to win."

Ten minutes later, when Claire returns, Heaven is slumped in a chair, facing away from her son, reading a trashy magazine. Che is lying on his bed, staring at the wall.

When Claire leaves that afternoon, she checks on Triumph last thing. Still listless and a little flushed, but nothing is obviously wrong.

It was the grumpy young woman on the desk again. Yossi furtively asked for

the Kathryn Phillips file but she continued looking at her screen. Does she know something? Does she know he is trespassing, probing this old secret? Don't be ridiculous. That's paranoia born of guilt. Act normal; no one here knows of the promise to Claire.

"It's out," she said, in a monotone.

Then she made a telltale glance towards the table beside the window where a sun-weathered young man, in long shorts and sneakers, sat at the table with the file spread out before him. His Hop Farm Festival t-shirt signified a music lover. Yossi went over and sat beside him, then used the t-shirt as a pretext to get chatting, at a whisper. He dropped into the conversation that he used to sell those t-shirts in his shop, Blue Bike Records in Camden. He was certain this guy would have been there, and he has. Instant rapport.

Over coffee downstairs, Simon Flaxstone told him about the book he was researching, an investigation into the Kathryn Phillips disappearance and the conviction of Patrick Bowerman. It's due out this year to coincide with the fortieth anniversary of her disappearance. My God, this could mean trouble, for all of them.

"You wouldn't know it, mate, but they're both household names in little NZ."

"Why was it such a big deal?"

"Television was new, so people were seeing the whole thing, the searches, the re-enactments, the trials in their living room. They were riveted. Patrick Bowerman being a middle class man might have been a factor. New Zealanders have a deep mistrust of the even moderately wealthy. Patrick Bowerman owned his own business, he loved classical music. He was openly atheist, too. Alien, back

then.

“Do you think he killed the girl?”

“No. I am trying to remain open-minded of course, but I’ve been looking into this for several years. I’ve sold it to the publisher as a “crusade” to exonerate Patrick Bowerman. I’m convinced it was a huge injustice.”

At this point, Yossi revealed who he was.

“Really. Really? I knew Claire was back in town. A friend’s child was in Starship. She won’t talk to me, you know. I’ve called her several times. She hangs up.”

“She’s not into talking about it at all.”

“Mate, I’d love to talk some more. I’ll bring some stuff to show you.”

The right thing to do would be to refuse. Claire would disapprove of this.

It was tempting. Simon thought Patrick is innocent and he has research, evidence, all the things Claire trusts, rather than just idle speculation. He would so love for Claire to know her father was innocent.

Roimata comes home from Rachel’s one night all excited, gripping a box of family photos and displaying a little greenstone fish hook around her neck. Rachel’s asked them to come that weekend to a hui at her home marae in Torere. It’s a family gathering and Rachel wants Roi to meet all her whanau.

“Don’t you think it could wait until another time?” Claire says to Yossi. It’s a whole weekend away. We’ve got the wedding to plan.”

“I’m looking forward to it. My first marae experience. It’ll be great for us all

to get away down south.”

“Well, I’m not sure I will come. I could stay in Auckland and catch up on work. But book a motel or a B&B for us all. There is no way we’re sleeping on a marae. I did it several times while I was at med school. Communal, schmommunal. You get no sleep at all.”

By Friday she’s had enough of work. Although she hates the thought of the trip, she can’t bear to let Roimata go without her.

“This is huge for her,” she says to Yossi.

“I know.”

14.

Torerenuiarua Marae, Torere, (Ngaitai)

They seem to wait outside the marae gates for ages. Nearby a carved entranceway breaks the brown fence surrounding the property. The gateway forms the shape of a child's drawing of a house; two beams slope up from the top of the gate to form the roof. Elaborately carved, human-like curved figures poke out their tongues. Where they meet at the top is another vertical post, also carved.

People come and go. Rachel, smart as always, stands out in her black trousers and long red cardigan. A huge taonga around her neck lends her tremendous *gravitas*. A few of the men wear singlets and jandals, although the wind is biting. There are lackadaisical conversations.

"Heaps of fish yesterday ..."

"Have you seen Uncle Bert today?"

"Yeah – he's just having a cuppa tea – he'll be here soon."

No one introduces anyone and the silences are long and lazy. Claire is impatient and uncomfortable. She huddles in her quilted jacket and stamps her feet, wishing they'd waited in the car, which is further down the road.

She hopes there's not going to be blame and lectures about colonisation and Pakeha cultural hegemony. She gets enough of that at work. She understands cultural difference, feels guilt about the past. Knows this land is founded on conquest. To care about it, though, has got harder and harder. The bloody past, weighing down on the present. She has had enough of it. Funny, she loved this stuff when she was young. Felt a huge sense of injustice for Maori.

Yossi watches and listens with interest. He looks so out of place with his lean face, prominent nose and quick, nervous movements. The round, calm, flat faces don't even look at him. Some of the men that come raise their eyebrows to him in greeting and Yossi replies with a "good morning" that manages to sound effusive in this laidback atmosphere.

Rachel greets many of the people with kisses and hugs. She knows all about their lives. Rachel brings over a shy young woman with a baby in a sling. It's Eli Tipene and his mother. Claire has a cuddle. He's gorgeous. Clean, healthy, well fed. He's thriving. She'd thought he would. Lifts his little t-shirt and checks his scar. It's perfect.

All at once it starts. How do they know it's time? Has she missed some signal? Rachel gathers them up and takes them towards the gate, one hand holding Roimata's arm as a woman's voice begins keening. *Haere mai ... Haere mai ... Haere mai ... Haere mai ki te whanau ... ki te mokopuna o Roimata ... Haere mai*. The sound is gravelly, cracked, painful. Claire's nerves tingle and her eyes sting. How ridiculous.

Everyone outside the gate huddles together and Rachel, keeping behind the men, pushes Yossi up with one arm and holds Roi's arm with the other, making sure they stick to the slow respectful pace.

The voice grows louder, wavers, and dies away as it slides down in pitch. The woman's hands shake and tremble. Claire's hasn't heard it for years and she's forgotten the power of the *karanga*. An older woman from her side replies.

Through the gate the low, plain meeting-house. Always so dignified, even

when they're scruffy, marae buildings. There are benches laid out for them to sit on, facing the house. In front of the house, facing them, some people are already seated, some with their eyes closed, some staring at Roimata. There are whispers and gasps. Rachel whispers to Roi,

"Don't worry, darling, they're just noticing how much you look like your father and like your grandmother. It's striking to us." Roimata blushes and stares down at the ground.

A man takes Yossi's arm and leads him to the front bench while Rachel leads Claire and Roimata to the one behind. Rachel has told them that Yossi will have to sit in the front with the men. Claire remembers how she used to think this was sexist. Right now she's just relieved to let Yossi take the limelight.

They sit, everyone taking their time, then an old man in the front row opposite coughs loudly several times as he slowly gets to his feet. This has an electric effect as everyone stops shuffling and moving. He has a stiff leg and carries an elaborately carved walking stick, which he waves in the air to great effect.

Tena koutou. He speaks a lot of Maori. Rachel whispers a translation into Claire's ear. Much of it she can actually understand herself, but she doesn't say this to anyone.

... He is welcoming all the guests to this beautiful marae on this beautiful day, especially you and Roimata. He is telling everyone how amazing it is that Roimata was born on the other side of the world in London and that she has found her way here to little old Torere. Inside the sacred house, she will find a photo of her grandmother Roimata. When she was young, Roimata was beautiful and broke many

hearts, just as your Roimata will do today. He is speaking of the joy that their whanau has reclaimed Roimata and that the blood of her father and grandparents and all his ancestors flows in her veins. It is an amazing story that Roimata was born across the ocean. This is her turangawaewae, her place to stand in the world.

Now he is making a joke – he is telling the young men – put your tongues away – yes she is very ataahua, beautiful - whoa”

The old man sighs and mops his brow and everybody laughs. In English, he says,

“Boys. She is your relation.”

It’s hard to breathe. She’s so bloody tense. Rachel is leaning in close so that she can whisper the translation and she is hot against Claire’s side. They could be walking to the British Museum, coffee in the square afterwards. Why did they come back? She can see Roi’s face and it is smiling and attentive. She has a translator too, a young woman with an eyebrow ring and a moko. The kaumatua is speaking in Te Reo again,

.... and the heart of the ancestors beats here...

When his song is sung, Rachel leans over and prods Yossi, who stands up. Rachel had been training him last night in the motel. She felt, being a man, he should speak if he would. She said Claire had no need to. So Claire had gone and had a bath while he’d struggled to learn a bit of a greeting.

“Tena koe e kaumatua Pereme ...Tena koutou, Tena koutou tena kotou” in what sounds perfect pronunciation to Claire.

“My name is Yosef Shalev but everyone calls me Yossi ... First, thank you so

much for your welcome. Being here reminds me of my homeland Israel, especially the humour, and the warmth towards guests. It is fantastic for me to begin to understand the blood that flows in Roimata's veins. As you know, I am not her biological father but she came into my life when she was little, and she has given me nothing but light and joy ever since...and this she will bring to you too, I can see that.

I am sorry I cannot speak your elegant language but I would like you to indulge me while I speak my first language, Hebrew, and sing you a song. It is a lullaby and I am singing ... *Sleep child sleep/this is a war of generations/ sleep child sleep/the tears have dried already for a long time/ Even if meanwhile light is not seen within you yet/ close your eyes/and together we will dream/This morning, this morning anew/this morning...*

He sings:

Tishan yeled tishan zot milchamah shel dorot tishan yeled tishan yavshu kvar mizman hadmao Gam im beinataim od lo roi'm becha or atzom et ha'einain veyachad nachalom. Haboker, haboker mechadash haboker..." Rachel stood beside him while he sang, humming along as she picked up the melody. She then took his arm and they both returned to their places.

During Yossi's speech the *kaumatua* leaned on his stick and listened intently, smiling, looking delighted with what he was hearing. When Yossi finished the old man jumped up and spoke again – this time in English.

"Thank you so much for that. I know now that I can relax – I am enjoying the knowledge that our precious treasure, our lost Roimata, was in very safe hands,

guarded by a good woman and a good man. And now she is home. Once again, welcome precious Roimata, precious tears. There will be many tears shed in memory of your grandmother today. Tears of joy that you are here with us.”

Five or six women in track pants and hooded sweatshirts, keeping their heads low and their backs bent, make their way up to stand behind the kaumatua. They start to sing, joining in after the old man has sung a few lines. Claire feels her eyes fill again. Their voices harmonise effortlessly, filling the draughty meetinghouse. She can’t believe she is still so soppy about all this stuff, in spite of herself.

“Ok,” says Pereme, as it ends. “Now let’s have a cup of tea and a smoke...”

Claire stands up because everyone else does. She fumbles in her bag for a tissue, forcing her lips to smile at the people who catch her eye. Forced smiles are always obvious. She doesn’t want them to think she is a snobby bitch. She puts her arm around Roimata who is there beside her. Rachel takes Roimata’s hand and leads her away to introduce her to some young people. Roi looks perfectly comfortable.

Then Yossi’s there at her shoulder, giving her a smile.

“Isn’t this good?” he says. “What a fantastic opportunity.”

Rachel brings over a tiny kuia to meet them. She is smiling, wiping her glasses with a hanky.

“Tears of joy,” she explains. She presses Claire to her nose again, murmuring, her hands shaking. Her emotion is palpable.

“My darling. Thank you. Thank you for sharing your treasure. This is so

right. I know she is indeed Roimata's moko. I have a story to tell you. See the photo over there."

In pride of place, a photo of Nanny Roimata, draped in a feather cloak, stands on an easel beside the back wall. Green leaves wreath the easel.

Claire nods. "Nanny Roimata."

"Last night, we had a meeting here. We talked of precious things, of your Roimata and whether she was indeed whanau."

Roi joins them now; the woman clasps Roimata's hand tight and holds it up in both her hands. She speaks softly, reverently.

"Anyway, when we were finished and we got up, I looked at the photo and it was crying! There were tears running down the face. We all knew this was a sign from our kuia. This hui was tikanga. We are doing the right thing. "

Now what was she going to bloody say? This is exactly the kind of problem she'd expected. They were going to fill Roimata's head with nonsense. She was bringing Roi up to be rational and analytical. Did these people believe these outrageous claims they made? Or were they busy impressing each other with how spiritual they could sound?

Years of practice allow her to keep her composure. For Roimata's sake, she has no choice. Why is she the only one who cannot wait to get the hell out of here?

Before she knows it she is peeling potatoes in the kitchen, proving she is not a snob. She had learned this years ago. These people have ambushed her, yet she still wishes to show respect for their culture. She has to cope, for Roimata's sake. Shit, what has she done?

Driving back from the marae to Auckland Yossi can't stop talking, raving about the experience, how meaningful it was to him, and how great it was going to be for Roimata. They've left her there with Rachel for another night.

Claire just listens, until Yossi gathers that she's not so sure.

"What is it?" he asks

Silence.

"Are you worried she will have all this in her life and all these new people and it will take her away from you?"

"Of course I am," said Claire as she checks her lipstick in the little vanity mirror.

"But there is more to it than that."

"What then?"

"I can't say it without sounding racist."

"But?"

"It 's too hard to express."

"You are not sure about these people? This culture?"

"Where do I even start?"

"What is the problem ?"

"Look, Maori are fantastic when there is a problem. They do death and grieving much better than Pakeha do, they are warm and caring. They are often much more accepting. Generalising wildly, of course. Jesus, I can't say anything at all. Even positive things sound patronising and racist. There are problems. Deep-

seated problems, ok? ”

Yossi said nothing as he negotiated a hazardous bend. He had hardly needed to drive in England and was finding the back roads in New Zealand rough.

Claire wondered for a minute why she wasn't driving.

“You'll need to slow down. Those signs mean curvy corners up ahead.”

“I know what the signs mean,” says Yossi. The wheels on Claire's side of the car veer a little onto the gravel shoulder with a loud spurt of stones. He persists with their earlier conversation, still hanging between them.

“So Maori have problems. They're still poor, right?”

“I hope you're not saying that's why I have reservations? Snobbery? Of course, poverty is a real problem. You've heard me on that subject at the hospital. Poor families are poor families. At home, I mean in London, we had poor families from all over. Pakistani, Somalian, Iraqi, Polish. You name it.”

They hit a hairpin bend, traveling downhill. Claire is quiet as Yossi grips the wheel and creeps around the corner, both of them peering ahead, desperate to be sure there are no cars coming towards them on this narrow little road.

“Look, as well as poverty, most of the sort of problems I'm talking about are caused by colonialism. I know that. You know that. Oh, I don't know what I am trying to say.” She looks over at Yossi who is still staring intently at the road ahead.

“They preach on the marae about how they treasure children but they have some of the highest neglect and abuse figures in the world. They have high suicide rates, and mental illness. Again, I'm not blaming. We bloody stole their land and dispossessed them. Just like every indigenous people that has been colonised in the

world -"

She takes a deep breath,

"Do I want my daughter distracted by this? Do I want her angry and full of hate? Their renaissance and pride is fine for them. If it's helping, and I think it is, do we have to embrace it too? Oh look, I am getting this all wrong -"

"I understand your concern," said Yossi, laughing at her difficulty in sounding politically incorrect – "you think she may fall into bad company? This is our Roi we are talking of. You have," he corrected himself, "we have already given her good values. We have taught her the right from the wrong. She is free to choose the good stuff she sees ... no?"

"Look it's not even that -" She wills her voice not to sound so cracked. She swallows and pitches her voice deeper and quieter.

"It's not even that. I have no problem with their culture for them. They can do what they like, be how they like as long as they don't hurt others of course. She could get into all this and spend time and energy on it and, look I sound bloody racist, but how relevant is it? How much is it going to help her? Bloody hell, cultures like this are everywhere in the world and they all hark back to nature and an earlier time, and stupid God. I was hoping she would spend her time studying and playing chess and playing her violin. She could break her heart over all this. I just don't know that it is worth it in the end. Do I sound terrible to you? Collective cultures. I am sure they work great for those raised in them. From my point of view, they lack ambition. They lack excellence. They lack self-analysis. They lack striving. So, now lynch me."

Yossi sits for a minute looking out at the lush bush they are driving through.

“Yes, yes, I think I see. There is that possibility.” He pauses for a minute. “Or she could find she has family and friends, people that look like her and she could take away what is good and move on. She could fall in love with one of them. The thing is, darling; it is Roimata’s decision. It’s her heritage and you have done the right thing in bringing her to it. It depends who she is and this will all help her decide that.”

Claire says nothing. She leans on the window. They’re passing through farmland now, folded green hills. She watches for a while and then closes her eyes. Fine for him, he can be all romantic about bloody Maori culture; he obviously does not love her as much. Even as she thinks it, she knows it’s not true.

15.

Yossi almost resisted the temptation. He'd arranged to meet Simon at his home. Over his muesli, sitting out in the sun on the front step, he'd tapped out a text cancelling the meeting.

He couldn't send it. The allure of knowing more about Claire's childhood, the tantalizing possibility of solving the mystery and being able to tell Claire, before her father dies, is too much. Just one more time. He'll look at what Simon has to show today.

It was yet another glorious Auckland summer day. He looked up. Couldn't see a single cloud. The glare from the pavement, the vivid hibiscus, the piercing rattle of cicadas and the buzz of light planes overheard all added up to a delicious sense of wellbeing.

The address Simon has given him is a tired-looking villa in Newton Gully with a tiny bit of overgrown lawn at the front. A cat stretched on the verandah in the sunshine as Yossi knocked on a wooden door that needed a coat of paint. Simon answered, but he was talking on the phone so he gestured for Yossi to follow him down the long dark hallway.

They emerged into a light-filled kitchen and family room that someone had added on to the back of the house. Painted an arty mossy green, it smelled of plunger coffee and last night's cooking smells. A huge framed poster of Matisse's Jazz Dancer was vibrant on one wall. On the big wooden table a perfect moth orchid flowered, surrounded by papers, folders, notebooks and newspaper clippings. Next to the table there was a whiteboard, ruled into a schedule. Through

the back window, in Newton Gully, vast concrete motorways tangled, cars crawled past without end, divided, came together again, against a background of bare dirt, graffiti'd underpasses, green patches. Over the gully were people's backyards, the land around them a riot of weeds: ginger, convolvulus, wandering Jew.

Yossi thought about Claire. How big a betrayal would this seem? Not just breaking his promise, but with a journalist of all things. She was so private.

Simon finished his call, apologised, and made a pot of tea. Yossi stared at the whiteboard, realising that it was a timeline for January 1970, the year of Kathryn Phillips' disappearance. 27 January had a big red star on it and a photo of a young girl riding a horse. Yossi realised that it must be Kathryn Phillips. He'd only ever seen the one photo of the girl, the one he guessed her parents must have released to the media when she first went missing, a very famous photo that Simon had said was instantly recognizable to most New Zealanders over a certain age. A smiling, girl with blue eyes. Pretty and innocent. He guessed this photo was the reason the case lingered so long in people's memories. What would have happened had they released this photo instead, he wondered, looking at the horse photo where Kathryn looked less blonde, less pretty, and more ordinary?

There was lots of scribbling on the whiteboard schedule. PB – fight with? PB – car to painter, PB - that was Claire's father. M? That must be Moira. His secretary?

Simon put a cup of tea down beside Yossi and handed him a worn folder. On the front cover, a white sticker, starting to peel off, bore the legend Claire Rita Bowerman, b.1970. It was mostly newspaper reports, in roughly chronological

order. Yossi began to flick through the pile, stopping almost randomly to read things.

Aged nine. Bowerman wife can't take any more. The daughter of murderer Patrick Bowerman had to ring an ambulance for her overdosed mother. A photo of little Claire, wrapped in a blanket, in the back seat of a police car, looking back through the rear window at the camera, face blurry.

Aged thirteen. Acquitted at last. Patrick, Rita, and Claire, posing on the steps of the High Court after his third trial. There's a strong likeness between Patrick and Claire, something to do with their good bone structure and them looking equally bewildered. Rita, smiling like the Queen, is firmly grasping her daughter's shoulder, forcing her to stand still for the camera.

Aged sixteen. Claire Bowerman, daughter of pardoned murderer Patrick Bowerman, scored the top University Scholarship marks in Auckland for both Chemistry and Biology. From the sixth form. The photo, Claire turning up to the Town Hall prize giving alone, wearing a baggy checked skirt, perhaps her mother's, and sneakers, using a hand to shield her face from the camera.

Aged twenty-two. A report of her mother's death, by suicide. A picture of Claire, tiny and grainy on a long lens, walking alongside a coffin carried by funeral directors, the only pallbearers.

Hovering around every article, always, the photo of the luminous girl.

Yossi sips his tea, which smells of bergamot. It's bracing and deliciously citrus-y, but bloody hot and it burns first his tongue then the back of his throat. He can hear Simon bustling about in the kitchen.

Her mother killed herself? He can't believe he didn't know this. Fuck.

How can he pretend nothing has happened?

16.

Auckland 1983

Even though there's grey drizzly rain, which seems to have been there for weeks, Claire dawdles home on her bike after school, coasting, only pedaling every so often. There's a few good puddles to go through, so she speeds up for those, taking her feet off the pedals and sticking her legs out, spraying water out the sides. Her mother had said she could stay home from school that day to wait for him but she hadn't wanted to; they had a Science test and she'd been studying hard. Tonight she's going to work on her speech. There's a choice of topics and she thinks she likes the one about the Treaty of Waitangi best, but she knows the other kids will laugh at her if she chooses that. They'll do anything that lets them talk about their pets, or Paul Weller.

Her father is sitting at their big kauri table, reading the newspaper. He's drinking coffee and picking his teeth with a little bit of cardboard he has folded over. When he beckons her and hugs her to him, he's still holding the cardboard. Yuk. He smells sour and dirty. His face is prickly and she remembers the feeling of brushing her hands over his stubble when she was little.

His hair sticks up at the front in a strong cowlick, exactly like hers. His skinny legs are pale in his loose old walk shorts. They're a bit gross, his legs, sort of baggy. The collar of his blue shirt is wearing thin, fraying along the fold. An oval patch has given up fighting and worn right through, slack white strands of cotton bridging the hole. She wants to touch the frayed bit to her cheek because it looks so soft.

Her mother is peeling potatoes and Claire goes to help.

“No, it’s ok, sit down and talk to your father.”

Claire feels her stomach tighten.

She gets herself two Malt biscuits and sits down by her father. He folds the newspaper neatly.

“Claire, I’m moving back in. Your mother’s giving me another chance.”

Her mother is giggly and happy for the first few days; she curls her hair at night and she wears shoes instead of slippers. *Nothing I can do, a total eclipse of the heart*, she sings while she does the housework. The prowlers have stopped coming. Mum says it’s because they have seen a man about the house again. Dinners get good. Steak with mushroom and wine sauce, pork chops, pot roast. Claire feels a little lost without her cooking and cleaning jobs, but it gives her extra time to study. When she tells her father she is going to go to medical school, he says he is very proud but not to expect much help from him because he is not clever.

While he was in prison, her mother had smashed most of Patrick’s records in small bursts of rage. Every so often, Claire had sneaked in, taken a pile of the spared ones, and stored them in a little high cupboard in her room. It’s really hard to get to but she can climb up there by standing on tiptoes on the built-in dressing table.

One night, while her mother’s out trying a new prayer group, Claire asks her father to come to her room. Self-conscious about her thirteen-year-old body, she stretches up, leaning on her wallpaper with its stripes of blue roses. She hands the pile of twenty or so worn and well-loved records down to her father a few at a time,

because it's awkward getting them down while she teeters on the edge of the drawer. He makes strange gasping sounds as he looks at each one.

"I didn't know which were your favourites, so I just grabbed a pile, sorry."

When the LP of Faure's Requiem comes down, he puts the others on the bed and holds that one up and makes little 'oh' noises and Claire thinks she sees tears in his eyes. She looks at the title, memorising it, wondering how you say that word. Four-ay. Four- ray. Fooor.

He goes into his room and comes back with a little cassette recorder and a pile of tapes of classical music and gives them all to her, showing her how to insert and eject the tapes and how to press Play. She can't believe it. Her own music in her own room. She knows that the player and tapes are from his prison cell, though they never talk about it. She is glad he had some music in there. She wonders who got it for him but she's too shy to ask.

Claire does homework in her room after dinner. She's doing a project on Mendel, illustrating the pages with detailed botanical drawings of the pea plants, which she copies out of their encyclopedia set. She does a title page with 'AA's, 'aa's and 'Aa's decorating it. The other kids mock her in class for using the word heterozygous, but she doesn't care. She loves science and she loves her funny, clever science teacher, Mr Sutherland. She daydreams of living, like Mendel, in a monastery with a big garden, where they sing and chant at night and everything is peaceful.

Each night, her parents argue.

Her father's often drunk, slurring his words and swearing. Claire learns to

shut the noises out because she has to get her homework done. She listens to all her Dad's tapes, the volume down low because she doesn't want her mother to take them off her. The music makes her happy inside and blocks out the arguing a bit. At least she's free to study without the usual constant interruptions from her mother.

One night, her mother screams that a man who lives around the corner is spying on them. Patrick refuses to go with her to confront him, so she goes alone, but only after huge hysterics. The family has a daughter in Claire's year at school. Neither of them say anything to each other the next day or even look at each other. It's embarrassing because they both play keyboards in the school orchestra and at assembly they have to play the marimba together. Claire feels herself go red in the face while she hits the wooden keys during *Down The Way Where The Nights Are Gay*.

A few days later, when she gets home from orchestra practice, her father has gone and his records have gone with him. She still has her tape player and cassettes, though. Her mother says nothing about it. Life goes back to normal. Macaroni cheese, Wattie's spaghetti on toast, boiled eggs.

For the rest of her life Faure will bring to mind her father. As an adult, she hears the Requiem in London in St Martin-in-the-Fields. The soprano sings from up in the gallery behind the congregation and the music echoes around the ancient church, around and about her, filling her senses, mournful and glorious.

17.

Waiheke Island 2010

Their Sunday morning ritual when they are on Waiheke is a walk on Onetangi beach and breakfast at their favourite café. Today a blustery, cold wind whips up the sand and tosses it at them, hard. It's almost unpleasant but Claire loves the sea in this mood. No one else is on the beach. The waves, cold, slate-coloured, slam onto the beach beside them. Roimata listens to her iPod and huddles in her hoodie.

Yossi seems very quiet this weekend. Claire reaches for him as they near the end of their walk, pulls him to her, kisses him on the cheek, the wind buffeting them. He just looks at her, pulling her hair off her face, not smiling. He's probably thinking about the wedding. She remembers his attempt to write their vows and how she had been too busy worrying about Brent Te Hira.

The steamy, bustly, delicious-smelling café suffuses her cold bones with warmth. She grabs a sticky, wobbly table and three mis-matching chairs. Yossi scores a newspaper. She feels good today.

"Yossi, let's write our vows tonight. And Roi, let's plan the bridesmaid's dresses. Can you help me write a list of what we'll need to do? You're happy to do my hair and make-up aren't you?"

"Yes, it'll be fun. Mum, can Aunty Rachel come to the wedding?"

Shit. "It's a very little wedding darling. Let me think about it ok? Don't ask her yet. I'll talk to Yoss and we'll see."

"Ok but there's only six weeks to go and she'll need to keep it free."

Still, Claire's mood is up. While Yossi's cooking she has a big soak in a bath, a bath bomb fizzing frangipani fragrance and releasing petals and oil which leave her skin slick. She eats in her silky dressing gown. After dinner, Roi goes up to watch television with Debs and Charlie.

"Yossi," she fills his glass with wine, "let's do those vows."

"Ok," he says, still distant and distracted. "I've made a start but they're in Auckland."

"I'm still worried what's going to happen at the end of the year if you still want to stay and I want to go."

"You still want to go back?"

"Yes, I do."

"Is it the memories here?"

"I'd left it behind."

He shrugs and shakes his head a little.

"Well, we're promising to stay together and work it out. So that's what we will do, I guess," he says.

"How can anyone promise that love is going to last?" Claire's thinking aloud.

He's quiet.

"What do you want us to promise?" she asks him, wondering why he isn't his usual bouncy self and whether he has finally realised how deep their differences are on the London thing. She immediately feels her heart go tight. It's only a matter of time until he stops loving her, sees through her, rejects her. She's always known that.

"I had written about honesty and sharing," Yossi says.

"Sounds good." Claire says.

He's so gorgeous, warm, and familiar. She kisses him and they go to bed, leaving the writing of the vows for later. She can't quite believe he loves her. Is he having doubts about the wedding?

When Claire wakes in the night, Yossi is up, sitting on the window seat, looking out over the starlit bay. The wind and rain from today are gone; serenity and silence have stilled them. She sits beside him.

"Claire, I would like to know more about your past."

"Why?"

"To help me understand you."

"Yossi, I'm sorry. I can't go there. I warned you."

"Why? Do you really have so much hurt from it still?"

"No, it's not that. The way I cope is, I don't think about it. It works."

Then they're making love again.

18.

New Zealand 1970

She's standing barefoot in the sticky road looking back at you, in her red dress, her blonde hair tumbling out of its Raquel Welch look, clutching her dress-up shoes to her chest.

Then along behind her comes a dark green Charger, coke-bottle styling, muscled arms spilling out windows, fingers raised, shouting and swearing, calling to her, leering. You've heard of these new gangs. The guys at work want to line them up and shoot them. Seeing them in the flesh, the swastikas tattooed on their arms and faces offend you.

You call out to the girl, desperate, "Quick, come here, and get back in the car." She gives you the fingers and keeps walking towards the Charger, swaying and unsteady but still with her sexy walk. They stop, call to her and while she climbs in they're grinning at you. You climb out to go over to talk to her, to warn her, but one big guy wearing some kind of German war helmet lazily gets out of the Charger, comes over and hits you in the face, hard. You look over at the girl again and she gives you the fingers.

You're not a brave man. Not a big man. You shouldn't even be here; you're already in so much trouble. She's laughing and drinking in the back seat and your face hurts and the guy is standing with his arms crossed, between you and the Charger. There's nothing you can do.

19.

Claire is examining a seven year old, the apple of his mother's eye, in the same room as Triumph and Che.

A woman in pink scrubs, wearing bright red Crocs, wheels her trolley over to Triumph's side and starts pulling on rubber gloves. She's here to take his blood. She's taped a photo of some purebred cat to her trolley. Claire has no idea what breed the cat is but it looks whiny, indulged and expensive. The Devoted Cat Owner has a cheerful, I'm-here-to-do-my-job manner. And a loud voice to match.

"Hi dear one, can you hold out your arm? Mum, it's best if you hold onto the arm and keep it still for me."

Triumph recognises the woman. She's stuck him with a needle before. He's not silly.

"No, no needle. Go away."

Patch looks as though she has no idea what to do.

"Triumph. Do as you're told." Her voice sounds harsh and guttural.

The phlebotomist uses language another child might understand, a child who speaks Epsom or Avondale or Birkenhead Point, or Chelsea or Holborn or Soho. Reasoning language, understanding language, co-operating language.

"Now, the doctor wants to look at your blood and see what it can tell us to help you get better. It's just a little prick. It won't hurt for long. Then you can have a lolly. Look, this is my cat. He's called Giles."

"No. No prick. No." He slaps her hand away with a little growl.

"Son. You have to do it," Patch says.

“No!” In anticipation of defeat, the tears come.

Knockers leans over lazily and slaps Triumph’s tiny hand with his huge tattooed one.

“Put out your fuckin’ arm,” he growls. Triumph holds out his arm. Responds to the biggest, most powerful person in the room. This is Mangere language. Survival language. Because-you-have-to, don’t-show-weakness-whatever-you-do language.

When his little face crumples at the pain, Knockers glares at him.

“Don’t cry. Don’t be a fucking wimp.” He watches the boy, holds up his hand as if to strike, daring him to show pain.

“Don’t cry!”

He’ll show him pain, is what they’re all hearing.

He doesn’t cry.

“Good boy!”

He’s three years old. But Claire thinks she understands. Knockers is praising him for doing the right thing. Knockers is there.

The mother she’s with looks at Claire in consternation, sharing a little conspiratorial, middle-class despair at the antics of these aliens. Rolling her eyes, tut-tutting. Wondering whether Claire will do something. Claire pretends she hasn’t seen.

Claire tells Janet about it later.

“Some would say that’s good parenting for the life he is likely to lead. He won’t last long if he cries at every little prick.” Janet says.

But he's three years old.

Yossi entered Dizengoff feeling guilty and conspicuous. Every person that glanced up at him, he felt sure was someone who knew him, someone who worked with Claire. All it would take would be a stray comment. Simon was known around here for his crusades. He'd already freed a wrongly convicted rapist, and exposed an insider-trading politician.

Simon had police reports and transcripts today. Bloody hell. Claire had been interrogated about forty times between age four and twelve, when she had refused to agree any longer.

They were difficult to read. Even though she was only a baby when the alleged crime occurred, as she grew police seemed to use her as a window into the household. She answered questions about her mother's state of mind, her father's moods, attitudes, actions, possible accomplices, overheard conversations. They'd asked her repeatedly about the woman at Dad's work who had left her job in the week of the murder. Moira. They'd asked about arguments, about money, even whether she could hear her parents having sex in the years he was home and how often she thought it happened.

Yossi felt his jaw clench and his knuckles tighten. He looked up at Simon, who was watching him read. He rolled his eyes and Simon nodded. He understood.

They'd asked about her Dad's clothes, whether she'd seen him burning anything, digging or changing his car. For God's sake. What were they doing? Whether he'd shown a lot of interest in the television news about Kathryn Phillips,

whether the murder had been discussed. Had her father coached her? Had he asked her to lie?

Every rumour, every piece of gossip, every new theory, every crackpot who claimed to know where the body might lie: each time the police scooped up Claire.

It was getting harder, facing Claire with his guilty secret, his intimate knowledge of her past. He must not betray any pity. She'd told him pity was intolerable to her.

He learned one thing from glancing through these transcripts. On the day of the disappearance, Rita's early testimony was that Patrick went off in the now notorious Holden Kingswood, with the baby, to try to get her to sleep in the car. Later, Rita's testimony changed. She claimed he was out early that day, said he was a Peeping Tom, out patrolling the neighborhood. Good God. Another time she said he had confessed to her that he had picked up the girl, but not to murdering her.

Patrick always maintained he was alone, driving around downtown Auckland, trying to pluck up courage to go in to his printing office, after his wife had been making abusive phone calls to his receptionist.

There was a lot of disagreement and speculation about the baby Claire. "WHERE WAS THE BABY?" shrieked many a headline. Most of the time each parent claimed the other had her at the time Kathryn Phillips disappeared. Why would they lie about this?

After coffee, Simon drove Yossi to meet a witness that he said would "blow his socks off." His car was full of bits of paper, chocolate wrappers, books, and

dried up pens.

“Scuse the mess, “ Simon said, “My car is my office.”

“So where are we going?”

“This friend of mine, Toby, he’s writing a book with a guy who used to be Mongrel Mob president but is now Christian and has left the gang.”

“What does this have to do with me?”

“Toby says he knows something about the Kathryn Phillips case.”

Toby lived out at Huia, a little seaside cluster of modest houses just west of Auckland. His house was a one-level, fake weatherboard kitset house with aluminium joinery, ugly really, but with a view out across a small inlet. There was a small fizzboat, similar to the one Yossi had at Waiheke, parked on a trailer on the driveway and Simon parked behind it.

The front door was open and Yossi could see through to the back of the house, where Toby was working on his laptop at the kitchen table.

A big old golden Labrador got up and looked at them when they arrived in the kitchen, but gradually settled back to sleep on a tatty blanket folded in the sunshine that was coming in the window. The kitchen reeked of dog.

“Kia ora bro,” Toby said. “Mac isn’t here yet but he promised me he’d show. Simon says you have a Maori daughter?”

“Yeah, Roimata.”

“Where’s she from?”

Yossi hesitated, wanting to say London, but he’d spent enough time now in New Zealand to recognise this Maori desire to make connections with new people

through whakapapa.

“Her birth father is from Torere. On the East Coast.”

“Oh, yeah, I know Torere. Then she’s Ngaitai? Related to Roimata Te Hira?”

“Her great-granddaughter.”

“She was an amazing lady. Everyone knew her. I’m from up north but my great-grandfather was from down that way. So we’re related too.” He laughed.

“How’s the book going?” Simon asked him.

“Oh good, bro. Yeah, it’s interesting stuff. Some bloody evil heavy stuff he’s been into, Mac, but he’s a good guy.”

“How much will he diss the gang?”

“Well he’s not pretending it’s all flowers and roses. We want to tell the story of why they join, who they are, where they come from and the brotherhood they find.”

“A hagiography then mate,” Simon teased.

“Hopefully not. He’s opening up. He said something cool the other day though. Hang on -” Simon reached across the table for his laptop and read from the screen. *“Gang members are arrogant but not confident. We took what we wanted and we knew we could scare people but this did not make us feel we were worth anything. I really like that.”*

When they’d had a coffee and there was still no sign of Mac, Toby rang him.

“Shit, sorry I’ve brought you guys all the way out here. He says he has a big business problem to work out,” Toby looked at Simon. “I still have to be careful, mate and he was a bit short with me. I don’t think we are going to get him to talk

about it at the moment.”

Simon grimaced. “Shit. Shit!”

“Can you tell me what you know?” Yossi said.

“We were talking about some of the crime the gang got into and he got talking about Patrick Bowerman. They were in Parry together.”

“What?”

Simon fills Yossi in. “Paremoremo. It’s a maximum security prison.”

“And he said something about knowing Pat was innocent. Said all the old guys in the gang always wondered why Patrick took the rap. He definitely said Patrick didn’t kill that girl.”

“Was it just his opinion though?” Simon got in before Yossi.

“He was so definite. I sure got the impression that the Mob was involved, that he knew more than he was saying.”

Simon and Toby started to chat about the book. Yossi excused himself and went for a wander along the pebbly beach. There was a smell of decaying seaweed, and a pile of remains where someone had filleted some snapper and left their heads with skeletons still attached lying on the beach. He stumbled, trying to avoid standing on a fish skeleton, and turned his ankle, the pain sharp and hot. Now what is he going to do? Can he tell Claire?

Will the truth free Claire? If she knew he was innocent, would she renew her relationship with Patrick?

Ought he to casually bring the Mongrel Mob into conversation? Observe her reaction? She has those patients at the moment from a gang. Would she call off the

wedding over this? But surely this was good news?

What's best for Roimata?

20.

Roimata arrives back the next day from a weekend down at the marae with Rachel, gives Claire a big hug, and lopes up to her bedroom with her bag. Claire doesn't mention the large greenstone spiral around her neck.

Rachel comes in a minute later and accepts a cup of tea from Yossi.

"How did she go?" asks Claire.

"She's a lovely girl. A real hit with the whanau. Seemed to take it all in her stride."

"Have you spoken to Brent?" she asks Rachel.

"Yes, I have. Claire, I hope you don't mind, but he talked to Roi on the phone last night. It was pretty strange for them both."

Claire gets up from the table and starts loading the dishwasher. Tears spring from nowhere. It's left to Yossi to see Rachel out. As they leave the kitchen Rachel comes over to Claire and takes her arm.

"It's ok," she says, "Relax, Brent is a good man. He will be very careful. He is as shocked as you."

Claire shrugs her hand off and doesn't say goodbye.

While they eat dinner, Claire asks Roi about her time down at Torere.

"It was so cool, Mum. I met so many rellies." The word sounds ridiculous in Roi's London accent. "They told me all about my whakapapa but I can't remember it all. I heard all these stories. I liked it Mum."

"What about alcohol and drugs?" Even as she says it, Claire hears how it

sounds. Yossi frowns at her.

“What do you mean?”

“Was there a lot of drinking? Were you offered stuff? Sorry, I’m just an over-protective Mum. You’ve never stayed so far away from me before.”

Roi doesn’t deign to answer.

Claire remembers from when she was a teenager. East Coast. Drug capital of New Zealand. Rastas on horses. Mysterious fires. Policemen run out of town. Not Torere but Ruatoria, nearby.

“No. Auntie Rachel was with me all the time. Some of the houses were a bit rough, but the people were so kind.” She knew what Claire was thinking and it made Claire blush.

“And Mum, I was thinking. Now that I’ve met the Te Hiras, what about your family? Isn’t there anyone I can meet from your side?”

Claire pretended to be concentrating on separating the delicate layers of filo pastry in Yossi’s spanakopita while she caught her breath.

“No. Sorry – there’s only me.”

“Your Dad is still alive though.”

“Yes and I told you I have nothing to do with him. I’m sorry if it sounds harsh. Really, I’ve been better off without him.” She didn’t like the way Yossi was looking at her, either.

Sure enough, when Roi had gone off to do her homework and she and Yossi were loading the dishwasher he said. “What Roi said about your father - ”

“No. Ok?”

“Ok.” Said Yossi. “But it’s sad.”

“I’m fine with it. Be a great deal bloody sadder if I had to see him. I thought you got that.”

She’s writing up notes in her study later in the evening when her mobile rings. An overseas number she doesn’t recognize. What if some journalist has got her cell-phone number? She presses reject. A moment later it beeps and there’s a voice message.

“Ah, Claire. Whoa! This is weird. I don’t know what to say. My name is Brent Te Hira. Last time I saw you we were in Florence. Rachel Rakena is my sister. I’d like to talk. Ring me back on this number.”

Can she ignore him? No, she couldn’t bear it if he rang her home number or rang while Yossi or Roimata were around to answer her mobile. She calls the number.

On the day she is to meet Brent, Claire wakes up to grey, drizzly weather. Bugger, she’s arranged to see him at Western Springs Park, a twenty-minute drive from the hospital, on the other side of town, because she’s unlikely to see anyone she knows. She hadn’t thought about what they would do if it rained. She changes several times. Pencil skirt and heels designed to make her look professional and business-like. Too fake. A dress she felt she looked good in. Too try-hard. She settles on her usual jeans and a pretty blue cardigan that she’s been told suits her.

She wants to feel comfortable.

The day holds dread for her in a few ways, but it's meeting Brent again she can't stop thinking about as she drives to work.

Che MacKenzie is back. This makes her focus. The child she had flagged in a meeting a few weeks ago, the one she thought was being abused. They all thought was being abused. The meeting had decided after she left to monitor the family. Whatever that meant.

Claire has been called to the ED to examine Che's abdomen. Heaven, Che's mother, is there, all bleached hair and thick make-up. Claire thinks she's Maori, but it's hard to tell. One of those top-heavy women, Heaven has squeezed her enormous bust and big arms into a tight black shirt, aware her leopard print mini-skirt reveals shapely legs. There's a man with Heaven and she is glancing at him all the time, flirtatious and needy. The thin, pale man reeks of body odour and stale cigarette smoke. He's shaved his head and has an arrogant stance and a belligerent manner to match. Rolling from foot to foot, he can't seem to stand still. He snaps at Claire when she speaks to Heaven without looking at him.

"Show me some respect."

She knows these men. Saw them in England. Great self-esteem but little self-respect. They believe in standing up for things, for their own rights, but it seems to be the right to act on a whim, not any rights worth fighting for. He's making a lot of noise, self-righteous, complaining. Claire switches off and leaves him whining.

She glances at the notes. Query retinal haemorrhage. Che's been bashed

again then. Asking the man to excuse her, Claire pushes past him to look at Che, who is lying still, with his eyes closed but conscious. Are those cigarette burns up the arms? Could they just be infected flea bites. There are marks on his legs, bruising. They could have been caused by a man's belt

Claire's job is to check for internal injuries. She palpates his belly, thinks he's probably ok. Look at his ears, though. Subtle bruising of the pinna. Almost nothing bruises the ear like this except abuse; being held and wrung and pulled. There is a thick ring of dirt behind his ears from days of not washing. This dirt almost undoes Claire. These things are not the preserve of a surgeon, but she could have prevented this. She knew this last week when she saw this child.

"Has the Ophthalmologist seen him?" she says to the nurse, ignoring the people so ironically called 'caregivers'.

"Not yet."

"I want him admitted to the surgical ward. And I want Te Puaruruhau involved." That's the Child Abuse team but she's hoping the caregivers don't know that.

"Diagnosis?"

Stupid nurse wants a diagnosis for the form. Che doesn't need surgery this time, but, boy, he needs to be kept in the hospital. In case the eye people don't admit him, she will.

"Trauma to abdomen."

She leaves the room and goes straight to the Social Workers office to make sure this has been reported, where, just her luck, she finds the mean-mouthed

social worker who had argued with her over the Peteru case. She can never remember her name.

“We’ll take care of it,” is her answer.

“Have the police been notified?”

“Not yet. We are arranging a meeting with the family. We will draw up a plan at the case conference tomorrow. It’s not certain yet.”

“There are injuries to his eye and to his ears that are very rarely accidental. He must not go home with these people. We’ve discussed him before. How many admissions does he need to have? Are we going to wait until they kill him?”

“We’re all upset. Leave it to us please. We’ll leave the medical stuff to you. And try not to be so judgmental. I could tell you a few things about Heaven, ok? She’s had a tough life.”

Claire knows Che’s mother is unlikely to be a demon. She assumes her childhood was tough. It shows in her face. It’s etched into her stance and the attitude of her head.

Her paramour almost certainly had a bad start too. Everyone has a limit. Lie a child down and deliver enough kicks and punches, boots to the head, put-downs, insults. Starve them of affection long enough. Some will die eventually. Some will become more vicious than their attacker.

Still others, and Claire was forever amazed that they seemed to be in the majority, put their hands over their faces and take it and overcome it and heal until one day, mercifully, they can leave. Some of these still wreak havoc on others but many go on to change themselves, manage relationships about as well as

everybody else, and become caring parents.

Becoming caring parents might sound unremarkable because it is common. But common does not mean easy.

It's stopped raining but she's late for Brent. He's waiting at the picnic table closest to the zoo, as they'd arranged. A complete stranger. She's been wondering if there'll be an intimacy, a connection with this man she's thought about so much but no, he's a stranger.

Hurrying to get there has left her flustered and hot and sticky, even though the temperature is cooler today. She apologizes too many times for being late and he motions for her to sit down next to him. "I'll get you a coffee," he says, and walks over and orders a cappuccino at the kiosk nearby without asking her what she would like.

He's put on weight. His hair is too long. Still has perfect skin and features though. Even, white teeth in a smile that can make you feel you're the only person in the room. Black leather jacket, crisp white shirt, neat jeans, polished black leather biker boots.

There are children and young mothers everywhere, mostly in groups with huge pushchairs and bags full of jackets and food and toys. The ducks are screeching. The smell of duck poo fights for space with the smell of hot chips from the kiosk. Toddlers yell and laugh. She feels out of place, furtive, as though she is doing something wrong.

She tries to stop herself staring at Brent, looking for elements of Roimata, of

course. Something about the way the head is held, the curve of the cheek hollow, the slightly amused default expression of the mouth. And a lot more, too.

All those ridiculous false dichotomies. Nature versus Nurture. Genes versus Experience. As if it could possibly be one or the other. She knows it is a complex interaction, a random, inelegant dance.

Brent has that outgoing, intelligent engagement with others that she and Yossi find so interesting in Roimata. But she and Yossi have nurtured it, turning it into wisdom, taste and caring. What a pointless exercise, this trying to unravel is. She can't help indulging in it anyway.

When Brent goes to collect their coffees he spills the contents of his wallet onto the ground, coins rolling in the trampled mud, credit cards flopping everywhere. Unperturbed, he holds his head back and laughs out loud, rolling his eyes at his own clumsiness. Exactly how Roimata would react. When he bends down to pick it all up he says something to a toddler waiting in the queue that makes the child giggle and the mother leans down and helps Brent pick up his money, handing it to him with a smitten smile, showing lots of her long slender neck to Brent. That easy charm, that comfort in his own skin, was what Claire had responded to in Italy. Confidence like that is so seductive. And she has seen it work for Roimata too, though not yet with the strong sexual element that Brent has.

For Roimata it is this signal she sends, that the world is joyful, that she soaks up experience. People everywhere want to be with her, want some of her light to fall on them. Her own goodwill, worn on the outside without a shred of distrust or cynicism, brings out goodwill and joy in others. Claire has sometimes wondered

whether it is as simple as being good-looking. But she's sure it's not. Though that no doubt helps.

Brent sits down again.

"You look just the same, but I guess you're more real. Memories are weird things, aren't they?"

He's the first to bring up Roimata.

"I talked to your daughter, Roimata."

"I am so sorry I've never told you. I just didn't know what to do. You were married. Your marriage sounded happy, you had other children."

"That's ok. It's been a shock but it's a nice shock. Rach would have told you that my wife, Marita, died about seven years ago." Claire nods. "It's true it would have broken her heart. But I think I'll tell my daughters about Roimata. I think they'll forgive me. A different generation. A new half-sister."

Claire winces. More bloody people to complicate Roimata's life. More people with some kind of claim, making demands to be treated in some special way.

"Are you here for long?" she asks.

"Three months. I took a whole lot of leave from work."

Claire blanches.

"Not just because of Roimata. I was going to do it soon anyway. Come home for a while."

A wee boy, riding his trike around the track, little legs pumping, falls off and screams. His tired looking mother puts the baby she's holding back in the pram and races over to pick him up. He's snotty and bleeding a little and covered in pieces of

the bark that forms the soft landing pad for the playground. But the mother hugs him close to her clean white blouse, not caring. Straight away his screams die down to snotty sobs. Claire misses those moments.

“I am amazed you called her Roimata.”

“I know. Stupid and sentimental. I remembered you talking about your Nanny that day.”

“It’s like she has something of me, even though I haven’t been there for her. Thank you.”

Claire says nothing.

“Tell me about her.”

“Hasn’t Rachel told you what she’s like?”

“I can’t believe all these years ... I’m trying to imagine ...”

“It’s all been pretty normal. She plays the violin. She’s a good chess player.”

“You have a partner now.”

“Yes, Yossi. He’s been with us since before she went to school. He is like a father to her. We’re a family. I’m sorry.”

He holds up both hands. “That’s cool. I am glad she has had a father. I’d like to meet her though? I didn’t tell her I was coming over, just got on a plane. I wanted to check with you first.”

Claire walks over to the bin and dumps her empty cup. She goes back, picks up her bag. She needs to get back to the hospital, to check on the little girl she’d just operated on.

“Look, I need to think about this, ok? I need to talk to Yossi. Roimata has

already had to adjust to moving here, leaving all her friends. It's not a good time for us right now. There's a lot going on."

"I promise, I won't try and be a Dad or anything. I've thought about it a lot. I just want to meet her, to see her, be, well, like a friend really."

"I'll think about it."

He stands up, grabs both her hands and looks into her eyes. He is very good looking still.

"Claire. Thanks for meeting with me. And with Rachel. I know you didn't have to. It's been great to see you again. I have very happy memories of Florence."

Flustered again, Claire pretends to look at her watch and then walks so fast back to her car that she's almost running.

Claire slips in beside Yossi that night. He's fast asleep and she warms her frozen feet on his calves. When she wakes, he's handing her a cup of tea.

She tells him about Che MacKenzie. She cries.

"Claire, I know you. I know you do what you can. You'll treat him with tenderness and love now. That will help him become strong."

Yossi talked like this often, about hearts and trust and tenderness. His language, and that of some of the other Israeli men Claire met through him, was demonstrative. But it didn't mean she felt she ever got any closer to him, understood him any more than other men in her life. Sometimes she can even believe he'll stay with her, stay loving like this.

Now, sitting up together in bed she asks Yossi to tell her about why he

doesn't talk about his own past.

"My parents were lovely," he says, "fantastically loving and caring. I would never have left if my parents had been alive. But I have given up on Israel. Given up on there ever being a resolution. Only forgetting can do it."

"I feel guilty marrying you," Claire said.

"Why?"

"Oh you know, only thousands of years of battling for Jewish identity. All those generations fighting and struggling. And we break it, just like that. Don't you feel the weight of all that?" she asked.

"I do, of course I do. But I try not to think about it. How do I help them, who no longer exist, by being miserable myself?"

"What am I supposed to think about Israel? Everybody has such strong opinions. I know nothing. It is not simple. I can't believe it divides neatly into good and evil."

"It most certainly doesn't. Any more than New Zealand does. Or anywhere else."

21.

Will Roi be anxious about what to wear to meet Brent? Claire waits for her to talk about it, but she dresses on that morning as she always does, casual. Jeans and a t-shirt with a big globe and the slogan, "There is no Planet B. " Comfortable in her own skin. If she is worried about it at all, she's hiding it well.

She's to meet Brent in town and she's determined to do it on her own. Claire checks again whether she'd like company, maybe there's last minute nerves.

"My heart's beating fast," Roi says, "but I'd still rather go on my own."

Independent genes. Where could she have got that from? Claire laughs to herself, desperate to normalise this.

At about ten Roi comes out of her room, carrying her beloved Marcs red bag, slightly more make-up than usual the only sign she's feeling any different to any other day,

"Bye Mum."

"I can give you a lift if you like?"

"Nah. It's ok. I'll get the bus."

"How are you going to know him? Is he wearing a red carnation?" Trying her best to sound light-hearted but just sounding naff.

"I've seen heaps of photos."

"Darling. You'll know him straight away. You look very like him. Don't get a fright. This is going to be strange for you."

"I love you Mum."

Then she is gone.

When Janet had offered to meet Claire for coffee while Roi was meeting Brent, she'd said no because she didn't know how she was going to feel. Now she wishes she'd said yes. She feels like shite. She's not sure where Yossi is. Off at the library as he always seems to be these days?

She unpacks and then re-loads the dishwasher like a zombie. Takes a cup of tea out into the tiny garden and sits. Thinks for the millionth time how much she loves Roi and wonders how people go on when things happen to their children. The phone rings.

"Kia ora, it's Rachel Rakena."

"Hi."

"Just wondering how you're doing. It's a big day for you."

"Yeah, it is. I'm ok."

"Can I come and pick you up, take you for a coffee?"

"Oh, that's kind. No thanks, I'm alright."

"Go on. I'd love to see you."

It will, at least, be a distraction.

Rachel arrives with a bunch of flowers from her garden. They go to a local garden centre, drink several flat whites each and eat berry friands. Rachel reassures her that her brother is a good man. She talks about the Maori concept of whanau and how there's room for lots of people in a child's life.

To distract herself from this dreadful topic, Claire tells Rachel about Che MacKenzie. Without naming him of course. She asks for advice. Rachel must deal

with these families as a principal.

“Are they Maori?”

“I think Mum is. The boyfriend, who I am pretty sure has beaten him, is Pakeha.”

“Do you know where Mum is from? ”

“No.”

“You have to do something. Don’t ever let anyone tell you that there is anything in Maori culture that allows people to hit children. There is nothing. It’s a source of huge shame to Maori.”

“I understand it’s one of a whole lot of difficulties. But it’s not ok.”

“They’re animals. Let me know what CYF do. I’m sure I can find a temporary home for him. We take any kid on, down where I’m from. Can’t stand the stories.”

When Roi gets home she doesn’t say much.

“How was it?” Claire tried to sound casual.

“It was fine. He’s really nice. He’s so like Aunty Rachel.” Roimata goes upstairs, gets out her violin and starts to practise. Good move, thinks Claire. She knows I never interrupt that. Is she so afraid of my reaction? Already, this all gets between us.

Violin practice can wait today. Claire goes up and hesitates outside Roi’s bedroom door before knocking and going in.

“Roi,”

“Mmm?” Roi resins her bow with long thin fingers that she certainly didn’t

get from Claire.

“You’re playing the quaver run and the semi-quaver run at the same speed.

Slow the quavers down. Pa pom pom pom pom pom,” says Claire.

“Oh yeah.”

“Roi,”

“Mm?”

“You know, if you want to talk -”

“It’s ok. I’m fine. Hey, guess what? He loves chess. That’s so weird – I thought I got that from Yossi.”

“It was the first thing Yossi noticed about you. The way you stared at his chess game in the shop. Weird indeed. But Yossi taught you to play.”

“Yeah and Yossi’s a lot better player than Brent sounds.”

As Claire turns to go, Roi says, “I love you.”

What a fantastic kid she’s got.

22.

Yossi and Roimata stand in the doorway of the grim little café in Great North Road, peering inside. Four or five loud young men in hoodies and sneakers strut and pose, leaning on the tables on the pavement, almost blocking their way, swearing and laughing. Yossi glares at them. When Roi said she'd agreed to meet Patrick, Yossi had never heard of the café. He'd assumed, when he heard Grey Lynn, that it was an Allpress and brioche affair like the ones they often visited for Sunday brunch. Instead it is part of some middle of the road chain. This particular one, surrounded as it is by smarter outfits, has found a niche with the poor, the mad and the homeless. The coffee costs only \$3.

He remembers Claire telling him about this part of Auckland, where she used to flat as a student. There have always been boarding houses there. Now there are only one or two left, peppered among trendy wealth; in big derelict mansions that no one else is prepared to take on. He guesses the locals are far too educated and cool to protest at eccentric behaviour or filthy clothing. They think it adds colour, helps their children to grow up interesting and tolerant.

"There he is," says Roi, pointing.

"How do you know that's him?" asks Yossi, hoping she's got it wrong.

"He told me he'd be sitting by himself at his favourite table, underneath a poster of Marilyn Monroe."

Sure enough, on the wall above the old man, like a nimbus, there is a garish poster. It's one of the vulnerable ones, her clothes too tight, her hair too blonde, and her face too beatific.

Roi strides over to the corner where the old man, his thin hair growing far too long down the back of his ancient t-shirt, fidgets with a coffee cup.

Yossi waits, watching Roi speak to the old man who jumps up and embraces her. Now Yossi wants to get to her but he has to push past an elderly couple who are eating with their mouths open, their shopping spread all around them on the floor. A young woman sitting by herself speaks as he passes and he hesitates a moment, before realising she's talking to herself. Yossi is afraid for his dear sweet Roimata. Oh my darling girl, you know not what you do.

"This is Yossi, my dad."

Patrick jumps up again.

"Hello, delighted to meet you. Isn't it a stunning day?"

He puts out a dirty hand for Yossi to shake.

Yossi wants coffee even though he knows it will be terrible.

"I'll order some drinks. Roi, would you like a hot chocolate? Would you like anything, sir?"

"Yes, actually. There was some rather delicious looking ginger crunch. Would you be kind enough to get me some?"

When Yossi returns after paying the sullen girl at the counter, the old man is telling Roi about his days at Mount Albert Grammar.

"I go to Epsom Girls, where Mum went."

"Oh yes. It's a very good school. I wouldn't have sent Claire anywhere else."

The old man's sore and moist eyes flick about a lot. Scabs litter his dirty face and he gives off a sour wet carpet smell. It's been weeks since the lank hair has

seen shampoo. But is this a man capable of evil?

Then Patrick is talking to Yossi. "Please tell me about my daughter. How is she?"

Yossi places a hand on the emaciated arm.

"Your daughter's a beautiful woman you can be proud of, sir. She's a doctor. She's a great mother and a kind and generous person."

And I love her and I am going to marry her, he wants to add. He must keep that to himself, though, because Patrick will not be invited. Which is making Yossi feel uncomfortable. Weddings bring out forgiveness in people, Yossi has seen it. Weddings and births can bring hope and redemption. But Claire won't want this smelly old man anywhere near their wedding. No one would want him for a father.

The waiter arrives with their coffees.

The old man takes his ginger crunch, picks up the whole over-sized piece and takes a bite. Then, talking through the food, says, "You said on the phone that you play chess. You might have got that from me. I was very good at games."

Roi leans forward and starts to tell him a few of her triumphs, flushed and proud. She's normally modest, but she tells her grandfather she was runner-up in London for the under-fifteen girls chess championship last year. He interrupts her.

"I have to go now. Sorry." He stands.

Roi and Yossi cross the road with him. With each breath out, he makes a wheezy grunt. At the car he says,

"So lovely to meet you both." He touches Roi on the arm. "You are very beautiful, my dear." Then turns to Yossi.

“Look, this is rather embarrassing but I seem to have forgotten my wallet. Would you be good enough to lend me some money for lunch?”

A line has been crossed, a border breached; Yossi knows he should not give this man money. For a start, it will go on alcohol. Then it will lead to more contact, more requests. If he gives in once, this man won't stop. Yossi is a grown-up. He has learned that in order to survive sometimes one sacrifices others. There is no saving them, no matter how sad the story that has made them what they are. And, most of all, Claire would take this as disloyalty.

But this is family. Watching him is Roimata, at the beginning of her life. She has had none of the struggle for survival, has none of the wisdom, none of the hardness that life has brought Claire and him. This was a big mistake. Claire was right. Roimata will think he is horrible and mean and she will feel pity for this poor old man. Still, he knows oughtn't to start this, should nip it in the bud, remain strong, think of Claire.

He can't. He reaches into his wallet and realises he only has change or a hundred dollar note. He does not notice the two boys walking past them as gives the note to Patrick.

The old man shrugs and walks away, hunched over against the wind, down Jervois Road towards the city. Yossi turns to Roi and pats her arm, opens the car door for her.

There's yelling and shouting. Loud, malignant shouting. It's coming from around the corner, where Patrick has just disappeared from view.

They run.

Patrick sprawls face down on the rough gravelly footpath. A boy is kicking him in the head; swinging his feet back furiously in between each kick. “

Mothafucka.”

Another boy watches, smiling, in his hand the hundred dollar note.

Roi grabs the head-kicker.

“Stop it! Stop it! What are you doing?”

He pushes her away with one hand.

Yossi tries to take control now.

“What’s happening here? Stop this at once.” The head- kicker just pulls back his leg again.

“Fuck off, cunt. It’s fuckin’ nuthin’. He killed that fuckin’ girl, eh?” Each ugly ‘fuckin’ is accompanied by a savage, sickening boot to Patrick’s stomach.

Yossi shoulder charges the kicker’s chest and grabs the pumping leg.

“Don’t. Stop this right now. He’s an old man.”

“Fuck off, motherfucka, this guy’s real bad, eh?”

The smiling boy pulls the soft hood of his sweatshirt over his head and holds up his hand in a stop gesture, “Bro, it’s cool bro. He killed that hitchhiker. We saw him on the TV. He’s always around here.”

“Stop it. Stop it.” This time Yossi gets between the head kicker and Patrick but the smiler grabs his shirt and shoves him out of the way.

“Help. Help. Stop it!” Roi kneels down by Patrick, covering him with her body, her screams turning to sobs.

“Shut up, bitch, or you’ll be next.”

“Roimata, run back to the car. Go!” Yossi says. She doesn’t. He’s trapped behind the head-kicker. He dives, pushing the boy away hard and shields Roimata with his body. The boy lurches forward and kicks out as Yossi’s left arm comes up to shield himself.

Cars are slowing down now and people are running towards them yelling. The smiler raises one eyebrow and flicks his head back in a gesture to the kicker. Away they strut down a side street, all gangsta-roll and bravado, proud of their morning’s work.

Roi leans over Patrick, sobbing. Pain begins seeping through Yossi’s arm. “Shh,” he murmurs. He eases Roi back and kneels down by the old man who has been silent for some time.

Blood cakes the long thin hair and courses down the dirty face onto the hot pavement. The eyes are contused black and pink lumps, the nose pulverised and twisted sideways. Little chips of gravel are embedded in the face like bloody stubble.

Yossi calls out “Patrick” and there’s no response. People crowd around them.

“I’ve called an ambulance, mate,” someone says.

The world feels surreal to Yossi. The pain, which was never that bad, has gone, but the spaced-out feeling is disconcerting.

He doesn’t look while they do the arm block, concentrates on gritting his teeth, getting through. Make light of it. He has pain relief and he’s in the hospital.

Claire and Roimata are with him and he will be brave and strong. Won't make a fuss. It's only a broken arm. How bad can it be? Easy.

The most disconcerting bit is afterwards, when they hand him his left arm and ask him to hold onto it with his right. The nurse hands him the lifeless thing that is meant to be a part of him. It reminds him of Martha, the long-legged rag doll that Roimata had when she was little. This is the weirdest feeling. There is absolutely no sense whatsoever that this is his, this soft, disconnected object. No tingle, no numbness, no vague stirring. Just a complete lack. They have tricked his brain.

All those hours spent clutching a parents' finger, reaching for keys and rattles, grabbing inexpertly at toys, lifting, banging, and touching things. Gone with a few chemicals. It is a truly creepy feeling. He'd almost rather have pain. The world is letting him down.

Claire catches his arm, which is slipping off his chest. He hasn't even noticed. She shows him how to hold onto it firmly with his other hand. It starts to slip again; he can feel it sliding out of his grasp, with his right arm, grabs it, afraid he will damage it since he can't feel a thing.

The doctor is talking to him about something to do with the arm and physio or long-term care or something. He can't listen, can't focus.

"How's Patrick?" he asks the policeman in the room.

The policeman looks confused.

"The old man, the one who was beaten."

"He's been admitted to intensive care. They said he would be dead if you

hadn't intervened."

"What happened?" Claire asks.

Yossi feels sick, numb, terrified all at once. His gut has turned to liquid. His consciousness, while dull to what people are saying around him, is at the same time, more vivid than ever. He is cold, why don't they give him another blanket? He is shaking. His right elbow, which is pressing on the steel side of the bed in order to hold his left arm on his chest, experiences the steel side as cold, shiny, and intrusive. Colours are bright, they come in waves. He couldn't name the colours, can't quite grasp the words. When people move around him, it is as though they are in fast forward. He needs to close his eyes. He can smell something. It's the hospital dinner trolley going past. Revolting. Food, how disgusting.

And then a wave of fear. He vividly remembers the kick coming towards him; remembers blocking it, winces as he recalls the feeling, the resistance, and the sick-making crack.

"Roimata," he says.

"I'm here, Yoss."

He feels a hand on his shoulder. She leans in and kisses his cheek. His senses feel overloaded. He might have to vomit soon.

"Thank god you didn't get hurt," he says.

Drifting up through his mind, though, something he has to get out in the open.

"Claire, there's something we have to tell you. We didn't mean to hurt you."

Is the whole world in on this? Claire walks out through A and E, out through the big double sliding doors, holding her breath. She hopes she won't see anyone she knows.

How could Yossi do this? A feeling of horror courses through her, filling her chest to bursting. She can't hear or see for a minute, but she keeps placing one foot in front of the other, aware of each step, each breath, she reaches her car, climbs in, leans on the steering wheel. Breathe.

She'll settle Yossi in at home, get them sorted, sort out his arm. But when that's done, she's going to Pearly Bay. On her own.

23.

It's getting late when she steers carefully up alongside the jetty. It's Thursday. She leaves the boat there. No-one's around but there's a blue and white launch she doesn't recognize moored close to the jetty, its rowboat pulled up on the pebbly beach, so someone must be in one of the baches.

It's strange opening up the bach by herself. Although it's less a week since they've been there, the air shifts when she opens the door. She feels like an intruder. Usually it's all of them, or, more often, she comes late after Yossi and Roimata have settled in.

The floors gleam and the fridge and bathrooms are clinically clean. They're much tidier here than at home. It's a bit like a boat, it's small and you have to be tidy. She enjoys cleaning up here, and spends a few hours each Sunday restoring this gleaming clean. The bach is ordered somehow, functional, no clutter.

She loves the way things sit in the bach, waiting for humans, ready to go. Binoculars, waiting for hands. Candles, waiting for dark. Here, there's no pressure to be tasteful, either. The odd kitsch thing here makes her smile and cheers her up, when it would embarrass her in her house at home. The cushions laze on the window seat, their bright pacific tivaevae colourful and vibrant, slumping, fading in the sun. Claire drops her bag and lies down on the window seat.

The quiet stuffs the air, makes her self-conscious, un-focused somehow. Though sometimes she craves quiet, she has to admit to herself that, today, she doesn't like it much. She doesn't want to sit here feeling sorry for herself. She even

briefly considers taking a quick trip around to the pub on the Island and seeking out warmth and noise. She has never been there, never goes to pubs, never socializes with strangers but this is something other people do at times like this, to mask their loneliness. She is being pathetic.

Rousing herself, she puts on a light, switches on the radio in time for the news. Some men are trapped in the hull of a boat while unloading logs up north. Two dead and a third hurt badly. It's unfolding while she listens. A bomb discovered in Times Square but not detonated. Airfares to Australia are going to get cheaper.

She makes herself a cheese toasted sandwich, from bread she finds in the freezer and cheese left from last weekend. Opens a bottle of merlot and pours a glass.

Pink geraniums are fluttering in the planters she has out the back, lit by the security lights in a burst of wind. She thinks she remembers that they don't make good cut flowers but wants the flashy pink inside anyway. Worth a try. She gets the secateurs and opens the back door. It's just a little breezy outside. It's the first time she has felt even a slight chill in the air since she has been back in New Zealand. She snips a few branches. Even though geraniums smell bloody and metallic, she takes a deep sniff.

She's glad to get back inside, the room still warm from all the sun it's trapped that day. She puts the geraniums in a little cracked milk jug and puts them on her table. Picks up her phone. Six missed calls. Six text messages. All from Yossi and Roi, all apologetic, then some worried. Let them worry.

She's sorted out the routines for Yossi's broken arm. Thank goodness he's right-handed. She's showered him, shampooed his hair, dressed him. He can manage that himself now. All without really talking to him. She's cooked a whole lot of dinners and put them in the freezer. She's done all the washing and ironing. They can manage without her for a couple of nights.

She's forgiven Roimata already. Hugged her, cried with her. Hated the thought she might have been hurt. Tried to see it from her point of view. Wanting to know her Grandad. Not knowing how shitty people can be and still be related to you.

But Yossi, Jesus. How could he have? Why didn't he stop her? Or at least tell Claire what was going on. Is she that controlling, that tough, that they need to lie?

She looks out winter duvets and puts them by the door, hoping she'll remember to air them the next day. Will it be cold for the wedding? Shit, the wedding. Wrapping a fleecy blanket around her shoulders, she heads out to the deck with her merlot, thinking she may as well watch the sun set.

The sea is bright silver just for a moment, so short a time she wonders if she imagined it, then cold grey blue. There's still a little stripe of yellow in the grey blanket sky above the Waitakeres, then the illusion of daylight is well and truly gone.

The Sky Tower lights blink on and off, a vertical strip of beacons. The lights of Auckland, hardly there a minute ago, now dominate. The boats below on the jetty are the same colour as the sea but their shape is flat where the sea is not. The water hisses softly, as though someone has left a hose on.

When she goes to bed, she swaps her jeans for pyjama pants, sleeping in her bra, singlet and sweatshirt. She doesn't want to be naked even for a minute. It amazes her, when she spends time on her own, how short a time it takes to be uncivilised in the little routines, wear her clothes to bed, eat straight from a pot. She sleeps fitfully, waking and remembering with a lurch in her stomach, that Roimata and Yossi have brought Patrick back into their lives.

Woken by a scraping sound from the back of her house, she opens the back door and she's not sure who jumps the highest, her or the elderly man in her garden, busy demolishing the rotten trellis that forms the back courtyard. He looks familiar.

"Whoa!" says the man. "You gave me a fright. I didn't know anyone was here."

"Hi!"

"Sorry, I'm Joe Johnstone. I'm Debbie from next-door's dad. And you're Claire."

"Yes."

"My wife and I are staying at the bach for a while. I asked Debs for jobs to do and she asked me to replace this rotten stuff as a surprise for you. She's bringing some new trellis over from the mainland tomorrow. I thought you were in town. I hope you don't mind."

"Oh no. Thanks so much."

"No problem. I hear you've got a wedding planned? Is there anything else you want spruced up for the big day? I like to keep busy."

“Thanks. That’s so nice of you.”

He works away hard, although he must be nearly eighty. Claire phones in sick at work and asks another surgeon to check on a couple of her patients. She has no surgery scheduled today anyway. Feeling guilty about Joe working so hard, she starts to drag the trellis over to her woodpile and break it up into kindling.

“Will this be ok in my log burner?” she asks.

“Should be fine.”

The work is good. It’s great. She goes hard, stomping and jumping on bits to break it up. It’s so quiet here. The sounds they make, the satisfying thuds and splinters and cracks, ring out around the bay. Seagulls shriek.

She makes a cup of tea at 10.30 and they sit outside on the deck to drink it.

“I remember you as a child,” he tells her. “I remember your whole family.”

She changes the subject, asking his advice on an issue they have with the water tank. He goes off to look at it.

Yossi rings. She presses Reject. She’d asked one thing. One little thing. Don’t make her think about her father.

Soon after he leaves, Joe comes back down the track and invites her to tea. She tries to say no but he insists, says Debs’ Mum, Joan, won’t forgive him if he doesn’t persuade her.

Joan serves roast chicken. She’s plump and cheerful and hearty, like Debs. Claire remembers her now, a classic Mum, plain but kind, always feeding her kids,

Claire too when she was there. Their family had seemed so normal, so relaxed.

But all is not well with her now. She has severe osteoarthritis. It's painful watching her serve the dinner and shuffle about. Debs' father is kind but lets her do it. Claire is itching to help but he signals, no, let her do it.

When they've eaten, Claire tries to do the dishes but Joan won't let her. She insists she'll do them later. She makes Claire a cup of tea and the cup rattles in her shaky hands as she places it on the table beside Claire's chair.

"Claire, I want to talk to you about your family. We heard on the radio your father's been hurt."

"I'd rather not, Mrs Johnstone. I'm sorry."

"Call me Joan. Well you're stuck here and you're polite. So you will listen. And since I am in pain, you will not cross me. Claire, since Debs told me you were back I have gone over and over in my mind, thinking about your mother and father and you. What could I have done, I ask myself. What could we have done differently?

I always felt sorry for you. You were an only child for a start. But your Mum. She had elegant couches and curtains. I remember some curtains in particular. She'd got someone to bring them all the way from Britain. They were deep green linen with huge white flowers. They made such an impression on me. All of the rest of us had synthetic brown stripy curtains, from the PSIS. Your mother was cultured. But she was strange.." She looks at Claire to gauge her reaction.

"Strange?"

"We used to say she suffered from 'imaginitis'. She thought people were out

to get her.”

“She was paranoid. Was she always like that?”

“I think so. I remember her telling me very early on that in her childhood there was a murder near her house in Wellington. She said the kids played cricket and smelled the body. I believed her but it all seemed a bit surreal. She used to, well, I don’t know how much you need to know this, she used to flirt with all the men and then, well, then she’d turn on them.”

“I know. She used to accuse them of peeping on her. It happened often. Everywhere we shifted, she’d accuse the neighbours of prowling.”

Debs’ Dad says, “She used to think there were prowlers all the time. Here in Pearly Bay, well, it was a bit ridiculous. She’d ask for help from whichever of us blokes was here. We all believed her at first – why wouldn’t we? But then it kept happening and the stories got weirder and weirder. Blokes tapping on her wall. And several lots of prowlers at once.”

“And then she started to get names for them all. And they’d have personalities.” Claire adds.

“And she’d come running for one of us blokes, telling stories about men out to get her, even though your father was there. And it was really embarrassing for him. She’d say he was a coward, or didn’t believe her or she’d imply he was somehow in league with the prowlers – leaving the curtains open and things like that.” Joe shakes his head, embarrassed.

“We never talked about mental illness in those days, Claire. We used to make funny signs that meant” Debs’ Mum says, lifting her hand up to the side of

her head, her finger circling in a sign that means crazy - “wonky in the head and things like that, but we didn’t know what to do. We felt for you and your Dad, but we had no idea how to help.”

“She wasn’t just mad, though,” Claire says, “She was a snob as well. She snubbed you all and looked down on you. She kept a lot of people at a distance like that.”

They say nothing.

“My Dad...” Claire can’t go on speaking. She draws further back into the shadow.

Claire’s mum takes over, “He was lost, I think. Didn’t know what to do. After a few years he became an angry man, stressed, we’d call it now. Then he had you and that made him happy. Then -”

They all knew what happened “then”.

Claire can’t talk about it any more, although she’s glad Joan and Joe have told her these things. She gets up to go.

“I’m sorry, love. I’m so sorry.” Joan holds Claire’s hand in her thick, gnarled hands. “I didn’t know what to do. And then they stopped coming here. And we just got on with our lives.”

24.

The birds are warming up and the dawn is poking tentative fingers into the Bay when she hears Joe walks onto her back deck, cough and put his bag down with a thump. Claire opens the back door. She's wearing an old swanndri of her Dad's she found by torchlight hanging in the laundry after she got home last night. He wasn't a big man but still it comes to her knees. This morning she has cut the sleeves off with scissors to a rough edge just below her elbows. Underneath, some shorts she's been using for gardening.

"Ha. Look at me. I'll drive you wild with desire in this," she says. He loves her flirting with him like this and grins, adjusting the belt on his tired old shorts.

The sea gleams silver and ghostly and the bush is dark on their way down the track.

"Will Joan be alright?"

"Yes, she's fine. She's got a cell phone and everything she needs. I've told Debs to ring a few times and check on her."

He doesn't say much. Rows her out to his boat. He's a bit slow and breathless but she feels safe. Once on board he says he knows a good spot near the rocks a few bays around where he has been catching heaps of snapper.

The light stretches and yawns. Where he stops is an empty bay, no baches, and no boats. Just bush and rocks, all birdsong and sea-swish.

"Great during the week here, no-one much around," he says.

Claire hasn't fished for thirty years or more but she's determined to bait her own hook and kill her own fish, if she catches any. She remembers what a pain her

mother used to be, always interrupting her father's fishing, demanding, talking. She wants to fish like a boy.

Joe lays some squid from a packet on an old cutting board criss-crossed with scrapes. He gets out a sharp, clean knife. The viscous squid is cold to the touch as Claire slices through it.

"That about the right size?" she asks.

"Perfect."

When the squid is in nice neat bits she wipes the knife with an old rag. Joe hands her a rod he has been fiddling with. Weights, hooks, line, everything ready to go. She deftly plunges the hook into the bit of squid, twisting it back and hooking it again. The squid must smells salty and tangy, not yet fishy.

The water slaps against the boat but only a little. She looks hard at the reel, goes through how it works in her mind first and then flicks off the lock and sends the line out, the reel whizzing with a delicious click. When she thinks it's out far enough she snaps it locked and sits on the cushioned bench along the side of the boat. Joe's is in too and he smiles at her. She sees how thin and dry his hair is, how his belt is slung low to be comfortable, how his bum has disappeared and there are just baggy shorts where it used to be, how one shoulder droops and the other strains to hold him up. She remembers him as a younger man, always working, painting, gardening, and fishing. Even though they were on holiday.

While they've been getting ready the sun has lit the bay.

"Look." A couple of jellyfish float past.

"Last summer there were orca out here one day. They're huge."

"I remember dolphins when I was a kid."

"Yeah, we did get them. Even came right into Pearly Bay a few times."

"Amazing."

"Yep, beautiful. You didn't get *them* in London, now, did you?"

She feels a tug, thinks it's probably just the tide, but then another and the top of her rod is bending over. She stands and winds her reel in, hears her father's voice in her head.

"Give it stick. Give it stick."

She turns the handle until she sees the pink glint of a snapper but when it comes to the surface it's little.

"Nah, not a keeper," says Joe.

She winds the little fish up above the water, leans over and holding her rod with one hand, she uses the rag to draw the wriggling fish up onto the deck, carefully anchors her rod between her knees and starts to free it as gently as she can. The fish bucks and slaps and she has to grip it hard with her left hand, while she works the hook out and then drops the fish back into the water.

They fish for half an hour, then, in companionable silence. Claire feels another bite and this time it's a big snapper, blushing silver in the water. She stabs it in the brain, through the little depression above its eye and quickly skins and fillets it, avoiding the sharp fins, and throws the head and guts and bones back into the water. Joe grabs the fillets and puts them into a chiller bag packed with ice.

"You're good at that," says Joe.

"I'm a surgeon."

Joe catches two and she fillets them for him, while he pours coffee from a thermos. She baits both their rods and casts them off, leaving them in the rings on the side of the boat.

There's warmth in the sun now and Claire leans back with her eyes closed and sips the horrible gritty instant coffee.

"Yuk" she says, "sugar."

"Sorry," he says, "I bring it like that – pre- milked, pre-sugared. Force of habit."

"Do you actually like this disgusting instant stuff?"

"Can't see what all the fuss is about this espresso or latte or whatever. Instant is good for what ails you," he laughs.

He tries to ring his wife but there is no cell phone coverage.

"We can go back if you're worried," says Claire. "I've caught my first fish in thirty years and I'm perfectly happy."

"No, no, she'll be fine. There are a few more in there yet."

"It must be hard, her getting sick." Claire says.

"Oh well, that's life." he says.

"Hard for Debs too."

"Mmm. They're close. Joan is real upset about Debs being on her own now. Worries about her as we get sick and old."

"Debs is great. She'll be fine." Claire says.

"She's a good girl. Feet on the ground like her Mum. He was a loser anyway."

A couple of seagulls have found them now. Squawking and wheeling but not

coming close.

“Your Yossi, Debs says he’s a good bloke.”

“Mmm, he is.”

“Well, if he’s a keeper, hold on to him tight. No fun in this world getting old alone.”

With that, he rinses out their cups and packs them away. He turns his back to her and grabs his rod again, bracing his veined legs against the boat to keep his balance.

They catch seven more fish between them, one a kahawai that he throws back, the others all big snapper. He’s elated.

It’s getting hot when he announces they’ve caught enough and they clean up together without talking, every so often one of them whooping or chuckling at their success.

She leans back, her head against the cabin, enjoying the rough breeze pushing against her as they motor back, her body aching but warm and content.

When they reach Pearly Bay she jumps into the rowboat first and grabs the oars and he lets her row them back to the jetty.

“That was fantastic, thank you,” she says when they reach her bach. She hugs him and kisses his cheek.

“Let me know if I can help with anything,” she says.

He holds her arm as she starts to run inside. “Whatever he’s done, love, forgive him.” He says, “We’re a long time dead.”

And he heads on up the track.

Whether it's the fishing, Patrick's advice or just a bit of time, Claire realises she feels much better. She texts Yossi to say she'll come home tonight, that she is ready to talk. She will try to explain to Yossi her strategy for dealing with her family. Cut them out, excise them. Let the wounds heal undisturbed.

Her phone rings immediately.

When Yossi comes to bed that night, she is reading. She reaches for him. He holds her close. They make love. They have often done this at moments of difficulty. Neither of them is big on talking about their feelings and sex brings them close. People say you need to talk as well, and that the intimacy could be an illusion. But Claire's not sure talking is any better.

Perfectly possible to have whole conversations and not understand each other any better. Just because you add words to intimacy, does it mean more? Is communication all it is cracked up to be? Women all report talking endlessly with their partners, dragging words out of them kicking and screaming. They seem to think there are breakthroughs, when they "get" what their husbands are trying to say every so often. Claire's not so sure. She watches the couples, parents of children at work. Most men just seem to try saying different things until they find something their wife is happy with.

Admittedly, there are odd times when it can be lonely after sex. When Yossi goes off to sleep and she lies wondering whether they'd really made a connection. But conversation can leave one feeling lonely too.

So tonight, she is thrilled to be stroking and sucking and kneading this skin,

this man she is going to marry. She loves the “present” ness of it, the way time recedes, the focus on this skin, that finger, this sensation. She loves Yossi’s physical presence. He’s real, flesh and blood, muscle and vein.

25

Yossi is composing a song. He's got Sibelius 5 on his laptop but he's hardly touched it since he came to New Zealand. He's trying not to get excited, having realised long ago that, though he has talent as a musician, he's not great. A disappointed composer, that's him. Not that disappointed, though. He loved his life. He'd loved music journalism and been good at it. Now he loved his shop. Deeply loved it. Yes, he'd had dreams of being a rock star as a young man, who didn't? Yes, her was pretty good on the guitar, very good, actually, for an amateur. Not everyone could be a great artiste.

Since visiting Patrick lying in his hospital bed, for some reason the first lines of an Allen Ginsberg poem have been going around and around in his head. And a tune to go with it, a riff and a chorus. He's setting it to music. It's so comforting, so distracting. It's really fun. His arm is still in plaster, but he can hold the guitar, play chords. And he can use the laptop with one hand.

Strange now to think of you, gone without corsets & eyes while I walk on/ the sunny pavement of Greenwich Village, / downtown Manhattan, clear winter noon, and I've been up all night, / Talking, taking, reading the kaddish aloud, listening to Ray Charles blues shout blind/on the phonograph/ The rhythm, the rhythm – and your memory in my head three years after-/ And read Adonais' last triumphant stanzas aloud – wept, realising/How we suffer-

He's trying to imagine things from Claire's point of view. Trying to feel empathy. How must it feel to have her father estranged, dying? She's behaving badly. He knows how difficult her childhood was but this breaks some boundary.

Respect for the dead and respect for parents, aren't these bottom lines? Some things are just wrong. Such as beating up an old man. Claire's always telling him these violent criminals have awful childhoods. That's wrong of their parents but still, beating up an old man!

Disrespecting the dead feels the same to him. Intuitively, universally, wrong. He plays the line of melody that he thinks is probably going to be the chorus again, *"the rhythm, the rhythm."* He likes it. Mournful but uplifting too.

"Yoss?" Roimata comes into his study. "Can I join in?"

"Sure." He puts aside the paper he's been scribbling on. Turns his chair from the desk and starts to play his guitar. They do a mean version of Wild Horses together and he starts to play that.

"What's that you were playing? You writing a song? Can I hear it?"

"I'm just playing with something. It's nowhere near ready for anyone to hear." He starts to sing Wild Horses, nods at her to join in.

"Please."

"OK but it's embarrassing."

He sings it through once, stumbling a little, experimenting with the key.

"Play it again."

This time, when he gets to the line about Ray Charles, Roi joins in, doing an amazing bluesy-gospel riff on the words "how we suffer," as a background to his singing. Wow. Claire said Patrick had perfect pitch too.

Yossi has tears in his eyes.

"It's about Patrick, isn't it?"

"It's a poem Ginsberg wrote when his mother died. I think she had a mental illness."

"What's kaddish?" Guilt attack. His parents must be turning in their graves. His daughter is fifteen and she doesn't know what kaddish is.

"It's our prayers for the dead. The Jewish way of mourning."

"Say a bit."

He does.

"You could take that and put it in the song. Loop it. Can I add some violin?" She runs upstairs to get her violin.

They spend the next few hours tinkering, composing, singing, then stop for iced tea and fixes of biscotti. Roi records him saying kaddish and samples it. It never fails to send shivers up and down his spine. Never fails to make him miss his mother and his father, think about his grandparents. He shudders a little at the thought that recording it like this may be disrespectful. It contains the word God but, hey, it's just a word, and it's only for them.

"Why would you go on and on about the glory of God when someone has died?" she asks when he translates a bit of the kaddish for her.

"That's a very big question," Yossi says. "Religion's one of those things where you have to, *like*," he does an exaggerated parody of her generation's fondness for saying like, "*like*, be there. Do you wish we'd raised you in a religion?"

"How can I know?" Roimata says. "Sometimes I feel ripped off. As if the rest of the world's in on something."

Then she asks about Adonais and he finds she's never studied Shelley. Or Keats. Yossi can see that he is going to have to start some reading guidance at home.

"Do you believe in anything? I mean, not God, but anything?" she asks, casually, as though she is asking whether he would like a cup of tea.

"I do definitely believe in evolution. As far as morals go, I believe in the golden rule – you know, do unto others. Religion can be a force for good. It gives people comfort." Yossi is struggling. He wishes Claire were here.

"Are you glad you were brought up Jewish?"

"Absolutely. My parents weren't particularly religious, but they're lovely rituals, a great culture. Are we depriving you of that?"

She shrugs.

"It's the supernatural things your mother and I have a problem with. It's not that things aren't amazing. I can't think of anything more wonderful than evolution. It's just that, although there's a lot we don't know yet, we do believe it's all knowable. There's no great mystery, just complexity. Does that make sense?"

"It's awful to think Granddad will die. But I hardly know him."

"When my mother died I went to synagogue a lot I really wanted to believe that I would see her again."

"Is Mum grieving?"

"Of course."

"How can we help her?"

"You do help her every day. You are the best thing in her life."

"Hey, why don't we put in a break with a klezmer feel?" She picks up her violin. Kids have that amazing ability to skip from the big questions of life to what they are doing in that moment, effortlessly and with equal concentration. She's still a kid then. What can they tell her? How can they help her get through this? Life is weird.

"Yossi?"

What now?

"Why 'corsets and eyes'?"

"I'm thinking those are the two things he remembers really strongly. Corsets are about restraints, too, and looking right. She might not miss those. And eyes are about perception. Experiencing stuff. She might miss that."

"What I would miss about you," she says, smiling, "is this delicious biscotti you make. I can't believe you can still make it with one hand."

She's ok then. He'll watch her but she's ok.

Her joke is so like something Claire would have said when they were getting too deep, too cheesy.

It's Claire he needs to worry about.

26.

The next night, Claire is reading in bed, a book about child abuse. She's thinking about Che, looking for evidence to insist CYFS removes him. It's fascinating stuff. What neuroscience can tell us about the actual physical changes in the brains of neglected or abused children. Evidence that watching abuse is as harmful as suffering it. Evidence that memory imprints viscerally on brains, very early, before we can consciously remember. Love as tangible synaptic activity. Che's six already, a lot of damage may have been done.

They need to act as soon as they can.

The phone rings at 10. It's her best surgical registrar, Angel, a very serious Chinese girl. Bright as a button. Claire starts getting dressed. She knows Angel would not call her unless it was necessary.

"Triumph Wharerau. Hypotensive. Temp 40. Distended abdomen. Tachychardic. No bowel sounds."

Shit. She knew he was brewing something. He's in septic shock. Peritonitis. She throws on track pants and a sweatshirt, working the clothes around the phone.

Angel sounds well aware how sick he is and that it should have been picked up earlier.

"I'm on my way."

Jesus, this has happened fast. She'd checked on him only this afternoon. Now he is gravely ill. She drives through the hot night, visualising the little boy and going over and over her examination of him that afternoon. Nothing. She starts to think through the operation she will do. Peritoneal infection: repair, purge,

decompress, control. Aggressive debridement, as she was trained to do, is now controversial. She'll see what she finds when she gets in there. She thinks about Patch, already beaten down by life. Repair, purge, decompress, control. She will not let him die.

By the time she arrives, Triumph is in the ICU, nasal prongs helping him breathe, tubes pumping replacement fluids and blunderbuss anti-biotics. She checks his ECG monitor and oxygen sats. He's a sick little mite. She talks to the Intensivist in charge.

Patch is outside smoking while they confer. Claire goes out to talk to her, standing in the still-warm air by herself outside the back entrance. The Sky tower, lit red for the Heart Foundation appeal or some such cause, rises up above the carpark building like the machines in War of The Worlds. The hospital is deserted.

"He's really sick. I'm sorry. It's probably what we call adhesions, like scar tissue that forms and blocks things up. It's likely his bowel has stopped working and then split. Then his poo has probably leaked into his peritoneum and caused an infection. I'll need to operate. But first we have to treat him for septic shock. His body has gone into emergency mode. His blood pressure is very low, which makes his heart work faster to try to push blood around."

As she heads back to the ICU through the bright, empty ED, Patch walking beside her with her knock-kneed gait, she thinks about the bit she hasn't said. The bit that would only terrify Patch; the delicate balance of the next few hours. The intensivist's job is to get him well enough to cope, keep him alive, get him out of shock; her job, as a surgeon, to go in, intervene, get rid of the toxic bag of pus in the

little boy's body. Too early and the operation might kill him. Too late and the infection might kill him. This is a judgement call. She can feel the adrenaline pumping.

They decide he's well enough at about 5.30am. The anaesthetist is tall and in the hushed theatre, he sets the table high. Claire asks for the stool she keeps for moments like this. She'll need to stand on it to reach inside Triumph. She can do this.

"Bloody gang parents. Did you see the father? He stinks. There'll be trouble if this kid dies," says one of the nurses.

Claire says nothing. She has clashed with this one before.

"The poor wee mite," says another.

Triumph is as pale and cold as if he were dead. She sees the scars on his huge bloated belly, one angry red from her operation last week. Did she cause this?

She's in. Repair, purge, decompress, control.

Afterwards, she's bone-weary but wide awake.

The vivid powder blue ICU is stuffy, brightly lit, and noisy with beeping and alarms 24 hours a day. At least the phone is quiet at night. Each patient has one dedicated nurse and tonight a perky Australian girl, who has overdone the fake tan, is keeping Triumph alive. She's wearing scrubs decorated with blue and red teddy bears, a stethoscope covered in a giraffe soft toy slung over her shoulder.

Triumph is intubated. He's naked, sprawled on his back, pale and puffy against the busy, bright, Spongebob Squarepants sheets, his genitals bruised and

swollen, a huge bandage covering the new wound. The usual array of tubes and catheters and electrodes snake over his plump little body again. Claire can't help herself, checking each one for herself. Patch sleeps in a La-Z-Boy beside the high bed.

After covering him with a folded sheet, and giving surgical orders to the nurse, Claire heads to the waiting room. There he is, Knockers, slumped on a puke-green plastic chair, his biker boots up on another, staring at the TV where a nerdy white preacher peddles salvation. She makes him a sweet, milky, coffee in a polystyrene cup and sits down beside him. He continues to stare at the TV, no acknowledgement, and no eye contact.

She tells him what she did in the surgery, that they will need to watch Triumph for 24 hours.

"He is sick, really sick, but if we get him through tonight, we'll have much more of an idea. The doctors in there are good at dealing with any crisis he might have and he has his own nurse watching him all night."

She gives him a card with her mobile number on it. Can he even read? Does he have a phone? For the first time she hears his surprisingly light, soft voice as he asks, still without looking at her,

"Did you come here specially to operate on Triumph?"

She nods.

This frightened, tired man is feared and hated. His gang behaves like animals. What must have happened to him? But she doesn't really want to know.

She's home just long enough to change her clothes.

Yossi follows Claire her out to her car.

"Claire, your Dad. He's very ill. They're he saying mightn't recover. Could you visit him? He's right next door to Starship, in Auckland Hospital."

"No."

"Roimata and I spent time with him while you were away at Pearly Bay."

"Great. What happened to your promise Yossi?"

Patch is there as always, wearing her ancient woolly hat and the same sloppy red jersey and pilled black track pants she was wearing last night. The only clothes Claire has ever seen her in.

"His Dad was like, whoa, you came out in the middle of the night to save him," she says. "He wants to call this one in here Bowerman if it's a boy. If it's a girl, we think it might be Star, after the Starship Hospital."

Claire would much rather Patch gave up smoking while she was pregnant as a tribute to her than pass on her name, but she knows there's no point in saying so. She smiles instead and puts her arm around Patch, giving her a light squeeze. Patch jumps a little, tenses up. As Claire turns to go, Patch looks around and leaning in close to Claire, she asks,

"Triumph's father, he wants to know, you know Patrick Bowerman, the guy busted for, like, that hitchhiker girl. Was he your father?"

Claire just nods. What will notoriety mean? More respect in their strange survivalist world?

Patch swallows, her brown eyes darting all around the unit. She almost whispers,

“Knockers, he reckons some of the old guys in the gang says your Dad never did it. They say he took the rap. They looked after him in jail.”

It’s hot in the ICU and Claire is sweating and dizzy. Patch has gone already, leaning over Triumph and stroking his cheek as though she’s never spoken. Claire hurries away. She’s late for rounds.

27.

The nurses complain in the case meeting about the behaviour of Che's stepfather, the thin pale man Claire had disliked on sight.

"Is he a stepfather? Does he have any rights?" someone asks.

"Mum's only been with him for a couple of months."

She's under pressure to discharge Che. He really doesn't need to be in hospital, certainly not in a surgical bed. Her Head of Department has told her to leave it to Social Work and get him out of the ward as soon as possible.

"We need to sort where he is going to go," she says. "Do you think Heaven beats him too, or just doesn't protect him?"

"On the record, we don't know. It's very difficult to find out. Off the record, she doesn't give a toss, certainly wouldn't let concern for Che get in the way of a relationship with any man that'll look at her. "

"So the earlier beatings?"

"My guess – other boyfriends."

Claire likes this social worker, much more pragmatic than Mean Mouth.

"I want the police involved. Now. If someone doesn't call CYFS, I will." Claire says to her privately, on the way out of the room.

"I'm onto it," she says. "That man is not taking him home."

Some sanity.

At eleven o'clock Claire has a moment to feel tired after being up all night with Che's surgery. Janet, the darling, has brought her a takeaway coffee and she

sits down at her desk to drink it. It smells bitter and reviving. But Janet comes back a moment later,

“That charming man is here. But drink your coffee first.”

Claire gulps down the hot coffee. Which she almost regurgitates when she gets close to the room. She can smell his disgusting BO from the doorway.

She knows he’s high as soon as she sets eyes on him. Pacing. Up and down the length of the room, a hip jerking walk, threat in every muscle. Muttering. She can only hear that “fuck” is every second word. His sunken eyes move a lot.

Crystal meth. P, they call it here, she thinks. Not that she’s an expert, but she’s seen it in the markets and parks of London. And amongst the young parents at Great Ormond Street.

Heaven is whingeing to a nurse. He’s well enough to come home now and it’s a real trek for them to come in from Swanson, can she get some petrol money for Jayson because he has to keep on bringing her in to the hospital?

Claire tries to see how Che is reacting but he’s just listening, his head down, his face unreadable. She stays out of it at first, stopping at Triumph in the bed opposite and looking at his charts, listening, observing.

The nurse jumps and drops the chart she is writing on with a clatter when Jayson interrupts Heaven and yells at the room.

“We’re fuckin’ taking him home. You can’t fuckin’ keep him here. He’s her kid.”

Patch and Knockers have both been sitting beside Triumph’s bed, looking

down. Trying not to be noticed. Now Patch walks slowly over and sits beside Che, who's playing with his game again. She puts one hand on his arm and her other on his head, leaning awkwardly to put herself between the boy and the man.

Claire takes control.

"Hello." She holds her hand out to the man, who doesn't take it.

"I'm Claire Bowerman, one of the doctors here. I met you the other day. Is there a problem?"

"Aren't you the fuckin' doctor that accused us? Yes there's a fuckin problem. You cunts won't let us take the kid home. Yes I have a fuckin' problem with that."

"Sir .. would you please come with me and talk about this in my office. It's not appropriate in this room. There are sick children here. And watch your language please."

"Yeah, sure , so you can steal the fuckin' boy while you fuckin' have me out of here. I'm not fuckin' stupid."

"Have you notified Security? And Social Work?" Claire asks the nurse.

"Yes, they're on their way."

"Sir, you have to calm down and come and talk with me."

"Sure, I'll fuckin' calm down. Ok."

He grabs the trolley at the end of Che's bed and upturns it, smashing it down onto the floor. The nurse lets out a little scream as the crash makes them all wince.

"Sir, stop it immediately. Security are on their way."

He moves towards her. Claire stares at him, standing her ground, not scared at all. She is calm and strong. Men like this are cowards. At the last minute he veers

away from her and grabs Patch by the arm.

“Leave my fuckin’ boy alone,” pulling her away from Che.

Claire goes to grab his arm but someone pushes past her. Knockers has both Jayson’s arms pinned.

“Mate, that’s my missus.”

“Mate. Sorry mate. The doctors should mind their own fuckin’ business.

These pricks are trying to steal my kid.”

He’s whining now. Knockers marches him out the door and into the arms of the Security Guard who’s just coming through the ward doors.

As he leaves, Jayson’s shouting,

“You fucking cunt of a doctor. Got the mob to protect you. I’ll fucking sort you out you blonde cunt, when they’re not around.”

Knockers comes back in and sits down by Triumph, without a word.

Claire comforts Che, Patch cuddles Triumph.

“It’s ok kids,” Claire says. “He’s just - ”

What the hell to say?

“You’re safe now. The man will calm him down. He’s angry with me but it’s not your fault.”

Both kids continue playing their games, as though nothing has happened. That’s a worry. Both used to this sort of thing. Seems normal to them. She’d rather see them screaming and crying, know that they knew this wasn’t the normal stuff of the world. To be calm like this, decidedly worrying.

“Thanks,” she says to Knockers.

He shrugs.

As her heightened senses return to normal, her hands tingle. She remembers that there's a mother waiting to hear how her daughter's surgery went this morning.

"Whoops, I have to go. Thanks again, guys," she says to Patch and Knockers and gets up to go. Knockers follows her out to the corridor and out of the children's earshot,

"Doctor," he says in his strange high voice, looking down at her feet, "he gives that kid the bash, eh?"

Claire shrugs. She can't say anything.

"You tell me or my missus if he gives you any more trouble."

She doesn't say anything. Knockers smells too. She's been told this gang piss on their jackets. As he walks away the vicious drooling bulldog seems alive as he moves. Certainly one way to tell the world to keep away. Would be nice to have one sometimes.

She turns her mind to the mother she has to talk to. The child will be fine but it's going to be a long recovery. And this mum is very over-emotional. She'll have to be very careful in her choice of words.

On the way down in the lift her phone rings. It's Yossi. The reception's not good. It's hard to hear him. Some words cut out.

"Claire, someone just rang from Intensive Care. They're putting your Dad in a ward, but he's still really sick. Roi and I will come up after school."

“Isn’t there someone else to take care of him?” asks Claire. “Does he have any friends, social workers, do-gooders?”

“Claire. You should see him.”

“I don’t want to see him.”

She hangs up. Does she want to see him? She goes back over things. The last time she saw him. Drunk and asking for money. The phone-calls when her mother died. The promises, the apologies. What would it be like to see him? She’d rather not. God, why have they come back. Roimata. Poor Roimata. How can she explain?

28.

Yossi and Roimata are not home when Claire gets there that night. He texts to let her know they are at the hospital sitting with Patrick. When they're still not home at ten, she goes to bed. When she leaves the next morning, early, they are both asleep in their beds. She has no memory of hearing them come in. There's a note on the bench from Yossi saying,

"Patrick is a little better. Do you think we should still go to Waiheke tonight? Rachel has offered to spend some time with Patrick."

Claire writes on the note.

"Yes, See you down at the ferry. I'll catch the 5 unless I hear otherwise."

She's forgotten how tropical Auckland can feel. Her clothes crackle in the uneasy stillness. People in the hospital grounds hide, in the shadows, from the limpid light.

She crosses the ward to pull the curtains because the glare is too harsh for the eyes of her sick patients. The city and the harbour stretch out before her, the Fullers ferry gliding across glassy water, swiftly passing a huge container ship. There are few small craft around today, forecasters warning of a cyclone heading their way. Fiji has been devastated by the storm overnight.

The islands in the inner harbour look close and detailed. She can see trees on some of the closer islands. On a day like this you can see Waiheke as a blue shape in the distance. For the first time since they got back to New Zealand, she's not looking forward to their weekend there. She shuts out the harbour and the

brightness with the faded curtains that are covered in smiley faces.

She's only got the one case today. It could be a long one. She stretches her neck and shoulders on her way out of the room. This girl is medically fragile. They all wonder whether they shouldn't just be leaving her to die in peace. Whose call is it? Her parents have consented, they've all agreed to go ahead. She hates the thought of it, but she'll definitely die without it so it's worth a chance.

It's good to get into the windowless theatre, away from the hot stillness outside, away from patients and patient's families. She pauses for a moment and checks everyone is ready. The tiny, vulnerable body is pale on the table, masked, intubated, unconscious. Lines and tape jostle for space on the scrawny bird-like chest. She cuts open the wee girl and identifies the tumour quickly. Then the beeps start.

"Right, hold on for a minute, please," says the anaesthetist, taking over and giving orders.

Claire stands right back, holding her sterile hands in front of her. She motions to a nurse to turn off the Radiohead that's been blaring. There's a bit of a fuss, lots of beeping, CPR and then, the giving up. The anaesthetist pronounces her dead, then asks them to leave everything as it is because it will be a coroner's case.

Sam, who'd had asked her to remove the tumour, comes rushing in just as they all turn away and take off their gloves.

"What - ?"

"Gone."

"Ok."

They'd all known this was on the cards; this child had been through so much.

"Shall I come with you to tell the parents?" she asks Sam. "It's better to have someone who was actually in here and I will want talk to them anyway."

"That would be great."

Claire takes his arm and guides him through the door as he says. "They're at the PICU. In different rooms."

Oh Jesus, she'd forgotten, this is the difficult divorce case the team had discussed at length at their weekly meeting. It's World War Three. Both Mum and Dad had applied to police to have the other banned from the hospital. Neither succeeded. Great.

As they walk into the PICU Claire glances into the nurses' tea-room where Mum is sitting holding the necklace of beads that nurses give child cancer patients, one bead for each procedure. Claire walks past and beckons the Charge Nurse, tells her to fetch Dad into the tea-room immediately.

"Do you want to break the news?," she asks Sam.

"I could go to Dad, you Mum? They're bloody toxic together."

"No. We've got to tell them both together."

They wait outside the tearoom, out of Mum's sight, until the nurse brings Dad, hand firmly on his arm. They walk in with him.

Claire has one last glance at the notes in her hand, memorising the names.

"David, Annette, I am sorry to tell you that Sophie died in the operation." She pauses as Mum cries out and sinks down onto the couch. Dad turns and leans on

the wall.

“Her heart gave up. We tried everything we could to get it going again but it wouldn’t. She was anaesthetised at the time and wouldn’t have felt any pain.”

She pauses and they are both silent.

“Now, I’m going to leave you with Sam. I know you are shocked right now but if you have any questions later, I’m here in the hospital for the rest of the day so ask Anna to get me. I am so sorry. Sophie was a beautiful little girl.”

With that, Claire leaves. But she hears the arguing and the blaming start up behind her. Poor Sam.

She jumps into the tiled shower and puts shampoo into her hair, the citrus fragrance astringent and cleansing. She turns the hot tap until the water is scalding hot. She leans her head right back, water streaming down her face. Separating out hanks of hair with her fingers she rinses out the shampoo, pulling on her hair so hard she almost tugs it out of her scalp. The harder she tugs, the better it feels.

The rest of the team is heading to Newmarket for a rare Friday drink, needing to debrief after Sophie’s death and the horrible family tension around it. Claire can’t face it. She needs to hold herself together, not lose the numbness. She’s desperate to see Roimata, hold her, comfort her.

She makes the five o’clock ferry. People are filing off the boat. Yossi and Roi are already in the queue waiting to board, holding bags of food.

“Yay – you made it,” says Roi. “Mum, are you sure we should go? Grandad - ”

“We should go.”

Yossi looks the other way.

The breeze has been getting up and now it starts to rain. Big heavy drops hosing on the wharf and drenching them, even though the sun is still shining. People squeal and the queue surges forward and loses some of its order as people jog up the gangplank.

They always grab one of the tables at the edge of the ferry with bench seats but as Claire plonks herself down in one, Yossi sits down in one of the centre seats instead. He takes out his book immediately. Could he be sulking? She has never known him sulk. It's not his style. Roi stands beside the table where Claire has settled, looking between Claire and Yossi, unsure where to sit. Claire gets up and grabs her bag and they head over to sit beside Yossi.

They keep wet weather gear in their boatshed at Matiatia and they suit up for the trip in the tinny around the headland to Pearly Bay. The wind is angry now; it whips their hair into their faces and makes the rain sting their hands.

When they get there, Yossi dumps gear then heads straight back down to the boat, tying things down maybe: she doesn't know what he is doing.

She looks in the freezer, hasn't had a moment to think about what they'll eat for dinner, but she's hungry now. Sees frozen oven chips and a packet of frozen crumbed John Dory. Kept for emergencies. It's not gourmet but she's shattered and she knows Roimata loves oven chips. She pours them both into dishes and puts them in the oven, knowing she should heat the oven first if she wants them crisp but unable to find the energy to care.

The wind is frantic now and she sees a deck chair cartwheel across the deck.

She races outside and rescues all four deckchairs, folding them and putting them into the shed, having to wrestle the door closed against the bullying gusts. Yossi doesn't come to help.

Only then she remembers the bags of shopping Yossi and Roi had put on the bench. Whoops, a package of fresh fish in white paper. She tears at the paper. Fresh snapper. His favourite. Bugger, Yossi must have intended that for dinner. Whoops.

Slender green asparagus, golden kumara, and long delicate broccolini. He obviously had it all planned. Should she throw away what she has done and start on the nice meal? Bugger it, she'll have more energy tomorrow night, will cook him a delicious meal then.

When Yossi comes in she hands him a wine, they clink glasses "cheers" from habit, then sink into the armchairs facing the boiling bay.

"Well I'm glad this week is over," says Claire.

Yossi just raises his eyebrows, still staring outside at the sea.

Roi is listening to music in her room and she turns it up louder as the wind screams around the house.

"What's that rubbish?" Claire asks, trying to sound light-hearted.

"Florence and the Machine. I've been listening to it too. I quite like it."

The smell of the dinner is getting stronger and Claire can see Yossi is puzzled.

"What's that you're cooking?"

"I'm sorry. I stuffed up. I'm tired, so I just shoved in oven chips and frozen

John Dory before I unpacked your shopping and realised you'd bought snapper."

"I would have cooked. I told you I'd bought it."

"No you didn't."

"I did actually. You were totally distracted. "

"Well I have no memory of that. Perhaps you should have made sure I heard you."

Roi's music glissandos and dies. The oven makes a strange peep.

"My iPod dock's stopped working," calls out Roi.

"Shit, it might be a power cut," says Claire. She tries a light switch. Nothing.

Roi comes out to them.

Claire goes to the cupboard and gathers candles, matches, and piles them onto the table before it gets dark. Two torches, the first aid kit, chocolate. She puts it all on the table, just as her father used to do. What else? Her Dad used to always have a transistor radio. Nothing like that now.

"What about dinner?"

"It might come back on in a minute. It will keep cooking for a while yet, while the oven's hot. It should almost be ready."

They sit down in front of the big window again watching the dusk merge with clouds until all they can see is churning water with luminous whitecaps. The storm is noisy now, then they can see nothing as rain hoses at the windows under pressure, wind keening.

This power cut could be a long one. She remembers a few here when she

was little. Her father would make it into an adventure for her; tell stories because they couldn't read. At the back of a drawer as the last light is fading she finds an old box of taper candles. Her father has written on the packet in his old-fashioned block letters, "NB there is an emergency kit with gas lamp in high cupboard in laundry." She goes to show Yossi but he has gone into Roi's room. She follows him in there and finds him fiddling with his iPad. "We should just go back, Claire. Roi and I would rather visit Patrick and it's terrible weather. Oh no. The ferries are cancelled."

"I thought they might be."

She grabs a torch and a coat and goes out into the storm. The wind is fierce, pushing her back. The rain hurts her face and she directs her torch down at her feet as she picks her way down the wooden stairs, slick with water, to the basement. She can hear the sea boiling and raging. In the back of the ghostly laundry, she finds a cardboard box labeled EMERGENCY in the same bold hand. However, this is not what makes her heart ache. It's the little box of Meccano tucked in there. He must have put that there for her in case they had a long night and she needed distraction. Not a doll or a teddy bear. Maybe it's down to him that she's not girly. A gasp escapes her, but no tears. Dad, she thinks. He's dying.

She shares out the rubbery chips and the fish she expects to be tasteless.

"Dinner's ready!" she calls and the two of them come out. They're laughing and she feels a stab of jealousy.

Eating by candlelight in front of the huge windows they are floating above

the roiling sea. The lights of the city have disappeared and there are no boats in the bay . Raindrops slap on the windows and stream down diagonally.

“Brent said it always rains when a Maori dies.” says Roimata.

A Maori dies every day. When it is a sunny day for a funeral they probably say God is welcoming the person into heaven or something.

“He said Maori believe that when people die their spirits journey up to the top of New Zealand where they leap off into the other world.”

“It’s a lovely myth,” says Claire.

Yossi frowns.

“Did you get to come here much when you were little?”

“Only a few times, with my Dad. Mum hated it here. She felt scared. It was too dark and too isolated.”

“How much did you get to see of your Dad?”

“Not a lot.”

“Did you visit him when he was in jail?”

“I did, yeah.” Claire gets up, starts packing up the plates. Bright lightning flashes. A couple of seconds later, thunder grumbles. The rain is even heavier; she can’t hear herself think. She moves over to the kitchen, starts packing the dishwasher.

“What was that like?” asks Roimata. “I’ve never been to a prison.”

“We better eat some ice-cream, in case the freezer defrosts.” Claire busies herself in the kitchen.

"You should talk to her about it. Answer her questions." Yossi says.

"She's so young. I don't want her to think about such things."

"It's ok," Roimata says.

There's no music while they clean up, this silence unusual for their household. When it's all done is the time when they would all read. It's hard to read by candlelight and they need to save the torches.

"We should all sit out here together," says Roi. "Let's tell stories." She gathers the three chairs close together and puts a bunch of lit candles on a little side table. This area of the bach glows and flickers, separating itself off in the soft candle light like a confessional.

Claire hates the thought of sitting there with Yossi, but she's done the dishes and has no excuse. Her laptop will work, perhaps she could write up some notes. But she knows she needs to spend time with Roi. So, without glancing at Yossi she sinks into one of the chairs and curls her legs up under herself. She leans over and hugs her daughter.

"Much homework?"

"Yeah."

"How's the practice? Can you do that passage in the Mozart yet?"

"Yep, nailed it. Mum, can you tell me about Granddad? You said I could ask any questions. He was pardoned, right? What happened to him then?"

"He came home to live with us. For a little while. But they argued. My Mum believed he was guilty, so they split up."

“What was it like when he got arrested?”

“Hey, who wants to play cards?”

“Claire, you should talk to her about it. We should answer her questions.”

“Ok. It was bloody awful.”

“We could play 500, what’s that three-handed version?” says Roi.

“No. We should talk,” says Yossi. “Why do you feel such anger at your father?

Do you think he is guilty? Roi and I need to hear. You need to talk about it.”

“How will talking about it help? I went away and got on with my life. I don’t like to think about it or talk about it. I am sorry Roi, but I have moved on. “

“It’s just – well, your father is not a demon. He’s a sick old man. We met him. Unless you can tell Roi and I well, explain what it is he did, it will seem to us that you are cold-hearted, willing to let a man die alone, and be buried alone. No man deserves that, surely.”

“How dare you judge me? You are taking his side over mine, when you know nothing.”

Roi gets up and goes to her own room, carrying a candle and a torch. She shuts the door. But she will still hear whatever they say. The small bach is the worst place Claire can think of to have a fight.

“I told you not to bring him back into our lives. We were fine. I can’t believe you would talk to me like that, and in front of Roimata. She will still hear everything we say.” Claire is whispering. She takes a torch and goes to bed. In spite of the weight in her heart, it’s actually nice in bed, snuggled up with the storm raging around her. When Yossi comes to bed, he reaches for her, pulling her close.

“Claire, I’m so sorry. I was harsh. I just don’t want you to regret not seeing your father. Once he’s dead, it is too late.”

“Actually, I did go and see him. When we first got back. He wanted money. He asked about Mum’s will.”

“He is poor.”

“For fuck’s sake.”

“Why didn’t you tell me?”

“I shouldn’t have to. It is my business.”

“So we don’t have to tell each other everything?”

“No, I guess we don’t.”

She pulls away from him.

“Yossi. We want different things. You don’t accept the way I am. You just want to dig up the past and I can’t go there. It’s hard enough for Roi to watch this family fall apart. I won’t put her through any more.”

“Claire, you are letting your family win.”

They are silent for a time. Claire stops herself crying. She bites on the inside of her cheek until it hurts.

“How did your mother die, Claire?”

What part of not talk about it did he not understand?

“She killed herself. Just before I came to London.”

“Oh, my darling. I am so sorry. But don’t let your pain about that get in the way of seeing your father.”

“You know nothing about my father.”

“Because you won’t tell me.”

“You promised you wouldn’t make me go there. It was the only thing I asked when I agreed to come here from London.”

Claire hardly sleeps. The storm rages, the rain hisses, every door and window seems to rattle in the wind. She thinks about whether she will tell Yossi, but she has never told anybody.

When Claire had achieved her internship at Great Ormond Street, the first person she had told was her mother.

“I’ll be all alone.”

“It’s the best children’s hospital in the world.”

“I’ll just have to kill myself then.”

Claire had heard it all before so many times. She never trusted anything her mother said. But , just in case, she said to her mother,

“Mum, promise me you won’t hurt yourself.”

“Everyone would be better off without me.”

“We’ll think of something. Perhaps you can come and live in London with me. Just promise me you won’t hurt yourself.”

“Off you go. I’ll be alright.”

Rita killed herself a week before the date on Claire’s ticket out, in glorious theatrical fashion, drinking a bottle of Remy Martin neat and taking a box of aspirin. She meant it, then, not like the other times. Claire couldn’t get an answer to her phone calls, drove around late at night, and found her. She called the police,

cleaned up, identified the body at the morgue. She only cried twice, first when the Police handed her a brown paper bag with the clothes in it her mother had been wearing. Then, when she had to iron some clothes for the funeral director to dress the body in. She ironed the blue linen dress her mother had loved. She ironed it carefully, weeping.

She organised a funeral. Her father didn't come. He was drunk every day anyway. He slurred his words as he spoke too loudly to Claire about his regrets. He had failed Rita. How guilty he felt.

Claire hadn't known what she'd felt. Numb. Short of breath. Fragile. As she'd flown out of New Zealand, a sense that she could at last start living her life.

No one needs to know that her mother had warned her. It's not her fault. No one would understand that, though.

She gets up while it's still dark, creeps out into the living room and sits on the window-seat. The rain is so heavy that she still can't see the bay, but it is calming. She watches individual raindrops land and drip, the wind blowing them sideways. On the other hand, if she'd told Yossi from the beginning, perhaps he wouldn't have pushed so hard to come back, and they wouldn't be in this mess. Too late now. Put it behind you. Move on. Deal with what you have here. Deal with it.

And for Roi's sake, at the moment, that means visiting Patrick.

29.

Once she's decided, Claire likes to get things done.

So Sunday evening, on the way home from the ferry, they stop at the hospital. After the others get out of the car, she sits for a minute, puts on some lipstick, looking in the rear vision mirror. Her hair's a mess. She realizes she has done her usual and rushed around all day without looking in a mirror. She scrabbles about in her car and finds a grubby comb. Runs it through and then pushes her hair all up into a clip at the back again. She's not going to find this so hard. She's sick of them, Yossi, Roi, Debs and Debs' parents, even Sam and Janet, thinking that she doesn't want to see her father because of some suppurating wound that needs cleaning out. The opposite is true. She's staunched it.

Claire is not at all sure about this trend of her generation for facing up to things. She likes to put things behind her. It's sad to feel so little, sure. But in the end an absence of feeling doesn't hurt.

There's a noise right beside her. Her car door opens and Yossi leans into the car. He kisses her cheek. He smells salty and sweaty still, from their weekend at Waiheke.

Yossi is very concerned for her but he's playing it low-key. His matter-of-factness is reassuring. This is what they do for each other. It's one of the things they have shared. Calm in the face of crisis. Not dramatic. Matter of fact. When she climbs out of the car, he takes her hand and starts to move off towards the main building. She stops him, looks at his face, reaches up and ruffles his hair. She'll miss him if she goes back to London. But she knew she shouldn't have trusted him and

come here

“Yoss, I - ”

“I know. We need to talk. Let’s just do this first.”

His slightly larger than usual footsteps seemed to guide her down the corridor in a ‘let’s just do it’ way. A ‘no more mucking around kind’ of way. ‘The world won’t end, you’ve done worse things in your life,’ his arm on her arms seems to be saying, though Yossi himself says nothing.

Roimata’s gone ahead. She’s already settled in a big leather armchair holding the hand of the man in the bed.

“Granddad,” she speaks a bit louder than usual. “Look, it’s my Mum. It’s your daughter Claire. Come to see you.”

Claire looks along the shrunken arm at the face. It’s yellow and strained and old but it is her father. The self-pitying mouth is the same. He stirs just a little, maybe, though his eyes stay closed.

With Yossi and Roimata expecting her to do something, she steps forward and puts a hand on the blankets lightly, about where his chest would be.

“Hi Dad, I’m here now. You don’t look too well.”

Just then a nurse comes in carrying a tray of equipment. Roimata lets go of Pat’s hand and gets out of the way. She stands behind Claire, nuzzling in to her gently. It feels great.

“Wendy,” she says to the nurse, “This is my mum, Claire, Patrick’s daughter.”

Wendy beckons them out to the corridor and says,

"I think it's happening now. As you know, we are not going to make any attempts to save him or prolong his life so I suggest you sit with him if you want to. I can get a doctor in for him if you like but I know they are not going to do anything so they will just confirm."

Roimata sobs and Yossi grabs her and holds her.

"Let him go. That's absolutely what he would have wanted." Claire says, detaching her hand from the cloying grip of the nurse.

"There's staff here all night so just press the bell if you need anything. There's tea and coffee just down there. Help yourselves."

Claire gets up to get herself a cup of tea. All she can think about is Roimata, that Roimata is sobbing and that she doesn't know how to comfort her. It's so difficult, this thing with children. How much to tell the truth, be honest about the harshness of the world, the difficulty in seeing pattern or meaning, the vast bloody random unfairness of it all. Or how much to try to soften the blow, let them learn gradually; hope they'll escape without facing the difficult things. Or at least, hope that when they do have to face them, they'll have the maturity, the understanding, to cope with things when it's appropriate, not now.

Roimata wants her to feel something. She knows that.

Back in Patrick's room, Claire gets close to the bed for the first time. Her practised eye can recognize near-death when she sees it. The look in the eye, the breathing. It will be a huge relief, not to have this man alive. And yet. Yet she does feel pain, memories.

Roi's sobbing and Yossi's calm practical noises infuriate her. She knows

what she wants from this man now. What she always wants, what she values. The truth. It's her last chance, she realizes.

Claire shakes her father's arm, disregarding the drip. "Dad. Dad. Now is the time you can clear your conscience. You can put me out of my misery. Did you do it?"

Patrick is agitated now, screwing up his face like a child, crying, and plucking at his IV.

"Dad? Did you kill Kathryn Phillips?"

Yossi has both Claire's arms now and is holding her back, stopping her from shaking her father. Roimata's crying has got much louder but Claire is only vaguely aware of them in the room. She wants to know.

"Claire, stop it. Stop it now. He is an old sick man. Stop it."

"Mum, don't. Stop it."

A nurse comes in. Claire shakes Yossi's arms off hers and leaves.

Claire doesn't want to go home. She doesn't want to leave Roimata at the hospital either. She drives down the road a bit and pulls over. Checks her doors are locked and then thinks a minute.

If only they hadn't contacted her father like she'd asked them then none of this would be happening. Now she's faced with all these choices. It's Roi, the sticking point. She wants nothing to do with her father, doesn't want to see him die, doesn't want to see him dead, doesn't want to mark his death in any way. But Roi is back there, with a dying old man she hardly knows and a mother who must seem so hard and unforgiving. Claire tries to think whether she can go back, pick up

Roimata and take her home. Really, even Yossi should not be there. Patrick is nothing to them. Why are they there? But can you abandon a dying man in front of a 15-year-old girl and expect her to understand?

She texts Roimata. "I will come and pick you up any time you are ready."

Then she drives back to the hospital, to Starship this time. It's late and the low-lit wards are hushed except for the bright, busy chatter of the nurses. She hates the way they do that when people are trying to sleep. She knows it's their job and they're in there for eight or twelve hours and they have to be up and they have things to do but they should understand people are sick and trying to sleep. She has made herself very unpopular by hushing them at times. It used to be that nurses had to teach medical students to be human but Claire feels the balance has shifted now.

These young women seem so self-assured, so ambitious. It's not that she wants respect purely by virtue of hierarchy but she wishes they would show respect to the patients and to her at times, when she feels she deserves it. It occurs to her how old she is getting. This word, respect, is something older people care about. This disdain she feels for the young, the ambitious, and the self-centred. Every generation thinks this of the following generation. How old and grumpy she has become.

She heads to the surgical ward. She wants to check on some children she hasn't seen since Thursday when she left. That seems a long time ago. She has more surgery scheduled tomorrow and she likes to talk to parents before their children come through. Her registrars have been dealing with things but she will just see

whether some of the patients are in and a parent sleeping beside them.

She logs on to the ward computer and looks through her list for tomorrow. She asks the Charge Nurse what has happened about Che MacKenzie's care, since she missed the meeting on Friday where they would have discussed his case. The Charge Nurse is a bit unsure.

"He's been on his own in there since I've been on. The contact number is a social worker."

When she has checked on all her other patients, Claire goes in. Patch is there beside Triumph, they are both asleep. Che is lying in bed watching *The Simpsons*. He's in a singlet and boxers, his little body, still bruised in places, is solid and his cheeks are chubby. He has white patches on his cheek from eczema. She notices his teeth are terrible and makes a note to get a dentist to check him before he leaves the hospital. She'll check his ears too, he probably has glue ear, because she thought he wasn't hearing all that well. She wants to know whether he has been immunised, too, especially against meningitis. She never saw meningitis in Britain. It would have sent them into lockdown. New Zealand is a wealthy country, but they're seeing diseases of poverty. Tuberculosis. Bronchiolitis.

It's hot in his room and he has a crumpled cream sheet half over him, his feet sticking out. Claire pulls the curtains around Che. He doesn't seem to care about the TV.

He's not sad, but he's dissociated. He's too passive, doesn't say a word. She looks for a bag. When asked, he draws out an old plastic New World bag he's clutching under the sheet. In it are a singlet and some spare undies. The bear the

hospital give out. A toothbrush set they also give out – a useless disposable one like the sort you get on an aircraft. It looks old as though he has been using it for some time. This bag will contain all he owns.

Claire stays with him. She goes and gets some playing cards from her office and teaches him to play Last Card. She stays a while after he falls asleep and looks at him. He looks angelic. If he'd died from these injuries, like the baby twins beaten to death last year, the country would be in an uproar. The only photo of the twins, out of focus, taken by God knows whom, has become a symbol of innocence and of the depravity of the family they were born into.

But if he continues to escape and grows up damaged, like Patch and Knockers, he will become the target of hatred.

The Surgical Registrar comes in and asks her if she minds giving him some advice. He wants to know whether it's worth disturbing his Consultant or not. It's an appendix that one of her colleagues is meant to take out tomorrow. It's burst. She calls her colleague and offers to do the surgery, an offer gratefully accepted.

And so, at the moment her father dies, she is doing what she loves, saving a young life. She could remove an appendix in her sleep. But she has no idea what to do about Che. And she's definitely heading back to London.

30.

In all their years together Yossi has only ever adored her. It'd been hard to get used to at first – this unconditional love. He'd just sort of signed up, somehow, early on, to love her, to be on her side, to be loyal. She'd never quite believed it would last. It was a bit like having a puppy dog. But she had come to love him so much and respect him so much, that she'd learned to appreciate him being on her side and to love his low-conflict, easygoing way of being. She'd teased him. This is Yossi's emotional life, she had joked with friends, 'Claire - my girlfriend! Me, her boyfriend! That way it is!'

When he comes home to the town house from the hospital in the middle of the night, his disappointment is palpable. She can taste it. He has never ever been like this with her. He doesn't look at her. He's very quiet. She's been getting her lunch ready for tomorrow, putting tuna and crackers in a bag.

"How is he?" she asks

"He's dead." He puts some toast in the toaster. His cruelty stings, though the news has little effect.

"Where's Roimata?"

"I've sent her straight up to bed. She's exhausted. I told her you might come up to see her."

He looks, well, Claire could swear he looks disgusted. She has never seen him look that way.

Claire drags herself up the clean modern wooden staircase. She knows she has to. But Roi is already fast asleep, under the duvet in her clothes. Claire climbs in

with her, holds her. Roi just groans and moves over, goes straight back to sleep.

"I love you my darling. I love you round the world and back a million times."

Roimata still doesn't stir when she gets out of bed the next morning.

She has a morning list and she's glad to get in to theatre. It's routine stuff.

Excising a poisonous appendix, repairing an intersusception.

She has not thought about the fact the nurses have 1420 The Edge playing in theatre. When the news of Patrick's death is announced in an upbeat, attention-grabbing way, (*"Coming up in the news, major suspect in historical blonde hitch-hiker disappearance dies"*) she asks a nurse to turn the radio off as she doesn't want to hear it on the hour every hour. The nurse changes it to talkback briefly. Some hate-filled woman is saying how pleased she is that the monster Patrick Bowerman has died. Flushed with confusion the nurse turns it off altogether, as she was asked.

After surgery, there is a message from Debs. She calls,

"Oh, Claire. I heard about your Dad."

"Yeah."

"Mum and Dad send their best wishes to you. We'd all like to come to the funeral."

"I don't know if there will even be a funeral."

"Claire, would you like me to come to the hospital and have a cup of tea or something? When school's finished, soon after three?"

"No, it's fine. I'm busy."

"Are you sure you should be working?"

“Of course, I’m fine.”

“After work, then. A drink? Is there anything I can do for you?”

“No, honestly. I’m fine.”

What on earth is she going to do? Her first thought is to go to Waiheke again but, she went there on her own in a huff last weekend, can’t do it again. And she wants to take Roimata. She is the priority now. But Roimata is unlikely to agree to just leave it all behind. How on earth does one explain all this to Roimata? How is it going to look to her?

If only they had stayed in London, someone would have officially notified her, she supposes, and they could have done something dignified from a distance – thrown a bunch of lilies into the Thames or something – and then a glass of expensive red wine. Listened to Beethoven’s Ninth, her father’s favourite. Next day, forgotten. But here, especially now that they have gone behind her back and met bloody Patrick, it’s going to get very messy.

At four o’clock she checks her phone. Still no call from Yossi. She’ll go home. She needs to talk to Roimata. Hopefully Roimata has been sleeping all day.

But the house is empty when she gets there. No note. She calls Yossi but his phone goes straight to answer phone. She calls Roimata, who answers.

“We’re at the hospital, talking to the social worker.”

“Ok. Why?”

“She just wants to know about a funeral and everything. Yossi thought we should come and see Patrick’s body again but it’s at the Coroner’s Court. And we

brought cakes and things to thank the nurses.”

“Ok, are you coming back home after that?”

“I think so. Shall I put Yossi on?”

“No, it’s ok. See you soon.”

When they get home, Claire feeds them the lasagne she has made. Rachel is with them, her arm around Roimata. She is clearly horrified that the body has been left alone, but going along with this Pakeha weirdness. She asks Claire when she is going to go and sit with her father.

“I’m not.”

All Claire cares about is Roimata, at this point. If Yossi wants to be angry with her and have some sort of drama over this, that’s his lookout. But she hates to think about Roimata trying to make sense of all this when she herself can’t.

While Rachel is still there, Debs calls in to check on her too. She doesn’t want to be rude. They open a bottle of wine and then another. Everyone keeps on looking at her and making conversational openings for her to talk about her feelings. She wishes they would go away. She imagines a bath, a detective novel and her glass of wine. Detective Griffiths rings to offer his sympathy. Her CEO from work rings. Bloody hell, they all expect something of her, expect her to feel something. The only thing she feels is worry about Roimata and Yossi. She remains polite, friendly, and distant. All this is happening to someone else.

She finally gets to talk to Roimata at about nine. After insisting Roimata go to bed early since she was up so late the night before, she excuses herself and, with

a heavy heart, goes upstairs and sits down on Roi's bed.

"Roi, how you doing?"

"I'm ok. I didn't really know him, you know."

"I know. It's all so weird, darling. I wish it could be different. It's all so complicated. I am so sorry. I want you and me and Yossi to be a family."

"I am sorry we hurt you. But I am glad I got to meet him before he died."

Claire just shrugs. "And he would have loved meeting you."

"But then I worry, if I hadn't met him in that café, he might not have been on Great North Road and those boys wouldn't have seen him and he wouldn't be dead."

"Those boys recognized him from the TV. The police said they had probably been looking out for him, knowing he was often around there. It just happened to be the day you met him."

"How can anyone hit an old man like that?"

"You know what I think. You get the brain you need to deal with the environment you find yourself in."

This is something she's discussed often with Yossi and Roi. For some of the kids she treats, to deal with their environment best means to be vicious, sly, self-centred, and violently angry, under siege, incapable of loyalty, incapable of calculating consequences. They are really good at 'reading' people, choosing victims and finding alcohol and drugs. That's what their brain focuses on developing, not sitting still and studying.

But it all sounds a bit lame when it's someone you know that they have

belted.

Where was she supposed to start? The wrongness of it all, the violence, the difficulty. Was it better for Roimata if she pretended to grieve, acted normal, and arranged a funeral? She would do it, if she thought it would help. Wouldn't she? But how can hypocrisy and lies and secrets ever help? Children see through these things. She sees it every day.

"Roi, the whole situation is awful. Awful that those boys could hit an old man. Awful that we still don't know so much.. I just don't know how to explain what I feel to you. But I will always be truthful to you."

"Did he hurt you when you were little?"

"What do you mean? Hit me? Abuse me? No."

"Do you think he killed that girl?"

"I honestly don't know."

"But what do you think?"

"I honestly don't know."

He tries again, obviously wanting to give her a chance.

"Claire, I am so sorry about your Dad."

"Honestly, I am ok. It's everyone being so kind to me that's hard. I feel like a fake, a drama queen. I wish we could just carry on as though nothing has happened. Everyone expects me to feel something I don't."

"We need to have a funeral. Can you stay home tomorrow? See the funeral director."

"I don't want to take any responsibility for this. I had cut my father off. That hasn't changed. I want to go to work tomorrow as though nothing has happened."

"Someone has to arrange something."

"I am sure there are processes in place. There must be social workers. There will be a Public Trust office or something, when people who are alone like this die?"

"Claire, you can't be serious. I cannot believe you are like this. This is your father. We can get him buried as soon as possible. But we must do something."

The next night Yossi feeds her cos lettuce with grilled chicken and pomegranate seeds, which she eats without speaking, without really tasting it either. She sips her wine obediently. No doubt perfectly matched. Does he have to be so kind to her? She tries to smile at him, realising that he has put a lot of trouble into the meal. He pours her a dessert wine, takes her by the hand with his one good hand, and leads her to the leather couch, after putting the tiny glass in her hand.

Her stomach lurches at the thought, but he's hovering, so she takes a sip and the suffusing warmth and sweetness of it relax her, too much. Her head spins. She'll go straight to bed in a minute. Sleep in the spare bedroom. By herself. Yossi always keeps crisp, Egyptian cotton sheets on the bed, ready for a guest. All she wants to do is wash her hair and sink into those sheets.

"Claire, I know you are tired. But we need a decision about Patrick's funeral."

"Yossi, not now."

"I know. I know. But we have to do something. Tomorrow."

"No funeral. Easy. Done."

"Claire. The man deserves something. He was your father. What will it say to Roimata?"

Claire says nothing. It will say, your mother comes from a fucked family. Which is the truth. If they were going to try to soften that blow, they should have stayed in London. A funeral won't change anything.

"Claire, I think you will regret this."

Claire heaves herself up. She drains the rest of the glass.

"There must be people that don't have funerals. Whatever they do. I'll pay the money. I'll ring them if you don't want to"

"Claire, your mother - "

She gathers up the shoes she's kicked off, pours herself a glass of water to take up to bed. Not now Yossi. All she can think of is those sheets.

"Claire, if you found out for sure he was innocent - "

"I'm going to bed. Good night."

"Claire, I've been looking into it. I might have some evidence - "

"What?"

"Well, there's this guy, writing a book. He says - "

"Fuck."

"Claire, he thinks Patrick's innocent."

"Fuck."

Forget washing her hair. She'll do it in the morning. It's all she can do to pull

on her pyjamas. Yet, she can't sleep. She hears Yossi come into her room. She pretends to be asleep. She sets her alarm.

There is gentle rain landing softly on her window. She remembers her father telling her that when he was in prison, the first time it rained, he had licked the glass to try to get at the rain.

When she has her plan, then she finally sleeps.

She drags herself up the next morning. Yossi and Roimata are having breakfast already. Both are still in their pyjamas.

"Roi, I've decided. I'll take the morning off. You and I will go do something nice together. A walk on the beach maybe."

Yossi puts one hand on Roimata's arm.

"Claire, Roi and I have been talking about it. Patrick has to go today. We will cremate him. He wanted that, he told the people where he lived. Roi and I want to be at the chapel. Rachel and Brent, Debs and her parents. They all want to be there. We will keep it really informal. But we want to be there."

"You come with me eh Roi? Shall we look at that little gallery we love in Kitchener Street? I'd like to spoil myself."

When she looks at Roimata, she realises what she has done. Her face looks stricken. She's looking from Yossi to Claire.

Yossi gets in first. It must be those fucking happy family genes.

"Roi, it's ok. We can do it. You go with your Mum. She needs cheering up."

Jesus. She didn't mean it to go like this. Yossi ten, Claire minus five.

"Ok," Roi is saying. "But can I buy some flowers first, for you to put on

Grandad's coffin?"

Claire sits down at the table. Yossi stands up and starts loading the dishwasher.

"Sorry , Roi. I didn't mean to - you go with Yoss. You and I can spoil ourselves tomorrow hey? Or tonight. *Black Books* and chocolate?"

How fake fucking cheerful she sounds.

Yossi tries one more time. As she's leaving the house, he says,

"Claire, come with us. You don't have to do anything."

Roi is upstairs. She can't hear.

"Fuck off."

He'd promised.

31.

So they do something at the crematorium that day. Ha. Two Maori and a Jew and they end up cremating. Claire goes to work, doesn't want to know details. But she is worried sick about Roimata. She knows how she must look. That afternoon, it's Yossi's turn to go off in a huff. He sees Roi home, packs some clothes and goes off to Waiheke. Will he manage one-armed? Rowing the boat around to Pearly Bay? Actually, he tells her, his friend Arie is coming too. They're going to have a boys' weekend. Which is likely to consist entirely of drinking wine, listening to music and talking. He seems determined.

He phones her at the hospital to tell her he made it, as he had promised he would.

"By the way, your father's been cremated. His ashes are at the funeral directors. You may want to pick them up."

"Why would I do that?"

"Well, I'm not going to. Unless you want him to sit on a shelf forever or be thrown in the bin, you will have to do it."

"It's not him. He's gone."

"Still, basic respect. Hell."

When Claire gets home from the hospital, Rachel is there with Roimata. She's teaching her poi and a lovely soft thwack thwack sound comes from the lounge.

Claire's glad Yossi's gone. He's betrayed her. She can't believe she came all

this way to be with him, allowed herself to trust him. When Rachel's gone, she and Roimata lie on the couch, cuddled together under a blanket. They watch a DVD of *Black Books* – three or four episodes in a row – and eat chocolate and cookies.

Claire buries her head in Roimata's hair, shuts her eyes, smells her smell, and feels her warmth. She asks about the cremation. Roi just shrugs and says it was short.

No-one had really spoken or anything.

“Aunty Rachel and Brent were there. They were cool.”

“Maori tend to do death really well. But Dad wouldn't have wanted any God talk.”

“No, Yossi made sure there was no God talk. Mum, why didn't you come?”

“It's hard to explain, darling. I didn't feel right about coming. I have sort of shut myself off from what were very unhappy times. I've put it behind me. I don't think about it. It's how I get by. I'm so sorry.”

“I played my violin.”

“That's great darling. Your granddad loved the violin. The best thing he ever did was introduce me to music.”

When Roi's gone off to bed at about nine, Claire's still too anxious to sleep. Now it's her turn to text and phone and receive no reply. She doesn't know whether to feel worried or angry. She hates the thought that Yossi is, what? Disappointed? Disgusted? If he trusted her, oughtn't he try to understand? And if he couldn't understand, oughtn't he try to trust her?

If she goes to bed, she will just lie and worry about Yossi so she pours herself another glass of wine and reads the Medical Journal instead. She puts on

Shostakovich, Piano Trio no 2, which her father loved. She's trying to read about laparoscopic techniques when her phone rings. At last. But it's Brent Te Hira.

"Claire, hi. I'll be driving past yours soon on my way to Rachel's. Do you mind if I call in? I won't stay late."

She finds herself putting lipstick on and changing from her dirty jeans into a dress. She wipes the benches, loads the dishwasher, and plumps the cushions. Why is she doing this?

When she answers the door, he hands her a bottle of wine and says he knew it was a rough day but that kind of made him want to be with them. He's gorgeous, still. Long, curly hair, rich brown skin and that sensual deep voice.

"Thanks for going today," she says. "I mean, thanks for being with Roi and Yossi. I think it must have made it easier for them, to have you guys there."

He smiles.

"It's all pretty weird, but I am glad I was there, Claire. Is Yossi not here?"

"No."

"He's a great guy. Roimata was amazing. It's the first time I've heard her play. But not just that. She was so composed and together."

"I know. She's so calm. I wonder about it sometimes. I hate to think she's old before her time."

"I don't think it's a problem. She's amazing. My daughters are too, my other daughters. The kids of this generation that's coming up are real extremes. Those doing well seem to be amazing. Those not coping are train wrecks."

They talk for a while about his trip to New Zealand, how he finds it, how it's

changed while they've both been away.

"Everyone expects you to be the same person you were at twenty when you left," he says.

They've drunk a bit of wine now. She mustn't get to like this man too much. He's not on the birth certificate and she's determined to keep it that way. Even more important now that she's leaving Yossi. He might think he has some claim on Roi. She wants to know whether he's thought about it, what he's thinking. But he seems so easygoing, so live-in-the-moment.

"I've been thinking a lot about you today," he says.

She says nothing.

"I've been trying to think about what it must have been like growing up. I mean I remember the case, that pretty blonde girl. Everyone does."

He's on an armchair, she's on a sofa but it's cosy and their legs are almost touching. He has a habit of looking straight into her eyes and pausing. He's so comfortable with himself and with eye contact. She feels flustered like a young girl.

She says nothing. She wants him to kiss her. She can't even remember what he has said. She giggles when he looks long into her eyes.

He leans over and puts his arm around her. She's not sure whether he's going to kiss her or just comfort her. She puts her mouth up to be kissed but he tucks her hair behind her ears instead and takes her hand firmly in his.

She starts crying. She leans into him. He hugs her and she feels tiny and his firm grasp makes her bones feel delicate and melty.

Then she gets up and gets tissues and makes him go.

She tries to call Yossi one more time when she is lying in bed but he still doesn't respond. She'd always known, really, that it wouldn't last. But still her gut churns about losing her family, her Yossi.

She remembers how she and her father had loved the children's book "Ferdinand the Bull", how he'd read it over and over to her. Dad. Gone. She thinks about his smell and his whiskery kisses.

As she drifts off to sleep she remembers reading "Going On A Bear Hunt" to Che MacKenzie that day. God, he hadn't known what sand and sea were. He'd never been to the beach. She fantasises about adopting him. His slightly sour smell, his unblinking eyes. His quietness. She really was growing dangerously fond of this little boy. It was getting unprofessional. She couldn't adopt him, she knew that. Christ, look at the mess she was making of her own life, couldn't even go to her own father's cremation. Couldn't save anyone else. Just didn't have it in her. Much as she'd love to. She knew what it was she'd be taking on. How much hurt, how much commitment. She knew, if she took him, she could never, ever, stop giving to him, no matter what. He could never be let down again. There was a chance it was too late already. She hopes whoever does take him understands that.

The next night, Yossi still over at Pearly Bay, Claire looks at fares to England. Although there's a feeling of autumn and it is definitely getting dark earlier, she has the windows open to let in the fresh, fragrant air. An e-mail from her old Head of Surgery at Great Ormond Street lets her know that there is a job for her there any time. She could get an apartment in a nicer part of London. Somewhere like Russell

Square or Bloomsbury, near the hospital.

It's how to tell Roimata, how to make it ok with her. Is this the right thing for Roimata? She's become so attached to Rachel. She's enjoying school and *kapa haka* and has an excellent violin teacher. But she can visit back here. She's old enough to fly on her own now. And, after all, she'll be closer to Brent, who is due to go back to Germany any minute. She had a wonderful life in London and her old school is sure to take her back; she was a star pupil.

Then there's Yossi. If Yossi stays here, which he probably will, then everyone's heart is going to break. He is Roi's father. He truly loves her. Claire would never try to deprive Roi or Yossi of that. She's perfectly rational about it. It's just she can't have him in her own life because he can't be trusted the way she needs to trust.

Yossi and Rachel get on really well. Understand each other much better than either of them understands her. It will be great for Roimata to have trips out here to see the two of them and other *whanau*. But doesn't mean she has to live here.

The website wants a date for travel. Probably best to time it so that Roimata can start school at the beginning of the school year in London in September. Perhaps go back in August, so they can have a summer holiday over there and miss the worst of the winter here, settle in and then start school? She starts entering different dates and looking at when the prices change.

Roi comes into the kitchen and puts the jug on to boil. Claire quickly shuts down the Air New Zealand website. Needs to think it through before she tells

Roimata.

“Mum, I want us to pick up Grandad’s ashes.”

Shit. Claire brings up some patient notes on the screen and pretends to be reading them.

“We can’t just leave him sitting on a shelf.”

“Mmm. You might have to give me some time to think about this.”

“We need to scatter them too. Where would he love? Pearly Bay?”

Claire pretends to be absorbed in what she is doing.

The next morning she drops Roimata at an early music practice at school. The sun is up and bright but it’s not hot yet. The trees cast long shadows and the air is crisp and delicious.

“Mum, if you don’t want to pick up Granddad, Brent said he would take me. He and Rachel are happy to help scatter him too.”

“Give me one more day to think about it. I mean, yes, we’ll do it. I’ll do it with you. I promise. I’ll just have to get myself prepared, pick the right day. Things are mad at work.”

“Rachel said she’ll take me to your mother’s grave as well. At Purewa, in Meadowbank. Have you been there?”

“Yes, when we first got back I went to see her.”

Now she’s lying. When will all this end?

“Where shall we scatter Grandad?”

32.

Of course she must do it. For Roimata.

After rounds, two of her surgeries are cancelled because the children have colds. She'll do it now. It's a sunny day. How hard can this be?

Bracing herself. She plans her morning. She's had a lot of practise at this over the years. Bracing herself. For getting home after school each day and finding out what mood her mother is in; dirty coffee cups were a bad sign, open windows good.

For prison visiting. For police interviews. For watching her father waking up after a drunken night and realise she'd been watching him all night to check he didn't choke. For watching him piss himself. For telling parents their child was not going to make it. She is good at bracing herself.

There's an hour and a half before she needs to be back in the hospital. The Funeral Director's in an old house in Remuera Road. It's a bit tired. Plenty of parking though.

Step One: when she'd looked at the map she'd noticed a little reserve nearby. She walks there in the sunshine. It's tiny, only taking up about two sections of a residential block. Why is it even there? It's simple but pretty. The grass has been cut and the smell, cool and fresh, calms her. One of the fences is smothered in apricot roses, crinkly and fragrant, with a glorious red tinge to the leaves. She remembers the name, "crepuscule," the colour of twilight. It doesn't really sound like twilight. It always sounds like "corpuscle" to her.

She lies down on the grass on her back, eyes closed and bathes her face in

the sun. Too hot for many; for her, an injection of Vitamin D, she supposes, a balm, an immunisation. She knows that ten minutes in sun like this will calm her. No one is around. There's a roar of traffic from Remuera Road but it's not too bad. She listens to each bird call. Some builder or gardener nearby has their car radio on and mindless pop music booms. How can they bear the distortion? To some, background noise is easily ignored; to Claire, it sets her teeth on edge. Ah, they've turned it off or driven away or something. It's gone. Listen to a few more birds. She can hear tui.

Looking at her watch, she stands and walks back to the funeral home. There's a sign on the shabby wooden door. PLEASE COME IN. The receptionist with big hair that must have suited her ten years ago interrupts her phone-call and, holding the receiver to her chest, asks Claire how she can help. She leans under her desk, and brings up a midnight blue box made of thick cardboard. The colour has been carefully chosen. Tasteful. Sombre, but not funereal. Placing it on the desk in front of her she checks the label. CREMATED REMAINS OF THE LATE: Bowerman, Patrick James.

"Is that correct?"

As the big haired woman hands it over, still holding the phone, another line ringing, she pulls out a list and puts a tick on it with the same hand.

"Thanks very much. Have a good day," she says to Claire.

See, not hard at all. Most things aren't, when you're brave enough to just do them, as the Nike ad says. The box feels strangely light. Claire turns it around and looks underneath it a little, while she walks to her car. What's inside it? She'll look

later.

Step Two of The Plan: She leaves the box in the boot of her car and walks to a café a few blocks along. She's brought with her an enormous treat, a London paper from last Sunday. The Times. Exciting. She'd bought it at a news-stand yesterday. She and Yossi often read them online since they'd been in this newspaper desert but this is a real one, one she can touch.

She orders a coffee, spreads out her paper and dives in. She can't wait for the peace and anonymity of London. Without Yossi, without emotional complications, just Roimata and her. The paper reminds her. Concerts, lectures, bookshops. Nothing too close to her. She reads about Harold Pinter's burial at Highgate. Doesn't think about work or Yossi or Roimata or her father. Her father, sitting in the boot of her car. It's over. He's dead. They're both dead. They're finished.

After she's read the whole newspaper, eaten it up, drunk it in, she drives back to work. On the way back she takes a detour into Parnell. There's a flat she used to live in at the bottom of Takutai St. It's a dead end street and Hobson Bay laps at the bottom of the road. There's a barrier up because workmen are removing the huge old concrete sewer pipe that used to cross the Bay. It's being replaced by underwater ones. Some have seen it as an eyesore for years. Claire used to love walking out across it. It was safe, about five feet wide, but it felt as though you were walking on water and halfway across you could see across Tamaki Drive out to the sea. It was the most amazing sense of freedom to her at twenty.

Here would be one place she could scatter Patrick. Certainly it was while she

was living in this flat that she'd had the most to do with him. While she was at medical school she'd found him a flat just nearby in Gladstone Road. A basement flat. He'd come around to her flat here, too, and embarrassed her by getting drunk and raving on in front of her flatmates. She'd tried so many times. Picked up the pieces, sorted his benefit, tipped out his alcohol, listened to his promises. Only to be called again and again by police to come and pick him up from A and E, or the side of the road, or the Rose Gardens, in a drunken stupor.

And all those years, she'd longed to know whether he was guilty or innocent. And he would never say. Left her in that horrible state of not knowing. He denied killing the girl of course, but would never say where he was or what he was doing.

She'd like to get this over and done with now. It's a beautiful day. This is the right place and she'd drive away free. She can do this, by herself. It's her business. No-one else's. She can't face sharing it with others. She's risen above this shameful past. She gets the blue box out and heads around the barrier, crunches along the pebbly foreshore. She tells the box, you're keen to go. You've had enough, right? And then is embarrassed, pleased no-one can see her talking to a box.

It's almost over.

And she can go back to London.

Except, Roimata. Roimata said she wanted to be involved. How is that going to work? Claire wants it over now. She can't deal with complications and people and emotions. Everyone expects her to feel something.

Her phone rings. It's Rachel Rakena. She thinks about not answering but

knows Rachel and Roi are doing some secret shopping for the wedding this lunchtime. Not that there's going to be a wedding, but they don't know that yet.

Perhaps there is a problem?

"Claire?"

"Hi."

"I've just dropped Roi back at school." Phew. Why does her heart always constrict until she knows Roi is safe? When will she learn to trust the world?

"She ok?"

"Yes she's great. Claire, I was talking with her about Patrick's ashes. She says you're going to scatter them. Brent and I would like to be involved. Is that ok with you?"

"You didn't know him."

"That doesn't matter. For Roi. Actually, Claire, for you. I know how hard you must be finding all this. Will you let me plan something? I can take care of it and then you just have to show up. But not if you have a way you want to do it. Just if it is a help."

Claire looks down at the blue box she is holding under her arm, brings it up to her face and brushes her cheek against its cold lid.

"Well, ok. I mean, I don't really care but what are you thinking?"

"Pearly Bay?"

"Yeah, that's best."

"You don't have to do this on your own, Claire."

"Thanks."

Actually, she does. She is on her own. But they could be helpful. For Roimata. It would take the pressure off her to have them there to talk to Roimata. And because they're going to go back and live in London, she doesn't need to worry so much about letting this family in to their lives, letting them complicate things and expect things.

"Thinking about it, he'd really like his ashes spread at sea," Claire says. "He loved the sea. So do I. That's what I would want done with mine too."

"Hmmm," Rachel says. She and Brent look at each other.

"What?" Roi says.

"Well, it's your business but Maori don't like it. It's kind of an environmental, kind of a respect thing--"

"What's wrong with it?"

"Really we like burial. I think we just believe that the body should be returned to the Earth mother Papatuanuku. That feels right to us, feels where we belong. It's about respect, for the dead, for the sea and for our food supply," Rachel said.

"It just feels yuk to us. Like spitting or peeing in your food, or scattering ashes on your food. You'd think that was yuk. It's the same yuk reaction," Brent adds.

Now it's going to get tough. Other people. Complications. She wishes she'd never involved them. She and Roi could have just rowed out and scattered him. Now if she does that, it's going to seem disrespectful.

She hopes they don't ask where the ashes are now. They're still sitting in her boot, where they have been since she collected them. Oops.

As she expected, Yossi and Roi immediately wanted to change the plan to suit Brent and Rachel.

Claire allows herself a small thought: what about my culture? My memories of my Dad at his happiest in the Pearler, with messy hair and salty skin. How about my wanting to scatter him in the brisk sea wind? It's ground bone cells, it's just ground bone cells. They're powdered, but then I suppose they do last. No environmental damage. Nothing to hurt the food. I love nature too. It's visceral, their disgust. It's visceral, my reaction, too.

When she mentions this to Yossi afterwards he says,

"But it doesn't matter to you anyway. You think he is gone."

"Well they are ground bone fragments so they are still technically him."

"Bone fragments? Ground? I thought they were ashes, left behind from the burning."

"No. That's what people think. The bones don't burn. Everything else burns completely away."

"But they don't have consciousness."

"Of course they don't."

"So you don't really care and they care a lot. And now Roi cares. You can't mind a compromise, Claire."

He's right. Roi cares. And he kindly doesn't mention that if she'd had her

way, the ashes would be sitting on the shelf at the funeral directors or buried in a big pile of other remains, or whatever they did with unclaimed ashes.

And then Rachel is so reasonable. She phones,

“Claire, I’ve been thinking about it. This is for you, we were meant to be helping you. If you want to scatter him at sea, I think I could cope with that. I would still want to support you. I would still want to be with Roi. Or at least, I could have some food and drink for you afterwards at my place. He wasn’t Maori. It’s not really up to us. But we’d have to tell Ngati Whatua. They’d want to put a rahui on the place.”

Because she is so nice about it, and because the respect is already there in Roimata, and because she is tired and just wants it over, and because she is going to take Roimata back to London soon, Claire gives in. They’ll do it a Waiheke. She doesn’t care. Just wants it over.

33.

Brent borrows his friend's catamaran. Claire wears a wide brimmed hat and sunglasses. Doesn't want to look like a drama queen but she may need them. She has to take the hat off as they motor out. Rachel has a photo of Patrick from somewhere and she has draped ivy around it and it is sitting on the hatch. As the ashes come on board Rachel says a little prayer in Maori.

"Are there laws about this sort of thing?"

"Probably."

Will everyone stop looking at her as though she is going to break? Especially Roimata. Brent talks to her now, standing at the tiller. He grimaces before he speaks. No need to bloody grimace.

"How far do you want to walk into the bush when we get there?"

Claire shrugs. She's the only one sitting down. The canvas on the seat cushion sticks to her legs in the heat. She uncrosses and re-crosses her legs.

"We can see the Coromandel," says Rachel. "Wasn't your father born there?"

"Yes. Thames."

They tie up against the jetty and then troop into the bush. It's hot in there, stuffy, the sun reaching in through the gaps and heating it up like a sauna. It's mature bush and Rachel tells Roimata the names of all the plants as they go around. They see several kereru and tui.

When they stop there is a song.

"That a bellbird?" whispers Brent.

"Yeah," says Rachel.

"Wow," says Yossi, when it's finished. "What a song. I read about them releasing bellbirds on the Island just recently. What do they look like?"

"They're tiny," Rachel says.

Inside the blue box is a sealed paper bag. It looks like a vacuum cleaner bag. Yossi tries to hand it to her. She just shakes her head.

"Roi, would you like to scatter him?" Yossi says.

"Ok."

Roi fiddles with the seal. Brent helps her. He rips the paper open in the end. Inside is a Ziplock bag. He opens it and hands it to Roi. Makes sure Roi has hold of it then steps back beside Rachel. He looks as though he doesn't know where to put the box.

Rachel starts to speak in Maori. Farewelling him. *Haere, haere, haere...*

Then Yossi says quietly, *As for man, his days are as grass; as the flower of the field, so he flourisheth. For the wind passeth over it, and it is gone; and the place thereof shall know it no more.*

Claire puts her cardy around her shoulders.

It won't take long.

They're paler than she expected. They look like sand. It's almost over.

Dad. Goodbye Dad. I'm sorry you had such a horrible life. I'm sorry I didn't do more to help you. I'm so sorry.

Roi finishes the task and stares at the plastic bag in her hand. She looks

stricken. Claire goes over and puts her arm around Roi, who cuddles her back.

“Mum,”

“It’s ok darling. It’s ok. I love you so much. You’re a good, good girl.”

Rachel starts to sing softly in Maori. Brent joins in.

Yossi comes to stand beside Roi and puts his arm around her from the other side. The song swells, then it’s over. Goodbye Dad.

Back at the jetty they sit on the boat and rest.

“Who’d like a cup of tea?” Brent says.

“I made chocolate brownie,” Rachel says.

Bye Dad.

On the way back to Auckland no-one really talks. Claire listens to Faure’s Requiem on her iPod. The sea is calm. Ferries come and go. Auckland looks completely still.

On the jetty at Orakei, Rachel reaches for Claire and gives her a big long hug, murmuring, holding her tight. At first Claire resists but then she relaxes. Rachel’s arms feel strong and safe and so warm.

“Claire, we’re here. We’re here. Let’s go and have lunch.”

Why not? She could do with a wine. Janet had said she didn’t expect to see her back today.

When Rachel’s arms release her she sees Yossi and Brent and Roi all

hugging. Roi is beaming. In just a few weeks she'll be back in London. But as she watches these warm, strong people surround her Roimata she wonders whether she is doing the right thing by her daughter. I am strong, too, she tells herself. I can do it. And there is one more thing she is going to do too. She's made a decision on the boat.

34.

They nearly have to stop before they begin. As they get out of the lift, Claire sees a familiar T-shirt coming towards her. It's black, on the front a huge, fanged face snarls, left half striped tiger, right half blue dragon, encircled by leaping flames. It's hideous. Above it, Jayson has his arm slung around Heaven's neck, her head pulled in to his bony shoulder at an odd angle, rubbing the top of her head on his unshaven chin with its red straggly hair, a pose that brags that she is totally under his control.

Heaven sees them first, stops walking, mouth open, then stumbles as Jayson drags her by the head into the lift.

"Jayse, Jayse," says a startled Heaven.

He's ignoring her but when Jayson sees them, he says

"What the fuck?"

The lift doors are closing but he puts his hand in the way and slowly the doors open and he drags Heaven out again.

Claire and Patch just keep walking. Patch immediately picks Che up and holds him to her. He just snuggles in, looking at the ground. She's awkward now, one arm holding Che, the other reaching for Triumph but also holding the booster car seat she is carrying for him.

"Hey, you cunt, where you taking that kid?"

Claire picks Triumph up and she and Patch both walk faster, trying to ignore Jayson. He's right behind them. Claire gets herself between Jayson and Patch. She feels his hand on her shoulder as she is just about at the front door.

“Put that kid down you fucking gang ho. Don’t touch my kid with your dirty mongrel hands!” he yells at Patch.

From just outside the front entrance appears Feleti, gentle giant Security Guard. He’s dealt with Jayson before. Claire knows him well, has often chatted to him on her way in and out of the hospital. His black uniform is comforting now; she never thought she’d be glad to see epaulettes.

“Sir, come with me.”

“She’s got the fucking kid.”

Feleti gets him in an arm lock. Claire smiles at Feleti over her shoulder as she and Patch speed up and almost run to her Audi which is waiting opposite in the P2 drop-off zone.

Jayson comes running out and thumps on the bonnet of the old Audi. He tries to sit himself on the bonnet but staggers off as get-away driver Yossi drives off, sedately, not like in a movie.

“Yippee ki-yay,” he yells. Che chuckles.

Shit, now it’s probably abduction. Jayson will be screaming blue murder even as they drive. Claire turns to see Patch in the middle of the back, fiddling with seatbelts as she belts in Triumph, on his booster seat, and then Che, on either side of her.

“Yahoo! Yossi, this is Patch, Che, and Triumph. Now I’m in the shit. Deep shit, Arkansas,” she says softly to Yossi after that, rolling down her window and feeling the air ruffle up her hair.

As they drive over the bridge she laughs, thinking of the paraphernalia she would have schlepped down to Worthing or Brighton, had this been a trip for her and Roimata at Che's age: sunscreen, hats, togs, towel, drinks, food, book, rug, cushions, water wings, bucket and spade, wet wipes, sunglasses, spare clothes, blankie, Dogga, first aid kit. If Yossi were with them, he'd have added wine and glasses, sophisticated cakes, his iPod, and connection to the car stereo, with a special playlist for the occasion.

Instead, just a gang woman, two kids, one in a hospital gown, and an ex-Israeli army getaway driver who drives like a Nana. It's fun.

There's a T-shirt of Roi's in the boot so, in the car park, Claire whips off Che's hospital gown and pops the T-shirt on him. It comes down to his knees. STELLA it says in sequins across his little chest.

As soon as they get to the sand, Yossi and Claire kick off their shoes and roll up their jeans. Patch is looking around her with wide eyes. She makes no move to take off her cheap black ankle boots or even her jersey and jeans and the woolly hat stays on her head, in spite of the brilliant sunshine.

The kids are agape. Triumph is in Patch's arms and when she tries to put him down he whimpers.

Yossi holds out his good arm and gently takes the wee boy, who looks as though he might cry. Yossi motions to Claire who helps him lift Triumph onto Yossi's shoulders. He sets off down towards the water at a gallop and the boy's whimper turns to a shout of delight.

Che hasn't said a word. Claire bends down and takes his worn, too-small

sneakers off him. He's not sure, but he lets her. When she goes to put them in a pile with hers, though, he reaches out and picks them up, holding them to his chest. She gets it. He doesn't own much. She lets him hold them for now.

She takes his hand and they walk down towards the water. By now, Yossi is running in and, when a wave comes, running out again just ahead of it, giggling and shouting. Triumph, on his shoulders, is laughing and laughing.

Claire leads Che down to the water and puts her own toe in, jumping at the cold. She breathes in deeply, loving the tangy, fishy air. It invigorates her. Che pulls away, not letting her tug him in. She stays right at the edge of the water with him, taking it as his pace, gently encouraging, laughing at the shocked look on his face when he feels the cold water with his toe. But he's not ready to go in. She cajoles, but gently. Even feeling the sand between his toes is something.

Then Yossi comes over, handing Triumph to her.

"Watch this," he says to Che. He kicks water at Claire. Che watches Claire. He looks fearful and alert, expecting anger. Claire laughs, makes a mock "O" with her mouth, and then laughs again. She kicks some water back at Yossi. He splashes her back. Then he says to Che, "Splash her." Claire pretends not to have heard and then squeals with laughter when Che splashes her.

Just five minutes later, he is running in and out, sloshing and wading, jumping and landing on two feet, thinking it hilarious when he sprays Claire. Splashing her again and again. Every time she pretends to be surprised. Every time he giggles with delight. Triumph chuckles too and buries his face in her shoulder, her face brushing his coarse black sticky-up hair.

An hour and a half just scoots by. Yossi shows Che how to skip stones. Yossi can make his skip three or four times. Che whoops with delight when his skips once.

When he puts his shoes down beside Patch, who is sitting on the sand shaping the letters C H E, they show him leapfrog. Patch, although she never takes off her jersey or rolls up her jeans, and keeps on her boots the whole time, does join in the leapfrog. When she goes to jump over Yossi he stands so that he has her piggybacked and he runs around with her. She is almost crying with laughter. She has a big deep belly laugh.

“Careful, Yoss. She’s pregnant.”

He sets her down gently,

“She’s tough, this one,” he says.

Patch beams.

Yossi and Patch take the kids down to the kiosk at the end of the beach and buy ice creams. Claire lies and lets the sun scald her face and creep through her pores into the marrow of her bones. She sits up and watches them walk back along the beach and she admires Yossi, so energetic, so happy, so wonderful with these kids. She feels a longing, deep in her gut. He’s a good, good person. People let you down sometimes. Get over it. He’s been so kind to her. So loving to Roimata. Be kind to him. Give him a break. Sometimes people think they know what’s best. He’s solid. They are a family and they forgive each other.

When they're almost back at the car, Patch says,
"I never knew the sea would be so noisy."

As they drive away, Che says,
"I saw the seaweed goes Pop and stuff squirts out all over Yossi."

Triumph says, "Yothi, Pop." And falls asleep.

All we can give children is memories, Claire thinks.

35.

As they drive home, a text from Janet: *Knockers took care of it. Jayson too scared of him. Hasn't even told anyone.*

She reads it to Patch who laughs with delight.

"Go Knocks," she says.

"Go Knocks!" says Yossi.

Claire laughs and looks over at him.

"Thank you, Yossi."

By the time they get back to Starship, Heaven and Jayson are long gone.

CYFS have notified them that they can't take Che home.

"That dude, he couldn't wait to get to some party, eh, they went off to start drinking. I'd like to smash him," Knockers says.

Claire just hopes Knockers didn't sell Jayson drugs. That's the reputation of his gang. She's not going to ask.

She discharges Triumph. Patch gives her a hug and Knockers tells her himself this time,

"We're gonna call this one Bowerman if it's a boy. Star if it's a girl."

At four that afternoon she's in PICU when her pager goes. She goes up to the ward to say goodbye to Che. The foster mother looks a nice enough woman, plump,

straggly hair, a bit worn down by life, and with two kids of her own, whom she has left at home. A good sign.

“Hi Che. I’m Lucy. We’ve got a doggy at home.” A bit too perky, perhaps, but she’s trying. She’s brought some chippies and a little box of Up and Go for Che. Sipping on his straw, Che goes with her without complaining, which breaks Claire’s heart.

“Bye darling.” Help him. Help this little boy. It’s the closest Claire has ever come to praying.

When she gets back to her office, Yossi is there with a huge bunch of flowers. Delphiniums, snapdragons, sunflowers. He beckons her over to the window and she can see the woman and Che walking up a little hill, past the adult hospital.

“At least she’s holding his hand. That’s a good sign,” Yossi says.

She starts to cry, her chest tight with grief and fear. Yossi holds her.

“I’m so sorry, Claire. Please stay with me.”

She just cries.

That night she lets him back into their bed.

“Claire, I am so sorry. I will work hard to make you trust me. I know how important trust is.”

“I know you meant well and wanted to help me. And I’m sorry, I’ve been such hard work since we came back.”

"I made you come back. Was it so wrong?"

"It's been hard."

"Will you marry me, Claire?"

She thinks.

"If you buy yourself a ticket to England and come with Roi and me."

"Anything."

She's almost asleep.

"Claire?"

"Would it be return to Auckland or one way?"

"What do you want?"

"Return, of course, but I don't deserve it."

"Return it is then."

36.

Claire drives to Grey Lynn, to the street where her father was living when he died. The houses are amazing. This might have been her life had she stayed here in New Zealand. Hundred-year-old wooden villas, renovated to within an inch of their lives. Garages and carports gouged out under foundations, gracious decorative verandahs lifted up and cantilevered, to protect multiple European cars for every family. Faux-colonial fences and elaborate gates with intercoms.

When she stops outside number 30, it is also a huge old wooden house, but one with peeling paint, surrounded by an odd collection of added on buildings from different eras, none constructed with any concern for staying “in keeping” with the original house. The car parks in front of the house, with signs beside them, mark it out as something different from the family houses around it.

At the top of the bedraggled stairs, there’s a laminated piece of paper instructing her to ring a bell. It looks dangerous, the bell, hanging on wires that are clearly meant to be behind the wall, half-hearted strips of insulation tape hanging off exposed wires.

What is it about her family that they frequent places like this? She’s visited them in psychiatric institutions, prisons. Her mother did a stint in a woman’s refuge once, when she needed attention, and dragged Claire with her. Then some place on the Shore they took her for supervised access to her father. Worn carpet, rotting wood, plastic flower arrangements, notice boards, and fake-cheerful décor. Places for people who didn’t cope. Well, she, Claire, was always going to cope. She’d decided that early on.

A cheerful young man leads her to her Dad's room, which she struggles to open with the key they have given her. She looks down at her feet on the rotting verandah. He walked on here.

The door finally gives, though she almost drops her handbag while trying to juggle the lock. There's that smell again. She had smelled it coming off her Dad's possessions in the brown paper bag that they had tried to hand her in ICU, though she had politely declined to take them.

The last time she had smelled it seventeen years ago, in an old state house in Mangere when she had visited her father before going to London. She doesn't know what the smell is. There's unwashed clothes, of course, and old man smell. There's a hint of instant coffee. There's the smell of poverty, which she often smells on patients, mixed in too.

His single bed is so narrow, it's amazing anyone can sleep in it. It's on wheels and, as she puts her hand on it, it moves around. It is unmade and has a dingy maroon and green cover that someone at some stage has thought smart. The sheets and pillowcases don't match, but then, whose do?

Against the wall leans a new, cheap, imitation-cane chair, which stands out among the battered, weary furniture. On the wall, a laminated list of instructions headed IN CASE OF FIRE. A faded old poster of some obscure painting hangs crookedly. A man, his face hidden by a straw hat, punts down a narrow river watched by a woman in a light, floaty dress with a parasol. Someone sometime presumably thought this would add cheer but it has faded until every detail of the painting has evolved into either a dirty pink or a purplish-green. Her father would

have hated it, but clearly no longer cared enough to take it down.

She wanders into the kitchenette. It's clean and tidy. There's no character though, nothing to help her get at who her father was. There's a dish-drainer with a plastic colander, a plate, and a mug draining. He's put a tea bag into a glass after using it and it is grey and vividly brown.

Back into the main room. Get going. Claire shakes out the green plastic rubbish bags she has brought with her. This bag can go to the Sallie Army. Opens the closet and starts pulling out fleecy jackets and worn track-pants. There is a layer of papers and bit and pieces on the floor of the closet. She will get to that later. This is more straightforward. She opens another bag for the rubbish, throwing away ragged clothes, stuffing the ones without holes into the Sallies bag.

Funny, the things that undo us. Claire sorts through piles of photos, all still in their paper envelopes. These could easily overwhelm her: baby photos, wedding photos, her mother looking young and happy. What stops her in her tracks, though, knocks the breath out of her, leaves her standing in the middle of the room gasping like a stupid goldfish is not a photo or a letter or an official document, but a battered copy of Winnie the Pooh. He'd read it so well. They'd laughed so much. They'd always shared this sense of humour; her mother thought them silly and childish. Right through her childhood, when she'd had times of contact, her father would hold her close and call her "a bear with a pleasing manner but a positively startling lack of brain." They both loved to say "time for a little something" when they were headed into the kitchen to search for snacks.

She sits down heavily on the bed, which rolls around a little. A man walks

past the window of the little unit, singing loudly “ I see red, I see red, I see red,” playing air guitar. She still can’t breathe. She can’t cry. She must pull herself together; get on with what she is here to do. She stands up and starts to divide the photos into those she supposes she ought to keep but doesn’t really want to and stupid photos of scenery and people that mean nothing to her, which she throws into the bin. She finds herself holding one, stares at it, cannot focus, and can’t think. Maybe they should all just go in the bin. Easier.

Her phone beeps. It’s from Yossi.

“Are you sure you’re ok? I’d like to come and help. Roi’s gone to a friend’s house.”

She sits back down on the bed. She presses Reply. Takes a deep breath. She’s not ok. She needs help. She needs Yossi.

“Thanks. Yes, come and help.”

She can carry on now, knowing Yoss is coming. She becomes efficient. She’ll keep the photos. She puts them all in a bag, goes over to the wardrobe, sorts clothes into those that are worth giving to the charity shop and those that just need to go into the rubbish. Yossi taps on the door of the little unit.

He comes in, his eyes wide with sympathy and love. He hugs her for a long time. She weeps.

“My darling,”

“I’m ok, honest.”

“I know you’re ok, but it’s bloody hard.”

“Thank you so much. You can start on the kitchen. Anything worth saving

goes over here with these clothes, for the charity shop. Throw out anything dirty, yukky, or broken.”

Yossi starts shaking out some of the plastic rubbish bags she has brought.

“It’s so hard, not knowing whether he murdered that girl. I guess we could go and ask the gang. I could get Toby to introduce us or something,” he says.

“No, I don’t think so. They’re not going to confess, which is the only thing we could believe. No, let’s just leave it.”

“We’ll never know?” Yossi asks. “You can live with that?”

“I do live with it.”

“I brought my iPod and little speaker. Do you want to listen to some music? Or we can talk. Do you want to talk about Patrick?”

“Music would be great.”

He puts on Bob Dylan. Perfect.

37.

It's still dark when Claire gets up at five. Yossi insists on driving her to the hospital and walking into the building with her. There'd been chaos at the gate last night. The Radio New Zealand news is full of the Peteru case. Yossi hits the button and switches it off.

"You're doing the right thing, you know."

"Are we?"

"Are you nervous?"

"There's just a bit of pressure."

Yossi sees her down to the lower ground level. He hugs her close. She smiles at him.

"Hey, man. I deal with pressure every day. I'm tough, remember. That's why you love me. I'll be fine. It's just more surgery. I love you."

"One week to go. I can't wait."

She feels tiny against the huge doors that separate the theatre area, bearing the legend AUTHORISED PERSONNEL ONLY. She turns her back and pushes them hard with her backside to open them, waving to Yossi as she goes through. She's glad he came.

Sometimes happiness is knowing things could be worse. Claire has made a difference. It's not certain that he would have died but as she cuts and lifts out Rory's kidney, she can clearly see the tumour, bigger already. She deals with it.

Clinically. Cleanly. There is every chance this child will lead a normal life. What he does with it is not down to her, thank goodness.

Kate and Isa'ako Peteru are waiting in a little meeting room near ICU, where Rory will go shortly. Claire pauses and looks through the glass for a minute. She doesn't have to talk to them. Sam could do it all, the CEO's involved, and their Clinical Leader is all over it. But she'd pushed hard for this. And it was her hands inside Rory. It was her belief that led to this.

Kate looks up, her face streaked and crumpled, her long limbs folded in on themselves and defeated.

"He's fine." Claire lets them know. "We'll watch him closely but surgery went really well. We have every reason to think he will lead a normal life."

Kate turns away and buries her head in Isa'ako's chest. He wipes his eyes. Then he closes his eyes and whispers to himself, praying.

Claire sits down. She wants to touch Kate, put her hand on her knee or something but can feel her sympathy is not wanted.

"The tumour was discrete. I cut out one kidney and the other is working perfectly. It all went absolutely to plan, no problems at all."

"What, do you want me to thank you?" Kate says.

"No."

Claire feels the silence, decides to let it go unfilled for a minute. Kate and

Isa'ako hold each other and cry.

“I am truly sorry you have been through so much. He should be well now. He really should.”

Isa'ako pats her shoulder.

On her way out through the public waiting room a Samoan woman, probably Isa'ako's mother or aunt, rushes up, weeping, and envelops Claire in a huge hug.

“Doctor, Doctor, thank you so much. God has answered our prayers.”

38.

New Zealand 1970

Why were you even there?

Your wife is hysterical, both of you exhausted from listening to the baby crying all night. You hear her ring your office, shout ugly things about you, hang up weeping. The baby screams and screams. A drive in the car might put her to sleep, give your wife a break, get you out of there. How do you end up on a hot side road, abandoning a girl who needs your help?

You'll go over that moment for the rest of your life. Close your eyes against the glare of the sun thumping in your head as you strain to see. Smell the stench of fertiliser, beer, and your own cloying sweat. Hear the deep roar of the Charger idling. Turn your head to avoid the ugly hatred of the swastika tattoos. Reach out to catch the girl's slurred stumbling.

Most of all, though, you'll remember the first thin wails of the baby in the carrycot in the back-seat of your car. The way the animal who hit you looked towards your Holden. The way you'd almost forgotten the baby was even there in the back of the car.

This is terror now. You have to save your baby, Claire. She must never even know you were here. It's your baby or the girl. The girl'll probably be all right. She's old enough to look after herself.

Get your baby out of this mess. Drive away.

She's wide awake most of the way back to Auckland. You stop at the side of the road and put her carrycot on the front passenger seat beside you. Every time you look

at her she's alert, looking around, jerking her arms and legs. She's soaking up everything like a big sponge. You don't know how to comfort her, what to say, what to do. You're so tense. You can't calm down: you talk to her, but it sounds desperate. You rock her but, in your panic, too fast. You stroke her, but not gently enough.

"I love you, Claire. I'm so sorry. I'm so sorry. You can do better, Claire. You can be better."

It's as though she knows. As though her nerves and her muscles will remember this, though she will never have the language for it.

39.

It's a grey day but the sun shows itself every so often. Not right when Claire and Yossi are saying their vows or anything poetic like that. Just randomly, three or four times after lunch the sun pushes through and the water sparkles and people's voices get lazier and her skin rises to the warmth through the gauzy sleeves on her posh jacket.

The rest of the time it's grey and dull and the water almost fades into the background, except if you look it is actually a pale silver. Twice while Claire is getting dressed in her buttery yellow suit, kereru flap past with a loud whoosh at a startling speed. Rachel says they're there to bring luck to the wedding.

"We get them here every day. They love the berries on the puriri trees," says Claire. "They seem to travel in pairs. They can be real show-offs sometimes, swooping and gliding. I guess it's a mating dance."

They've decided to go for a little drama to start the wedding. Debs has talked Claire into a bit of theatre, a bit of effect. It's the one time, Debs keeps telling her. It's your one chance. Relax, girl, and enjoy it. And to her own amazement, she does.

Debs' Dad brought his boat down from Russell specially and at about three in the afternoon, he picks Claire, Debs, and Roimata up from the jetty and takes them out a wee way and drops anchor. He's kind then, teasing Claire, feeding her a bit of brandy and distracting her by telling stories about the history of Pearly Bay. Half an hour later, Debs' phone plays a tinny U2 song and she says, "That's the signal. All ready on the shore."

Rachel's voice rings out in a hair-raising karanga from the jetty. The keening flies around the bay, dying away into the bush and Claire shivers and tries not to cry. *Haere mai. Haere mai.* They have talked about the words of the karanga and she and Rachel have agreed that the calling to the dead to stay with the dead and the living to stay with the living. *Te hunga mate ki te hunga mate, Te hunga ora ki te hunga ora.* Entirely appropriate. Sure, Rachel believes the spirits of the dead are there with them, in the bush, in the sky, in the water. Claire interprets it as telling the past to leave them alone. Put it behind them. Nothing supernatural.

Claire simply does not believe the dead are here with them in any actual way. But they're here in their influence on them all, the way they're shaped, in their genes and their energy and their attitudes. She understands it that way. She thinks of her mother and father, both buried now and oblivious. Not peaceful, because that would imply they exist, have a state of being or feeling. They're gone. Over.

Haere mai. Haere mai. Joe slowly pilots the boat towards the jetty in response to the karanga and Claire can see them all now on the jetty, waiting for her.

"What a motley lot," she says to Debs, who smiles and says,

"Your motley lot."

"My motley lot," says Claire.

"What they all have in common is that they all love you. They all wish so much good for you and Yossi and Roi, you know."

"I know. Now stop being nice to me. I'm going to get through this whole day without crying," says Claire as Joe goes alongside and ties up. Then he takes her

hand and whispers in her ear,

“You look radiant, my dear. And your parents would be so proud,” as he helps her up onto the jetty.

Rachel's *karanga* dies away and the next minute Brent steps forward and begins a *haka*. Handsome in his dark suit he leaps about, eyes rolling and tongue flicking in and out, in and out, face jerking slightly up to the right, slightly up to the left. He places a perfect green leaf on the wooden deck and backs away, grunting and tongue flicking on the offbeat.

Roi, looking older than usual in her mossy green dress and showing lots of young smooth brown back reaches down and picks up the leaf, smiles, then steps back in line with Debs. Claire touches Roi's hair and hugs her with her left arm, her right holding the bouquet of perfect yellow tulips Debs presented her with this morning.

Yossi steps forward, beaming from ear to ear. He's not ashamed of the tears streaming down his face. He hugs Claire, kisses Roimata and Debs and then the celebrant begins their simple vows.

Afterwards on the deck, Arie puts klezmer music on the stereo and Arie and Yossi put their arms around each other's necks and dance the hora, whirling and laughing, grabbing Sam and Janet who join in. Rachel and Brent join the circle too, looking as though they've done it all their lives. Yossi pulls up Roi and dances with her as they often do in the kitchen for fun. He looks across to Claire and she can tell he is bursting with pride. He loves her. She believes it.

Before they eat, Rachel stands and speaks. She has excelled herself today

with a black dress and long red jacket, a black koru printed on each sleeve, her taonga a cool, luminous pounamu koru. She pays tribute to her Nana Roimata, lying under her beloved mountain and Papa Donald, lying next to the beautiful River Arno in Florence.

“I know you hate this oogy spooky stuff,” she teases Claire, “but it was Donald who brought you and Brent and Roi together. And it took Yossi, dear Yossi, to bring you all back here to us.” She talks about Yossi’s parents lying in Israel and Claire’s parents lying not far away.

Roimata stands and sings with Rachel, showing off her new moves with the *poi*, not skilled yet but confident, flicking her head and widening her eyes which are as green as her dress. She stands very straight and holds her head high. Where did this poised young woman come from?

After they have all eaten too much and had too much wine and they are nearly ready to leave for the ferry, Claire thanks them for coming and says there is one thing she has saved until last. She smiles at Roi, who gets out her violin and plays Claire’s favourite Bach sonata. Everyone is silent as the exquisite sound joins the sigh of the bush and the slap of the water. Claire thinks her heart will burst. Everyone she loves is here with her, safe and peaceful, at least for this moment.