

**Catch them  
when they Fall**

Helen Fa'amotu Tau'au-Filisi  
(Fa'alava'au)

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## **Attestation of Authorship**

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person, nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma or a university or other institution of higher learning.

Helen F. Tau'au-Filisi: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Although this novel is based on true events, names of persons have been changed with additional characters and events included.

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## **Abstract**

In 1991, Ela's returns to teach at Southside High school as a first year English teacher in Otara, South Auckland after a seven year absence in tertiary study. She too had been schooled in South Auckland schools in Mangere and initially wanted to return back to Uni after two years of teaching to complete a PhD, write fiction and poetry, and then find a nice man to marry but nothing has quite prepared her for the challenges that she must face at Southside High.

She meets her students': Ben, an developing artist and 'gentle giant' who is on his own learning journey, missing his mum and lives with his dad; Ruth, an aspiring student who wants to study law and faces family difficulties; her best friend, Moana, who is an inspiring singer and wants to be a future teacher but has to make some difficult choices and her ex-boyfriend Jackson, 'the big mouth' and trouble maker who faces some difficulties of his own. She also meets Lani, a 'sleeping' teacher who has become disillusioned with teaching who challenges Ela about what she can do to make a difference.

'Catch them when they fall,' is their stories of courage, frailties, hopes and dreams in a world where it seems as if everything is going against them.

## **I. INTRODUCTION**

This exegesis will discuss the influences, goals and intentions of my creative work the novel, 'Catch them when they fall'. It will also examine the ways in which the genres of poetry and the short story are included to add texture to the contexts of the story and the use of multiple narratives that intertwine throughout the novel. The primary intention of 'Catch them when they fall' is to take the reader on a journey of why and how some New Zealand Samoan students and teachers may have failed in the NZ education system in the two suburbs of Mangere and Otara in South Auckland during the early 1990s.

The novel itself is the culmination of twenty one years of experience within the South Auckland, New Zealand education system in various roles as a teacher, tutor, facilitator, lecturer and contractor since first starting out as a first year teacher in 1991. In that first year, I thought about writing a novel regarding the experiences that I had endured but time and circumstances did not permit such a project until now.

This exegesis and novel is very much the fruition of an intent that has lived in my head for some time and has finally become a reality on the written page.

### **i. Synopsis**

Ela is a New Zealand Samoan who has successfully completed a Masters degree and is ready to teach for two years at a South Auckland secondary school before returning to Uni to start her PhD. At Southside High school in Otara, she meets Ben a NZ Samoan boy and 'gentle giant' who befriends Scot, a palagi boy who teaches Ben about friendship, but what is the mystery

with his parents? She also teaches Ruth who initially is an ambitious student until the separation of her parents and Moana who has had to make some difficult decisions about her future. Nothing at Teachers College has prepared her for the shock of what she is about to learn.

## **ii. The Novel's narrative and main characters**

The three narratives of the three main characters are first person point of views that of: Ela, a NZ Samoan female graduate with parents both born in Samoa, it is her first year as a secondary school teacher having being schooled in Mangere aged 25-26 and working in Otara for the first time; Ruth at first is an ambitious 16-17 year old female student living with her parents but due to the separation of her parents she loses the motivation to study and leaves with her dad for Brisbane; and Ben is a 15-16 year old male student living with his disinterested 'dad' in a state of poverty who tries to make changes in his situation. His late mum was born in Samoa but his biological father is unknown.

## **iii. The organization of the exegesis**

This exegesis begins with the introduction of laying down the foundation for the backdrop of a South Auckland educational setting in 1991. Background explanations continue in part two to contextualize with other relevant texts that inform my writing with a discussion on Pacific and Samoan writers who have informed my writing processes.

In part three, I continue with a discussion of the methods and approaches, including the use of autoethnography, that I have utilised within my writing to

explore the issues, problems and solutions that I encountered with my writing to weave together theoretical concerns and the methodological approaches.

The fourth section is my discussion section, in which I study two significant chapters in my thesis in relation to earlier sections and to what extent they have successfully achieved my intentions. I also consider some of the central roles of families and their implications on student achievement.

The final section is a discussion of the successes and limitations of 'Catch them when they fall' and where further research and redrafting might be necessary, if I were to publish the work for a target audience of educators and students situated in South Auckland schools and beyond.

#### **iv. Background**

Interest in my creative project grew from my experiences as a first generation NZ born Samoan living in Mangere since the 1960s. I was educated at three Mangere schools, primary to secondary from 1970 to the early 1980s. My education continued for a further five years at the University of Auckland in which I completed a Bachelor degree with a double major in English and Geography and a Masters degree majoring in Human Geography. I then chose to study for a year, in 1990, at A.C.E. (Auckland College of Education now known as University of Auckland, Epsom Campus) for a Diploma in secondary teaching.

I began my teaching career in 1991 as a first year English teacher and continued for five more years at Tangaroa College in Otara. 'Catch them when they fall' is based upon my diarized experiences and thoughts at the time.

In my disillusionment as a teacher and in the wake of the damning Education Review Office (1996) report which slated at least fifty schools in South Auckland as failing and of not delivering quality education (Eppel, 2004), I began to look for opportunities to try to address some of the negative issues that I had experienced. In 1997, I first began contract work with the Ministry of Education on the P.I.S.C.P.L. project (Pacific Islands Schools Community Partnership Liaison) as a Liaison Advisor with the purpose to write a guide<sup>1</sup> for Pacific families and communities to work closely in partnerships with their school/s in order to see more Pacific students succeed (Tau'au, 1998).

In the following year, I signed a two year contract to work in the Ministry of Education as an Otara education facilitator from 1998 to 1999. This experience further dismayed me as to the plight of Pacific students within the education system.

In the year 2000, I was further disheartened and was ready to leave for Australia but met my then fiancé (now husband) and started a family whilst continuing to work on another contract with TEAM Solutions at A.C.E. from 2000 to 2006, originally as a Pacific Islands education advisor until A.C.E. amalgamated with the University of Auckland in 2004 and became known as Epsom campus and I later became a schools education advisor to Auckland high schools with a focus on Pacific education issues. From 2007 onwards I turned my attention to working within the tertiary education sector.

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<sup>1</sup> The guide was published by the Ministry of Education and was launched in 1998. It was translated into the five Pacific languages of: Samoan, Tongan, Niuean, Cook Islands te reo and Tokelauan.

## **v. Rationale, Purposes and Aims**

My primary rationale for writing 'Catch them when they fall' was to share these experiences with a broader audience. To achieve this, I needed to find appropriate voice(s) and genre(s) to write about the myriad of social issues and experiences that had affected and challenged me as a NZ Samoan woman with a keen interest in South Auckland education. The novel gave me a platform to explore the notion of presenting my experiences fictionally through writing.

The purpose of 'Catch them when they fall' was to capture and record some of the complexities of the issues, dilemmas, stereotypes and assumptions that were often associated with Pacific peoples but in particular NZ Samoan students and teachers in South Auckland secondary schools and specifically in Otara and Mangere, to bring about a better understanding of what sometimes lies beneath the stigmatism that is often associated with these non-achieving students and teachers at these schools.

My intention was to write from my reflections and to share with other NZ Samoans, Pasifika peoples and a wider audience that would allow me to discuss some of the experiences of minority people who have experienced colonization in their education but little in the way of academic achievement in the westernized educational system of Mangere and Otara, New Zealand in the early 1990s.

## **vi. Underlying themes**

The main themes underlying 'Catch them when they fall' can be broadly divided into two areas. The first involves issues of cultural hegemony within the educational landscape or as Bishop (2009) contends that it is, "a framework of neo-colonialism and as a result continue to serve the interests of a mono-cultural elite," with its highly Eurocentric environment and values, apparent in the majority of teachers at the school being of European ethnicity and the majority of the students being of Pacific or Maori descent with the disconnection between two value systems. The result is that many Pacific students are over represented at the tail of New Zealand's educational statistics for OECD Organisation for Economic Co operation and Development (Hattie, 2002) although over 80% European achieve. This is due to not having gained qualifications and their apparent failure often blamed on not having the cultural capital that allows them the knowledge to be successful through cultural deficit paradigms of teachers. Bishop states this as epistemological racism, "embedded in the very fundamental cornerstone principles of the dominant culture," (Bishop, 2009, p.2).

The second issue involves cultural displacement of living away from places of cultural origin and connectedness with intergenerational issues, the changing identities of first and second generation NZ Samoans through urbanization and their experiences within what is often termed as 'dysfunctional families'. 'Catch them when they fall' also provides an exploration of some of the social-cultural experiences of living in Mangere and Otara, suburbs of low socio economic status in NZ and the issues that lie therein.

**vii. Title: 'Catch them when they Fall'**

The title "Catch them when they fall," is the metaphorical idea of people falling or failing within the NZ education system for NZ Samoan students and teachers within South Auckland, although it also relates to a sense of 'falling' when facing difficulties in life. The directive is to, 'catch them' when they 'fall', which alludes to able people who can assist, help or support those who are 'falling'. Some examples that demonstrate this concept is the character of Moana who becomes pregnant and has to secretly drop out of school to have the baby, Jackson doesn't attend the fifth form exams to advance to the next level and Lani is no longer interested in teaching and wants to leave a job that she was once passionate about due to feelings of exploitation.



## **II. PACIFIC WRITING**

My experiences of Pacific writing had its' seeds sown during my University studies in the late 1980s, at the University of Auckland, in which I read and studied Pacific literature which explored themes such as the demise of cultural knowledge, cultural displacements, identity challenges and intergenerational issues etc. The works of Albert Wendt, Konai Helu Thaman and Epeli Hau'ofa influenced my early thinking and provoked thought about the challenges many Pacific peoples face living as NZ Samoans in South Auckland, as I was.

In this section, I will look to locate my novel 'Catch them when they fall' within the tradition of other Pacific and Samoan writers. I will compare and contrast differences and similarities through specific examples in the use of poetry, short stories and novels in relation to social-cultural experiences of Pacific people, particularly within urban settings. I will also explore connections of Pacific and Samoan writers regarding notions of identity, displacement and diaspora with a particular interest in educational themes.

Some of the writers of whom I am most interested in examining are the first published writings of Pacific writers and specifically those of Samoan descent who use English as their medium of writing. These writers are often referred to as Post-colonial and/or indigenous writers, who have published in one or more of the following three genres: short story collections, poetry and early novels.

### **i. Background**

Since the 1800s, Pacific writing was a term firstly associated to those travellers, from colonial settings, who wrote about their travels and

experiences in and around the Pacific Islands such as the early Missionary writings of Reverend John William's *A Narrative of Missionary Enterprises in the South Sea Islands* (1837) and Robert Louis Stevenson's *Island Nights Entertainment* (1893) and later James Michener's *Tales of the South Pacific* (1948). There were few if any published indigenous Pacific writers, although many indigenous people did assist in numerous projects to translate traditional myths and legends for an English speaking audience such as Governor Grey's *Polynesian Mythology* (1855).

This began changing in the 1970s and the 1980s when a critical mass of indigenous writers from around the Pacific Islands began writing using the colonial language of English with published works from indigenous perspectives. One of the main centres was at Fiji's USP University of the South Pacific of which Albert Wendt, of Samoan descent, was on staff and one of the leading figures of the movement as was the Tongan writers Konai Helu Thaman and Epeli Hau'ofa. Students from the University were also encouraged by Wendt to take the opportunity to publish their works in the University's literary journal *Mana* (Sharrad, 2003).

The central themes of these emerging indigenous Pacific writers included: a response of indigenous Pacific peoples to the changes brought about through the adaptation and modernization of traditional Pacific cultures to westernized colonial settings, as is one of the central themes of Albert Wendt's characteristic narrative of the time in his first novel *Sons for the Return Home* (1973) whereby the central character becomes alienated to his Samoan homeland and also to NZ his adopted home through his experiences of an estranged relationship with a palagi girl and her family. In his collection of

short stories *Flying Fox in the Freedom Tree* (1974) Wendt begins to address the idea of deconstructing white colonial paradigms and responding to the challenges and often clashes between the values of traditional village settings and those of urbanized town lifestyles. Similar themes echo in the satirical fiction of Epeli Hau'ofa's *Tales of the Tikongs* (1983) and his novel *Kisses in the Nederends* (1988) in which he also responds to the challenges brought about by development and modernization from village life to urban centres. In Konai Helu Thaman's poetry collection *You, the choice of my parents* (1974) she discusses the post-colonial influences of diaspora in her poem '*They won't leave*', cultural displacements are discussed in '*I tremble*' and changing identities in moving from rural to urban settings in her poem '*The working relative*.'

By the early 1980s Wendt's reputation is solidified as a leading Pacific writer which leads him to edit *Lali: a Pacific Anthology* (1980) writings by various Pacific writers from around the South Pacific.

This movement of indigenous voices continued through the 1990s and brought about new representations of Pacific writing. This can be seen, for example, in the works of Niuean born writer, poet and artist John Pule with his inaugural poetry collection of *Sonnets to Van Gogh and Providence* (1984) and novel *The Shark That ate the sun* (1992) in which he explores the relationship of a Niuean family with letters to emigrant workers in NZ. Another example is Sia Figel's *Where we once belonged* (1996) which is primarily about women and the coming of age of the main character and her experiences in seeing the clash of traditional Samoan values versus western ideas.

## ii. Samoan writers of influence

Some of the characteristic narratives of Pacific albeit Samoan writers that informed my work were the early works of Albert Wendt, Ruperake Petaia's poetry collection *Blue Rain* (1980) and Fia Sigiel's first novel and short stories collection, all of whom I have met at different stages of my academic and educational career.

My first introduction to Albert Wendt was in the late 1970s. I was a fourth former at Nga Tapuwae College, the first multicultural school in New Zealand, which Wendt visited to address our school assembly. I don't remember a lot about what he spoke of, but I did recall that they introduced him as something of a highly acclaimed Samoan author. When the movie "*Sons for the return home*" was released in Auckland in 1979, I recall my parents and many other Samoans adults at church buying tickets to view a 'first' movie about Samoa. Upon my parents return, I distinctly recall that they were disappointed at the movie and the themes it discussed, and didn't think that it was suitable to talk to us about it. It wasn't until many years later that I read and viewed the movie and understood their reactions.

In the mid 1980s, I chose to take a Pacific Literature paper at the University of Auckland, and for one of the novel studies I chose to read his novel *Pouliuli* (1977). I had already read some of Wendt's earlier works such as *Inside Us the dead* (1976), *The Birth and Death of the Miracle Man* (1977) and *Lali: A Pacific Anthology* (1980). My first reactions to his writings was that I found his novels particularly hard to relate to. This was because firstly: I was a young New Zealand Samoan woman born in New Zealand and did not have the same experiences of Samoa as Wendt. I also did not share his negative

perspectives of the faaSamoa and indeed Samoan culture in general, which can be seen in the depiction of his main character Faleasa Osovae in *Pouliuli* who pretends to be demon possessed resulting in ramifications on his aiga and village. I decided that I did not share Wendt's views on culture, although I was already aware that the faaSamoa, in itself had qualities that were admirable such as the concepts of *faaaloalo* respect and *alofa* love but was also often flawed with its traditional views concerning the roles of women and children within the *aiga* family both nuclear and extended.

However, in 1990 I decided to apply and was accepted into his Creative writing class of twelve students in which I majored in writing poetry. In that class he encouraged us to read, read, read and to keep up with international and literary movements of the times. I found that I still couldn't relate to him, although we were both of Samoan descent, my values and beliefs were still conservative and traditional with a focus on writing for a young Pacific South Auckland audience.

The impact that his writings had on my work was that I wanted to steer away from the deficit thinking paradigms that often negatively impact on the perceptions of western views on Pacific peoples. I wanted to write about some of the challenges that NZ Samoans often faced, but I also wanted to celebrate the achievements and idiosyncrasies that make us unique.

I was introduced to the poetry of Ruperake Petaia in 1990 when I completed a four week placement as a student teacher at Samoa College in the English and Geography department at the school. One of the senior English classes was studying his poem '*Kidnapped*' which explores the loss of cultural knowledge with the effects of colonization in the Samoan education system

whereby students' minds are 'kidnapped' by the teachings of curricula shaped by the dominant colonial culture. This particular poem resonated very pointedly with me as I was able to identify with being 'kidnapped' by the NZ education system into thinking, at an early stage, that my Samoan cultural heritage inherited from my parents and upbringing was of no consequence and often a hindrance to academic achievement. This poem made me question the values that were often not taught, such as the important role of traditional cultural knowledge in the faaSamoa and how this knowledge was not being passed on to the next generation through school curricular.

Consequently my poetry too, reflects the dichotomy of unique Pacific values and cultural knowledge versus the English history lessons that we were taught in schools, in that we learnt English histories and about European countries as a colonial outpost but we did not learn the histories of our own Island nations as reflected in my poem *Pacific Forefathers – Super Navigators of the seas* and in *Am I Samoan?*

I met Ruperake Petaia in the early years of my teaching when he was invited to attend Tangaroa College as a guest speaker in some senior English classes. He was the uncle of one of our students and was on holiday in Auckland before returning to Samoa. It was the only poetry collection that he wrote.

I was also interested in reading the work of Sia Figiel, who was the first published Samoan women novelist. Her book *Where we once belonged* (1996) echoed some of the themes that I was concerned with, for example, the traditional roles of women in Samoan society, as well as the way that the role and values of the traditional Samoan protestant church often clashed with

westernized values shaped by the popular culture of Hollywood movies and contemporary music. However, her novel was unique in the way that it portrayed the sexual coming of age of a small group of Samoan teenage village girls and the difficulties that they faced, as within traditional Samoan society things of an explicit sexual nature are taboo and forbidden to be discussed openly. Figiel does not conform to the traditional norms, and in effect breaks the silence on such conventions. Similarly, her short story collection *The girl in the moon circle* (1996) expresses themes of sexuality and violence, exposed through the narrative of a ten year old girl.

I met Sia on two occasions in 1998 to 1999 when she gave readings of her work at the Otara Library, with many secondary students from the Otara high schools in attendance to listen to her readings and to ask questions. I found her readings to be highly dramatized and she enthused her audience with her 'larger than life' expressive nature. I later met her at a Pacific educators' conference workshop which she also attended and she shared some of her life experiences as a Samoan writer. I enjoyed her use of humour within some of her narratives. This is something which I also include in my own work.

The impact that her writing had on 'Catch them when they fall' was that I realized that although I did not conform to all the conventions of traditional Samoan values, I was not particularly interested in the 'darker' exposure or social critique of some of the very real issues that seemed to characterize the narratives of the writers that I have already identified. In a sense it seemed to me as if they were using the very methods of critiquing that often were associated with western academic thinking and paradigms such as the

satirical views that often saw traditional cultures as somewhat dysfunctional and 'old fashioned' for the modernized times.

### **iii. My space as a NZ Samoan woman writer**

There were few, if any, published Pacific women or Samoan female writers of whom I was aware of during the early 1970s. It was not until the 1980s when I discovered the work of the Samoan poet and artist Momoe von Rieche and the poetry of Emma Kruse Vaai who had both attended USP in Fiji during the 1980s. They too wrote about the many challenges and issues Pacific people faced in the changing landscapes from rural villages to new homelands.

In contrast, Selina Tusitala Marsh, of Samoan and mixed descent, published her inaugural poetry collection of *Fast Talking PI* (2009) with poems about urban Pacific identities. Marsh's themes were similar to those that I wished to explore with a localized focus on New Zealand Samoan South Auckland experiences.

My work deviates from many of the Pacific born writers, due to my particular lens as a NZ Samoan women writer living in South Auckland in which I learnt the language and values of the faaSamoa in New Zealand. In contrast to Pacific born writers, I see New Zealand as my homeland and Samoa as my heritage heartland in being able to converse in Samoan.

Having been brought up in South Auckland and not in a village Island setting, I felt that the church in the form of Mangere PIC Pacific Islanders (Presbyterian) Church became a supplementary village setting for my family and I, with extended family ties to church families where we would meet regularly to



learn, share knowledge and function much like a village setting. The congregation comprises of Samoans, Niueans and Cook Islanders, who can all share the English service in the mornings and can also attend the staggered ethnically specific services in the evening for each of the three heritage languages.

#### **iv. South Auckland themes**

It has often been quoted that Auckland houses the largest Pacific Islands population of any city in the world and particularly within the South Auckland region with a population of over 177,000 people as recorded in the Census data of 2006.

In 2007, a South Auckland Poets Collective was formed with a view to perform and publish South Auckland poets' works. Three years later *Something Worth Reading* (2010) an anthology of ten South Auckland poets works, was launched with an accompanying CD to share with a wider audience. The themes of identity and the complexities of living in South Auckland were some of the themes expressed in the collection. This was very encouraging to learn about as I believe that my writing and sharing cultural knowledge would add to the voices and fill the gap of sharing some of the experiences as a first generation NZ born Samoan women living in South Auckland with second and even fourth and fifth generations of Pacific people living particularly in Mangere and Otara, that have been missing in earlier Pacific writers' works.

These localized areas have many stories that have not been shared and I wish to position my voice as something new of wanting to speak in a variety of

voices. These voices are expressed through the characters of Ruth, Ben, Ela, Moana and Lani.

Of the three narratives: Ruth is a student voice close to my heart, a picture of some of my struggles as a new South Aucklander, trying hard to understand and pass exams – things that were foreign to my parents. Ben symbolizes some of the young South Auckland men who I had taught. These men didn't always appeal to the macho male image, but like Ben, desired to carve their own identities. Ben does this with the help of a palagi friend Scot. Scot is quite the opposite of Ben in terms of physical appearance and confidence, and teaches Ben about friendship. Moana is symbolic of many South Auckland girls, that I became aware of when teaching, who had had abortions without their parents knowing. Some of their untold stories were about not having that significant male father figure and role model who could give them the love and support that they needed, instead, they found it elsewhere with dire consequences.

I also wanted to write about family dynamics in South Auckland. This occurs through the character of Ela who lives in a stable household with her two parents. Her father who until now hasn't agreed with Ela's questioning of their cultural beliefs, has subsequently changed his views now she has become a teacher and assumed a higher status. Ela has a strong mutual relationship of respect with her mother and this is evident in the way she refers to her mother as her "best friend". In contrast, Ben is motherless but he shares insights of having a relationship with his mother. Moana, dissimilarly, has a mother, but she is self-centred and absent to Moana's needs. She leaves Moana to often look after the younger siblings while she is busy with her younger boyfriends.

Moana confides to Ruth that her mother's boyfriend is abusing her. Ruth's mother is also absent and chooses to leave her husband for a new boyfriend. This leaves behind in its wake feelings of rejection and feeling unloved by her mother, new issues that Ruth must grapple with, so much so that she is unable to focus on her goals of passing the exams.

These are some of marginalized characters in 'Catch them when they fall' that would be found in South Auckland communities with complex life issues and difficult family dynamics that I wanted to give 'voices' to within my thesis.

### **III. METHODOLOGY**

In my first year of teaching in secondary school as an English teacher in 1991, I kept a diary throughout the year that documented daily events, my feelings at the time and also my mental state on various occasions. I had studied Stage one Anthropology papers during my initial University studies and knew that it was important to take notes as there might be a time when I would want to refer back to these recordings. I was aware at the time that the experiences that I was involved with would one day merit being written about and these diarized writings became the basis upon which I developed my thesis.

Their narratives are written in first person and it was intentional to be able for the reader to 'get into their heads' to know what the main characters were experiencing at the time.

#### **i. In the beginning – Autoethnography**

In 1997, I began part time studies towards a PhD at the University of Auckland in the Geography department, however, due to meeting my then fiancé in 2000 (now husband) I decided to defer my studies till a later date as we planned towards starting our family. At the time I had begun to look at ethnography and specifically autoethnography as a methodology that I wanted to use to record and reflect upon the phenomenon of the cultural displacement of NZ Samoan teenagers in Mangere but I was not convinced that the approach that I was being asked to take in reading all the literature concerned with identity issues was conversant with what I wanted to explore. Something was missing.

I came to understand the research methodology of autoethnography as a tool often utilised by Social Sciences researchers in Anthropology and Sociology as qualitative research with the view to observe, document and (re)present the narratives through their own voices as texts within their field of study such as confessional notes, or personal accounts as the researcher or the ethnographer as author (Coffey, 2002).

As I began to write the three narratives for 'Catch them when they fall', I transferred my autoethnographic notes from my diary and developed these notes into the narratives, particularly of Ela.

I was also interested in the writings of bell hooks (intentionally uncapitalised) an African American feminist writer who has written extensively about issues of race, gender, politics and education to name but a few of her themes. It was her book *Bone Black Memories of Girlhood* (1996) that gave me insight into her writings and stories about memories of her education in the racially segregated public schools of Kentucky that resounded with some of the experiences and emotions that I had similarly felt as a child schooled in South Auckland although in a different context. I therefore, wanted to use autoethnographic notes as narratives and as a means of reflecting upon the experiences that I had documented in my 1991 diary with the Otara high school environment and the community therein as my 'field of study'. The relationship, however, was still problematic with the idea of 'reflexivity' in that I would be considered both the informant and the researcher with apparent prejudices in perhaps not being able to see the relationship biases that I might have.

## **ii. Post colonial indigenous research methodologies**

Still, the methodology did not sit comfortably with me as I began to learn more about Kaupapa Maori research methodologies as indigenous peoples intentionally decolonizing their research and paradigms of thinking. I was already aware of this approach through my work, since 2010, as a Student Support and Learning advisor at Te Wananga o Aotearoa, Mangere campus. Te Wananga encourages alternative research paradigms to what are often termed Eurocentric Western research paradigms which do not take into consideration indigenous values and ways of engaging. This has been referred to as the 'captive mind' state (Chilia, 2012) whereby researchers are challenged to consider whether the Western social science methodologies being used are indeed appropriate for working with indigenous peoples without critiquing these approaches. I felt that I needed to find a methodology that worked with my values and understandings as a New Zealand Pacific woman.

## **iii. Storytelling and Talanoa**

I then came upon the concept of 'storytelling' as discussed by Smith (1999) as a powerful tool and means for indigenous people to pass on important cultural values and information to the next generation. I have utilised this concept in my writing of conversations between the main characters. This is similar to the premise for future writing that I would like to continue with, to pass on cultural knowledge to the next generations.

"For many indigenous writers stories are ways of passing down the beliefs and values of a culture in the hope that the new generation will treasure them and pass the story down further."

(Smith, 1999, p.144-5)

In Timote Vaoleti's journal article *Talanoa Research Methodology: Developing a position on Pacific Research* (2006), he advances the cause for research dealing with Pacific peoples to have a personal encounter with peoples' stories rather than questionnaires which provide generalizations and may sanitize their realities and issues. *Talanoa* is the Samoan and Tongan word for a conversation, to talk, this methodology requires there to be a personal relationship between the researcher and the participant. This is not dissimilar to the conversations in the thesis between the main characters where ideas, issues and stories are shared by the main characters and with the reader through their conversations and their life experiences that would otherwise not be expressed to public audiences. As expressed in the storytelling conversation of Ela with her fifth form class.

"You know something else that I thought about at the time? was that sometimes when no one else believes you, you just have to stand your ground even when everyone else believes that you're wrong but you know that you're right - don't change your story according to what everyone else thinks but be true to yourself." (p. 178)

This interchange of conversation between characters allows for ideas to be expressed in such a way that it would seem that there is a three way conversation with the reader as the silent listener. This is the way that I consciously wrote the conversations between the characters in passing important information not only between characters but also to the reader as the silent listener.

## **IV COMMENTARY**

This section discusses and explains two chapters: Chapter 19 and Chapter 27 from the creative work that relate to the notion of *Talanoa* or conversations about some of the real issues in family dynamics that can support or hinder NZ Samoan students achieving in their education such as the role of motherhood, fatherhood and spirituality that I wanted to bring together intentionally in the creative work, through the different contexts within the text.

Chapter 19, is the climax of Ela's narrative whereby we see her frustration with teaching. This provides the platform for, her more experienced colleague, Lani, to share with Ela, the deeper issues that Lani has been aware of as an experienced teacher. Through the character of Lani, I was able to discuss some of the important concerns regarding my observations of teaching at the time, that could not have been expressed through Ela.

### **i. What beneath the surface lurks?**

The climax for Ela's narrative is played out in Ela's conversation with Lani about her perceptions of the school as a first year teacher. Lani is an experienced NZ Samoan teacher who no longer teaches with passion and she listens to Ela's perspective of why she is feeling frustrated in the school.

"I reckon that there are only a few teachers who really care about whether these students pass or fail. It's like they expect them to fail, so why bother teaching them much? I don't necessarily think that I'm a very good teacher but at least I'm trying to sort things out but I just don't get it, I don't really think that many of the teachers here really care about whether these kids are gonna make it. I think about the stink resources, the fact that no one talks about success or achievement in the school. All I hear instead is about what they can't do or they blame the parents and blame their backgrounds." (p.238)



This scene is placed towards the end of the novel and is a culmination of ideas that Ela is now giving ‘voice’ to which she has not spoken to anyone about beforehand. Through the voice and character of Ela, I was able to express the surprise and shock that some educators have when faced with the problems associated with teaching in South Auckland schools. In contrast, Lani is the experienced and disillusioned voice of many Pacific educators who no longer has faith in the education system. I also wanted to explore ideas of what may be the causes of such underachievement in South Auckland high schools as expressed by Lani in her conversation with Ela.

“What we’re experiencing is something between covert racism and classism. I’ve had time to think about it and have read about it in a different books and it goes like this: It’s not talked about, it’s not thought about. But it’s there. It’s hidden, but it’s not so hidden. You think it’s there, then you doubt yourself. It’s like a tumour hidden underneath it all like an underground volcano ready to explode. It’s insidious, it gets under your fingernails.” (p. 243)

In her conversation, I wanted to discuss ideas that I had come across in my research and work within the educational community to ‘put it out there’ for an audience to debate and uphold or refute. One of the primary problems that I had experienced was sometimes the attitudes of teachers that weren’t conducive to a rigorous learning and teaching environment and many of these teachers were in middle management and senior leadership roles where they were ineffectual in the management of students and their half-hearted work ethics. In chapter 21, aptly entitled ‘Who are you?’ this rhetorical question asks the reader (if a teacher) to identify their attitude as either: a) a sleeper;

b) a climber; c) a blamer; or d) a hater although the same question could also apply to parents/caregivers and students.

I similarly wanted to discuss about some of the challenges that often Pacific students face in their pursuit to try and succeed in the education system but I also wanted to write about obstacles that were often beyond their control.

Lani's response is potent to me as a measure of how I felt during my latter years of teaching at high school.

"But the sad thing about it all, is that they get paid well whether or not our children are learning, whether or not they pass or fail. There's little accountability, they don't really care and it shows in their teaching and their actions. That's why you've got twenty year old resources, that's why we've got a rundown school, that's why we've got old busted down sports gear and no school pride cos they can't be bothered so they blame the parents and blame South Auckland and blame poverty and belittle our people in their own circles." (p. 243)

I wanted to voice the overwhelming desperation of the situation that I had felt.

In contrast, I also wanted demonstrate some of the support that significant adults can have on assisting students such as Mr Holden, a palagi teacher who supports Ben to achieve his goals despite the fact that he doesn't have much moral or financial support from his 'dad'. For these people to make the difference they must step out of their 'comfort zones' to assist 'at risk' students like Ben, who need an extra helping hand to support them to negotiate their way through the added difficulties of having little support at home for their educational goals.

Mr Holden told us that next month we're having a special showing for all the parents and anyone who's interested – it's like an art gallery display. I'm so excited cos it will be the first time that my art's ever been on show for everyone else to see. With the pastels that Mr Holden gave to me, I've

started playing with bold colours and designs for my tapa design boards...  
(p. 265)

Ela also echoes the same support by offering to lead the Bodybuilding contest for the senior boys and working with the boys in a professional manner. This raises their expectations and their 'game' so much so that they are no longer having fights during the school day. They are now preoccupied with a higher standard of looking after their bodies. Along the same lines, Ela also takes over as lead teacher for the school council and begins to bring some organization into the student body that wasn't well supported by the previous teacher. This is described through Ruth's narrative about the changes that Miss T is bringing about for the student council.

At the first meeting Miss T said that she would now be working with us to get things on track for the end of the year after we told her that nothing much had happened with the Council during the whole year. She also got Christina, a senior to take minutes and that we would set an agenda for each meeting. She promised that we'd all get the minutes before each fortnightly meeting. (p. 264)

I wanted to write about 'real stories' that students, like my children, could relate to and identify with. I wanted to parallel the types of 'slice of life' short stories within which the narratives share lived experiences of urbanized Pacific people in their new homeland New Zealand, within the South Auckland education system and particularly for those secondary students who are wanting to succeed but who are needing extra assistance to negotiate their way through.

## **ii. Dénouement: beyond the text**

In Chapter 27, the dénouement is different for all three narratives coming to a close. With the assistance of James George, my mentor, I was able to capture messages that I wanted the reader to be left with upon finishing the novel.

In Ela's denouement, she speaks with Sima about returning back for another year but doesn't say what her plans are; Ruth flies off to Brisbane with her newly separated dad to begin a 'new life'; Ben takes his commissioned paintings to see Scot and his father with some explaining to do. I wanted to leave the reader with possibilities of what might happen in an open ending despite what the difficult circumstances were ie. With Ela's frustration at the school; Ben has been told by his best friend Scot's dad to keep away from his son; and Ruth has to begin anew with her move to Brisbane.

In essence, I wanted to give the reader hope that all was not lost despite the afore mentioned difficulties facing the main characters as the creative work comes to a close.

## **iii. In consideration of motherhood, fatherhood and spirituality**

I wanted to also explore the important roles that parent figures had on the achievement of children in regards to mother and father figures and the role of spirituality.

On motherhood, I wanted to represent the significance of the role of mothers (or the absence of a mother figure, in Ben's case), and the struggling solo parent

families, as described through Ruth's narrative. For Ruth, the feelings of rejection of not being loved by her mother, results from the break-up of her parents and impacts on her educational achievement. This is different for Moana because her mother had children to a number of different boyfriends but is oblivious to Moana's need of her. Moana is left in the position of becoming a solo parent, but wants a better life for her child and adopts the baby out to a European family to give it a better chance of succeeding at life. She wants to break the vicious cycle of abuse from her mother's live-in boyfriend.

On fatherhood, the male figure of Ben's 'dad' who does not engage with Ben, contrasts with Ela's relationship with her parents who are very loving, caring and supportive. Scot's dad is very much a busy man and doesn't seem to have time to be with his son. Ruth's dad cares for her but doesn't show much emotion and is unable to engage with her own educational work and leaves to Ruth to negotiate her own way through. In the end she gives up her dreams and they leave New Zealand.

I also wanted to look at the relationship of religion, which is often rejected by post colonial writers as oppressive and non-indigenous. I wanted to demonstrate how Ela has a personal relationship with her God. She consistently refers to her world around her in terms of her positive relationship with God, even though this is not how she views the church that she is attending. Like myself, she also draws strength from her spirituality and faith in times of hardship.

## CONCLUSION

As a result, I have become particularly interested in what is termed Post-colonial indigenous research paradigms, which have at the heart of their processes the aim of decolonising traditional research methodologies. This is necessary when working with specific ethnic groups, and those who are marginalised and who do not traditionally have a 'voice' in dominant society. In writing this exegesis and the creative work, I wanted to ensure that I was not deliberately writing in such a way that would alienate indigenous peoples, instead I wanted to challenge and call into question some of the practices that were constraining student achievement for NZ Samoan students and teachers in South Auckland.

### i. Successes, Failures and Limitations

The intended outcome was to provoke thought about the challenges many Pacific peoples face, based on my own experiences living as a New Zealand Samoan in South Auckland, and to pass on specific cultural values and knowledge to future generations of *mea sina* that are often not seen as being of importance to Western epistemologies or within the generic New Zealand education system.

I feel that the completion of my creative project has been an achievement and is the fruition of many years' work. My failure would be due to the time factor in trying to juggle so many things of being a mother in fulltime work and also attempting to complete a major creative work, all within a span of a few months, and giving it the quality time that it needs (and not rushing it at the

end). The limitation is that I could keep on writing but the book but all good things must come to an end.

## **ii. Post Script**

I taught at Tangaroa College between 1991 – 1996, and in the last two years I became one of four deans of a vertical whanau with the management of around 350 students from Forms 3 - 6. During that time, I remember thinking that some of the boys attending the college would eventually end up in prison.

In January 2000, I met my fiancé and he was an itinerant minister who had been overseas for several years and had come to NZ on a respite ready to return to Malaysia, however, as we decided to marry the following year he remained in Auckland. I came from a conservative Presbyterian Pacific Islanders' church and he from a Pentecostal Samoan church background where they had regular prison ministry visits to Mt Eden Prison. Visits would be with the remand prisoners, the youth wing, the general population of those who wanted to attend and the psychiatric ward. During a period of about a year of visiting regularly I counted 12 past male students that I had either taught or I had come in contact with as a dean or teacher at the school. They often would see me and recognise me and after our 'session' of sharing ie. Singing gospel songs, sermons and sharing, they would sometimes come up and say 'hi' or just acknowledge me with a nod and a smile. I never asked them what they were in for. There was only one young woman that I had taught who was in the women's prison. I recall that she had 'family problems' and had only been at the school for a short time before she left.

### **iii. The role of literature as a catalyst for change**

There was a three pronged approach to my writing of this creative work. It was to firstly motivate and challenge educators, particularly South Auckland teachers at Mangere and Otara to support and teach to the best of their abilities; secondly, for students to become committed to their studies or to find a place that would be motivating for them; and thirdly for parents or caregivers to work positively in their roles to encourage and give support for NZ Samoan, South Auckland students for a better chance at achieving with the hope that it would address some of the inherent problems that I came across in my days as a teacher, educator and now parent and education advocate.

My hope is that this creative work will somehow find itself into educational discussions with teachers in South Auckland schools, particularly in Mangere and Otara even if they don't agree with the messages in the book – it could serve as a means for 'checking' whether their hearts are in the right place with the high expectations that are needed to assist these students to achieve within an education system which has been failing the students on a large scale for so long. That is why the novel includes characters who are both teachers and parents who are failing to help these students. .

### **iv. Future possibilities of the work**

In the future, I would like to find a publishing house or small publisher or alternatively self-publish 'Catch them when they fall' so that it will be accessible in the public arena. There is the possibility if there was enough interest in the



creative work, that I would be able to follow up with a second book of what happens to each character ie. Does Ben get back together with Scot? Does Ela make changes at the school? What happens to Moana?

The work could also be topical as a film as the underachievement of Pacific and Maori students in South Auckland is still at the forefront of educational issues that are affecting New Zealand's OECD statistics and this work provides an insight that is not common knowledge with the greater New Zealand population.

I would also be interested to continue my studies towards a PhD and further my understandings of indigenous methodologies and the creative project that I have started here, and would continue to write and pass on specific cultural values and knowledge to future generations of *mea sina* that are often not seen as being of importance to Western epistemologies or within the generic NZ education system.

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## CHAPTER 1

### Ben

I miss my mum. Don't want to go to school. Wish I could stay home but then don't want to when dad's at home. He was Inside for a few years, then when he came out my mum got sick. He used to go to the pokies all the time. Then she kicked him out. He used to go out to the SkyCity Casino until he totalled the car. Then she died.

He's got new friends now. I don't like them. They just like to come around to drink and smoke and then leave their rubbish lying around. They like to work on cars in the garage. I'm glad mum's not here. She wouldn't like what they've done to the house. It doesn't look like the nice house we used to have with a tidy garden and nice things. Now it looks like a dump.

Sometimes I go to school hungry cos we just have bread and butter and I get sick of bread and butter. When we're lucky I get jam, tea leaves with no sugar, or a tea bag that's been used over and over. They just like to drink and go to the TAB or Lotto. Always waitin for the big win. I miss my mum. She use to look after me real good.

At school, kids keep away from me. I've heard them whisper that I smell. I can't smell a thing. We don't have a washing machine, it broke years ago just before mum got sick and my dad can't be bothered fixing it. Sometimes I wash my clothes with just a little water and then hang it up. When it's dry, I just put it back on again. But then I don't care what they say. They just leave me alone. I guess they're just scared of me.

Sometimes when I come home, the house is a mess from all the cans and bottles that I have to push past. I try and clean up as best I can then I check the cupboards. Most times it's empty or just the odd stale bread or fish and chip papers. If mum was here this wouldn't happen. My father hates it if I ever mention my mother. He has a fit. The last time I brought it up, he started throwing things around. I got angry and told him to stop. He came over to me to hit me like he used to do before he went Inside. He punched me in the stomach real hard. I fell to the ground. Then he tells me to get up. I get up. He kicks me and I'm down again. He's laughing. This time I get angry. What the hell is he up to? but I don't wait for the next hit. He comes to me and I rush at him and smack him hard into the wall.

“Don’t you ever hit anyone unless you have to defend yourself,” my mother would tell me.

“You’re much stronger than anyone else I know, like my giant father. Remember to just take it easy.”

I listen to her and have never touched anyone. But he’s broken the line so this time I punch him hard in the stomach and he’s on the floor. He doesn’t get up like I can and he’s not laughing anymore.

“You better not ever hit me again or break any of mum’s things or I’m gonna punch you up bad.”

He looks at me scared and that’s the last time he ever dares to hit me. He just doesn’t talk to me much anymore. But it doesn’t bother me ‘cos he just use to order me around. Now, I just do my own thing and he leaves me alone.

## **Ela**

It’s October 1990. I thought to start that Friday afternoon to drop off my C.V. on the last day of job applications for Southside High, in Otara, South Auckland – it’s the school furthest away that I had only heard about. Two more would follow at two high schools closer to home, in Papatoetoe then Mangere.

I walk up to the tall blond receptionist, looking very efficient with her coiffured sprayed hair and carefully made up face. She looks like an aged Barbie doll.

“Hi there, I’ve just come over to drop off my job application.”

I hold it out for her. She immediately looks me over behind her tortoise framed glasses, then stands up and walks over from behind her reception desk. I hand over my precious package expecting to leave but before I can she stops me.

“Please take a seat. I’ll be with you shortly.”

‘Hey, wait a minute,’ I want to say, but I hear the clicking of her efficient high heeled shoes as she quickly walks away. If I had been given a chance to reply, I would have

declined as I'd come casually dressed in a T shirt, shorts and Jandals. I hadn't expected to have to discuss anything.

'Oh, oh, I just hope they're busy.' I sit down on some nearby seats and await her return but after fifteen minutes she still hasn't returned. By now I'm wondering what's going on? I've only got a couple of hours before the other schools close and this is the last day. This was taking a lot longer than I'd expected. I start thinking that maybe I should make a run for it but then I hear the familiar sounds of high heels tapping rhythmically back to me. She arrives and without a word beckons me to follow her. Obediently, I follow her down a dark series of corridors. I have no idea where she is taking me. Then she leads me through thick glassed security doors and along another set of corridors until we get to a room with bright fluorescent lights. I can hear voices speaking loudly nearby.

She motions for me to sit down beside an open door. She enters the door and the voices promptly stop. She returns and beckons me into the room. She smiles hesitantly then leaves. It takes a while for my eyes to adjust from the fluorescent lights into the darkened room. I can just make out two men and a lady. It seems as if this has become a formal interview or an interrogation. I try not to panic. This wasn't supposed to happen. I'm not even dressed for it. My confidence is waning. Of all the days to wear jandals and shorts but then when you're in a rush – things happen. Well, what have I got to lose? I'll just have to make the most of it.

A tall palagi bespeckled man motions for me to sit down. He has a deep tan and a quiet voice. He briefly introduces himself as the one of the senior management team. He looks after pastoral care for students and says his name is Steve March. He then introduces the others. I quickly look around. The principal is the guy with the suit and tie. His name is George Pene. He looks a little odd in his suit that makes him seem stiff and starchy. He looks like a light skinned Maori, short and with a stern smile. He doesn't have a lot of hair on his head and this is further emphasized by the way he combs his hair. He nods when he is introduced but doesn't say a word. The lady doesn't even bother to look up when she's introduced. Her name is Luisa Parker. She is older, maybe in her early fifties. She is neatly dressed with her dyed black hair slicked into a bun. It's hard to tell her ethnicity. She may be Maori or Pacific? She definitely

isn't Palagi. Her taut face pulls a brief reluctant smile. I notice, too, that her fingernails are carefully manicured and painted a blood red. Steve March states that she is the school disciplinarian. I could tell that by her stern face. She must also love her talons that mismatch the dark crimson lipstick on her thin lips. I see that they already have copies of my C.V. in front of them. That was quick!

A barrage of questions begins: 'What brings you here? What's your background? Where did you go to high school? What are your teaching subjects? What institutions did you get your qualifications from? Why do you want to teach here?'

I answer them as honestly as I can. No sense in pretending but the question that stood out for me was: 'What would you do if one of the students jumped out the window?' A quick thought came to mind, 'does that happen here?' but I speedily replied that there would have been something that had had happened before the incident that would have provoked such action, so I'd have to go back to what had happened before the incident in order to rectify the problem in knowing whether to follow suit or to let them go. No sense in jumping to conclusions. I think the senior managers were somewhat flabbergasted by my response, 'that's what you get for trying to put me on the spot!' I want to say to them but don't. They look at each other and nod. Apart from that, no further hints are given as to whether I'm giving the right answers. From the questions, I get the feeling that they're wrestling with something but hard to tell what because there's an angst in their line of questioning. I get a flash thought that maybe they're sizing me up to see if I'm fat enough to put into the oven like Hansel and Gretel's witch. In this case, witches.

I walk out of that interview somewhat red faced and drained. 'What the hell was that all about?' I look at my watch. Dam it, it's too late now. It's past 3 o'clock and the deadline is over. I missed out on dropping my last two C.V. at the two other high schools. I let out a heavy sigh and walk back to my little Honda Civic shuttle. All that work for nothing. Oh well, let's see what comes of this.

I shut the car door and begin my journey homeward. They said that they'd contact me next week to tell me the outcome of my application. The competitive side of me is excited but the small voice inside asks if this is really what I want to be doing. Sometimes I'm not so sure about this whole teaching business. Maybe I'm getting cold



feet? It's not that I don't want to teach it's just that it's not my life's dream. I haven't confessed it to anybody but the truth is that I'd love to be a successful writer, finish my PhD before I turn 30 and if all else fails then I'll teach. I guess all else has failed.

***What's it like in Your World?***

*where money \$peaks its mind  
and violence is the friction of  
rubbing note\$ together*

*You possess magnificent magazine palaces of  
exquisitely sculptured lawns  
and coiffured tresses  
those scenic heights that span a panoramic view*

*As Your sleek wheels  
glide past  
i inhale your dust*

*Do You see me?  
in my cardboard box?*

## CHAPTER TWO

### Ela

Only a couple more days before I have to start my new job as a high school English teacher at Southside High. It was never my dream, although some people would think it was but I've decided to keep writing otherwise I'll lose the passion forever. I like writing poetry and short stories and someday would like to write that award winning novel. Have kept a diary since I was little, so maybe after two years of teaching and paying off my student overdraft and credit card, I'll get back to starting on my PhD, then I'll be back on track to my dream of writing and find me a nice guy to marry.

I went to church today with dad, mum and my little brother Pili. It's our Sunday routine of no TV, church and rest. Dad's a foundation member and elder. He takes his usual seat next to the large opening double doors to greet people coming into the service. Mum sits in the alto section of the choir in front of the pulpit. I sit with Pili, my lil' five year old adopted brother, in our usual seat at the back. It's the usual Samoan Sunday afternoon service, with the usual congregation of Samoan families. I watch Pili drawing with some crayons I brought along. It's after lunch and I'm trying hard to concentrate and not fall asleep with the promise of the usual boring sermon. Today, there's a visiting minister from another Presbyterian church preaching, although he seems a bit more lively and interesting than the usual career preachers.

"Open your bibles to the book of Matthew chapter 25 and we'll read together verse 40."

I join in a chorus of voices reading from our Samoan bible.

Today I want you to think about this verse: 'And the King will answer and say to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, in as much as you did it to one of the least of these, My brethren, you did it to Me.'

I sit up. He's got my attention. He continues.

'When was the last time you did an act of kindness for someone who was more poor than you? or when was the last time you helped someone who was disabled? Can you

think of a time when you stopped to ask a widow or an elderly person if they would like some help and without payment? When was the last time?’

There’s a murmur in the congregation. They don’t always like these kinds of sermons. He continues.

‘Was it yesterday? Last week? Last month? Last year? Now think about it because if our Lord is saying that we should be helping the poor, the elderly, the widows, the disabled and there are many who are called the ‘least of these’ then who are we not too?’

He got me thinking as he continued on with his twenty minute sermon. Here I am living in Mangere and now I’m going to be working in Otara. To think that I used to be ‘the least of these’ with my parents struggling to hold down factory jobs in order to pay a mortgage, feed, educate and school all six of us kids and now all the others have left home and doing well leaving my parents, myself and my little bro. Maybe God’s got me out there on assignment to work for a couple of years ‘with the least of them’. I think of Southside High nestled at the back of Otara, also known as one of the poorest suburbs in the country.

After church, I shake the visiting minister’s hand whilst others walk past. At the dinner table, at home, I ask my dad about what he thought about the sermon as my mum begins packing away the lunch dishes. It’s my turn to do the dishes so I’ll take my time and have a discussion with dad. He likes to exchange personal views on the evening service sermons. I’ve often wondered why he didn’t pursue becoming a minister as he never misses a service unless he’s so sick he can’t get out of bed. He makes us do the same too and if he’d had his way, I’d have been at Knox College training to be a minister by now.

“It’s a bit like you starting in your new job tomorrow,” my dad replies.

“What do you mean?” I ask, although I know what he’s talking about but I like to listen to what he has to say.

“You’re now able to help out in our community. You’re the only teacher in our family and the first to graduate from University. You’ve been given a special gift that not

many people have. You're now a role model but it's no good having all that knowledge and not helping others too along the way."

I reflect on that for a moment and then reply.

"But it's not fair because palagi people don't have the same expectations on them and they just get on with their careers and don't have to think about helping others."

My dad is now used to me questioning certain values, not as a sign of disrespect but in my observations of cultural differences but it wasn't always like this.

"Yes, but we are not palagi and we are taught about loving each other, honouring God and respecting our elders. Don't you forget, greater is your reward in heaven. That was the lesson from last week's sermon."

He gets up and pushes his chair away from the table. This signals that our conversation is over. My dad is also the Samoan group treasurer, this means that he has to balance up the books and write up the week's small offerings in his ledger. I too get up and reflect on his words while doing the dishes. Pili comes along to help me with the dishes. It just doesn't seem fair to have that kind of responsibility. It would be like one beggar showing another beggar how to find food.

## ***URBAN JUNGLE***

*First Generation:*

*Timeclocks*

*Supervisors*

*Working on the line*

*Factories*

*Clockhands*

*It ain't your time!*

*Hey! you come onto my land, you play by my rules,  
you play by my rules, you get –*

*Quarter acre house, warm clothes, TV  
Nice car, lotsa food  
And plenty of money on  
Silver dollar trees...*

*Second generation:*

*Working class  
Education, fashion  
Get an office job*

*Express yourself  
Find yourself  
Cheque book and credit card*

*Hey man, this is a dog-eat-dog world of racing rats  
Ain't no rules, you make 'em as you go. You kill for number one.*

*Mortgage, renting, it's on H.P.  
Bank loans, cancer and cholestoral  
And bills, bills, bills in  
Company letter-headed envelopes...*

*Third generation:*

*? ? ?*

## CHAPTER THREE

### Ela

My first day on the job. I get up early for work before 6am and have a cup of tea with dad before he drives to work with my mum. He works as a storeman at the local car factory and my mum works on the factory floor making up different car harnesses. The car factory is just a five minute drive from where we live. He follows his usual morning routine of getting up early, saying his prayers and having breakfast before getting ready for the day. I picked up the habit from him as an early riser. Mum on the other hand wakes a little later, gets breakfast ready for my little brother and then potters around the house with some house cleaning before getting ready for work.

“Have a good day at work and don’t worry about cooking dinner. I’ve just put the meat out which I’ll cook when I get back,” my mum reassures me as she leaves and kisses me goodbye.

“Yes, and don’t forget the Sunday school teachers’ meeting starts tomorrow,” dad says as he kisses me goodbye and is out the door. Shoot, I forgot to mention to him that with my anticipated busy schedule, I didn’t think I’d be teaching the teenage Sunday school class this year. Oh well, will see how this goes.

We have a family tradition of waving to other family members until they are out of sight. Their car disappears around the bend and I go back into the house and close the door behind me. They must be relieved that I’ve finally scored myself a permanent fulltime job after so many years of student jobs and often getting paid peanuts.

I hear Pili stirring in his bed and I quickly get him dressed with a quick breakfast of Weetbix. I pack his lunchbox then place him in front of the TV while I carefully dress. My outfit is a pair of dress pants, a nice blouse and sensible black flats with some hardly visible earrings, all sensible teachers’ attire. We walk over to my aunty’s house on the corner where I drop off Pili. She’ll take him to school with her little boy and then will pick him up after school. I now get ready for my half hour drive to work. I make sure I have everything ready in my bag including my healthy lunch, new stationery and a drink bottle. Yesterday had been great to relax at home on our Auckland Anniversary holiday – just love my summers but now it’s all over.

Arrived at work early around 7.30am and parked in the staff car park. I take my new satchel with me and feel like a bonafide teacher. I walk up towards the main entrance of the administration block and then it strikes me that the buildings actually look a lot worse for wear. It's funny how there are so many Maori and Pacific students here but there is little evidence of their presence on the walls as art work or inside the foyer of the admin block. I do, however, see some staff photos and a cabinet of trophies but nothing else.

Upon reflection I hadn't really paid much attention to this at my first interview or when I signed my contract but in the light of the morning, Southside High school looks huckery. There's some graffiti on the walls, some sad looking plants in bowls and it definitely needs a new paint job. It's been some eight years since I left High school and now I'm coming back as a trained teacher. Still it doesn't give me a good feeling. They don't seem to look after the place very well compared to some of the fancy school administration blocks that I'd witnessed whilst on practicum. Sure, I've lived in South Auckland all my life, so this shouldn't be anything new to me, but it doesn't mean that you don't have some pride in where you live or work.

I walk into the staffroom and see a couple of efficient looking palagi teachers who are quietly talking between themselves. They give me an offhand wave but quickly get back into their conversation. I find myself a seat on the opposite side along the wall, pick up a dated education magazine from the year before and feign being genuinely interested in reading it. Slowly people are drifting in and I find myself watching them between glances at a second then third magazine. It's now past 8.30am when the staff meeting was supposed to start. I'm noticing a pattern that most teachers are European and many are looking twice my age with the average age probably in their mid to late 40s. Just then I remember that I left my drink bottle in the car and decide to go and get some welcomed relief out of what's feeling like a stuffy staff room. Many are now pouring in. I leave my bag on the chair to save it for when I return.

I go to my car and see a splattering of students with yellow shirts, brown pants and skirts, and some with brown shorts and jumpers. They're walking onto the school grounds. It reminds me of pineapple lumps and rotten bananas. Who chose those

colours? This would definitely make for a fashion emergency, I laugh to myself. I see a couple of girls walking up to me.

“Hi, Miss,” they say.

“Hi there,” I reply as they walk past and giggle. I notice that most of the students look like me of Maori or Pacific descent with no European students in sight. I quickly retrieve my drink bottle and head back for the staffroom. A few more students pass me and smile. I wonder if any of them will be one of my students. I can see them watching me and probably wondering who I am. I can’t wait to get the formalities over with and then to get on with the teaching.

I get back into the staffroom and realise that in that short time, all the chairs have been taken and that someone has moved my bag onto the floor with my chair now being occupied. There is standing room only. Being Samoan, this isn’t a problem because I’m used to sitting on the ground for family meetings when there aren’t enough chairs or to show respect to our elders when we are at family gatherings. However, this is a staffroom and I wasn’t expected to have to sit cross legged on my first day back to school in after as many years. It felt like I was back at primary school again.

I seat myself on the floor next to some other seated teachers and try to make myself more comfortable. I decide to tuck my legs beneath me but then have to move over as another young teacher rushes in and sits beside me. She’s wearing shorts. Boy she’s got muscly legs and is wearing a sports T shirt. She looks like she’s been peddling a bike with her pink bike helmet still in hand and sweat trickling down her temples. We exchange ‘hi’s’ and I’m just about to ask her some questions when there’s a tinkling of a metal spoon hitting a teacup and people whispering loudly ‘shhhh’. A quiet hush takes over the talking din and the first staff meeting as a fulltime permanent teacher begins for me. The three senior managers who had been present at my impromptu interview are seated at the front of the staffroom. The principal begins the formalities for the year ahead.



“Kia Ora everyone and welcome to all staff. Hope you had a well deserved holiday. And now I’d like to introduce to you our newest staff members. There are eight of them who will be joining us for 1991.”

Everyone applauds on cue.

“I’d like to firstly introduce to you to four of our first year teachers beginning with Miss Ela Tag-a-loa-la-gi.”

He trips up on the pronunciation. I try not to look embarrassed.

“She is the newest member of the English department. She joins us from Auckland Teachers Training College with a double major in her Masters degree of Geography.”

There are a few claps. I smile and wave my hand so that they know who I am although he’s got it wrong because I only have a single major. He continues with Fiona, who is a mature palagi lady also joining me in the English department, the muscular teacher Simā who will be with the P.E. department and Zane a Maori graduate joining the Maori department.

After the initial introductions, a bevy of questions hits the principal about what happened to the ten or so other teachers who resigned last year. As it turns out, there must have been some pretty bad stuff that had gone down last year with lots of teachers airing their concerns, hence, why I find myself here. I noticed that Jean Symonds, a tall palagi lady in her forties, seemed to want to antagonise the situation even further by repeatedly asking similar questions which I’d thought the principal had already answered. It was definitely draining just listening to them.

I look at Sima and she looks at me with feigned horror. I try not to laugh and shake my head lowering it so as to not let anyone see my look of disbelief. Is this for real? It felt like I was in a TV soap opera with teachers making speeches and crying, more speeches and arguing, with lots of angry talk. What did I get myself into? Most of the talk seemed to be directed at the principal but was deflected by the two other members of his senior team so that at the end of the discussions, he seemed unfazed and Sima and I exchanged looks. What was all that about? With me thinking, ‘Do they ever get any work done around here?’ The principal then summarized the events from his perspective and adding that it was a new year, that this was a new beginning with new

staff on board and that if anyone wanted to discuss matters any further, they would have to make an appointment to meet with him or one of his senior management team. He then stood up, said 'good day' to his staff and left the room. I didn't know what they were on about but somehow his message of reassurance didn't give me much guarantee that this was over. I could tell by the faces of nearby teachers that there were still some disgruntled staff who didn't think that this was over by a long shot. Ms Parker then told us the room allocations for our departmental meetings that were scheduled for after morning tea. She then dismissed us for our morning break and I got to catch up with Sima.

"My name's Ela."

I smile and extend my hand to her.

"I'm Sima."

She shakes my hand and returns my smile.

"You look like you biked here?"

I continue the conversation and move to look for some chairs to sit on as others are exiting the staffroom.

"Yeah, I just biked here from Mangere. I'm waiting for my car to arrive from Wellington. My brother's driving it up for me."

We seat ourselves on some vacant chairs.

"So you're a first year teacher too?" I ask. I see that many teachers are starting to line up for coffee and tea in the corner where the staff kitchen is situated. I motion to Sima if she would like some and we walk towards the line.

"Yeah, up here from Porirua and in the P.E. Physical Education department. And what was all that about?" Sima whispered as we waited in line for a cup of coffee. There were also some homemade pineapple scones fresh from the oven.

"My name is Ngarima, I'm one of the cleaners. I live just across the road with my husband Tere, he's the caretaker, if you girls need anything you'll know where to find me. Have some of my lovely scones."

It smelt divine. We both thank her and return back to our seats.

"I have no idea what's going on," I whisper.

"Where do you live?" Sima asks as she starts sipping coffee from her mug.

"I live in Mangere with my folks. Did you say that you biked in from Mangere?"

"Yeah, I'm living with my auntie until I can find a flat or something. I'm originally from Porirua and when I saw the job advertised in the Gazette, I thought I'd give it a go and move up to Auckland. I'm just waiting for my car to arrive. Do you mind if I can get a lift with you home after school?"

"That's fine. I can meet you back at the staff room after we've finished," I reply.

"Thanks, I'd really appreciate that."

Then she looks at me real close.

"So are you Maori or Cook Island?" she asks.

"Neither," I reply, "I'm Samoan, I was born here."

"Well, what about that? I'm Samoan too, born here – well down in Wellington. I didn't think you were Samoan."

I'm used to that comment as I have a light tan probably through German ancestry on my mother's side or the Asian side of my dad.

"I didn't think you were Samoan either."

What with those muscles? We exchange phone numbers and chatter for the next few minutes until we were reminded of our meeting rooms.

After the initial staff meeting, I was then ushered into three more meetings: one with the English department; a meeting as a new whanau staff member for the Pounamu house that I had been selected into and then the final meeting was for new staff with the principal. At that last meeting I really did get put off by Principal George's vision of some kind of Utopian ideal society, with the students forming an inseparable bond with their high school. I think my old high school was somehow more realistic. If

people could read minds they would have been able to see the incredibly big question mark in my forehead. Where do they get these people from?

After the meeting, I returned to the English Department and had my first real look at the English resource room – my heart sank. I could see that the room was badly in need of organisation and repair. The H.O.D. Head of Department, Mr Sommers explained that he had just started late last year and hadn't had time to sort things out. I found that hard to believe having just come back from the holidays.

I surveyed the room and saw that some of the books were in extremely poor condition, not to mention the dust and cobwebs that were on shelves and the shelving system was in disarray. I just couldn't believe the state that the resource room was in and how old these resources seemed to be. How could they let it get this way? It was hard to believe what I'd walked into. It was then that I knew that I was supposed to teach here and make a real difference for these students. They didn't deserve this. They probably didn't even know about it. Unbelievable! Mr Sommers said he had to get a few things and walked out leaving me when Fiona walked in. She too looked in disbelief at the resources that we were expected to teach from as first year teachers. I didn't say anything and began stacking like books together and Fiona followed suit.

More English staff joined us for a little while and then they started leaving one by one. I was trying to arrange books into a better order when I heard a knock at the door. I went to open it and found Sima smiling.

"What are you still doing here?" she asked.

"I'm just trying to work out a better way of arranging these books in our resource room."

"Did you know that most of the other teachers have gone home already?"

I look at her surprised as I hadn't realised that it was now almost 4pm. I gathered that Mr Sommers had probably gone home too.

"Yeah, let's go."

I locked the door behind me and we then jumped into my car and drove off back to Mangere where I dropped her off at her aunties house, an eight minute drive away from mine.

I arrived home just before dinner. Dad was listening to his old taped Samoan music of 'Punialava'a' and mum had just finished setting the table with Pili's help. Pili jumped onto my lap as I described to my parents my first impressions of the school and some of the incredible things that I hadn't expected to witness on my first day in the job.

"Maybe that is the reason why you've been given that job, even though there were many jobs out there – maybe this one was a special assignment."

My dad looks at my mum and me and then smiles mysteriously and continues eating. They take their faith seriously and I hoped that they were right because if they weren't, then I was a fool for being there.

Sima later called and the more we talked, the more we laughed and joked over the happenings of the first day.

"So what brings you to Auckland?" I ask her over the phone, sometimes it's easier to ask people questions on the phone so they can feel more at ease at answering. Sima shared about her hopes and her dreams.

"My goal is to buy a house in Auckland and then to travel to the Women's Rugby world cup somewhere in Europe in the next couple of years. What about you?"

It was a fair question. I shared my goal of just finishing two years of teaching to get certified and then to go back to Uni to start on my PhD, maybe write on the side, then perhaps become a lecturer with frequent overseas trips. It was hard to believe that finally I felt like I had a best friend that I had always wanted and now my prayers were answered. It turns out that Sima had the same offbeat Samoan sense of humour that I possessed.

"What about that Jean Symonds? She kept saying, 'I take my hat off to you,' for getting rid of those ten teachers."

We were laughing away.

“Yeah, and then she said, ‘I take my hat off to you,’ for finding eight new teachers.”

We keep adding on to the story line.

“Yeah, and then she kept taking off her hat for several other things.”

I couldn’t stop laughing.

“It’s a good thing that she didn’t take her socks off to him. He would of fainted.”

That cracked us up and we ended up talking for over three hours and would have continued if my father hadn’t wanted to use the phone. Already I couldn’t wait until the end of the year. The first day was exhausting.

### ***DREAMS ARE FOR FREE***

*What do you dream to be when you grow up? my mum asks me*

*I want to be just like you – I reply*

*No, you don’t. I want you to be better than me*

*I want you to have a better education, a better job, a better future.*

*No, I don’t want you to be anything like me.*

*What do you want to do when you grow up? my dad asks me*

*I want to marry a man – just like you*

*No, you don’t. I want you to marry someone better than me*

*I want him to have a better education, have a better job and give you a better future*

*No, I don’t want you to marry a man struggling like me.*

*So she pursued the things that she thought they’d asked of her*

*and got a better education, a better job, and had better future prospects with a better man*

*then she met proud, opinionated people who prided themselves on their university education*

*their six figured salaries and selfishly spent dollars*

*so too was her metro-sexual unfaithful future fiancé.*

*She longed for the simple wisdom of her now greying parents who had believed in her  
and had shown her their depth of love with very little in their bank account*

*They had no academic qualifications or future prospects except for heavenly rewards  
and with that realisation, she rejected those dreams and returned to her old ones*

*No, I dream to be just like you two – as carefree and happy as her parents had been.*

## CHAPTER 4

### Ruth

Gotta get up ready for school today. I rummage through my drawers to find my uniform that I'd washed last year but now when I look in the mirror, oh no, much to my horror, my dress has shrunk! It looks so tight like I'm wearing someone else's mini skirt. Oh shit! I'll just have to unbutton it, unzip it and leave my shirt out to cover it. No one will know the difference. It's not that I've gained a lot of weight, it's just that it's going on the fourth year of me wearing the same faded uniform skirt since I first started this school but I sure ain't gonna ask my mum to buy me a new one, cos she'll just have a fit and make a big scene like last year.

"Can't you see we don't have enough money with only me working to pay the bills and put food on the table. What do you think? I'm made of money?"

I go to protest but then she reminds me.

"Hey, maybe you should quit school and help out now that you're almost sixteen."

I ignore her suggestion. There's no way I wanna quit school yet. I've got things to do, places to go, people to see and I just don't wanna end up like my parents. Don't get me wrong, I love my parents but I don't remember the last time we laughed together.

Anyway, glad mum's gone to sleep early. She's finished from her first job cleaning offices in the city from 9 at night till 6 in the morning then home to sleep till her second job starts as a cleaner, after school, at the local primary school. So she'll be up around the time I get back from school.

I go get myself ready. Check the kitchen for some breakfast, last night's dinner of soup and bread – nah, think I'll give it a miss. I quickly pick up last year's school bag and head for the door. I just remembered. I'd better take some paper and a pen just in case we're expected to do some writing. I pass mum's room. I open her bedroom door and check in on her. I can hear her snoring dead asleep, still in her cleaners uniform. Great, she's outta my hair and I can just relax on the first day of school with no one bothering me like she does. I walk out into dad's room and look for dad but can't see him. We all have our own rooms since dad stopped working. At least dad can get some



peace and quiet away from her snoring and bad moods. He's probably out in the back garden. I go outside to look for him and there he is tending to his small vege garden. He's got a taro patch, some lettuce and spring onions, a few silver beet and some Chinese cabbages. He said it reminds him of when he was younger in Samoa when he used to look after their family plantation with his father.

My dad was born in Samoa and my mum was born in Rarotonga and came when she was only five years old and now only likes speaking English. Dad came when he was in his early twenties and he's sometimes too shy to speak English to others. He just loves it out there especially on beautiful mornings like this one. I walk up to him and tap him on the shoulder.

"Have you been awake for long?"

He's crouching by his taro patch, busy pulling out some weeds. He replies to me in Samoan as he sometimes does although I don't always understand him.

"Ua uma ona e sauni mo le aoga? Are you ready for school?"

He stops weeding, looks up and smiles. I nod in return.

"Yeah, kinda lookin forward to school but I'm sure gonna miss sleeping in in the mornings."

He smiles and goes back to his weeding.

"Ma aua e te popole i le tala o lou tina. Don't worry about what your mother said."

He knows that sometimes my mum can really lose it.

"You just work hard. This will not be your last year of school. I can help out with your school. Don't you worry. See this?"

He points to his taro leaves. I'm a lot closer to my dad than my mum.

"These taro leaves are almost ready and then we can tie them up and put them out at the front of the house with a sign. Can sell them for \$5, just like last year. You have nothing to worry about."

He has a self satisfied smile.

“Thanks dad.”

I scoot down and give him a kiss.

“I gotta go now, before I’m late for school. See you later.”

I don’t hear his reply as I speed off down the road.

## **Ela**

This is my first day of classes. I wake up early to take Mum to work as Papa had decided to walk. Pili comes along for the ride all ready for school.

“Are you looking forward to your first day of work?”

My mum smiles at me. She has been my best friend and supporter over the years. It was she who had encouraged me to take the opportunity to carry on with my Masters degree when my dad had said I’d had enough schooling and that I should help out with the bills.

“Yeah, just a little bit scared, I guess.”

I return the smile and back out of our driveway.

“You’ll be fine, just relax and don’t worry.”

We drive in silence for the rest of the short journey and then she says ‘goodbye’ and I return back to drop off Pili to my aunty and pick up Sima. We laugh a bit more about our experiences on the first day as teachers and we seemed to share a lot of the same things like our parents being born in Samoa, we liked island food, hanging out with our families, we both went to church and sports, except that she was a fanatic. She was a Black belt in Karate – third Dan, a good friend to have around just in case, I noted. She loved playing Rugby, was in a women’s rugby squad and loved to play tennis, squash and basketball. I, on the other hand, loved to work out in the gym all throughout my Uni years, I love to jog and also play badminton and had recently joined an Outrigger club last year and was loving it. I promised her that I would take her to one of my training sessions if she took me for a game of squash. There was mutual agreement.

By the time we had arrived at school, we had exchanged lots of info about each other's family: she was a middle child one of eight siblings, whereas I was the youngest of five older siblings who had long gotten married and left home. I was the only older sibling still at home with my younger adopted brother who was more like my own son. I also found out that she was brought up Catholic and I, by comparison, was brought up Presbyterian and by that Protestant. An unlikely match, given the history of our two religions.

When we arrived at school, we quickly made it on time to the morning staff briefing which wasn't as eventful as the previous morning's but I was excited with anticipation that I was finally going to meet my classes today as they gave out our class lists. It dawned on me that the students, who'd arrived at school yesterday, hadn't received the correct message that they weren't to come into school until today, somehow it didn't surprise me that the communications of the school weren't that great.

At the staff briefing, I checked out my schedule. I'd been given two junior classes and two senior classes. I was later told by Mr Sommers that I had a bottom Form 3 class with some 32 students; a middle stream Form 4 class with 34 students; a Form 5 examination English class near to the top stream with 30 students and a middle range Form 6 class with 15 students. I guess they won't give me any Form 7 students preparing to go to University or jobs until I've proven myself, I concluded. That was okay with me, as I'd tutored a range of students during my years at Uni in coaching examination English free to students at our church and private tutoring to get me some money over the holidays. So not having the top students was fine by me.

## **Ben**

Don't want to go back to school today. Went to English and I've got a new teacher. I like Miss T, she seems nice. I don't know how to say her last name but I like the way she smiles. She smells nice too. I think she's gonna be different from the other teachers cos she told us that she was Samoan, born here and had been brought up in Mangere.

“Mangere’s a community cousin to Otara except we have an airport and the sewage ponds.”

She don’t look Samoan but then I’m the same. People think I’m Maori.

“Okay class, now that you know a couple of things about me. We’re now going to go around the class and I want you to tell me one important thing that you think I should know about you or if you can’t think of anything you can just say ‘pass’.”

Well that got the class talking and it made me think about what I was gonna say to her. Some of the girls passed and some of the guys said some stink things to try and get her attention like Jackson.

“The important thing that you need to know about me Miss is that I’m too sexy for my shirt.”

He got a big laugh from that and a few boos which Miss T said we were allowed to do. It was getting closer to my turn but I still couldn’t think of anything to say. Then it came to the new palagi boy called Scot.

“Well, I think you should know that I’m really good at soccer but my dad wishes that it was rugby.”

He looked at bit sad after saying that and then it was passed on to the next person. Others kept answering and then it came to my turn. I told her my name and then I went blank, this has happened before cos I don’t like attention. I didn’t know what to say.

“Do you want us to come back to you?” she asked me, “or do you want to pass.”

I didn’t want to look stupid in front of the class.

“You just need to know that I don’t like coming to school.”

I heard some uncomfortable laughs but when I looked up at Miss T, she looked a bit sad.

“Okay, thanks for sharing that. Hopefully by the end of the year it might change.”

She smiled to me and with that I felt like I could trust her and I knew that I didn't need to worry about her making me look stupid in front of the whole class like Mr Ash did last year. I'm so glad I don't have him again this year. I just wanted to knock him out.

Last year, he made the class laugh at me. I don't even remember what it was over but I got up from my chair and walked over to him. His eyes got real big and he backed away until he was pinned against the wall. He looked real scared. I stopped in front of him. I wanted to belt him real hard like when my dad got real angry at me. But my mum's voice came into my head. At 6 foot 3, I stand a head taller than him.

"Don't do anything bad son. They'll take you way from me."

We lock eyes. I look at him real mean like. I raise my arm. I wanna punch him real bad. But I don't. He closes his eyes pinched up waitin for the big punch. I give him my best pukana eyes then I poke out my tongue just in time for when he opened his eyes. I then gave him the finger an inch away from his nose. Then I turn and walk out slamming the door behind me. That was the last time he picked on me. I got a detention for that.

At school, I got a new mate who likes to just hang around me. He's that pakeha boy. He's new in school. His name is Scot. I told him to get lost the first time I met him outside the class. But he had some other guys pickin on him. He ran to the other side of me when they went to hit him.

"Sorry," he said as he tried to hide behind me, "I don't even know these guys."

I got angry cos I don't like people making scenes around me.

"Piss off," I say to them. Jackson's the leader and he comes over to punch me. I don't like Jackson, he's a real show off and I've been in the same class as him since primary. He's a big bully. Likes to pick on kids younger than him. He usually doesn't like to mess with me but there's a bit of a crowd here so he's gotta act tough. He throws a punch that's supposed to hit my chest. I catch his fist and turn it around. He squeals like a pig.

"Let me go you handicapped."

He makes me mad and his boys laugh nervously from behind. They don't come to his rescue cos nobody wants to mess with me. I turn his fist a little further.

"What did you call me?"

He doesn't reply.

"Let me go."

I can feel him squirming but ignore his pleas.

"Did I hear you say I'm sorry?" I ask him.

"Yeowch!" he says and then chokes out an apology after I swing his arm an inch higher.

"Okay, okay. I'm sorry."

I let him go. He rubs his arm then swears at me before running off with his boys. He don't give Scot anymore trouble after that.

## **Ruth**

When I get to school, the first bell rings and the seniors are all ushered into an assembly in the hall with Ms Parker, a.k.a also known as 'Godmother'. She's the meanest mother dog I've ever come across in school. I don't like her at all and the way she talks to students like she gonna rip us up if anyone answers her back. As far as I'm aware, no one's taken her on. Man, she is scary. So there she is, barking her orders from the front and still sporting her slicked back hair bun and red dagger fingernails and lipstick. She's like a man in a skirt.

I'm following her every word and busy looking around for Moana my best friend but I don't see her. We've been best friend since last year when her family came to live here from up North. She's got like five or six younger brothers and sisters and they've all got different fathers. Poor Ruth is the babysitter but somehow she seems to enjoy it. Not me, I'd have a fit. But I wonder what's up? I hope she's alright, or I might have to sneak out of school tomorrow to go look for her.

While I await the roll call for the fifth form classes, I look around at the teachers and see that there are the same familiar faces like Rambo, Mr Holden, Ms Symonds but I can that a few teachers are missing especially Mr Ash and Mrs Steel. She was another bad mother. I hope she's gone for good cos there's definitely no love lost between us. I got the feeling that she didn't like teaching us and was always talking to us like we were dumb or something. I like English, it's my best subject but when the dragon was here, she kept saying that my writing was too fancical, like there's even a word in the dictionary like that. If she's gone, good job I hope that they find someone better to replace her.

I see a few new teachers. There's an older European lady, a young male teacher and what looks like a two young female Maori or Pacific teachers, hard to tell – one is slim and the other is stacked. Whoever I get, I hope they'll be good because this is a very important year for me with senior exams and getting into Uni. I just gotta pass.

They call out my name and I end up in Rambo's form class – it could have been worse. We march behind him to our new form class for the year. He gives us our timetables and events for the first term. I don't mind him cos even though although he's a bit of a macho man, he's harmless. Always wearing T shirts that show his big muscles, he's not that bad. He tells us his background story.

"Ya know? I use to go to school here many years ago when the place first opened up. Back then it was all farmland and there were plenty a pakehas that went to school with me but now things have changed."

Rambo tries to speak the same way that some of the tough guys do. But I think that's more cos he's copying them and wants them to respect him. He gives out our stationery list and tells us the rules of his form class.

"First of all, ya all gotta get here on time or I'll shut you outta the class. Ya gotta all be in uniform. No chewing gum or I'll make ya pull off all the gum I find underneath any desks and make ya eat 'em."

We look at eat other. I think we're thinking the same thing. Is he for real?

“No just kidding – but you will get a detention after your first warning. No fighting, or I’ll give you some boxing gloves to sort it out the ring. Nah, just kidding again – or am I?”

He tries to look mysterious but looks more like a clown except he’s not so funny.

“And for me it’s three strikes and you’re out. First offence: you get a warning. Second offence: you get a detention and third offence: I bring your parents, your grandmother or whoever from home to sort you out.”

Hmm, looks like the guys won’t be able to muck around too much with Rambo which is fine by me. He gives each student their schedules. I get mine and study it thoroughly.

“Now, if you have any problems with your schedules go and see Mr Bennet. So while you’re waitin for the bell to ring, you can talk amongst yourselves.”

I don’t wanna talk with anyone. I’m busy looking at my schedule. Yeap, I’ve got English, Maths, Geography, History and Biology. Glad now that school’s started and I don’t have to be stuck at home bored to the bone with my dad cos then he gets me cleaning the house before mum gets home and then there’s just TV to watch and I’m sick of watching TV. Homework will definitely keep me busy but my dad won’t let me go to the library by myself or go to my friend’s house, unless I sneak there on an errand to the shops. He’s always checking up on me. On the other hand, I hardly see mum now that she sleep’s all day and works all night with her cleaning jobs.

Sitting in class is pretty uncomfortable, in trying to make sure that no one can see that my skirt zip is down and I have to keep checking that the front of my skirt is pulled down close to my knees so that I won’t give the guys a thrill. I wish I could buy a new skirt or that I could go and get a part time job but then my dad thinks I’ll go crazy and hang out with boys. Give me a break. I need a life! I look out the window. Rambo’s on again talking about his camping holiday with his family.

“We went to the Hunua’s for a family camp and we had a ball...”

I’m not really listening to him, instead, I’m thinking about how my Dad’s been off work for two years now. We can’t even afford a holiday. I wish he could just find a job but whenever he goes, he gets the same reply. It’s been hard ever since he had the



accident at work and then the operation. He can't stand for too long. So now he just stays home. He doesn't talk much with mum anymore unless they're arguing and she just works, sleeps and eats then gets angry at any little thing. I know she doesn't really like all the pressure that's put on her with her being the only one working. And my mum doesn't believe that he's trying hard enough to find a job.

"You're just bloody lazy," she tells him.

"Well, it's not my fault I can't find a job here. If you listened to me, I would have had a job in Aussie years ago when we were supposed to go there." Most of dad's family have now moved to Australia in the early 80s but mum doesn't have any family there, they're all here.

"But even if we moved there – you still wouldn't get a job. Cause if you can't get a job here, then what makes him think that you're gonna get a job there?"

It goes on and on like a sad merry go round. I kinda agree with her but then it might be a good idea to make a new start in a different country? Anyway, there's no way she wants to leave here, she's made that plainly obvious. She almost hit me the other day when I was feeling brave and went on his side, cos I was sick of their arguing.

"Why don't you just give him a break? Maybe we should take a look at Australia and he might even find a job there."

As soon as I'd said that I wished I could take it back.

"Why don't you just shuddup! What do you know? You been to Australia? Well maybe you and your dad should pack your bags and go there by yourselves."

And with that she gave me a dirty look.

"And that better be the last time you tell me what to do. Cause the next time you'll get it."

I thought I'd better exit quick but not before I gave her a dirty look and walked out slamming the door behind me. She swore at me but I didn't care. I'm sick of the way she talks to him and ignores me, it's like she's checked out. Anyway, it won't be long now cos next year I'll finish school, then leave home and go to law school and then I'll

become a lawyer like the ones on TV. I'll make lots of money and never have to bother about living in this stink neighbour again. Now that's only a few years away. Not long to go now.

The bell goes, it's interval and I need to go to check out the library. It's closed with a sign that says that it won't be open until the second week of school. Oh, stink. I was looking forward to going to the library at lunch times to get into my study routine but not to worry as that's where I'll be spending most of my breaks.

I decide to sit on the chairs outside the library to check out what class I have next on my timetable. I open the sheet of paper and see that I've got a couple of new teachers, one for P.E. and one for English. My next class is English with Miss Tagaloaalagi. I wonder if she's one of the younger teachers I saw. Tagaloaalagi, what a mouthful. She'll probably get a hard time with that name. This would be the first time I'd have had a brown English teacher, as the majority of my teachers have been Pakeha with a couple of Maori teachers in Primary school. This will be interesting, hope she's as good as the other teachers and that she's friendly, but not so friendly that the class is gonna walk all over her and eat her for breakfast, like last year with Mr Morely. He was a first year teacher and he didn't last long cos they gave him a real hard case class and those kids started running outta the class and jumping out the windows. He couldn't control them, I remember, cos we used to have our class next to his and they were so loud. The last thing I heard about him was a rumour that he'd lost the plot and had to leave. The bells rings and I put my timetable away in my bag and get ready to meet her.

On my way to class I remember the New Year's Resolution that I'd made to myself this year – that I'll not hang around with friends and let nothing get in the way. I just want to concentrate on my exams and pass them well. And I especially want to beat that Sheryl, she's pretty smart but I know I can beat her in exams. She's such a show off. She won the academic English prize last year because she likes to suck up to teachers. I wanna make sure that I'm the one picking up the academic prize and not her so I'm not gonna let anything get in my way. Watch out world here I come.

## Ela

My first class of the day and I met my senior 6P4 English class. They are six formers and seemed quiet but expectant. It's a small class of only twelve mainly Pacific students.

"Hi there, my name is Ela Tagaloalagi but you can call me Ela."

I see a few eyebrows raised but I continue.

"This is my first year teaching English at high school but I have tutored many high school students before so you don't have to worry."

I hear a few snickers but I ignore it.

"I live in Mangere and spent a few years at Uni. I'm Samoan, born here and it's nice to be at this school."

Some students clap, others look at each other like they're not so sure of me. There's an awkward silence.

"Now I'd like to learn your names but I do have a profile sheet that I'd like you to fill in and then it will give me an idea of what you have studied last year in English and what you hope to gain from being in this class."

I hand out the sheets and they all start to write. The class is very quiet as I go back to my desk realising that I forgot to mark the roll. Oh, it can wait. It felt kinda funny in realising that this must be one of the first times that some of these students had faced a young P.I. Pacific Island teacher in my being only a few years older than them at twenty six years. Many of them were probably sixteen or seventeen? I could see that some of the guys were looking a little starry eyed.

They quickly finish the task and hand back the sheets. Most haven't written much at all which wasn't the point of the exercise. How was I going find out what they'd been taught? Somehow, I didn't feel as organised as I'd hoped I'd be and it also made me realise that I wasn't really sure about what to do next. I couldn't wait to get home after school to start making a new plan for the class.

That night, after we'd had dinner and my parents had retired to their room with Pili fast asleep. I wondered if my personality was going to change in having to deal with teenagers all the time. I also reflected that I needed to think more from a Christian perspective and not be so negative and gossiping on what been going on there or to get drawn into the mess that seemed apparent. It also dawned on me that I had better talk to my professor about continuing my PhD studies and my that I needed to keep writing. My professor didn't want me to stop but when I explained to him that it was too much to ask my family to support me through yet another degree when I should now be helping out with the bills etc. he didn't push any further and told me to keep in touch.

While I was busy working away, mum called me to the phone. It was Tavita, a Samoan born guy whom I'd met over summer through a mutual friend. I had travelled last year to Samoa to be one of eight bridesmaids for a family wedding with my parents and little brother. His name had been mentioned by one of my cousins. He had been described as being quite eligible and had left an office job in Apia for the bright lights of Auckland. When I finally met him at a family do, he seemed okay to talk to but I could tell that he wanted more. What he didn't know was that I'd already decided that I wasn't thinking about marrying a Samoan. I just knew too much about Samoan attitudes, faalavelave and traditional perspectives on women's roles. Things would be just way too complicated. Anyway, he wasn't really my type.

"So are you free on Saturday to go out for lunch?" he asked with some confidence.

"I think I'm free but I'll have to check my diary which I left it at school. Where would you like to meet?"

He suggested a café in Ponsonby which was definitely not my scene.

"And why don't you wear some shorts to show your nice legs."

Are you kidding? I wanted to say. I could tell that he really dug me but that was a definite turn off – get a life man!

"Oh sorry, I just remembered. We've got a family function on Saturday. Sorry about that I just somehow forgot all about it." I ended that call pretty quick after he asked me to promise that I would call back when I had some free time. Needless to say that I

was definitely not going to keep tabs on this guy. I decided to end it there and then  
and no, I didn't wear shorts.

### ***APIA boy***

*In his ie faitaga he struts  
a confident man  
got an ofisa in Apia  
pushing pens  
with palagi education*

*he sees her  
kiwi girl  
BNZ – born and bred  
women's man  
got big ambitions  
devilish intentions*

*Behind hibiscus smiles  
he notes the light tint  
no tell-tale scabs  
clothes showing skin  
her sweat like raindrops glistening*

*Dinner and dance  
he whispers sweet nothings  
lips dripping with Vodka  
"Aggies, Tusitala's, Mt. Vaea's niteclubs  
where the action's at  
shows off to his friends  
he leads from the front  
keeps her to his back*

*Kiwi girl complains  
she doesn't belong to him  
she shoots him straight  
with words he cannot master  
where to run  
for cover*

*He leaves  
alone  
but where did I go wrong?*

*In the light of day  
with a throbbing hangover  
he sees himself  
he is but  
an Apia boy*

## CHAPTER 5

### Ben

At lunchtime Scot and me just hang out. We keep away from the smokers cos they can be trouble. Scot brings a ball and we just kick it around. He has the best lunches. He gave me some of these fancy sandwiches. They were pretty good cos I don't bring any lunch to school.

I go to my next class and it's Art with Mr Holden. I look around the class and there are only boys in the class. I've been looking forward to this cos Art is my favourite subject and now that I've got Mr Holden, yeah! He's pretty good at art. I've seen his drawings and paintings and they're pretty good too. I've been wantin to be in his class since I first started here but I got this other teacher who just made us do boring things like draw a flower or sketch a chair. Now I got me a real art teacher who can teach me a few more things about drawing and painting.

"Okay gentleman, it's nice to meet you. I'm Mr Holden, and I don't take no flack from nobody."

He took us by surprise cos we don't hear a lot a teachers talkin like us.

"You come here into my domain, I'll treat you well and teach you about the finer things in life. In return, I ask you to respect me, respect the property within this class and we'll get along just fine. No five finger discounts in this class which means that I don't want to have to count up things and find them missing because that person's going to be in serious trouble and as a bonus, we'll go pay a visit to Miss Parker who'll help you find another class to attend. Do I make myself perfectly clear? If you understand, say 'Yes sir.'"

"Yes sir," we all echo.

"And being in this class is not a right, it's a privilege and it's shared property – I look after things here for you and you look after it well for me and we'll get along just fine. Are there any questions?"

Nobody answers. I like Mr Holden, he's a no nonsense kinda guy.

“Now gentlemen, and that’s what I’m going to be referring to you all as because I know that you all are. Let’s begin...”

I am so excited, can’t wait till we get into it, that was until he gave out the stationery list and I look at the total and it’s money I just don’t have.

“So gentlemen, the sooner you buy your Art pack for class, the sooner you get started. Oh, and by the way – yes, you can listen to your music on the radio, C.D. or tape but only on a moderate setting. Not up loud that’s thumping, but then it’s only fair that you listen to my classical music too.”

Some of the boys groan but Mr Holden only smiles.

“It’s only fair that if you’re educating me with your music that I share some of my own with you.”

He smiles. He’s a bit of a crack up but already I like Mr Holden. I think we’re gonna get along just fine.

## **Ela**

Keep waking up early around 6am. I make my dad a cup of tea and then slowly begin to get ready for work. It’s a routine now that I’m becoming more familiar with.

I realise that as I work with my seniors in 6P4, that most students are not too sure about what subjects to take or what they need to be taking for their final year next year. There’s only one student in the whole class who is absolutely certain about where she wants to be in a couple of years’ time and that’s Ruth, she wants to be a lawyer. Very few students really have a clue about what to take. It reminded me of when I was in Year 13 and I’d say that ‘my ambition is to have an ambition’ in not really being sure about what path I was going to take at Uni but I had been highly competitive then and would probably have succeeded anyway with my parents’ support and the fact that I was hard working but I could tell that some of these students really had no idea about goals or future plans and that was alarming. Now with less than a couple of years left, some had narrow paths in their career options. This was a real worry for me in that it almost seemed too late, not only because I didn’t know them well enough to be of much help to them but I couldn’t direct them



on their strengths, personalities or weaknesses. Here they were not realising that they were making these crucial decisions that would influence the directions for the rest of their lives and I felt helpless to support them. I thought to approach Mr Karl Bennet, the sixth Form Dean but on a couple of occasions that I had seen him in action, he seemed to have a real killer dog attitude when he had students talking with him and he'd bark back instructions.

"So what am I supposed to do about it? you can't change your options now. You should have thought about it last year when I was making up the timetable. Now you'll just have to make do, cause there just isn't any other available option right now. So go back to class and maybe next year we'll look at it again."

I'd see students walking away from him with their heads down and with no recourse of action to change their options. He seemed to hate being asked questions or having to problem solve for students but he sure loved bellowing out his opinions. I decided to work it out with my students on my own.

Another observation that I made in these early days was that it seemed that there were so many meetings that I needed to attend. First year teacher meetings, English teacher meetings, Whanau teacher meetings, Form 6 teacher meetings, it was never ending. It seemed that whenever a teacher wanted to talk about something that they would call a meeting and I'd have to book that time out instead of planning or marking. I could also tell that there was still some unrest with the teaching fraternity as teachers were still huddling up whispering in corners and speaking in a coded language about the happenings since last year. Not that I was particularly interested anyway but the whole political situation was just too distracting for me. I had better things to think about and just wanted to get on with my job and to teach these kids and help them to succeed.

One of the things that I realised earlier on was that getting to know the students and teaching them new ideas was by far a greater reward. Learning names, was therefore, very important and especially in knowing the noisy and cheeky kids' names in the class so that I could talk to them directly. Jackson was one such student and he could sure drive a teacher crazy what with his answering back and wise mouth comments but I've had older brothers so I didn't have a problem putting him in his place at times.

“Miss T?”

Jackson’s at it again. I’m at my desk marking while the class is working away quietly.

“Yes Jackson, how can I help?”

What’s he up to?

“Are you married?”

The classes’ attention is now focussed on me instead of doing their work.

“And what’s that got to do with the price of puha?” I reply as I put down my pen and look up at him. Jackson looks a little flustered as it wasn’t exactly the kind of answer he was expecting and the rest of the class laughs.

“Have you finished your work?” I ask. Jackson shakes his head.

“Well now, maybe if you have finished your work we could have that conversation.”

I pick up my pen and continue on with my marking. He turns back to his books, not too happy with the attention shift.

“And Jackson?”

I’ve got his attention back.

“Yes, Miss?” he replies not smiling.

“I’m far too old for you and you’re far too young for me, and I’m sure it’s illegal.”

The class bursts out laughing as I go back to my marking. Jackson is smiling and all is well.

## **Ruth**

Yeah! I’m still in the same class with my best friend Moana. As soon as I saw her in the morning, I gave her a big hug.

“Where’ve you been? I’ve been worried about you, I even wagged class last week on Friday to come see you but there was no one at home.”

It was so good to see my best friend again. Now I had someone to talk with in class.

"I couldn't come to class in the first week cos mum's got a new live in boyfriend. I don't really like him, his name's John and he was an old friend from up North who came to visit but now he's staying and they had to move his things in but they needed to go up North to go get the rest of his gear. So they left me to look after the kids while they went on their tiki tour. Mum told me to close all the windows and doors in the front and the kids had to play at the back, so that's why you probably thought we weren't there."

We started walking to our next class of Maths with Mr Pringle. I think she's got a dumbass selfish mum who's always looking out for herself, on the prowl for young looking guys and doesn't even look after her kids properly. But I don't say that to Moana, cos she's so sensitive about her mum cos they've been through so much together. I don't know how many boyfriends that ladies has had but now that my best friend's back, I'm so glad cos I won't be lonely anymore.

"Well, it's just so good to see you and I can catch you up on the work."

I'm smiling like anything.

"Yeah, it's good to be back."

And off we go to class. Mr Pringle's okay, but he is sure boring and half the time the class is way too noisy for me to concentrate. I look at Moana working hard beside me trying to copy my notes from last week to catch up. Sometimes when it's just too tough to concentrate, I find myself looking around the class and seeing how the others are behaving. There's Sheryl off again on the blackboard answering Mr Pringle's question whilst most of the other girls in class are doing their own thing. Come to think of it, I don't bother much with the other girls cos they're always mucking around talking about boys and stuff but I've got some more important things to focus on. And with Sheryl struttin her stuff around like she's gonna win the academic prize again? there's no way. I get back to work.

My English class has pretty much the same kids as last year's except now with Miss T, it's more interesting. I don't know who gave her that nickname but it suits her, although most of us can say her last name, I bet the staff are gonna have a hard time

with it. She's pretty friendly, confident and smiles. It's funny cos she asked us to call her by her first name Ela but when she said that we all looked at each other like, 'What?' that would be awkward. So we've just settled on Miss T and now the name's stuck and I think she likes it too or rather, she hasn't stopped us calling her that.

Sheryl did do a funny thing in English today. When Miss T was reading out some passages from a short story Sheryl let out a loud sigh like she was bored or something. The class watched as Miss T ignored her and I wondered what Sheryl was up to. When Miss T started to read again, Sheryl began sighing again a little louder than before. Miss T looked up, ignored her and then resumed her reading. This time when Sheryl sighed heavily, I could tell that Miss T wasn't impressed.

"Is there is something wrong here or do you need to be excused from class?"

We all knew that Sheryl was trying to test Miss T, like she does most teachers. Thinking like she's smarter than the rest of us. I try to stifle a laugh and so do the rest of the class. I don't think was expecting Miss T's reaction.

"No, I'm fine Miss just clearing my chest."

We don't hear from her for the rest of the class. Good on you Miss T, she was just trying to fake you out but you showed her.

When I get home, I'm gonna ask my dad if he can take me to the library to do some study and get out some books like last year. He wouldn't let me to go during the holidays by myself but now that school's started, I'm sure I can go again.

Mr Pringle's is still at it, teaching over the many voices. I just wish he could control the class and tell them all to shut up, then maybe I could concentrate on my work but he doesn't and I go back to day dreaming.

Which brings me back to Miss T. She's different from the other teachers as most are palagi and much older. She told us that she was Samoan but she doesn't even look like one. I thought she was Maori, cos she has light skin, not like me. She's like early twenties, dresses nice, she's slim and I think some of the boys drool over her but that doesn't faze her. It's like she's one of us but she's not, cos she's a teacher. I don't know many Pacific island teachers and she's definitely one of the first that I've come across

that teaches English. Even though she's just come out of teachers college she sure is smart and seems to fit right on in. She knows her stuff alright.

She even let Moana and me be in the same group cos some of the teachers make us sit separately cos sometimes we talk a lot. But this year's gonna be different cos I told Moana that I really need to concentrate on my work now and spend more time in the library studying. She agreed and said that she'd join me, but I can tell that she's not going to be as dedicated as I am. Can't say I blame her what with her mum having another new boyfriend and she having to look after all her younger brothers and sisters while her mum's acting like she's still some PYT: pretty young thing. No wonder poor Moana can't concentrate on anything. I feel sorry for Moana cause she has to act like the mum and her mum acts like she's a teenager. What a shame.

### **WHERE DO YOU GO?**

*What do you do? when you know your mum's addicted  
and you can't rely on dad  
cos you don't know who he is  
and you don't have any grands  
cos they died so long ago  
and the teachers look at you  
like you're stupid with no future*

*What do you do?*

*Where do you go? when there's no food on the table  
and your stomach's grumbling hard  
and your mum's passed out from alcohol  
cos she's numbing herself from life  
then you think to blame yourself  
when it wasn't even you  
cos you don't know what to do*

*Where do you go?*

*How do you live? when you can't buy lunch at school  
and you don't have any stationery  
and you have holes in your shoes  
that you hide from everyone  
and you dream away your days  
wishing someone really cared  
cos there's no one there for you  
How do you live?*

## CHAPTER 6

Ela

Picking up Sima in the mornings from her aunty's and laughing all the way to school is a great start to the mornings.

"We're almost there. Okay, just one more. Did you hear the one about how can you tell a Samoan's been on a computer?" I ask. I'm driving and I've just finished listening to one of Sima's jokes.

"No," she says laughing.

"Hey, you can't laugh cos I haven't even finished it."

We've been laughing since we left her house.

"Well, you can tell that a Samoan's been on a computer cos there's twink left on the screen."

We're slapping ourselves silly and laughing till we're crying.

"You're sad," she says to me.

"You're sadder," I reply and we laugh some more.

We get there on time but it's sure stink having to sit on the floor for the staff meeting. It's not that we get in late, it's because as soon as the seats are full and the older teachers walk in, Sima and I get off our seats and let the more mature teachers sit down, part of our shared upbringing of respecting our elders but they really need to buy more chairs.

Today, I taught my Form 5 and 6 English classes about keeping a writing journal and the different ways that people like to express themselves.

"So if you'd like to write and express your experiences, your opinions or ideas you can use rap, song lyrics, poetry etc. The world is your oyster."

I really want to begin to challenge them to write more meaningfully rather than the dull sentences I'd been reading.

"But Miss, we've never been told that we can write about rap and that kind of stuff in our books," Sheryl says with one eyebrow raised. Many heads nod in agreement.

"But of course you can - in my class, as long as it's appropriate, because sometimes what we're going to do in class will mirror what is happening in our society and sometimes what we do - doesn't. I'll try and find a healthy balance but try and write about things that really mean something to you. Your journal is about expressing who you are and maybe one day you'll read it again and think wow! Was it really like that?"

They seemed genuinely surprised and asked more questions.

"I don't know much about poetry. Can you teach me how? Do you write poetry Miss T?" Tangi an often cheeky but harmless boy asks.

"Well, as a matter of fact I do. I love to read and write poetry maybe one day I'll read a bit of Shakespeare and some of my own," I reply.

"Who's Shakespeare? I only know the 'Jack and Jill' kind," he explains.

"You'll get to know Shakespeare a little later in the year and Nursery rhymes are but one form of poetry. Do you know any other Nursery rhymes?" I ask him as I try and extend his understanding further.

"Just a few."

"What about rap? Do you like to rap?"

He nods his head.

"Do you sometimes make up your own rap lyrics?" I ask.

"Yeah, sometimes I come up with my own but they're not all that good," he replies.

"Well, rapping is a specialised type of poetry which has a beat to it. So in actual fact, you might find it quite easy to write poetry in 'rap' form."

I can see him smiling.

"Yeah!"

A light bulb turns on.



“I’ll write some for you to read in my journal Miss.”

I see a new energy in him and not the puzzled look we’d started the conversation with. I really enjoyed the lesson as we explored further ideas about rap in poetry but it sure took a lot of time and energy encouraging them to take the freedom to think and to believe that they can write about their lives. As I reflect on my teaching, one thing’s becoming plainly obvious in realising that the unit plans that I’d written last year whilst at Teachers College, just don’t work and I need to find topics that these kids would relate to. Some of the expectations that I’d had for the earlier units that I’d written just didn’t match the kinds of students that I was working with now.

I’d decided earlier on that I wanted all my classes to write journals that they could document their lives, their thoughts, ideas and aspirations and decorate them as they liked. The only specification that I’d asked for them to follow was that it needed to be readable, meaningful and not offensive. I also explained to them that it was confidential so that I could also get some honest feedback on my teaching and the class. I might even get some ideas on how I can work better alongside them in knowing that I had had lots of problems growing up with my parents as most teens do.

By the third week of class, I was still struggling as to what I’d be teaching from one period to the next in not having a general plans on units for all of my classes. The resource room was still being sorted out but most of the resources were dated and needed biffing out. It was kinda daunting to think that I was teaching students from scratch and hadn’t any notes on their abilities or capabilities. I didn’t know what levels they were operating at and thought to ask about it. At one of the English teacher meetings I tried to bring this up with Mr Sommers.

“Before we finish this meeting, are there any further questions?”

I hesitated but thought to ask my burning question.

“Is there any information that I can be given for each student that I’m teaching about their capabilities in English. Any test results or anything from last year or the year before, just to give me some idea about where they’re at?”

Mr Sommers looked like I’d just asked him a stupid question.

“I’ll get back to you on that but if there are no further questions, let’s call it a day. Have a fantastic weekend,” he said and off they went. Even Fiona seemed to be okay and I wasn’t going to tell her that I was struggling because she looked like she had it all together and I certainly didn’t want to appear dumb. The rest of the English department didn’t seem interested in sharing any information so I felt that I was winging it blind. ‘Forget it, I’ll just work it out myself.’ They didn’t seem to have kept any records from year to year or if they did, they weren’t gonna share it.

At school, I’m feeling very discouraged! I don’t even go to the staffroom anymore for morning tea or lunch. Instead, I leave my lunch in my allocated pigeonhole at the staffroom and go for a walk to pick it up. My classroom is only two blocks away. On one such day, on my way there, I saw a congregation of students outside the library and two boys scuffling in the middle of the crowd. At the same time, I saw Jean Symonds and another teacher walk on past ignoring the group and I knew instinctively that there was a fight going on. So I ran towards the crowd trying to make my way to the front but there were a lot of students crowding in. Just before I was able to reach the boys, I heard a loud voice and knew it was Ms Parker, she’s got the loudest voice that could scare the living daylights out of anybody. All the students parted and began to scatter as soon as they heard her and the boys promptly stopped scuffling. I saw that it was two big senior boys Santos and Gapelu, whom I’d seen around school.

She sees me there and she’s smiling in seeing me witnessing her in her element. She has everything under control. I feel so embarrassed, here I was trying to get to the students to stop them fighting and only one yell from her and everyone scatters. I get it! Next time I’m gonna yell like a fierce banshee and maybe I’ll get better results. As the crowd disperses with Mrs Parker leading the sorry boys out, I think to myself well at least I know now. My teaching days will never be the same.

## **Ben**

Today, there was a big fight at lunchtime outside the library. Those tough senior guys are at it again. Gapelu is about the same size as me, he’s Samoan and is always looking for a fight and Santos is Tongan, he’s a lot bigger but he doesn’t have the mouth that Gapelu has. So they must have gone for another big punch. This happens a lot at

school. The teachers don't really care. I was with my mate Scot on the field kicking his ball when we see all these kids run fast to a bunched up group of kids. I know it's a fight.

They're yelling, 'fight, fight, fight!' and they're in a tight ball around the two guys and watching them.

I hate it when they fight. I turn to go away but then I see Miss T. She's running to the crowd while other teachers are walking away fast. I drop the ball and run fast to the fight 'cos I know those guys. They won't give a damn who's around. I get close and I can see that she is trying to get to the guys. I was gonna tell her to move away but then I hear Miss Parker's loud booming voice.

"What the hell is going on here?"

The shouting stops. The senior boys stop tumbling. Mrs Parker stands with she hands on her hips. Everyone makes way for her or take off. We're all scared a her. She's like a mean stepmother. You don't wanna cross her. She's eyeballing them.

"You, Santos and you, Gapelu had better just walk straight to my office, you hear? and you'd better not give me any more trouble."

They nod, no body messes with Mrs Parker. They let go of each other. They get up off the ground and walk head down one behind the other. I've never been to Mrs Parker's office.

"What the hell are the rest of you looking at? Huh? The bell's gonna ring. You might as well get back to class. This ain't a circus!"

Those who are left make their way quickly to class. I see Miss T, she looks red. She walks away when the bell sounds but I know that she couldn't stop it. What was she thinking? It worries me that she wanted to help. But she doesn't understand that she could have gotten floored. She needs to take better care of herself. I don't want anything bad to happen to her.

Tonight my dad came with his mates. His mates bring some bottles and a couple of girls. I don't like it when they bring them to my mum's house. They say they're only gonna stay a while then they're going out. I don't care. I just go into my room when they come. I got homework to do. They leave me alone. I gotta go for a piss but I have to pass my dad's room. I go past and his door is half open. He has this girl all over him. I push the door hard and it thumps against the back wall so he knows I'm there.

"Hey whadduya think you're doin? Aye?"

I look at him disgusted but don't reply.

"You just get on your way and shut the door."

I look at him, I'm so angry I wanna hit something.

"You're disrespecting my mum's house, you'd better go and do it someplace else. I ain't goin no where."

The girl stops. She knows I mean trouble. My dad gets up. He walks towards me. I clench my fists ready to go for it. In the corner of my eye, I see his friends walkin up the corridor. They smell trouble. He comes up to me. I can smell that stinkin alcohol on his breath. He's shorter than me. I can see in his eyes he's thinkin 'what's he gonna do with his friends watchin'. I don't say nothin. I'm just waitin.

"Don't you tell me what to do in my own house, boy," he says. His finger pointing up my nose. We stare at each other, almost eye to eye cos he's shorter than me. I'm just waitin. His alcohol eyes blink. My heart is poundin. He lifts up his hand. I'll give him the first punch. His eyes are groggy then he pulls his hand through his hair.

"Anyway, we just goin. Run out a grog. But I ain't finished with you boy."

He looks at me real mean like. I return his stare.

"I'll be back," he says.

"Come on guys let's go. My boy here can't handle the heat. Come on hot stuff, I got more where that came from."

The girl gets up, puts on her jacket and walks over to the door. She smiles and winks at me when she goes past. My dad doesn't see. He pinches the girls bum and follows her. She giggles and his friends laugh and they all push off.

When the last of them goes and the door closes shut. I'm almost shakin. I wanna punch somethin real bad. I go outside into the garage and see a couple of cars my dad and his friends have been working on, lifted up on wood stacks, bonnets up. There are some car doors standin by the wall. This is my dad's space with his mates. I don't give a damn. I start punchin up the car doors. I don't stop until my fists start bleedin. Then I leave. I go back to my room. My fists hurt but I don't care. I miss my mum. She never let me drink, even when the fridge was full of dad's bottles. She said if she ever caught me drinkin, she gonna woop me good. I never have.

The next day I see my dad take out the car doors and chuck them out on top of his other rubbish. He don't ask me a thing.

## **Ruth**

Now that the library's opened, I've started going there at lunchtimes, doing my homework and making sure I'm ahead of class and not behind. Academic awards, here I come. Eat your heart out Sheryl. Today it was quiet as usual at first and then I saw a whole lot a excited kids running out the door and shouting, 'fight, fight, fight...'

I couldn't be bothered to go out and have a look cos I'm sick of those macho guys fighting and showing off plus it makes me sick how some of those dam teachers just walk on past and can't be bothered to do anything about it, unless it's Ms Parker. I guess they're scared that someone might knock them out by accident. Anyway, I'll just let them do their thing and I'll have a future. I'm also waiting for Moana to see if she'll be joining me, but I guess she's too busy cos she's not here and lunchtime's almost over.

I see a lot of students returning with the excitement wiped straight off their faces with Ms Parker's voice being the killjoy. Yeah, if I was out there, I'd surely high tail outta her range cos Miss Parker has a way of getting people on detention even for just looking at

her. She's someone that you wouldn't want to cross on a bad day, cos she'll just take your day to a whole new level.

After school, when I get home I have the usual chores of tidying up around the house and helping to set the table for an early dinner with my dad cooking. Mum usually prepares herself quickly and then takes off for work. Lately, I've noticed that my mum's putting on lipstick and makeup. My mum used to never wear makeup to work and only when she went out with dad but they haven't gone out in ages, so I ask about her new look.

"You're wearing lipstick and makeup to work?" I question. I'm sitting on the edge of her bed as she applies her mascara, followed by her lip pencil.

"Yeah, there's nothing wrong with looking nice when I go to work," she replies as she continues with her new makeup regime.

"But you never wear makeup to work," I continue as she completes her look with a ruby red lip colour.

"What's your problem?"

She stops and turns from the mirror and looks directly at me.

"I work hard all day and all night to put food on the table and to pay the bills and you think you can tell me what I can or can't do in my own house?"

She is really mad and I'm surprised at her reaction. I try to calm her down.

"I was just commenting that I'd never seen you wear makeup to work before. I'm sorry ..." but before I can say more, she continues.

"Not that it's any of your business and so if I want to wear lipstick or makeup it's no big deal but don't let me catch you using any of my makeup – do you hear?"

What's her problem? I stand up and make for the door. Underneath my breath I said, 'As if I would.' She goes back to the mirror. I don't care she's looking ugly anyway with too much makeup on. I'm not so close to mum and she doesn't even seem very interested in me, although I guess it's more because she's tired whenever she gets back from work. Yeah, she does help pay the bills but we never talk much except for

her instructing me about what I'm supposed to be doing. It's like she would rather be working than be at home with me and dad. When I was little I used to ask if she could give me a brother or sister and she just looked at me like I'd just sworn at her. I guess it's never gonna happen.

I've finished my chores and then go to see what my dad is doing. I find him in front of the TV watching a game show. He's laughing along with the contestant who's not doing so well. My dad just loves watching game shows, in fact, it only makes my mum even more angry when she sees him having a good time in front of the TV instead of contributing to the family finances. I sit down for a while and watch but then decide to go and do some homework.

"Hey, I've gotta go now. My ride's here," mum yells from the front door. I hear a car horn sounding and my mum runs outta the house. Usually I don't bother to say goodbye to her but today I just take a look out the window. That's when I see him. The lady that usually picks up my mum is replaced with a dark man in sunglasses. Mum gets into the car and she's smiling. It's a flash car with a low droning engine sound. She looks happy and the man driving the car talks with her and they both laugh. He backs out of the driveway and then they speed off. Later on, it dawns on me that maybe he is the reason why she's wearing the makeup.

At dinner, I ask my dad if he's aware that there's a man picking up mum for work.

"Yeah, she told me that the lady who usually picks her up doesn't work there anymore and she's found a lift with one of the other workers."

It doesn't seem to faze my dad at all but I'm suspicious.

"But he's got a flash car dad. You never know, right?"

My dad doesn't seem in the least bit interested and is watching another game show.

"Your mum is fine, she knows how to look after herself."

I wanna say that it's not her that I'm worried about, it's actually my dad. He just doesn't believe that she could do anything like that to him. But I know better. You can never say never.

### ***Rain Poem***

*The whispering raindrops  
silently caresses her mind  
she pouting  
as if some child pursed in thought*

*She thinks of him  
slowly  
turning  
each  
frame*

*Hopeless, helpless  
she hadn't meant to  
hurt him*

*The other man  
was just a fling*

*nothing more  
nothing less*

*But this time  
he's gone for good*

*Quietly her tears merge  
as droplets  
a pool of memories  
form  
at her side*



## CHAPTER 7

Ela

“Today, for journal writing I’d like for you to choose from one of the following topics that I’ve written on the board:”

- My culture is / is not important to me because...
- I like / don’t like Southside High because...
- Own topic choice.

It’s funny but I’ve found that the students like reading my comments and the little cute stickers that I’d stick at the end of their writing, just as I’d enjoyed when I was in primary school. In fact, I read their journals first before marking other work and found that I got to know the students a lot better.

Later, I felt exhausted but also knowing that I needed to get better prepared too. I’m still not too sure of the units that I’ll be teaching as there doesn’t appear to be a system that they’ve used and the older teachers don’t seem to want to share any of their work. When I asked Mr Sommers about this he looks at me like I was stupid.

“What kind of unit plans would you recommend that I use?” I ask him.

“Didn’t they teach you about unit planning in teachers college?” he responds looking exasperated. It looks like I’ve caught him at a bad time.

“Yes, I have got some unit plans but...” I start to explain more but he cuts me off. Picks up his resources walks toward the door.

“Then use those.”

And off he goes to his next class. What a waste of breath trying to ask for his help. I might as well be talking to a brick wall.

I’ve noticed that at a couple of the meetings that the older teachers give him a hard time. I figure that it’s a waste of time asking him any further questions and decide to nut it out on my own. It sure will be a laugh and a little daunting to wonder how things will figure out by the end of the year but I think everything will pan out so I’d better just leave it to the Lord and not worry about it, like they said in church yesterday.

I found that as I took the time to plan my lessons that I was beginning to really enjoy it and the students too! However, I noticed that some of my first year counterparts weren't finding it as easy in the bits of conversation that I'd hear, in adjusting to a 'work it out yourself' attitude which seemed to be a part of the unspoken teaching philosophy here. Teachers didn't seem to share their ideas except for criticising one another and there seemed to be an animosity against the senior management team with the rest of the staff and no one seemed to even be bothered much with us first year teachers.

Then I think about these kids. There's this one guy called Ben, he reminds me of my of a gentle giant friend I had at school who was so intimidating in his physical appearance but was harmless. Ben stands at over 6 feet tall but I can tell that he has a gentle heart. All the kids keep away from him except for his tag along side kick, Scot, who is one of only two pakeha boys that I teach in all of my classes, who happens to also be very funny. All the rest of my students are either Pacific or of Maori descent. He stands out because he and Scot are so different, it reminds me of a juxtaposition that I learnt in Art. They're both opposites. Ben is tall, shy, quiet, and wears the same things every day. He doesn't like attention, compared to his friend Scot who is short, loud, funny and loves attention. He wears expensive sports shoes and has quite a lot of gear. The reason they stood out in my mind was when I was on duty I'd see them kicking a ball together and then later they're eating together. When I talk with Ben he just smiles and looks down and either nods, shrugs his shoulders or shakes his head. The first time I talked with him in class, other students snickered and I told them to be quiet. My stern face gave them my message. I decided at that moment that I would give Ben and students like him the chance to talk in class and to grow in confidence. It wasn't that long ago that I was that shy student who sat at the back and couldn't ask questions and I never got the opportunity to talk in class but that didn't stop me from thinking and having my own opinion about things.

Then there's Ruth, always working hard in class, very focused and at the library during lunchtimes studying. She reminds me of when I was at school and studied hard in the library at lunchtimes when everyone else was out and about playing on the fields and doing their thing. I guess for me it paid off.

## **Ben**

In class today I notice that Jackson is up to no good. He's got his friends together and they're laughin at his exercise book. He keeps lookin up at Miss T, she's busy explainin some things to some other students, and then he's lookin at his book. I know he's got somethin for her to look at. I don't know what they're up to but I know they're up to no good. Hamo has been asked to collect all the books and they're all gigglin when Jackson hands in the book. I wonder what he's up to. Don't like that Jackson. Don't trust him as far as I can throw him – and that's pretty far.

Scot's pretty good at Soccer. He shows me all these tricks he knows like bouncing the ball all over his body without it touching the ground. He can do it with over fifty bounces. We counted. I try and I can only do three at the most.

"When soccer season starts, I'm gonna join my team again. We're called the Leopards and we're pretty good. We came second in our division last year," he says this as he's bouncing the ball on his head.

"Why don't you join me?" he asks.

"No way."

"Well, why don't you come and watch my games if you're free on Saturdays?" he asks.

"Why would I wanna do that for?" I reply. I don't fancy standing around doin nothin.

"Cos that's what friends do."

"Well, I gotta think about it. Sometimes, I just wanna sleep in on the weekends."

I don't tell him that I do wanna go but that I don't like to go places cos I don't have a lot of different clothes to wear and I got the same old shoes with holes in them that I been wearin since mum's gone.

"I'm gonna ask my Dad if he can spot me for every goal I score or he could shout me. I could ask him that if you could come along."

He's really gunnin for me to go with him.

"Sure, why not" I reply. I don't tell him but I'm a bit scared a meeting his family.

I go home that night and think about it. My dad's out again with his boys, left only bread and their left over chips for me. I wish I had a dad like Scot's. Instead, I got me an alcoholic old man. I remember my mum said that he wasn't always like that, she said he was good when she first met him but when she found out about his drinking problem, it was too late, she was already pregnant with me. She said her father never liked him so she had to leave home if she wanted to keep him and me. She had just moved in with him from Mangere. She was a Samoan born here and my dad is too but you'd think he was Maori cos he never speaks Samoan and his friends are all Maori. I don't even know if I've got any cousins. My dad doesn't have much to do with his own family. Mum said something about how he didn't like the Samoan way of doing things so now he does his own thing and I don't even speak a word of Samoan and that's just the way it is. I go to my room and start working on my art homework.

## **Ruth**

Moana has pretty much caught up and it's neat having her to talk with and share about stuff. I told her about my mum. We're in P.E. and Rambo's got us doing group exercises at different stations and rotating every five minutes. We're now doing star jumps.

"So, what ah ya gonna do?" she asks in between star jumps.

"I don't know. I don't wanna hurt my dad cos he thinks that he's just a work mate but from what I saw – I'm pretty sure that he's more than that," I whisper to her.

"But do you really think, she'd do that to you – to your dad?" she asks. Rambo blows his whistle and we have to move to the next station. We have to do Burpees. We wait for his signal. He whistles and we're at it again.

"I don't know... since dad stopped working we hardly talk... she's always tired... and she's started wearing makeup... to work now."

I'm starting to run out of breath from talking in between burpies. Moana's a lot more fitter than me, I guess it's from all that running around after her sisters and brothers.

"My mum wears makeup and she doesn't even get outta the house."

That's true cos Moana's mum wants to keep looking young so that her latest young guy won't see the wrinkles forming, I guess. I decide to talk about something else, I don't like talking about my mum too much, it's just too depressing.

"Let's change the subject. Hey, whaduhya think about Journal writing for Miss T?"

I remember opening my first entry after handing it in and I was surprised to find a cute sticker and a thoughtful comment. I looked around and everyone else was exchanging descriptions of the stickers they got. I got me a cute little smiley face. I think I'm gonna like journal writing.

"I love the stickers and her comments were pretty good. I wrote a poem for her to read, I don't know if it's right but I thought I'd give it a try," Moana replies.

"Yeah, I wrote a poem too. Ya know, I think she's pretty genuine, not like some of the teachers here."

I look up and see Rambo's lookin at me.

"Too much talk girls, not enough action," he says. I begin my burpies again and he walks away.

"Yeah, like him."

We're both laughing as Rambo blows the whistle for us to move to the next station where we have to go sit ups.

"Oh no."

We both don't like doing sit ups and wait for Rambo to blow the whistle.

"Well, he's not that bad, not like Mr Bennet, he's an egg. In fact, I'd rather see Rambo in shorts than that Mr Bennet, he's got sticks for legs."

"Yeah, that'd be a crime against nature."

We both start laughing whilst doing our sit ups.

## Ela

I sure love reading the student journals, in fact, it's the first thing I do when I get home over the weekends. However, when I open Jackson's work to mark his journal, I notice that on the inside front cover, he's drawn a silhouette of a naked couple having sex with a red outline of a circle around the couple and a red line running diagonally through the silhouette similar to a 'no smoking' sign or 'don't drop litter' signs. I'm instantly angry at this but then think to myself, 'what would Jackson be wanting to solicit with this picture?'.

'Oh, you'll get a reaction all right my boy.'

So I make plans to confront him when I next see him in a couple of days and we'll see what he says.

On Monday, I give the books to Lana to give out to the class and try not to be obvious that I am watching to see Jackson's reaction when he receives the much anticipated book that is being returned to him. However, when he opens the book I see him look at me and his smile quickly fades. I've written a note on top of his front cover and it says, 'see me after class.' I can tell that although Jackson likes to think that he's tough, no one likes the thought of having to face Ms Parker. So I now eagerly anticipate our talk as I know he isn't.

After class he dawdles and waits until his friends have left before he comes up to my desk. He waits for me to look up and I can see the smile has definitely been wiped off his face. I ask him to give me his Journal book to which he rifles into his bag and brings out the offending book. I look at him sternly.

"So Jackson, I know I said that I told you all that you can decorate your Journal book as you wish, but what is the meaning of this?"

I open his book to the front inside cover. He looks at the insulting picture that I'm pointing to.

"I don't know," he replies.

"Well, you must have had an idea that I was going to comment on this picture, so what was the reaction that you thought that I was going to give to it?" I ask.

"I thought you were going to laugh," he replied but he wasn't looking too confident about it now.

"Oh yes, I did and you know what? I think that Ms Parker would have a good laugh too when she sees it."

His eyes are wide open.

"Do you think that she will appreciate it even more than I would?"

Jackson is dumbfounded.

"Yes, I know I said that everything is in your journal is in confidence but really Jackson this is offensive and in bad taste and like I said before, it's illegal."

He looks at me with further surprise.

"You didn't think... I didn't mean... I don't want Ms Parker to see that."

He looks away from the offending picture.

"Yes, I thought so. So now you are in a dilemma: either you can keep the picture there for Ms Parker to also see, or you can replace it with something, shall we say, that's more appropriate and less offensive."

I hand the book back to him. Jackson seems relieved but has not quite gotten over the shock of what could have been his big reveal to Ms Parker.

"Yes, Miss I'll change it."

He looks relieved.

"You do that."

And I dismiss him. After the door closes and I think he's out of hearing range. I have a big laugh.

I've decided to teach some more poetry techniques to my students beginning in the mornings with my Form 3 students. I thought to look at similes and metaphors. It was such a laugh when we described the animal kingdom and I felt that they were really enjoying themselves. In my last class of the day, I asked the seniors in my Form 6 class if they were aware about the difference between metaphors and similes.

"Whadduhya talkin about Miss?"

They looked at me like they didn't know what I was on about. I thought they were joking until I found that that they weren't.

"You don't know the difference between a metaphor and a simile?" I ask.

"Does a metaphor have something to do with metal and a simile have something to do with something similar?" Sheryl asks.

"A good try Sheryl, let's talk about the differences."

After discussing the definitions and trying a couple of exercises to do with animals that they thought was funny, I felt that the light bulbs had been turned on. I think my class now knows the difference between the two.

That night I looked in the mirror and can see that I'm losing weight, with not enough sleep and marking and worrying about what I should be teaching next. I thought about how maybe some of these kids just weren't being taught some of the basics or it wasn't sinking in, however, when I taught it and checked that they did understand what I was teaching then I knew that it wasn't that they were less smart but maybe it reflected they weren't being intentionally taught what they needed to know. I also reflected on my own personal experience in school and how it used to be hit and miss with some of the teachers that either were too lazy to bother and would do other things rather than teach us and those of whom I just couldn't understand because what they taught hadn't seemed relevant to me.



This certainly wasn't what I had expected and the weight loss was tied to all the drama of trying to figure things out by myself, I was also reminded that I'd better get a haircut. During Uni I just kept my hair in a ponytail but now I think I need something short and simple that's less of a fuss and hassle in the mornings. I think I'm gonna cut my hair short. I just can't wait to have it done. But I'm also realising that there doesn't seem to be enough time to do anything for me anymore with the constant planning and marking. I was really missing my early morning quiet times with the prep and more prep for school. Even my family relationships seemed to have been left behind. I was starting to miss my outrigger trainings and I didn't even play much with my little brother. But I am starting to see that I really needed to be prepared and better organised with each class and that it's so important to do this to keep me sane and on top of things.

As I'm marking, I look out the window and see my dad washing his car. When we were kids, my dad used to have a Mark II Zephyr for almost twenty years and I was really ashamed of it in my teenage years. We now have a Ford Falcon and it too needs to be given a rest but my dad's not one to be up with the Joneses, he's looks upon his cars like a family member and really looks them after it well. It's definitely not an accessory. I see him hosing it down and wonder what will become of this one.

### ***Papa's Mark II Zephyr***

*Papa's shiny blue and white Mark II Zephyr was his pride and joy  
bought back in 1964 to replace the  
racy black bachelor motorbike with it's roaring engine  
complete with helmet and dark chocolate leather bomber jacket  
A family man now with a wife, daughter and another on the way  
no longer a women's man with a reputation  
now a respectable and honourable.*

*Every weekend he'd polish and buff her to sparkly new  
kept her immaculate as could be*

*her cool steel steering wheel with leather upholstery  
she was his pride and joy for almost two decades  
but over the years wear and tear took its toll  
and pretty soon tears and holes appeared in her leather seats with  
doors that no longer closed so well.*

*In the 70s, whilst other families were upgrading their cars  
Papa kept his endearing Zephyr  
a mutual relationship of love and care  
as they traversed many a mile from Auckland to Wellington  
with regular family trips to beaches and church  
transporting important guests to important places  
she was his trusted friend but time was beginning to take its toll  
and fixing it was becoming too costly.*

*Occasionally, patched gang members  
would knock on the door to ask if he would sell her for spare parts  
his daughter wishing he would but his answer was always the same  
his daughter becoming more ashamed wishing she could ride a more fashionable car  
and was so embarrassed that she would rather walk or  
would scoop down in the back seat whenever she saw classmates  
as they drove by, not wanting to be seen in the aging Zephyr.*

*All too soon, it was all too much  
and in the mid 80s, his Mark II Zephyr had done it's dash  
and she refused to toil anymore with parts harder to find.  
she could no longer pass the road worthy test so  
reluctantly they parted ways – he could not bear to sell her  
and instead gifted her to his mechanic friend  
reluctantly replacing her with a Ford.*

*He never saw her again  
but was sometimes reminded of her*

*immortalised and remembered in black and white photos  
of better days gone by with loving memories.*

## CHAPTER 8

### Ela

It's the weekend, and last night it was raining heavily and so in the morning I decide to not go to my weekly Outrigger training but to stay home to read and prepare school work for my students. I also decided to do some sewing – thought I'd wear a bright red tapa print shirt to school as having seen this really nice bold print material in the shop the other day, I thought to buy it and share my Pacific heritage visually as I had a lot of students asking me if I was Maori. I thought that this might be helpful in answering many of their questions. Sadly enough, at school they kept all the Maori students in the bilingual unit unless they opted out into mainstream where I taught so I didn't teach many Maori students.

"You don't look Samoan," one Samoan student said to me.

"You look more like a Maori or Cook Island," his Samoan mate says to me. I shake my head.

"My mother's great grandfather was German and I think my Dad has some Chinese heritage, so that's why I'm lighter, I guess."

They still look at me unconvinced.

*"Ae loga e mafai ona kaukalo faaSamoa."* (She probably doesn't speak Samoan.)

He laughs to his mate. I reply in Samoan.

*"Ga'o o le faapelekagia ou ke iloa."* (I only know English.)

They look at me stunned and laugh.

"Sorry Miss, we thought you were just joking."

They look at each other and laugh some more and walk away.

"I was," I say as I smile and walk away in the opposite direction.

"Mum, did you know that lots of the kids think I'm Maori."

Mum is helping me out as she is good at sewing and taught me to sew. She would sew all our clothes as children as it was a lot cheaper back then. When mum first came to Auckland in the early 60s, one of her first jobs was to learn to sew tailored suits.

“Probably because your great grandfather was German,” she reminded me. I’d always wished that I had received her green eyes passed down to my brother instead of me but I guess I got her skin colour instead.

“So that’s why I want to wear some tapa shirts to school so that the kids will know without having to ask me.”

We continued sewing until it was finished and then I modelled it for her.

“Very bright,” she said.

“Just the way I like it,” I replied. I will definitely be wearing it tomorrow. Beats having to wear that horrible yellow and brown stained colours that those poor students have to wear. It’s like wearing brown kaka and yellow pee – whose idea was that in the first place? Poor kids, you’d never ever get me to dress in those colours. Whoever chose those colours must have been colour blind. After our sewing, I sat down for a cup of tea with my dad. Pili had long gone to sleep.

“Tom rang earlier, he said that he’d be coming over with his new girlfriend Jane.”

Mum was pouring out the tea for us as she never drinks tea. I missed seeing my older brother Tom now that his divorce with Gene his ex-wife came through. They’d had no kids and that was probably part of their problem. His new girlfriend, Jane was okay but it was her brother, Laurence, who I didn’t like.

“I hope he doesn’t bring Lawrence with him, he’s a creep.”

Mum didn’t like him either but she was always one to keep her thoughts to herself. My dad’s a little hard of hearing, so sometimes he can’t hear half of what is being said in front of him. It’s been put to the time when he used to drive those big freight trucks that would make lots of noise but they didn’t have earmuffs in those days.

“You just tell Tom and I’m sure he’ll warn Laurence to keep away.”

I nod in agreement but knew that it was a waste of time. I had told Tom earlier about not wanting to have his no good friend pakeha friend coming over when I was at home but he didn't believe me. He met Lawrence last year as a new team member in his league team and then was introduced to his sister Jane. But I don't like the way he seems to have formed a keen interest in me like he thinks he's all man.

"Tom, can you tell his friend to get lost? I don't like the way he looks at me."

This was at one of our family BBQs that Tom had bought Jane too but that Lawrence had tagged along to as well. He'd keep looking at me and smiling like he was trying to get my attention. What a creep!

"He's harmless, it's just the way Tom is. You just have to ignore him sometimes. He thinks that he's a ladies' man."

Lawrence is talking at a distance with my Dad and is smiling at me.

"He's a creep and I don't appreciate him calling me his little pony that he wants to ride."

Tom looks at me half shocked then smiles.

"Look, I asked him about that and he said that he called you a pony because of your ponytail, he's harmless just ignore him cos he thinks that you probably got the wrong idea. And he understands that maybe you wished that we could spend more time with me like we did before I met him and his sister."

I knew that guy was trouble and now making out that I'm paranoid, the creep!

"What? That's not true. I'm not jealous," I reply. I look over and see my dad laughing with Laurence who is such a charmer but also an incredible slick conman. I would certainly have to watch out for that guy. He was definitely trouble.

"Look, just lighten up on him. He's had it hard and now things are looking up for him."

I couldn't believe how terribly blind my brother had become with his girlfriend's brother and I didn't want to hear anymore.

"Oh, forget it."

I walked away and into my bedroom locking the door behind. Laurence was beginning to be a pain now. Not only was he a liar but he was also starting to get on my nerves. I reckon he's got a mental health problem, maybe schizophrenia or a sex addict or some psychopath dumbass but Tom reckons that I'm too hard on him and that he's had a hard life and that I need to lighten up. Oh I can lighten up alright if he wasn't such an easy person to pull the shutters over his brain with that guy's bleeding heart story. Later on, after they'd left, I spoke to my mum and dad.

"Dad and mum, I don't want Tom to bring Lawrence over anymore, he's too creepy."

Maybe they'll listen to me.

"We can't stop Tom bringing his friends home, because this is still his home too and it's open to anyone that you kids invite over. Just ignore him. Tom told us about what happened to him."

I'd had enough of his bleeding hearts story about his nasty childhood blah, blah, blah. I reckon half of it's probably made up anyway. Oh well, I decided that whenever he was in the house, I'd be either be busy in my bedroom or I'll go out for the time. He was definitely not a guy that I wanted to be around.

Needless to say, that I didn't stay for our monthly communion that Sunday, instead I came home because of my conviction with Lawrence yet I knew that I must change my attitude towards him but still keep a fair distance. I later, spoke with Sima about it over the phone.

"Just let him try something on you and I'll pulverise him."

We end up laughing.

"Yeah, right after I do a Ninja on him."

We're cracking up over the phone. It's always good to talk with Sima. She's a good friend to have and a good friend to laugh with. A real answer to prayer.

## Ben

Today, I got parent and teacher interviews. No way I'm gonna tell my dad. Cos he won't go just like in primary school. My mum used to go all the time. She never said anything much. But at the end of the interview, she always asked if I was behaving myself and when the teacher said 'yes', she'd give me her special smile, like she was real proud of me.

"You ain't that smart but you ain't that dumb son. You show respect for people and they respect you. Don't make no trouble and then trouble won't come looking for you."

That's what I don't like about my dad, he never says anything worth remembering. He just ignores me and I ignore him.

At school today, Miss T asked me a question. I can't believe it. She asked me a question and when I didn't answer she just said 'that's okay I know you're a deep thinker' and asked Saama instead. I can't believe she asked me like she thinks I know the answer. I didn't even know what she was talkin about cos I was so busy drawin in my book. But it made me feel good. She don't ignore me like the other teachers and she has a nice smile like she cares. I've heard the other kids say that she's a good teacher, cos she's real smart and knows lots of things. I'll learn a lot when I listen in class but sometimes I get into my drawin and forget about everythin I'm pretty good at art. My dad said it's a waste of time. I don't care what he thinks.

My artwork is comin along just fine. Although, the only problem is that I'm behind on some of my paintings cos I found an 3B art pencil to help me on my sketches but I don't have any paints at home to paint with, so the only time that I can paint is when I'm in class. Sometimes I stay in at lunchtimes to finish off my work. I haven't told Mr Holden that I don't have the money to buy the rest of the stationery. I just use whatever I can find that's lyin around, especially the art paper which Mr Holden doesn't mind us usin anyway. But I think I've gotta find me a part time job cos it's no use askin my dad cos he just uses his money on booze and stuff.

The neat thing is that Mr Holden lets Scot come in during some lunch times when I'm tryin to catch up and leaves us to get on with it. Most of the guys go out to hang out



with their mates and have lunch. I'm sure glad that Scot comes cos then I can share his lunch. He said that he doesn't mind cos he has such a big lunch. I'm sure that it's too much for a boy his size.

"My mum said that now that I have a friend who looks out for me that maybe you might want some extra food just in case you were ever hungry."

Boy, am I glad of that, cos most days I'm hungry but I don't think much about it. I think Scot's family must have a lot a money cos he has a lot a gear but he said that his dad doesn't mind him to goin to a local school like he did before he made a lot of money. I paint, we eat and we laugh. At least I got me someone to share lunch with.

## **Ruth**

It's the parent/teacher interview today and I'm glad my dad could make it. Mum's working again but then if she wasn't she'd probably be too tired to attend anyway. We walk into the hall where they've set out rows of chairs and desks with some teachers sitting behind and waiting. We walk over to where a line of teachers are standing behind a long table with boxes placed on top. I see that this is where we are to pick up our reports. Rambo is there and I introduce my father.

"Hi Mr Anderson, this is my dad," Rambo shakes my dad's hand.

"You have a very good daughter here, she's always studying. Keep up the good work Ruth."

My dad smiles in reply, he's a little shy. I quickly look over my report and see that there is nothing out of the ordinary, the usual good comments, dad smiles when I give it to him. I look around and I can see a lot of familiar faces from classes. I say 'hi' to a few of them and smile at how classmates can often look very different or almost the same as their parents. I look more like my dad, there's nothing of me that looks like my mum.

I'd better look for my teachers. I've got Maths with Mr Pringle, Science, English with Miss T, History, P.E. with Rambo and Geography. I see that my history and geography teachers are free, so I go see them with dad. They are very positive and give me favourable reports of me. Dad just nods and smiles. His English is not that good but

then again I know that he feels a little self conscious of being with educated people. He only had primary and intermediate schooling and didn't have the benefit of coming to New Zealand for education like my mum did. I see that my Science teacher is free, I keep checking with Miss T but she has a long line of students and their parents waiting for her. I decide to go ahead and see my Maths teacher. We walk over to the queue and join them. It's 6pm and some teachers look like they're getting ready to head off for tea or maybe even home but Miss T is still going for gold. There are a few other teachers still seeing students but none with a long queue. I can see that she is doing the best that she can as when the next person sits down she gets up to greet the parent and then the relieved parent wants to hear as much as they can about their child's progress. We are now third in the queue. I can see my dad yawning and rubbing his eyes, I bet he's getting tired from all this waiting but I plead with him to stay and wait. I really want for him to meet her cos she is so different from other teachers and she's my favourite teacher.

Finally, we are next in line and as I listen to her, I realise that she is speaking Samoan to them. No wonder, she's got a long line awaiting her, word must have gotten around that this new teacher speaks Samoan and so all the Samoan parents who don't mind waiting around are lining up to speak to her. I look down the line and sure enough, there are many Samoan parents and their children awaiting an audience with her. I'm really interested to hear what she has to say the mother of one of the more naughtier boys in Form 3, his name is Norman. He's not only a trouble maker but also has a bad mouth when he gets really angry. Have heard him swearing like mad outside the tuckshop the other day when one of his friends accidentally bumped him and made him drop his meat pie. I can see that she is really polite and respectful to Norman's mum cos she doesn't have her head down as some of the parents do.

It's almost 7pm and by this time, lots of the other teachers have long left but there are still a few teachers milling around with Miss T and a couple of others meeting. The principal signals that unfortunately, it is time to complete the interviews and if people don't mind making an appointment to see the teacher during the week, that there are only five more minutes left. My dad looks at me but I'm willing Norman's mum to shut up and leave so that my dad and I can talk with Miss T. They stand up and the interview is over as they shake hands to go. It's our turn, as Norman walks away with

his head down but still smiles to Miss T who returns his smile. I walk up with my dad and she reaches out her hand and they shake hands. She motions us to sit and then she begins speaking to my dad in Samoan.

“Talofa lava, Mr Vaea. Nice to see you Ruth. I’m sorry, but my Samoan language is not the best as I’ve explained with the other parents but I will try my best.”

My dad is grateful to be able to speak in his own language and feels instantly comfortable to converse with her.

“Thank you for making the time to meet us. It’s really nice to be able to speak in my own language as I don’t feel very comfortable in speaking English,” he says in Samoan.

“Not to worry, your English is probably much better than my Samoan.”

We all laugh and that puts my dad at ease.

“With only a few minutes to go, let me tell you about your daughter Ruth.”

My dad waits with anticipation and she begins to discuss my progress in class.

“Your daughter is one of the top students in my class. She is very hardworking, she listens well and doesn’t get easily distracted by other students. Her writing is really good and she tries her best at all times. I often see her at lunchtimes in the library studying whilst others are playing outside – that takes real discipline. She is definitely committed to success and at the rate she’s going, I wouldn’t be surprised if she does really well in her exams at the end of the year. Do you have any questions?”

My father looks like he’s about to burst with pride. The other teachers have told similar things to him in English but when told to him in his own language, I can see that he is getting emotional with tears welling up in his eyes. He shakes his head.

“Thank you for teaching my daughter. If there is anything that I can do to support her, please tell me and I will do whatever I can to ensure that she will do well.”

My father is so happy. I just want to hug Miss T.

“Just, encourage her to keep doing what she is doing and stay on track. Keep up the good work Ruth,” she says as she nods to me. By now teachers are starting to stack

chairs and turn off some lights. We get up again and shake hands. The others behind us have left and Miss T turns to pick up all her books as we exchange our goodbyes.

We get home and mum has long gone to her second job. Dad is watching TV again and I'm in my room getting ready to study again. This has got to be the best year yet.

## **Ela**

I'm bushed! Home after parent- teachers interviews and I'm ready for a shower and off to bed. I must have been the last teacher still doing interviews when everyone else had headed outta the door early. Man, so this is what I have to look forward to every parent-teacher interview night. I walk over to the kitchen for a cup of tea. Dad is still up and mum is in the bedroom with Pili getting him ready for sleep.

"Want to join me?" my dad asks.

"Yeah, then afterwards I'll go straight to sleep. I feel like I've just run a marathon – in talking that is."

I make a cup of tea and then join him on the kitchen table.

"So, how was your first the parent - teacher evening?" he asks.

"It was a real hard case, cause when the parents found out that I was Samoan, it was hard to stop them talking when there were so many waiting in line. I was probably the last teacher to finish outta there, and some of the teachers finished ages ago and left after our dinner. But I didn't get to go to dinner because I had such a long line of parents to talk to," I complained.

"Well, it must have been very special for the parents in being able to talk to a teacher whom they can understand, let alone speak Samoan. I think you'd have made some parents really proud to see a Samoan teacher sitting there and talking with them."

I looked up at him. Funny, I hadn't thought to see it from their point of view. My mum joined us at that point after seeing Pili to sleep.

“And I don’t think I need to buy anymore tapa material now that everyone knows that I’m Samoan now.”

We laughed together. Dad caught her up on the news of my first parent-teacher interviews night.

“And did you know that a lot of kids at the school don’t know how to speak their cultural language? Because when I asked them to write about their culture many of them had never been to their islands or had mixed heritage in a dad who was Samoan and a mum who was Niuean or other cultures and some of their parents only speak English but they were born in the Islands.”

My dad, in particular, had been a stickler that we were only to speak Samoan at home and leave English for the classroom but that hadn’t always happened.

“A culture’s values and traditions are transmitted through its language if indeed children cannot speak their cultural language they lose what it means to be Samoan, or Tongan, or Niuean by not being able to speak that language.”

Culture is very important to my dad. It made me reflect on how fortunate I was as a first generation NZ born Samoan, that the Samoan language was my first spoken language as I’d been brought up to learn my parents’ language, as well as learning English at school. I had many cousins who couldn’t even understand their Samoan parents.

“Yeah, and most have never been to Samoa, or Niue or they’ve never seen a coconut tree or swum in clear water but I’m too tired. I’m off to bed.”

And with that we said our good nights and I was asleep as soon as my head hit the pillow.

***Am I Samoan?***

*Cos I don’t speak the language*

*Born in NZ but never been overseas*

*I've not seen a coconut tree*

*And don't eat bananas that are green.*

*My parents are Samoan*

*They speak the language*

*They were born in Samoa*

*They eat sea cucumbers, taro and green bananas*

*But what about me?*

## CHAPTER 9

### Ruth

At the beginning of our form class with Rambo, a senior comes into our room and asks if he can make an announcement. Rambo agrees.

“Okay, make it short and sweet.”

He continues marking the register.

“Okay, 6P4 we’re gonna have us a talent show coming up at the end of the month as a fundraiser for our seventh form senior camp. The prize money is \$100 worth of vouchers shared between the first, second and third places. You need to sign up this week outside the school hall. There’ll be seniors outside our form class with sign up sheets, at lunchtimes, all week to take your names. Are there any questions?”

I look at Moana. She looks at me and I whisper to her.

“Well? Are you gonna sign up?”

She looks at me doubtfully.

“I’ve gotta think about it.”

I look at her and can see she’s hesitant.

“Come on, you promised yourself last year that you’d at least try, so are you waiting for? This is your chance to show everyone that you can sing.”

She doesn’t look at all confident. I’ve heard Moana and she is one of the best singers I’ve ever heard. Good enough to come on TV I reckon. I found out her secret when she was trying to sing one of her baby sisters to sleep during one of the weekends I stopped over after my dad sent me to the shop. That girl can definitely sing. The senior leaves and there’s a buzz about the room.

“I think I’ll do it.”

I’m busy looking out the window and hadn’t even heard her until she nudges me.

“If you promise to go with me to register today, I’ll do it.”

I give her a big hug and can't wait until lunchtime when she goes to sign up.

Afterwards, I can tell that she's excited but also a bit worried. Moana's pretty quiet in class and a little shy at times but I think she'll do really good. The school is in for a surprise. Over the next couple of weeks Moana gets ready for her big debut.

"Can you help me to get ready?" she asks me.

"Sure, as long as I get my school work done."

But I'm only joking cos she knows that I'm pretty focused on making it good this year so that I can get high enough grades to go to Uni after 7<sup>th</sup> form.

"So, whatahya gonna sing?" I ask her.

"I've decided that I'm gonna sing my mum's favourite Whitney Houston song."

I know the song but I don't know why she cares so much for her mum when her mum doesn't really care for her but I don't say anything. Her mum is her problem. I got problems of my own.

**Ela**

"So whatahya think?" I ask Sima.

"Are you in?"

I can see she's thinking.

"Well, whadduh we got to lose."

She's smiling and I know that we're in for a good time. I'd heard that there was gonna be a talent quest and then thought about going in for a laugh but I didn't want to do it by myself, so I asked Sima and she was game too.

"So when do we start rehearsing?" Sima asks.

"Right away at your house, where there's no distractions."



I was supposed to be dropping Sima off where she's staying temporarily with her single aunt who's never been married and doesn't intend to and works long hours.

"I have to leave and get away from her or I'll catch her disease of being single for the rest of my life."

Like me, Sima also saw herself getting married and having kids. Most of my friends were doing it and it was only a matter of time before he turned up so we might as well have some fun in the meantime.

"Do you have any good music?" I ask Sima.

"I have some old tapes and a few CDs but nothing that stands out."

We go into her small bedroom and she's right. There's not a very big selection.

"So what should we do?" Sima asks.

"Just lip sync to a song with a few simple actions and we'll be fine. But we have to find just the right song."

I'm looking through a box of tapes and CDs that Sima's handed to me.

"Hey, how about one of Michael Jackson's songs?" Sima asks.

"I danced to 'Thriller' when I was in my 7<sup>th</sup> form. Nah something with a message in it for da keeds' now that we're bonafide teachers. Something that's appropriate for us first year teachers..."

And I'm smiling.

"...something that's classic."

Still rifling through her meagre selection.

"How about this CD? Diana Ross and the Supremes."

She hands it over to me.

"Yeah, now this could be something!"

As I run my finger down the song titles.

"Some of these I've never heard before."

I keep looking and reading the titles until I hit one that I'm familiar with.

"Hey, what about this one? 'You can't hurry love.'"

I'm singing it and getting excited.

"Which song is that?" Sima asks.

"You know the one about not having sex too soon."

I'm laughing and slapping my side.

"Yeah, that's the one."

Sima joins in singing with me.

"Let's start rehearsing."

We start making up the actions as we go along laughing all the way.

## **Ben**

All the kids are excited 'cos there's gonna be a talent quest. The Seniors' been telling everyone. Scot wants to go.

"Do you wanna go too?" he asks me.

"Nah, I think I'll give it a miss."

"Are ya sure? We could always walk out if it's real stink." he says.

Maybe he's right.

"Sure, why not but I got no money."

"No worries. I'll pay us in," he says.

"I can't pay you back right one day."

"Not to worry, cos that's what friends are for."

Scot smiles.

“Thanks.”

But I’m not really interested in talent quest. This is Scots thing.

“Did I tell you that some day I wanna be a famous actor or be in a boy band when I finish school?”

I’ve heard the guy sing and sometimes he’s off key and I don’t think he can act but I don’t say a thing.

“Really?” is all I can think of to say.

“Yeah, I’ll be famous and live in Bel Air, near Hollywood where all the famous people live in California.”

That boy is crazy.

“Who wanna make you famous? I mean you gotta be real good at something.”

I’m smiling and he can see that I don’t want to hurt his feelings.

“You just wait and see. I’m gonna be rich and famous and then you’re gonna ask for my autograph.”

He’s smiling and shaking his head at me.

“What I want your autograph for?”

I say with a little sarcasm. Learnt that in Miss T’s class.

“So you can tell all your family and friends that you know me.”

By now he’s starting to laugh.

“But I already know you.”

He looks at me and then we both start laughing out hard. I’m shaking my head. He’s one crazy boy.

## Ruth

I'm spending a lot of time in the library. Moana reckons she wants to too but she gets easily distracted with her kid brothers and sisters and especially now with the talent quest. I support her like during class when she's humming along I tell her to be a little more quiet or else the others are gonna hear her and sometimes I elbow her when I see her daydreaming out the window to bring her back to the task at hand. I think she's gonna blow them all away and I know the prize money will help some.

"Ruth, do you have anything nice for me to wear at the talent quest?" she whispers to me during Maths.

"Why don't you wear something from your mum's closet." I whisper back to her cos her mum always seems to be wearing nice clothes with her ever changing boyfriends.

"I can't, cos my mum would kill me if she found me wearing anything of hers. She doesn't like me to touch any of her things."

She looks down hearted.

"Yeah, it's the same with my mum too."

I carry on with my work but I'm still thinking about it.

"Never mind, I'll just wear the school uniform."

"That's a good idea."

I half-heartedly agree with her except that her uniform's a lot shorter and tighter than mine. I think guys'll probably think that she's done it on purpose but they don't know that it's because she's more worse off than me, what with there being seven mouths for her mother to feed not including her new boyfriend.

The day of the talent quest arrives. I'm up with all my homework so I can take the lunch break off. Moana comes and gets me.

"I'm really nervous, could you please come with me to the toilets?"

I follow her, there's a couple of girls there but they leave when we come in. She goes into the toilet cubicle with her bag.

"Just wait out here, I just wanna show you something," she says.

"Okay, sure."

After a few minutes she comes out and I can't believe it. She looks transformed. She walks over to the steel mirror and puts some amethyst gloss on her lips with a light blue glittery dress, high heels and she's let her hair down.

"Wow!" I say, "you're really serious about this."

I still can't get over her make over.

"Yeap. It's do or die,"

"But where did you get that dress from and those shoes?" I ask.

"It's one of my mum's new outfit and she's gonna kill me if she ever finds out."

I give her a big hug.

"You look fabulous. You're gonna blow their socks off," I say.

"Thanks, but there's no way that my mum will ever find out cos I'm gonna just put it back tonight when she goes out. She'll never know."

She takes one long look at the mirror, she then takes a swirl around and we're good to go.

"They'll be so shocked when they see you."

I still can't get over how good she looks.

"That's what I'm hoping for," she replies. We leave the toilet block and make our way to the hall.

On our way, Mona gets lots of stare. I'm surprised that she isn't her shy usual self but I think that with the sparkling dress, high heels and make up it has given her a new confidence and she looks good with her slim figure. I see some girls whispering behind

their hands and watching her as we walk past but she doesn't seem to notice or even cares. She gets some whistles too from some guys and she replies with a smile.

The main entrance is packed with people but I see that there is another entrance that the seniors have blocked for contestants to enter. We make our way towards it but when we get there the senior stops me.

"Sorry, contestants only. Unless you are a part of her act, only contestants can come through this way."

I give Moana a kiss on the cheek and slap her back.

"Give it heaps Moana."

I turn to leave as Moana slips through the door and waves to me. It's then that I realise that I don't have any money to pay at the door. I guess I'll just have to wait outside until it's finished. I'm just about to head to the library and then I hear my name called out. I turn around to see Mona running towards me.

"Here, you forgot this."

She hands me some coins.

"Thanks. But where did you get it from?" I ask.

"The same place I got the outfit."

She gives me a hug.

"I gotta go. Wish me luck."

"Hey you don't need it. You're the best."

She runs back smiling. Then off I go and squeeze myself into the front of the queue and pay at the door. When I enter the hall, I can see that there's still room in the front and I go sit down. There're lots of people milling in. Pretty soon it's time to start and I'm right there into it.

## Ben

The day of the talent quest and we go to the school hall. It's crazy packed. Looks like the whole school is there. I'm taller than most kids. I can see where the line is moving fast through the door. Lots of kids are pushing to get in. Scot follows behind me and pays at the door. We get in fast.

We walk in and they got a stage up front. This is where we have assembly. They decorated the place up a bit. I look to Scot and he waves for us to sit on the floor at the front cos he's so short.

"Hey, no way am I gonna sit in the front."

I move to the back but Scot comes to get me.

"You can't see anything from the back," he says.

"Okay," I say and we settle for the middle. There's lots of excited kids comin and sittin in bunches and laughin. Me and Scot just watchin. I know Scots excited cos he's movin here and there like he's got ants up his pants and talking a mile a minute. I just rather be kicking a ball. Don't much like crowds.

The hall is filling up fast. I can see some of my teachers standing on the sides holding up the wall. Don't see Miss T, maybe she's on duty. Hope there's no trouble here. I see Jackson and his boys walk in. They tryin ta act cool. We just waitin now for something to happen.

They close the door and we're ready to start. A senior comes to the front with a mic. He's dressed up like he's going on his first date or something.

"Okay, Southside. Are you ready?"

A few people respond.

"I said, 'are you ready?'"

Kids start scream 'Yeah!'

"Okay folks, you are in for a great time in showcasing the talent that we have here at Southside High. But before we start, some House rules: no throwing things, no

shouting out stink comments and no one's allowed to say 'Boo' or they'll be escorted out of the premises. That means that you'll be kicked out of the hall."

Some kids say 'Boo.'

"Who said that?" The senior asks and there's a big laugh from the crowd.

"Okay, with no further adieu, whatever that means. I bring you our first act 'Kool zone.'"

It's some guys singing and dancing to one of Michael Jackson's songs.

"They're alright but I could do better," Scot tells me. I just look at him like 'what? Are you kidding? You can't even dance.' But I don't say a thing cos he's so excited. Next they have some girls singing together. They sound okay but then when they hit a high note, one of them goes off key and everyone starts laughing. She ends up running off the stage with the rest of her group following. They haven't even finished the song. They get another laugh from the crowd. Next a resident fafaine sings. S/he's got this tight dress on and lots of makeup like a circus clown. Can almost sing but when s/he hits the high notes her/his voice cracks which starts more people laughing.

A couple more acts come on stage and by this time I'm gettin bored. The next act is a girl singing with no music. She's a senior. I've seen her around and boy she can sing! She's singing a Whitney Houston song. One of my mum's favourites, I almost wanna cry. She finishes and everyone stands up and claps. Wow, she is amazing. I think she is surprised by everyone. She bows and then walks off the stage while we are still clapping. More groups come and go, nothing quite as amazing and then a couple of bands. Apart from the girl singer the rest weren't really all that good. My favourite was one of the bands. I'd love to learn how to play the drums. Now that would be really cool. The last act finishes and then they say it's time for the judges to decide. But they gonna have some entertainment. I'm ready to go.

"Scot, I'll wait for you outside," I say as I get ready to roll.

"Hey wait up, there's only one act to go before the judges' decision. Lunchtime's almost finished by now."



I look at him shaking my head, don't want to get stuck walking through that small door but he's got those begging eyes.

"Okay," I say "but just one more."

Two girls come up to the stage from the back door and the crowd explodes out laughing. I think what's the big deal? They probably can't sing like the rest of them. But then I hear the kids talking excitedly.

"It's Miss T and Miss Stowers."

I take a real good look, I almost couldn't tell. They got my attention now. Scot is jumping up and down and the kids behind him are getting sick of him.

"Hey, bloody sit down. We can't see!"

I turn around and they shut up. Scot sits down but is still squirming. I take a real close look again and sure enough it's Miss T. She's wearing the girls' school uniform with the skirt and jumper. She's taken off her glasses and got herself some cool shades, school shoes and socks on. She looks just like a new pretty senior student. She's got her hair in two ponytails. Miss Stower's got on a uniform too but it looks too small for her and she got these big muscley legs and shoulders. She looks like a lady bodybuilder busting out of the school uniform and she got these funny glasses on. She just missing a moustache and big nose and would like those funny guys on TV. They just standing there looking like they chewing gum, twirling their hair and waiting for their music to start. They gotta be crazy. Scot is smiling big time. Like he gonna burst or something. I think he's gotta small crush on Miss T. I think most of the guys in class have and now here she is entertaining them.

"She can be my girlfriend any day."

Scot smiles and tells me.

"I doubt it," I say and he laughs.

"She's too young for you."

He laughs back at me.

“Well, she looks good but can they dance?”

He’s waiting there nervously hoping that she can. I think everyone else is wondering if they’re good? A voice comes over the mic and tells the crowd they got technical difficulties with the music and could everyone please be patient. Meanwhile, Miss T and Miss Stowers are popping bubbles with their bubblegum. Everyone bursts out laughing.

“Hey, that’s not fair,” Scot shouts out.

“We get a detention for that.”

People around him laugh. The music starts. It must be an old song. That’s when Miss T spins into action. She dances pretty good at the front with Miss Stowers behind her. They both pretend to sing and their actions are pretty good. Except Miss Stowers looks a bit awkward. Miss T looks right in the zone. Then Miss T does a solo dance and goes up to one of the Seniors and pulls him up to dance. But he goes all shy on her and sits back down. Miss T looks like she’s got a broken heart. Other guys are calling ‘pick me, pick me’ but they’re off again dancing and then they finish and dance off the stage. The crowd goes wild. Everyone’s standing up to see if they gonna come on stage again and they do and give a bow to the audience with big smiles. Scot’s going crazy.

“Did you see that? Did ya see that?”

I just smile and think. ‘They’re some crazy teachers cos I aint seen nothing like that before.’ No teacher’s ever done act crazy like that but they were real good.

## **Ruth**

During most of the first acts that performed before Moana came on stage, the audience weren’t really interested in them. I guess they were pretty average if not plain ordinary but when Moana started singing, after an initial hesitation, she got right into it and everyone went quiet. She has the most beautiful voice and no one even knew about it. I looked around and smiled as people looked shocked and amazed that this girl whom they’d seen around the school could sing this good. In fact, you’d think this song was made for her. By the end of the song I was almost in tears and so proud

of her. She got a standing ovation and lots of cheering. Wow! I could see her smiling as she took a bow and then left the stage with the crowd still cheering for her. After Moana's song, I decided to go back to the library and continue with my study. When I got there, it was pretty much empty so I took my usual desk and started studying again. After a time, the bell rang and I packed up for my next class. I'm pretty sure that Mona won the contest. When I walked out I saw some seniors I know walk in excitedly. "Who won the talent quest?" I ask.

"Some girl in 6P4 called Moana but it really should have been Miss T and Miss Stowers, they were the best," they replied.

"What?"

I was so surprised. They must have continued after I'd left. Oh, I wished I had stayed now.

"Those teachers had some pretty good moves too."

I listen and watch them as they try to mimic some of the dance moves and dance actions. I continue listening and laughing as they describe the scene. I could almost kick myself. I should've stayed and watched the whole show but I'd decided to study instead. Oh well, nothing I can do about it now. I walk to my next class and see Moana walking towards class. She's replaced the dress with her old school uniform and a lot of people are congratulating her. She walks up to me and I give her a hug.

"Congratulations, I heard the good news. You were great."

I am so proud of her.

"And I got me some prize money, \$50 worth of Whitcoulls vouchers. Now I can finally buy some stationery."

She is beaming with people passing her and saying positive comments.

"You were the best Moana."

And sometimes slapping her on the back.

"Wow, what a voice."

Students are smiling and surprised in seeing someone that they hadn't noticed before.

We enter the class and more people congratulate her, even Mr Stewart, our science teacher, must have heard the news too. For the rest of the afternoon we talk about Meiosis and Mitosis but Moana is miles away distracted by her win. I can tell that she feels different now that everyone knows that she can sing. A new confidence and I feel so happy for her but I gotta keep focusing on Science as it's one of my least favourite subjects so I need to pass this one bad.

### **Ben**

I don't have English until the next day. When I walk into her class she smiles.

"Hi Ben," she says as she always does. Then other kids come in and start hounding her on how good she was.

"I don't know what you're talking about. You must have mistaken me for someone else."

The other kids are laughing and know that she's kidding and looking real innocent, pretending that she doesn't know anything. But they keep insisting. She just smiles.

"Okay class, enough distractions for now because we have gotta get back to the lesson and not be distracted by anything."

She makes me laugh. I go home and I'm humming the tune. Those teachers are a crack up.

### **Ela**

Had such a laugh with Sima at the talent quest. At the last minute we decided to wear school uniforms and Sima got us to borrow some of her P.E. students clothing and Sima's was definitely busting out of her's but we just didn't have the time to check for anything else. Mine fit just fine.

The actual dance was a hoot as we both love to dance, we discovered, and I think we brought the house down as we mixed funky moves in with some silly ones. I even got a senior to take some photos just for a laugh. After the dance we couldn't stop laughing – definitely on a buzz but when the students came to talk about it, I decided that I would deny that I'd had anything to do it. i.e. plead the fifth amendment that I can't say anything that might incriminate me even if I don't live in USA. It sure was fun and reminded me of my seventh form when I danced with a darkened motorcycle helmet at a school assembly to Michael Jackson's 'Bad Boys'. Oh, the things we do for fun. A welcomed distraction from the headache that I'm still feeling in class in trying to second guess myself with planning and knowing that there are things that I don't know but I don't know what they are and no one is really willing to help and I don't wanna ask. I guess when I get to the end of the first year, I'll know? But right now I don't.

That night, I look into the mirror and see these big pimples now appearing on my chin – all the pressure? And a cold sore on my bottom lip. Oh my goodness! I had the odd pimple here and there since leaving high school but not on such a large a scale as now. I can't believe it. I've gotta buy me some pimple cream tomorrow and will also go look for some cold sore cream. I can't go to school looking like this! I throw myself onto the bed and start my pity party.

It seems like the system s-u-x! here I am a first year teacher at the school and there's no real help or good resources to teach these kids. I mean why in the hell do I have to be spending so much time planning and marking and missing out of life. There's just got to be a better way, but I don't know it. It made me think of Ruth. She's one of the scholars in my class. Very smart and very dedicated. Often times when I would go to the library to see what other resources I could get to work with during the lunch break. I'd see her there in the same spot with books out working on something. Very few other students would be in the library with most playing outside or having lunch. She was one of the students that I really want to gun for yet with all the problems I'm having in just getting things organised I feel as if the kids were getting sucked into a system that was failing them even before they begin! I felt so very frustrated. If this was what it's meant to be a first year teacher at a school like this, I don't know if I want

to even stick around for the second year – very disheartening and discouraging.  
There's gotta be a better way! but what?

### ***HOPE, FAITH and LOVE***

*When you're feeling down and nothing's going right  
When no one seems to care and no one calls your name  
You gotta hold on, stop lookin down and just look up  
Cos something good's gonna happen if you wait for long enough  
It's just around the corner, so don't give up  
You just gotta have hope*

*When things get outta whack and things just seem too big  
When you wish someone was there looking out for you  
Hold on with courage cos it's never too late to believe  
Cos little miracles can happen when you keep doin good  
And turn that other cheek when the goin gets tough  
Cos a reward is waitin for you if only you'll believe  
You just gotta have faith*

*You gotta have love to survive in this world  
Give more, take less and care for those who need it  
Cos where there is love there is also forgiveness  
You can quench a whole lotta anger with a smile  
And it makes the world go round and round  
It does more good than you will ever know  
You just gotta have love*

*But the greatest of these is love...*

## CHAPTER 10

**Ben**

Scots pretty good at Soccer. He shows me all these tricks like bouncing the ball on his head ten times. I try and I can only do three.

“When the soccer season starts I’m going to join my team from last year. We were pretty good and came second in our division. Do you want to join up with me?”

He’s still bouncing the ball on his head.

“No way.”

I’m just watching him, waiting for my turn.

“You could always come and watch my games if you’re free on Saturdays.”

He’s dropped the ball, it’s my turn and I’m now bouncing it around.

“What do I wanna do that for?”

It doesn’t take long before it drops again. I kick it over to him.

“Cos that’s what friends do.”

He’s looking at me.

“Besides everyone else in my family’s too busy to even bother coming.”

He’s stops and drops the ball and is kicking holes in the grass instead.

“I gotta think about it.”

I pick up the ball and try bouncing it on me again. I don’t tell him that I do wanna go but that I don’t like to go places cos I don’t have a lot of different clothes to wear and that I don’t like people looking at me cos I got the same old shoes that I been wearing since mum’s gone and the same old clothes.

“Whadduhbout your dad?” I ask. The ball drops and I kick it over to him.

“He’s always too busy but I reckon if it was rugby, he would never miss a game. He’s a diehard rugby fanatic - never misses watching an All Black match.”

Now he sits down on the grass picking at the weeds.

“What’s your dad like?” he asks.

“Ya don’t wanna know,” I reply. I don’t wanna talk about my dad.

“And your mum?”

I sit down beside him and start picking at the weeds too.

“She died not so long ago. She was the best. Used ta look after me real good. But now she’s gone, I miss her.”

I don’t wanna talk anymore. I get up and start bouncing the ball.

“Do you want to meet my family?” he asks. He stands up to join me.

“Yeah, maybe later,” I say. I’m a bit scared of meeting Scot’s family.

## **Ruth**

A couple of weeks after the talent quest, Moana is still beaming. I think girls look at her differently now with some respect like she’s someone now and I’m now known as the friend of the girl who can sing. Before they’d just ignore us both but now when we walk together, lots of seniors say ‘Hi’. Moana looks at me and we just end up giggling, cos before this no one would even bother to talk to either of us.

“I’ve got something to tell you,” Moana announced to me a couple of weeks after the talent quest. We’re in Mr Stewart’s Geography class and he’s droning on as usual.

“Hang on, I’m just trying to work out this problem.”



But I can tell that she's got something to tell me. She's squirming in her seat like she's got something exciting on her mind.

"Oh, I give up. So what's the big deal that you have to get my full attention," I say to her.

"Do you know Jackson from 5T2?"

I look at her like 'what's so special about him?' I nod my head.

"Yeah, whadduh about him?"

"He wants to go out with me."

She stops smiling as soon as she sees my reaction.

"What? that little creep?"

He is shorter than a lot of guys his age and I've known him since Intermediate school.

"He's a year behind us," I continue and 'he reckons he's it' but I don't tell her.

"Yeah, I know but I've always had a secret crush on him."

She's got this silly smile on her face.

"You gotta be joking, he's a 'wanna be' and he thinks he's so cool. You wouldn't really be seriously considering going with him, would you?"

I just can't believe it. She's looking a bit guilty.

"Look, I've known him since Intermediate school and he's definitely a creep. I saw him tie a can to a dog's tail once and they couldn't catch the dog cos he was running so fast to get away from the noise that the can was making. Then it got run over by a car."

I want to say more but I can see that it doesn't make a difference, she really likes him.

"I didn't say I was into him. Oh, just forget I said anything about him."

She's opened up her Geography text book and she's not smiling anymore. Moana hasn't been the same since she won the competition. She's definitely got more confidence and a lot of people now know her but I know that she's really chuffed at

having a guy finally taking notice of her. But of all people? The bell rings and we each pack our books into our bags.

"I gotta go to the library and do some more work. You coming?"

She just shrugs her shoulders and heads in the opposite direction. I walk to the library but I have to go past the tuck shop. There I see Jackson with his arm around Moana. 'Wow, she doesn't waste time,' I walk past and pretend that I haven't seen them. I wanna say something but I know that it will only hurt her. I go over to the library and start going over my work and checking out some books. After lunch, when the bell goes, I wait at our next class at PE for Moana but she's not there. I guess she's decided to go do her own thing. I just hope it's not with that boy.

Later on, in walking home I see Mona coming up back with Jackson. She's holding his hand. I look at her like. 'Are you crazy?' I wanna say to her. They come up to me.

"Jackson, this is my best friend Ruth."

He looks at me and smiles.

"Well now, maybe I'm your new best friend."

He squeezes Mona into him and she giggles. I just look at him.

"No man, you just knowing her for a day doesn't make for a best friend."

He whispers something into her ear and she giggles some more.

"Hey look, I gotta go and catch up with my mates."

He gives her a kiss on the cheek and looks over to me and smiles. I just wanna wipe that grin off his face. I turn to look at her like 'what are you doing?' He runs off and I give Moana the cold shoulder and walk off ignoring her. She catches up to me.

"Hey, wait up."

I keep walking fast.

"Look, I don't have time for your little romances with that creep. Seeing him kiss you makes me wanna puke. How can you let him even touch you?"

I stop, turn around and Moana catches up but she's still got that silly grin on her face and I know that she's still thinking about him. I can see that she's not even paying attention to what I've just said.

"And anyway, what was he whispering to you? Man, he's rude."

We're walking again. I sure don't like him.

"Nothing," was Mona's reply, she's looking down.

"Nothing, my fat ass. Course he was, so come on what was so important that he couldn't tell me in front of my face."

I'm getting mad now. Mad that she likes that stupid creep and mad cos I know she's hearing but she's not listening.

"You don't want to know,"

"You might as well tell me since he's your best friend."

Mona stops walking.

"He said that you're jealous."

This time I stop walking.

"What?"

I can feel my blood boiling.

"What does he know? He just met you and all of a sudden he knows all about me? He better just keep away from me or he's gonna meet his maker."

This guy makes me sick.

"Oh, he was just joking."

"Well, that wasn't a joke to me. He's such a creep and I can't believe that you wanna go out with him."

I can still remember seeing the dead dog.

"He asked me to be his girlfriend."

Now I look at her in surprise

“What? Are you for real? Can’t you see Moana? He doesn’t really like you. He’s the type of guy who’ll just use you. He’s after one thing.”

I can’t believe that she’s even considering him. Hasn’t she even been listening?

“No he’s not. He cares for me.”

Moana looks very hurt.

“No way, he doesn’t care cos he’s gonna get you in trouble.”

I feel like I’m trying to talk sense to her but she doesn’t get it.

“No, you’re just jealous ‘cause no one’s asked you.”

That’s it, I’m really angry as hell and she just better watch out!

“What did you say?”

We’re almost at the street where we part ways.

“Look, I don’t care if he smacks you up or leaves you like that dog. Don’t you come crawling to me if he gets you in trouble. You’re gonna be just like your mother.”

It’s too late, I’ve said too much and I see Moana’s eyes open wide and I know that I’ve gone too far but it’s too late.

“Well stuff you too, you jealous bitch,” she says and she takes off down the road.

“No you’re the stupid bitch!” I yell after her.

Later on, in my room I’m still seething. I think of Moana and how we’ve only been friends a couple of years and that creep Jackson just stepped into the picture for a day and it’s all over. He’s had other girlfriends before her and he thinks he’s such a stud but he’s just a wannabe. Can’t believe that I let that creep has come between us in our friendship but there’s no way I’m gonna be talking to her anymore while he’s around

cause he's just trouble. I decide that I'm just gonna leave her alone to do her thing while I concentrate on my schoolwork. I don't have time to waste on losers like them.

## **Ben**

I like art. Mr Holden said that I was one of the best students he's seen in a long time. Mr Holden don't tell it in front of the class either and I really appreciate that. It made me feel proud. I know if he told my mum that she would have been proud too. There's a few of us who take art cos we really want to but most of the guys are here cos they got kicked out of their other classes. They don't give me no trouble and just leave me alone cos if anyone disturbed me during class, I might have to give them a pounding. So far, no one's challenged me.

This is my best subject and Mr Holden is my other favourite teacher next to Miss T. He's got us to start some painting with these new paints and he really likes my drawings.

"I want you to consider incorporating some meaningful motifs into your artwork, some ideas perhaps patterns from your culture."

I don't know exactly what he means but I didn't want to tell him that I was Samoan but that I don't know the language or nothin much about the culture. My dad acts like he's Maori, looks like a Maori, hangs out with Maori so I guess I could be a Maori by association like I heard him say once.

I don't know what to do. Samoan motifs? I look around the room for ideas and then it hits me when I saw a small tapa cloth hanging up on the wall.

"Ah, Mr Holden, is that Samoan?"

I'm pointing to a tapa cloth tacked on the opposite wall across the room from me. Mr Holden looks up from his paperwork.

"Why yes, Ben. It was a gift given to me from one of my past students and may I say that he did pretty well in Art too. Went on to art school at Whitcliffe Fine Arts Academy. Last time I heard, he was working for some big gun graphic arts company."

He returns back to concentrating on his work. He's got me thinking, maybe I could go to art school and hey, maybe I could use some of those tapa patterns into my painting. I got me some meaningful Samoan motifs. I start studying it, by drawing the different patterns then I start painting and using dark colours like the colours on the tapa cloth. Later on in the period Mr Holden looks at my work.

"I like your bold use of colour and those brush strokes complement the piece nicely. Carry on developing those ideas. I think you're onto something."

Then he gets me these flash paint brushes and bright coloured paints.

"Here take these, you can keep them."

He winks at me and goes back to his work. I carry on with my work for a moment and then I go back to him. It just doesn't sit right with me. I know my mum wouldn't like me to take something that doesn't belong to me.

"Mr Holden, I really appreciate this but I can't take this cos I can't pay you back."

He's got me worried, I don't want any favours or have to owe anything to anybody except for Scot but he's my friend. He takes me to the back room.

"Ben, I know that things aren't so easy for you but you've got so much talent that if I had to wait until you got all your things together, I know it would be that side of Christmas. So just think of it as an early Christmas present. You've got a good eye and great talent and I don't want to see you miss out just because you haven't got all the gear. Do you understand?"

He looks at me. I shrug my shoulders.

"Look, if you can help me at lunchtimes or after school to tidy up the class then that would be a big help to me. So you see? We're helping out each other."

He's smiling and I know he's genuine and I don't have to owe him anything. I smile in return.

"Thanks Mr Holden."

I'm not really sure about what else I can say cos I really like the stuff he's given me and now I can paint at home like the other kids in the class. Later in class he also shows me how to use pastels and has got me a big sketch book. Looks like I'll be cleaning his class for the rest of my life.

I'm busy drawing and trying out my new pastels then I see Miss T come into our class. I wonder what she's doing here. I overhear her talking to Mr Holden about wanting to have a look around the art class cos she used to be an art student. I see them talking and Mr Holden starts showing her different art work. She sees me and waves. They talk some more and then when they finish she comes over to me and looks at my art.

"Wow," she says. She's looking at my pastel drawings of the tapa designs.

"I didn't know that you were an artist. Your study and development of that tapa design is really good."

I'm a bit shy of her attention but I like it.

"Can you show me some more?"

I nod my head and then take her over to some of my initial dark paintings that were drying. She takes a look and smiles.

"Hey, you're pretty good at this I see. I really like these."

I show her more drawings of the tapa cloth design and point to the tapa cloth on the wall.

"Are you Samoan Ben? For some reason I thought you were Maori."

She's looking carefully at the drawings.

"Wow, I'm really proud of you. You've got talent, that's for sure."

I can't help smiling but look down, I'm shy around her or should I say any ladies except my mum. She sits down next to me and is still holding my drawings.

"You know, when I was at high school I took Bursary art in seventh form and passed it."

That surprised me and I didn't know what to say in reply then I go all red. She continues.

"But my marks weren't high enough to get into Art school at Uni so instead I took English and Geography. So here I am."

I look at her and see that there is some sadness but then she smiles again.

"I've gotta go but would love to see your portfolio later on in the year. Would that be okay?"

She gives me back my drawings.

"Yeah, sure that's okay."

Then she says 'thanks and goodbye' to Mr Holden and he says 'anytime' and then she walks out to her next class. She likes my work. She likes my work. The other kids are looking at me but I don't care. She likes my work.

## **Ela**

Feeling really tired after school with not enough sleep with all the marking and planning. Had to break up a fight in class with two boys squabbling over a pen, a pen! There's just gotta be a better way, but what? I still feel angry with the tone of the school, the look of the school and the teaching at the school. I came home and decided to clean up my room and went Outrigging late. I live about a ten minute drive from the more affluent side of Mangere Bridge where a bridge divides us poor brown folk from those rich white folks.

When I get there, I see five guys are all suited up and ready to go. They lift the canoe out onto the water and start paddling. The Coach is a few years older than me and his partner takes the ladies group and paddles with me when we get enough ladies. His father used to come to church with us but died several years ago. His son didn't take much to religion, like his dad but instead got into Social work and started an Outrigging club which opened up the opportunity for many brown cousins to go over the bridge to paddle. It was a sign on our local library that caught my attention that got me



initially interested in joining the club. We didn't have any meetings or subs to pay. He just encouraged anyone to come for a paddle. He's a man of few words and after my first lesson in learning how to handle the paddle, I was hooked. He didn't seem to mind that I'd come by myself and that we rarely had enough girls to paddle but sometimes if the men were one paddler short, he'd get me to jump in and paddle along with them. The men's team were definitely serious and would train for hours on weekends.

Today, I'm waiting for my five other lady paddlers to arrive. We have a regatta taking place in June and still we haven't got a full team together.

"Looks like they're not gonna turn up again, so you can go out with the guys when I call them back."

I nod, smile and watch the men paddling away in the far distance. I wish those ladies could get it together for training but I don't think it's ever gonna happen.

I love Outrigging, it's like a cerebral part of me, being out on the sea, on a warm sunny day, dipping my paddle in and out of the sea and feeling the movement of being propelled forward with every thrust of the paddle. Nothing beats the exhilaration of racing. I feel at one with the sky, sea and air. I guess it's my happy place, away from the pressures of school. It's nice and quiet out there with only the sound of our dipping paddles and the 'hip' of the caller when we need to change hands. And when the sun's shining bright, I just love it. When I go out with the men's team, I'm so amazed at their strength and speed at how fast they can paddle compared with the women's team. I think maybe my team's not serious because the ladies are often just girlfriends of the guys who only come for a time when they first meet their partner but later on as the novelty wears off they stop coming and I'm waiting for new girlfriends to arrive. But I don't care, I just love being out on the water with the guys or the girls. Takes me back to a time when my ancestors were navigators of the Pacific oceans, or rather my maternal granddad a fisherman in Faleula. Wow, no place else I'd rather be when I need time out to relax. If only I could find the time outside all the pressure.

After my paddle, I thank the Coach and drive home. I turn on to my favourite radio station and listen to a love song by Mariah Carey. Yeah right, thanks for reminding me

in adding to my worries and frustrations of not yet having a neat guy to share with and definitely not that creep Laurence or the guy I just dumped after a couple of lunch dates. Listening to the song doesn't help and brings back thoughts of my loneliness. I decide to turn it off. Enough frustration for one night. It made me realise that I'm not really sure if I wanted to really stick around teaching for very long. I don't know what to make of it perhaps it's not my real calling, like what the preacher talked about at last Sunday's sermon: about knowing the difference between a calling and a sending. This feels more like a sending to the mouth of the lions' den. Perhaps I should only stay for a year and then take off to a school closer to home, my hometown base which would definitely save me a lot of petrol and probably the headache. I feel pretty bad about being a part of a system which fails the kids! Hmmm roll on Christmas.

### ***Pacific Forefathers - Super Navigators of the seas***

*Long ago before Captain Cook sailed his seven seas  
my pacific forefathers were the Navigators of vast oceans  
traversing super highways, heading for exotic paradises  
discovering virgin islands and living at one with the land*

*Their rituals allowed the land to replenish and grow vibrantly  
and none were without for all shared communally in the bounty  
families flourished and people lived healthy, happily, longevity  
then things changed when Captain Cook and his colonisers arrived*

*The oral tales stopped from being told to the next generations  
we now learnt their histories, their conquests, their languages  
Their rituals were about exploiting and exporting to foreign lands  
and families no longer flourished as they became cash poor*

*New diseases decimated our peoples as did their religions and money  
which divided villages and families, challenged values of old*

*each now worshipping their own chosen gods and new gods  
forgetting their rich heritages, languages, histories and legacies*

*but now we must rise up and teach our next generations  
that things were not so, that our forefathers were visionaries  
with forward planning and navigational skills way before their time  
they were engineers and skilled craftsmen building sustainable communities*

*We can now teach them with pride about how our past generations  
who built and loved, cherished and planned, fought and won  
to keep alive what was important in language, culture and customs  
Lest we forget and become mere figments of an inspirational past.*

## CHAPTER 11

### Ben

Scot lives on the new side of town. It used to be all farmland but now they got these new fancy houses there. I never been to Scot's house. He said that I can come around any time but I can't. I really want to but know they'll be looking funny at me although in my head I think I already met them.

"You should come over sometime because it's only me, my parents and my little two sisters."

He's teaching me about how to kick a ball between our jumpers serving as goal posts in front of the school fence out on the field and I've gotta defend the goal.

"I'm the eldest and then Sarah is my five year old sister and my new baby sister is called Iris. She's just turned one. Do you have any brothers or sisters?" he asks me. It's my turn. He gives me two chances to score while he tries to defend the goal.

"Nope, just me."

"My father said that he used to go to the primary school just down the road at Ridgemount school and when he heard about the new housing development at Botany, my parents decided to buy a place out here, to get us out of the city."

He's too good for me at defending his goal so I kick it to him. It's my turn to defend.

"You know, before we moved out here we used to live in this posh townhouse in town but I used to always get bullied at the private school I used to go to, so I started wagging school but then my dad caught me this one time when I was trying to catch a bus out of town."

We were elbowing each other and going for the ball but he was too dam quick for me and scored a goal.

"So what happened?" I asked. We take our positions again.

"Well, we had a family meeting and my dad and mum told me that we were going to be moving here and I was so over the moon but I made them promise that I could help in choosing a school to go to."

I thought about how I never got to have family meetings or given the choice to choose between much of anything.

"And then what happened?"

I was interested in the different way that this family seemed to work with each other.

"Well then, when I told them that I didn't want to go to any of the three private schools that they wanted me to go to, my mum almost had a fit.

"Why?"

"Because my mum came from a rich family and she said that when she was growing up as an only child, she got to go to private schools all her life and no son of hers was ever going to a public school over her dead body."

Wow, I was interested.

"So what did you say?"

"I told her that if they kept making me go to a private school that I was going to keep wagging from there, because I hated the last one so much. Here it's not so bad, you have your usuals like Jackson but over there they were really nasty," Scot said.

"What did they do to you that made you not want to go there anymore?"

I didn't know much about private schools let alone any other schools outside the schools that I'd already gone to.

"I don't want to talk about it. Let's just say that they didn't like the way my ear stuck out and I didn't let my parents see the bruises."

He stopped kicking the ball and started playing footsy with it and seeing how many times he could kick it into the air without letting it fall to the ground.

"So how did you get to come here?" I asked.

“They made me promise that if I got good marks, that I could stay here. So far it’s been good.”

He dropped the ball and then it was my turn. It didn’t take long and then the ball dropped and I passed it back to him and he started kicking it in the air. It made me think that his family really took education seriously much different to my father who didn’t seem to care much at all. Scot’s pretty smart and in class liked to answer all the questions. I watch as Scot is carefully kicking the ball. I can see how the bullies must of picked on Scot cos he looks small for his age and he’s got these big cabbage ears that seem to grow out from the sides of his head. In fact he looks like a midget or a dwarf next to me but we still hang out.

“My dad also told my mum that maybe if I went to a local school that I might learn how to be more tough and stick up for myself. But it’s my mum who was real scared for me because she’d always been to a posh school. But now that I have me a friend like you, and my school reports so far have been good - she doesn’t worry about me anymore.”

He’s dropped the ball and then I pick it up and started kicking it again.

“Well, I’m happy for her too cos I sure like those sandwiches.”

The bell rings then I drop the ball and we both laugh ourselves off the field.

## **Ruth**

I don’t see Moana at school the next day or for the rest of the week. I guess she’s decided to take some days off school and muck around at home. Usually on Fridays, we make some time to talk before the weekend but now that she’s got herself a new boyfriend, I think I’ll just give it a miss. Besides, Moana doesn’t have a phone at home and I would usually go over to visit when I go to the shop but can’t now, so I’ll just leave her alone. I think about how I used to feel so sorry for her having to look after all her brothers and sisters when her mum wasn’t around or even when her mum was around she’d be picking up after them and watching over them. I used to think what a crappy mother she was but Moana used to say that she had to help out her mom. If

you ask me, she's gonna turn out just like her lazy mom who likes to muck around with younger guys. I did meet her mother's other boyfriend the last time I visited and I was surprised to see how young he was. He was like in his mid 20s and Mona's mum is like in her late 30s. I reckon he's just after the extra welfare money she gets from having all those kids but Moana reckons that her mum's in love. Yeah right, love is blind and deaf and dumb.

It's not until midway through the next week that I see Moana. She's ignoring me and keeping her distance. Usually we sit together in all four classes that we share but now she's sitting way on the other side. I don't care cos I'm not gonna let anything get in my way this year. Not even the loss of a friend.

At home, mum wears makeup all of the time now and most times she just sleeps with it on. I just steer clear of her and go into my room whenever she's up and get on with my homework. She leaves me alone with dad watching TV or in his garden. We don't even eat together anymore, cos dad eats in front of the TV, mum eats whenever she wakes up and I eat whenever I come out of my room. There's an almost eerie silence with each person doing their own thing that you'd think we were just flatmates and not a family.

Each afternoon, the same guy comes to pick her up and I watch them behind the kitchen curtain. She smiles, she hops into the car, they talk, they both smile and then he reverses and they rocket off. They almost look like a couple. I've decided not to talk about it to my dad cos he doesn't seem bothered and I don't want to upset him but I reckon that something's going on, I'm just too scared to think about it too much.

## **Ela**

A busy day at school for sure! One thing I noticed about all my classes was that when I first introduced myself as Miss Tagaloalagi I explained to them that they could call me Ela. Their first reaction was one of surprise. I had made this decision as when we'd had this discussion in my Teachers College professionals class. All my life I'd been called

Ela, so it wasn't a big deal for me to have students call me by my first name? It was better than having a mouthful to deal with and I'd had so many problems with the wrong pronunciation of my surname growing up, that I thought that I'd solve this possible problem for me by letting students call me by my first name. When I introduced this idea to my initial classes, students just looked at me somewhat surprised and some giggled but after a while they'd revert back to calling me Miss, in fact they call all the female teachers 'Miss' and all the male teachers 'Sir', I guess they have more special words for the teachers that they don't like but that really made me think that there was already some firm ideas about teacher genders and their titles.

I was also aware that when I walked past a lot of the classes that there was dead silence, especially among the more experienced and older teachers. At teachers College we'd also discussed this in my professionals class but I lately noticed that my classes were getting too noisy, and I'd have to constantly tell them to quieten down. It sometimes felt as if I was at a rugby match and you had to yell to the person next to you to be able to hear them. I better think of some class control mechanisms. After only a few weeks of school, I still wasn't into this whole teaching business. It had its moments but not many and I didn't like the vertical forms either of having to work with students in Forms 3 to 6 with many students having very little in common in my form class with the seniors on one side and the juniors on the other. I think I'll bring some board games to school to get them to do things during form class. Not sure if they had really thought some of these processes through.

It's the weekend - yeah, and I picked up Sima. She was very excited to be going on her first paddle cos when we got there, we were two people short of the six needed to go outrigger. For a first timer, Sima was pretty good although it was a little hard for her at first in never having held a paddle before. For my first time it hadn't been so bad cause I'd been on church camps where we'd often have a kayak to float around on except in this case it's with a singular paddle and five other paddlers. Afterwards, we went to our favourite fast food dig and we ate big! Man that girl has one big appetite but it felt good in celebrating that not only were we teachers but we could also learn a



new thing or two. We also made it our last time to be pigging out as I needed to get up and training for the regatta even though we still didn't have a team.

"Boy, I'd love to join your team but I've got after school basketball teams to sort out and Saturday games. So I don't know that I can commit to it but I would be able to come to the trainings every now and then."

That was fine by me as sometimes I was the only lady who'd end up coming to practices.

"So, if I'm free I'd also like to go to the regatta 'cause I've never been to one," she said.

"I've got a confession to make too, cause I've never been to a regatta either so going with someone else would be good."

Sima and I were cracking up like mad with more jokes about the school and I really appreciated that now I had someone to laugh with and have a great time with too. It seemed that in the past when I was at Uni I got used to doing things on my own but with Sima, there was lots of laughs and fun. I felt like I'd met my Samoan soul mate and friend for life.

Later that night, dad called me in to have a talk. I wondered what it could be about and mentally went through to check whether I might have done something that could have upset my dad because he hardly summoned me unless it was something serious. I sat down next to Pili who was playing with a train set that I had just bought him. We were all seated in the lounge with my dad and mum facing me.

"You know that I'll be going to Samoa next month to check on our family house and see how our family in Siufaga are doing."

I nod my head and wait intently for whatever it was that he was going to tell me.

"I'm going to bestow some matai titles on some of the members of our family and I'd like you to consider becoming a matai for our family."

I look at mum and she looks sad. I know that this wouldn't have been her wish for me because she had lived through the difficulties of never having enough money for all of

the faalavelave that comes about through the need for my father to have not one but three chiefly matai titles for his different family lineages and villages. I've seen her when she's been stressed in trying to stretch their budget to service not only our family's needs but also monies for weddings, funerals, birthdays and church obligations. I didn't have to consider anything. My mind had been made up many years ago before this question was ever to be even considered.

"I'm sorry dad, but I don't want to be a matai."

I stood up thinking that our conversation was over.

"Okay, it's your decision but sit back down, I want to talk to you about something else."

I sat down wondering about what else he might want to be talk to me about.

"I think you should seriously consider being a matai now that you have a position of responsibility in the community but I'll leave it up to you."

I know that this part mum would have insisted on in making sure that I was able to make up my own mind.

"I also wanted you to know that I'm also going back to Samoa to find out about buying some land closer to town to build our family house on. I wondered if you would be interested in putting some money together with your mum and me to buy it?"

I felt so happy, I nodded. Of course I would, I'd been back to Samoa last year and had enjoyed the freedom of being back to my roots and living simply. I had thought about it and had even considered living there for a year but our house was too far from town where I'd be interested in working.

"Yes, I'd be happy to help out and give mum the money to bank."

My mum smiled and I knew that this made her happy. Finally, we could have something of our own in Samoa, as both of my parents had helped to fund their family houses back in Samoa but other family members were living in it and although we stayed at Papa's family house, it always felt like an imposition even though we felt comfortable there, that when we left they could have their house back. It made me think about Papa's house and when he told me the story about his late mother not

wanting for him to leave Samoa, just in case he left and never returned. Even after she died many years before I was born, he still maintains the family house that he built for her and I suspect the promise he made to her.

### ***Papa's Fale Palagi***

*Papa was secretly born  
on an Island  
hidden for the indiscretion  
his mother unwed, so young, she concealed her pregnancy*

*but no so secret  
that paramount chief of the village  
sent for the child and gave him his name  
for they were with no child born – barren  
Now had a son of their own  
they loved him so much  
that he would roll on the ground  
if he did not accompany them wherever they went*

*Years later to be told  
had he seen his mother? by the other villagers  
when she appeared from another village  
with family of her own  
not suspecting he had any other  
than his own parents  
yet he loved them still*

*Tragedy struck when the boy was twelve  
and his beloved father was no more  
his mother packed their belongings and returned*

*with her son and adopted daughters  
as was custom  
back to her late mother's village for a time  
then back to a rural remote late father's village  
where she originated*

*She took with them her four poster bed  
and 'sefe ipu' away from Fasitoo  
remnants of a time gone past  
which Papa still lovingly preserves*

*Money was scarce and he left school  
at primary and found a job  
as a house boy in Vailima  
at the former house of the famous  
Robert Louis Stevenson  
he met the last NZ High Commissioner  
stationed there a Mr Bowls  
who encouraged him to seek his future  
a life in the new New Zealand  
with opportunities to whet a young man's palette*

*So he asked his mother but she said a flat no  
and refused to let him go  
- even if I cannot buy sugar or anything to eat  
I always want to see you"  
for she loved her son so fiercely  
and had lost so much in so little time  
and He loved her tenderly and relented  
for a time  
for he was not blind to their poverty  
and the new New Zealand promised so much  
with stories from travellers of a Canaan*

*dripping with milk and honey in New Zealand*

*He reconsidered and decided to go*

*- you will forget me, you do not love me if you go*

*she cried*

*- we will see who is right*

*was his stubborn reply*

*for he was as stubborn as she*

*and off he sped working and sailing on the Tofuna*

*the banana boat as it was called*

*where he later met his beautiful wife to be*

*as she walked off the ship*

*(but that is another story)*

*In 1957 he arrived*

*in the land of golden opportunities*

*he did not forget and*

*regularly sent her remittances of several pounds*

*he never forgot her love and always remembered*

*the mother who had taken him in when he had none*

*He worked hard - saved hard*

*she missed him still*

*but proud when he returned*

*to build her a fale apa*

*with his dreams for a fale palagi for her*

*but it was not to be - he returned too late*

*she was buried at the back of their fale palagi to be*

*and did not get to see*

*the house of their dreams*

*but in her death he remembered her words*

*in his heart that he would never forget*

*his annual pilgrimage back to their home  
with memories of days gone past  
first with his children and now grandchildren  
he retells the story of a father who loved a son  
and a mother that loved so fiercely and  
tenderly buried in the heart of a man  
who loved them best*

## CHAPTER 12

### Ben

Scot asked me to go to his house for his birthday. They're having a birthday party for him after school. We've finished playing ball and I'm eating his lunch and waiting for the bell to ring.

"Sorry, I'm busy."

I tell him between munches.

"Busy doing what?" he asks.

"I gotta look for a part time job so I can buy some things. Hmm, that was finger licking good."

I'm licking my fingers to get the last taste of it.

"I'll help you," he says. Sometimes he says he gonna give me some money cos his dad gives him pocket money but I tell him that I don't want it cause I wanna do it myself. My mother said I should never accept anything that belongs to someone else.

'Nothing in this world is for free cos there is always a catch somewhere – someone's gonna have ta pay somehow.'

Those words stay with me. When he comes to school the next day, he packs a big lunch for me.

"What's this for?" I ask but I think I know what it is.

"Cos you were too busy to come to the party so I brought the party to you."

I open the large plastic bag and see that he got me a big piece of chocolate birthday cake, some fancy lil' meat pies, colourful muffins and other yummy munchies.

"So, what did you get for your birthday present?"

I'm starting to gobble it up. I pass it to him for some.

"Ah, no thanks," he says.

"Did you get a new car?"

I'm smiling, joking around and eating. This is the best feed I've had in a while.

"Nah, not yet. I haven't even got my licence. Maybe next year?"

"So what did ya get?"

I'm interested cos I've never had a birthday party since mum died.

"Well, my dad couldn't make it so he gave me two fifty bills to buy whatever I want with it."

I look at him wide eyes. What I could do with two fifty dollars.

"Wow, that's pretty good. Wish I had your kinda parents."

I'm surprised, that's a lot a money. I don't even know what a fifty dollar bill looks like.

"Trust me, it ain't that great. I just wish my dad could've been at my birthday but he had his usual work stuff to go to and I wish he could make it to my games every now and then – like some of the other dads.

"But you've got a hundred bucks. Man I'd rather have the money than see my dad."

Scot stands up and walks off into the field.

"Hey, wait on."

I quickly pick up my unfinished food, put it back in the plastic bag and wrap it closed. I catch up to him cos for a short guy, he can walk fast. He then stops and faces me.

"You know, somehow he never misses an All Black match and gets all dressed up then he goes out with his mates to their box seats and whenever he asks me I just say 'no thanks,' 'cos if he can't be bothered going to my games, then I can't be bothered going with him."

I look at him and don't quite know what to say.



“What? If I were you I’d go just for the ride but what about your mum can’t she come to any of your games?”

He’s starting to kick holes in the ground and I join him. Suddenly kicking holes in the dirt is very important to us.

“My mum’s too busy with the baby or transporting my little sister to all her ballet and swimming and piano practises, she doesn’t have the time to talk to me like she used to. I’d rather have that than a whole lotta money.”

The bell rings and we head back to class.

“Are you joking?” I say, “I’d take your place any day and with all that money I’d buy me some new clothes.”

I laugh but Scot doesn’t reply to me, he follows me into class and for the rest of the day he doesn’t say much.

It’s Friday and we’re walking home. Scot hasn’t talked with me much all week since his birthday. I guess he needs his space, like I do sometimes, so I don’t say much to him.

“So would you like to come over to my house?”

We usually walk to the second intersection and he turns left and I turn right.

“Nah, not today it’s too far to walk,” I reply. I wanna go to his house but I don’t want people lookin at me.

“We could bus there or maybe I could ask my mum to drop you off afterwards. She works from home.”

I can tell that he’s hoping that I’ll say ‘yes.’

“Sorry, I got things to do after school.”

I’m stalling trying to think of any excuse.

“Like what?” he asks. He doesn’t look convinced.

"I've got lotsa homework for art to do over the weekend."

"Oh, okay," he says but he doesn't look too happy.

"Then why don't I come over to your house?"

My eyes open wide.

"We could work together on our homework."

He's smiling again.

"What?" I say, I'm tryin ta think of another excuse, fast.

"Can I come over?"

"What do you want to that for?"

I can't think of an excuse right now, I'm still stalling.

"Cause I sometimes get bored at home."

We're almost at the intersection.

"What you must be joking with all the gear you got?"

I don't believe it, if it was me I would never leave home.

"I just want to hang out with you," he says.

"What do you want to do that for?" I ask.

"Because that's what best friends do."

"You ain't my best friend," I reply. We both stop, we're at the intersection. He looks at me hurt.

"Then who is your best friend?" he asks.

"My dog," I reply smiling.

"But you've never mentioned a dog," he says confused.

"It's my next door neighbour's dog."

He looks at me then we both end up laughing. Nah, I don't really want him to see my house or my dad.

"Well then, why don't we go to the library or the swimming pool."

I can see that he aint gonna give this up.

"I don't have a library card."

I manage to say without trying to sound too much like I'm looking for an excuse.

"You can borrow mine."

"Nah, it's okay I don't feel like reading."

It's time to go and I can tell that he's stalling.

"Well then, what about swimming?" he asks. The swimming pool and library are close to each other and a twenty minute walk straight ahead to them. Both are for free.

"Come on, we got our P.E. gear here. We can just swim in our shorts and then dry off."

I remember how my mum used to take me to the free swimming lessons when I was young. Haven't been back since.

"Yeah, okay."

Scot is talking a mile again he's excited at the thought of going to the swimming pool instead of going home to all his gear. I don't get him. I think about my mom. She would have liked Scot. She don't care about peoples colour. I think my dad would probably laugh at him cos he's so small and white. And he might even want me to use him for his money. I know how he thinks. I don't trust him. He might even say something to him. No, there's no way I'm gonna take Scot to my house.

We had a ball at the swimming pool. There was hardly anyone there. I forgot how good it feels to be in the water again. The pool was heated, not too hot and not too cold.

Some people there were swimming laps in the lanes. Scot's a good swimmer and he's showing off that he can swim backstroke, breast stroke, freestyle and butterfly. I can only float and swim freestyle without the breathing.

“Why don’t aren’t you in a swim team or something?”

“I used to be at my old school but I love playing soccer more. Getting out in the sunshine and all that.”

We later find a ball and start playing tag with it until the life guard tells me not to throw so hard or it’s gonna hurt someone. I decide to stop. We get changed and walk out like wet fish.

“I’m so hungry,” Scots says as we walk out. My stomach’s been rumbling a while back but I was just waiting to go home to see what’s been left behind.

“You want to eat something? My buy,” my friend says.

“I’ll eat whatever you wanna eat.”

“Someday I’ll pay you back when I get a part time job.”

I just hope it’s sometime soon.

“No problem,” he says.

“So what do you want to eat?”

My favourite question of the day.

“I’d like some fish ‘n chips and a meat pie,” I reply. We walk to the Fish ‘n chip shop and he orders some takeaways and then we go around the corner to the dairy where he picks up a meat pie and a can of coke. We wait for a while and play spacies then he picks up our order and we’re both trying not to burn ourselves with the hot meat pies and the chips, walking as we’re eating. When we almost reach the intersection, Scot tells me the real reason why he doesn’t want to go home.

“I feel left out now. My parents are always busy with the girls and don’t have any time for me anymore. My mum used to have time for me before the girls came along but now she’s either taking them somewhere or taking baby to visit friends and no one’s interested in me or my soccer games anymore.”

He looked sad like he didn’t want to walk to the other side of the road.

“What about your dad?”

“He’s usually busy with work or playing with the baby or out with his work mates. He said I’m big enough now to work out my own schedule but the real reason is that he can’t be bothered when I ask him to do stuff with me, because he’s got more important things to do. I don’t bother asking them anymore, I just do my thing and go. He wanted me to get into a Rugby team cos he’s a such big fan of the All Blacks. I reckon he wanted me to be an All Black but that’s too much pressure, besides, I like soccer. What can I say?”

He looks away and I see how sad he is. He looks like he’s gonna cry. We don’t talk much the rest of the way to the intersection.

“So you wanna play date?” Scot asks me. He looks like he wants to be happy again. I look at him and smile.

“What are ya talking about?”

“It’s what my mum asks other mothers if they want to make a time to play with Iris. You know, I don’t hate them - it’s just that my parents just seem to have forgotten me.”

I can see that he’s wanting some company.

“Maybe, we could come every Friday after school.”

He’s smiling again. I reckon it’s a good idea.

“You got yourself a date.”

His eyes are dancing. I figure I can go to the pools maybe on Fridays after schools and Sundays before school then the kids won’t say that I stink.

“Yeah, that will be a good idea,” Scot says, then we say our goodbyes and walk home the rest of the way. I got me a best mate.

I get home and my dad’s there.

“Where’ve you been ya look wet?”

I look at him and ignore his questions. I'm not even gonna bother to answer him 'like what do you wanna know for?' He's never asked me about where I've been. I think he's up to something. Then I look around and I see a couple of TVs, a microwave, some boxes with covered lids.

"Don't touch these things, they belong to my friends, okay?"

He's grinning like he's some macho man or somethin.

"And they gave us that TV and microwave," he says pointing to the corner where a large microwave is sitting on an even bigger TV. I look at them and then I look back at my dad and can see that he's smiling too. Then I know where they got it from cos they got no money.

"This don't belong to us," I say to him.

"You better just shuddup, ya hear? This ain't none a your business and if you say anything to anyone – they gonna hurt you bad, you hear me?"

I walk outta the kitchen and slam the door. Now they're stealin things from other people's houses. I don't know what to do. I just know that this is no good if the police find these things in our house. They might even think that I stole it. I decide not to do anything just yet. I gotta think about it.

## **Ruth**

I don't see Moana for a couple more weeks but I don't care, I'm really into my study. Then one day when I'm in the library. I see Jackson with his arm around a new girl. I've only seen her a couple of times before but I shrug it off and go back to my studies. I hear the girl giggling and I want to tell her to shuddup but when I look up, I see him looking at me and laughing and then he starts toying with the girl's curly brown hair. 'See if I care, not any of my business what my ex best friend's boyfriend wants to do when his girl's not around. Good job, serves her right. Don't come crying back to me,' is all I think of and get back to my work.

The following week between classes, I see Moana on the far side of the courtyard outside the tuckshop. I can see that she's been crying as she quickly wipes away her tears as more students walk into the courtyard. She's outside alone under a tree. I know it's her, cos she's wearing that familiar old jumper that she wears cos she can't afford a school uniform jumper. I think to walk past and ignore her, she'd never know but then I know that something's upset my once-was my best friend, probably that Jackson with his new girlfriend. I walk over and sit next to her. She looks up and turns away from me.

"Are you okay?"

A stupid question, isn't it obvious?

"Look, I'm sorry Moana. I don't want to be enemies. You were my best friend and I didn't want to see you get hurt."

To that Moana lets out a big sob then she turns towards me and hugs me as she cries into my shirt. I give her a hug back. I guess we're friends again.

"I'm sorry too," she says.

She starts talking between sobs and she then sits up and wipes her nose with her hand.

"I've broken up with Jackson."

"Yeah, I guessed that cos I've been seeing him around with a new girl."

The spark that she'd had in her eye for him has quickly faded.

"What happened?"

"He was just an asshole. I thought he really cared about me but you were right, he just wanted to use me."

She looks away.

"Well look here, don't worry about him, he was just a dumb jerk anyway and now you don't even have to worry about him. It's now his dumbass girlfriend's worry."

She looks at me between tears and doesn't say anything. I know that she's hurting.

"But it gets worse," she says and the tears start flowing. I brace myself.

"But what could be worse?" I ask her.

"Can you promise me not to tell anyone? Not a single soul? You're the only person I can trust."

I look at her and know that this is serious. What has the dumbass done to my friend? I look at her sad eyes and know that she must have gone through something much more worse.

"I'm think I'm pregnant," she says and looks down at her stomach. I'm shocked. I don't know what to say. The bastard, I just wanna smack him out.

"Did he rape you?" I ask.

"I don't wanna talk about it."

Her tears start flowing again and I reach out and take her hands.

"Does he know you're pregnant?" Is all I can think of to say.

"At first, I didn't want to tell him but then I thought that maybe he could help me out but when he found out, he said that he doesn't want the baby, he told me to go straight to the school nurse and get rid of it."

She looks distraught.

"Is that what he wants you to do?" I ask.

"He wants me to have an abortion."

The words sink in like lead.

"He told me that he doesn't want to ever see me again."

I can see that this has been his decision and not hers.

"What? First he gets you pregnant and then he abandons you?"

The more she tells me, the more I want to hurt this Jackson.



"That's not all," she continues.

"What? You mean there's more to the bastard?"

"He said that I'm not supposed to tell anyone or he'll..."

She stops.

"Or he'll what? Smash you? Who the hell does he think he is. You've gotta tell someone. What about Miss T? she'll know what to do?"

I stand up to look for Miss T but Moana stops me.

"Look, I'll talk to her. You can trust her and you know there's not a lot of students that I can trust in. I'll..."

Moana doesn't want to hear it.

"No. You promised you wouldn't tell anyone."

She looks desperate and now I can see the dark circles under her red eyes. She probably hasn't had much sleep and has been crying lots.

"But you can't let him get away with it?"

I'm so angry that if he were here, I'd go grab him and smack him out.

"So whatdayah gonna do? tell your mum?"

She looks at me with incredibly sad eyes. I already know the answer before her reply.

"There's no way I'll tell my mum cos she's pregnant too."

I can't believe what I'm hearing.

"What?"

I look at her flabbergasted.

"As if things couldn't get any worse."

I just couldn't think of anything that could help to solve this situation.

"Are you sure you're pregnant?" I ask again.

"I'm pretty sure, I've got an appointment with the nurse to check it out later on today," she says.

"That's why my mum's boyfriend has moved in with us cos they're gonna have a baby."

I felt for my friend, I wished that there was a way that I could help her.

"She'd have a fit if she found out that I was pregnant too."

She began rubbing her stomach.

"But didn't she just meet the guy?"

It just didn't seem fair.

"Yeah, during the holidays. So there's no way I'm even gonna bring up the subject of a baby plus I can't keep the baby cause I don't have any money to look after it."

I didn't know what else to say it seemed as if she had already made up her mind.

"So you're gonna have an abortion?"

She nods her head and I can see the tears beginning to form and spill over. I cry with her. I can't believe that she has to go through this, all because of that jerk. I stay there with her for the rest of the period cradling her on my lap. She looks so young and fragile. How can people be so cruel to one so innocent. We're about to leave, as it'll be lunchtime soon and then the fields will be swarming with people. One of Jackson's friends comes up and drops Moana's bag at her feet.

"Jackson said that you forgot this."

He runs off laughing. Moana goes to open up the bag and then let's out an almighty scream and begins crying again. I carefully open the bag and then I see it. A little dead mouse with a note beside it in scrawled in handwriting with the words: 'You better not tell!' In shock, I drop the bag but then decide to pick it up. I run with the bag a short distance then throw it over the fence into the bushes. I then run back to my friend and hug her and to try and ease the shock from her former boyfriend.

I decide to skip my next class to be there for her and we go to the local park where we can have some privacy and talk about it some more without Jackson or his friends awaiting us. We talk some more and she confesses to me that her mum's new partner's been making moves on her too when her mom wasn't at home.

"What a jerk! I hate that kinda guy."

This just seemed to be getting from bad to worse. That explains why she went with Jackson, cos if anything happened, she thought she would be able to rely on Jackson but he turned out to be only using her for the same thing. I felt for her but there's not much I could do. I'd heard of this sort of thing happening to girls but never thought that it could happen to someone close to me and she's got her whole life ahead of her.

"The sad thing about it was that I didn't really wanna do it with him but I was just trying to make him happy cos then I thought that I'd be happy too but I was wrong."

I look at my best friend and realise how fragile life can be.

### ***Virgin land***

*He raped her  
there  
and  
then  
ploughing her field  
with his oxen*

*He curses her  
relentlessly  
pushing  
thrusting  
tearing the earth beneath her*

*Planting his seed*

*he leaves her*

*barren*

## CHAPTER 13

### Ela

One of the things I'm realising about school is that hopefully if I continue next year, it would be a great idea to have a full year plan of the units I'd teach and a breakdown of the resources needed for each unit for each lesson as it seems as if I'm doing all the guess work as I teach from one day to the next. This, in fact was getting me down with the amount of guess work, marking and more planning. So with the heap of work I needed to do, I didn't get to go Outrigging as much as I used to plus I was starting to put on weight now. Sometimes I'd plan heaps of work but it seemed hard to know where to start with four classes to work through.

One thing I did enjoy though was teaching students about the various books and the themes within. It was very discouraging to know that some of the terminology that I used was very foreign to the students in that it made me wonder about what had been actually taught in classes in the earlier years. How could they come to Form 5 and 6 without understanding some fundamentals? Needless to say that I had them copying down a lot of the notes from the board because we were only allocated a small budget per teacher for photocopying.

At times, I'd be feeling a little down like I'm not really giving enough time to God and have so many other things to do like marking and planning. I think about school and the pressure that's associated with it and although I enjoy outrigging I'm often not able to go to trainings as much as I used to in trying to get on top of the school work. I might as well be a student again.

On Friday, on the last period of the day before the weekend, I read an excerpt from one of my favourite books that I had to read during one of my senior high school years. It was the same book that my 6P4 class were now studying. But as I read it something rang true for me where I was. The book was called "To Kill a Mockingbird" by Harper Lee. It was the part about where the one of the main characters learns what 'real courage' is. That it's about trying hard, even if the odds are against you and never giving up, even if you know that you're gonna lose that you've given it your best shot.

That's how I felt, like I was operating sometimes in blind faith – whether or not you win, at least I tried my best.

This is how I feel at school as if I'm licked with all the planning and stink resources and in not knowing in depth how to really help the students to win the race. I always prided myself as being academic but in seeing how far behind the students were even before I could even get them into the running was stink with the resources wanting. It made me sick that I couldn't be the best teacher that I could possibly be for students like Ruth, whom I knew really wanted to pass her exams and even for students like Ben, who were so quiet and wrote so little and yet they mattered too. How am I gonna get there when I feel that there is so much going against me? But the thing was that I felt like I didn't want to see it through that maybe this would be my first and last year here then I'd be off to explore more distant horizons and to experience success some place else. This was all so disheartening. I think I really needed to share my burden with my Lord because it was becoming too big for me! Here take it Lord! Show me what to do in this place.

At home the next day, I spent it with mum for the whole day sewing basketball uniforms for Sima's boys. I was so proud of my mum and how she helped to sew and cut up the uniforms 'cause Sima couldn't sew for peanuts and they didn't have any budget to buy new uniforms but she had got them to do a few sausage sizzles. When she told me that it still wasn't enough money to buy their uniforms, I offered to ask my mum to sew it for her and to just pay for the material.

"But we don't have a lot of money to pay her," Sima explained but she was happy to know that there was a possible alternative to her problem.

I knew that she was just relieved 'cause she knew how embarrassed the guys were in going in their own gear like a rag-tag team when the other teams were all geared up in basketball uniforms and looking good.

"Don't worry, I'll be helping her too with overlocking the pieces and she can show me how to sew it together so that she's not doing heaps."

Sima looked relieved.

"I owe you," she said with a smile.

"Yes, you do. But then again, not really because you did that talent quest with me remember?"

We laughed again, remembering the things that we were doing not only to help the students but also for a bit of fun along the way.

## **Ben**

It's almost Easter. I hate Easter. It brings back sad memories of when Mum died. I don't like to think about it and I don't want to go on holiday. Cause it will be just me, my dad and his mates and I'll miss her even more.

"What are you doing for Easter?" Scot asks me.

"Nothing much."

"Why don't you come over for Easter?"

"We've been through that before."

I'm not looking too hot about stuff.

"Oh," he says.

"Well then, why don't you come to my soccer trainings or checkout my Saturday games. We can hang out at Easter. I'll be training on Tuesdays and Thursdays with a game on Saturday."

"I dunno," I reply, "Im looking for a part time job during the week."

I would like to go but I don't want his family to see me.

"My family's not interested much in my soccer games anymore. They were when I was little. My mum and dad used to go to all of my games but now with my two younger sisters. They say it's their turn now and sometimes my dad plays golf on Saturdays and

my mom does her own thing when baby's asleep. She's not a great fan of Soccer or of any sports come to think of it. So it's just me."

He's got those puppy dog eyes and I can see that he still gets lonely in a house full of stuff and people. Maybe he's the same as me.

"Okay, I guess I can. What time are your games on Saturday?"

I'm not sure how I'm gonna do this cos I like to sleep in on the weekend.

"We usually play in the mornings around 10am with home games or we go away and the coach transports in his minibus. I'm sure he'll let you come with us cos we got plenty of room."

He's beaming away.

"Okay."

"My team's the Leopards and I'm in a team with a couple of Indians, Maori, some Tongan and Samoans and a couple of Asians on my team. Only two kids from our school go to the club but they're juniors. We've got new clubrooms too."

I've never been in a club or been anywhere with other kids except for playing with some Samoan kids who used to be our next door neighbours years ago when mum was alive but they moved away a long time ago. I'm a little curious about it.

"Sounds good to me."

"We can meet at the dairy on Saturday at 8.30am but be early 'cause we got an away game and gotta leave the club by 9am to get there."

"Okay, I'll see you then."

We're at the intersection and then we part and go our separate ways. But the next morning, I sleep in and wake up at 11 o'clock. I forgot all about it. On Wednesday we come back to school after the Easter break. I meet Scot in Miss T's class he is unusually quiet.

"Sorry mate, I slept in," I say it as a kinda apology.



"No worries," he says but he doesn't say much more. I feel a little guilty.

"Did you win?"

"Yeap."

Miss T is telling us to copy some stuff down from the board. He doesn't talk much to me for the rest of the day. I guess he's madder than he lets on. Later on I decide to try talking with him.

"Are you still mad at me?"

"No, it's okay. I won't ask you to come to any more Soccer with me."

He's not looking at me.

"Why not?" I ask.

"Because I think you ashamed of me."

I look at him surprised.

"What?"

Is he kidding me?

"Ya gotta be joking. I'm not ashamed of you."

I don't know what he's talking about.

"Yes you are."

"No way," I say back to him, "you can't accuse me of nothin cos I'm not ashamed a you."

I'm deadly serious but then I see him break out in laughter.

"Nah, you're just too ashamed 'cause of my big ears."

He pretends to punch me and I pretend to fall over. It's good to see him smiling again and I know that when we joke, it eases the tension. The bell rings and it's the end of another day.

"I got you something he says as he goes into his bag and pulls out a big box with a chocolate rabbit looking out of the plastic window.

"What's this for?"

"It's cause you're my best friend."

I accept it from him and can't believe that he would still forgive me.

"You've giving me this even when I didn't turn up to your game? I really am sorry."

And I mean it this time.

"It's okay, I know that sleeping beauty needs his beauty sleep."

We're laughing together again but I can't believe that he went to all the trouble to get me something. I've never had a chocolate Easter or bunny since mum died. It brought back a lot of memories.

"Are you okay?" my best friend asks, "you look sad."

"I'm okay," I reply again. She died just before Easter when I least expected it.

## **Ruth**

Today, we're writing stories about a time in our lives that made us stop and think. Miss T told us a story about a time in her life when she used to work at a shoe shop in the sports shoes section for a while when she was in Uni. We like it when she tells stories, not only did it give us time away from writing but it was always interesting and she usually challenged us to think.

"I used to work on Queen Street, for a couple of years, during the weekends and holidays. The floor below was a sports shop that some other Uni students used to work at and I worked on the ground floor."

Everyone is listening carefully wondering what she's going to talk about.

"This one particular Saturday morning, during the holidays, after I'd put away shoes, I waited behind the counter whilst my other co-workers went off on their morning

breaks. So here I was minding my own business when I heard a whole lot of noise coming up from the store below like a lot of things had fallen down or something. Then I saw this Maori or Pacific looking guy race up the escalator with a baseball bat in his hand. He looked at me momentarily, then took off out of the shop and disappeared into the street crowd. I found out later that that same guy had beaten up a Uni student who was working below by himself and had ramsacked some shelves of the store and had taken off with a baseball bat and nothing else. Later on that day, I got interviewed by a policeman but my store manager didn't believe my story because that Uni student was taken to hospital and he couldn't understand why the guy left me alone when I would have been an eye witness to ID him."

Everyone in the class was quiet and listening intently.

"The next day, they had a story about the incident on the front page of the Herald. I read the article but when I read the part about the escape route he'd taken and saw the diagram, it was different from the story that I'd given to the police."

One of the guys in class raised his hand to ask a question.

"Why do you think they drew a different picture of the escape route from what you'd told the police?"

Miss T paused for a minute.

"It was simple, they just didn't believe that he would have left me standing there when the other guy was badly beaten up and that they thought that I had probably lied about it because no one else was there except me and that the manager must have said something to make them think that his story was the right one and he hadn't even been there at the time."

I had a burning question that I wanted to ask.

"So why do you think he left you alone?"

I could see that Miss T probably had been thinking on this question too.

"I really don't know. My guess is that it had to do with the fact that he had just committed a crime and needed to get out of there fast, or he didn't see me as a threat

or maybe he saw another brown face? I guess I'll never know. But as far as I can remember, they never caught the guy."

There was silence in the room I guess everyone was thinking about what could have happened.

"You know something else that I thought about at the time? was that sometimes when no one else believes you, you just have to stand your ground even when everyone else believes that you're wrong but you know that you're right - don't change your story according to what everyone else thinks but be true to yourself."

Then she went back to our lesson. Yeah, her story really made me think.

So I wrote a story about my parents and how even though everything's going good at home – I reckon my mum's cheating on my dad, and no one else wants to talk about it. Here I am, 16 going on 17, and my parents don't even let me go out cos they're too scared that something might happen to me or that I might do something stupid.

I wrote about how sometimes my parents never talk but when they do, it seems like they're always arguing. You'd never think they were even married cos they don't do anything together anymore that would make you think that they even love each other and we don't do much together as a family. We don't go to the beach during the holidays or to see a movie. My parents mostly ignore each other but then they also seem to be ignoring me. She goes to work and he stays home cos of his injury and I hardly even see her, it's like she just loves her work more than me.

It made me think about why do couples wanna stay together if all they do is complain about each other? It also made me think about Moana and how she got herself into this sad situation and now she has these big decisions that she has to make and her mum's not even gonna be there for her. I wish I could tell Miss T about all this but Moana made me promise that I wasn't to tell another soul. I wonder what Miss T would do in this situation if she were in my place.

What do you do?

*When you're not so sure about what you're doing and where you've going?*

*Who do you turn to?*

*When you know that things aren't quite right and but you don't have the answers?*

*How do you know?*

*When things are going wrong and you know there's gotta be something better?*

*Where do you go to?*

## CHAPTER 14

**Ela**

Haven't read a good book in ages – just no time to enjoy life! Papa went to Samoa and came back with a notice that he's seen some land that he's interested in buying and mum's started our savings account so looking forward to building that beach back in Samoa in the not too distant future.

I've noticed that the teachers here aren't very friendly and that with most teachers being older than the rest of the students that when school finishes at 3.15am it's like the teachers can't get out of the parking lot quick enough. It's like there's a big race to get out of there. Things have died down a bit with teachers too. It turns out that the Principal had had an affair with a teacher who'd left at the end of last year and lots of teachers had left because they either hated him or hated her. I couldn't be bothered with any of it so I just kept away from all of them. But every now and then I'd see Jean Symonds whispering away, speaking in veiled discussions with her friendly colleagues.

At one time she didn't realise that I was walking behind her when she was talking with one of her mates.

"Did you hear about that girl that sings?"

"Yes, I heard about it. If you ask me, they just breed like rats. I'd just take her to the school nurse to take care of it."

Then she turned around to check if anyone had heard her, only to see me looking straight at her. Her face looked flushed at first and then took on a new demeanour as if to say 'so what? What are you gonna do about that?'

I didn't say anything and turned to go to my class. She was definitely one proud lady to look out for. I didn't know what it was, but I didn't like her. At the end of the day, I went to pick up Sima to drop off on my way home.

"So what other extra curriculum activities are available for students to participate in, apart from what the PE department provides?"

I'm dropping her off as she cycled in to work as part of her daily exercise.

“Well, I’m the only female staff in the department and we just don’t have enough equipment or people to even consider offering more activities.”

I nod in agreement.

“Yeah, it’s difficult when most of the other staff are older pakehas with families and they’re just not interested in staying behind. I guess I’d feel the same if I had kids.”

It made me think about when I was at high school and I was into soccer, badminton and other extra curricular activities, yet there was not a lot of variety in what the students here could choose from.

When I reflected on things I knew that I was still not happy. I guess I’ll never be? Sometimes I feel ‘up’ when I know the class has learnt something that they really needed to understand and ‘down’ when things aren’t going so well but when I feel bad it usually has to do with the loud noisy class and my inability to be able to keep that noise down and the feelings that no one really wants to help out. I remember Max our Professional class tutor saying that you should never smile at your class until Easter. I remember thinking, ‘what are you crazy?’ but now in hindsight he was right. If I ever teach again, I’ll start up strict and then ease up much later maybe by Christmas then I won’t have the headache that I’m experiencing now. Have to think of a way to get the noise level down! Way down!

Didn’t go canoeing either just too tired. Just keep feeling that I’ll only give it 1-2 years max ‘cos it just drives me crazy with the things that they’re doing or not doing here! Beat even before we begin! School can be so discouraging.

Sometimes it’s pretty depressed like I’m losing control even before the year is even half way especially with the time that I’m not using to prepare for my classes. When I mark some of the essay work, I can tell that there is still a long way to go with my class. Ruth is by far one of the more experienced students in that she ‘gets’ what I’m trying to teach about how to answer the exam questions of not writing everything that you know but to keep focused and to plan carefully. So much to teach yet so little time but the sad thing is that I find that students get distracted so easily, it’s like they’re motivated to do everything else instead of concentrating on the task at hand. Am thinking that I need to get different strategies to work with these kids because many

are not self motivated to learn and that's a big problem cause if I have to fight them to try and get it into them about how important it is for you to understand this in order to pass your exams, in order to have your career path, in order to help you gain good employment or future then if they can't be bothered, or if they don't listen, or if they don't get it then they probably won't have a good future. It's like playing on a losing battlefield in not being really sure about what I'm supposed to do next. Perhaps I will need to cut out outrigging all together where I seem to be wasting time and energy instead of helping these kids? Yet, how can I help them when they don't even seem to get it? Life can be so complicated.

## **Ben**

The days are getting colder but I got me a heater. I tried to ignore the cold that comes under my door and through my thin blankets. But when I saw the heater standing there with another lot of goods from my dad and his mates, I decide to bring it into my room. I don't think they missed it, cos no one's said anything about it, so I might as well keep it. Maybe they thought that it dropped or something, or they're just plain dumb and forgot all about it. I don't care it was just nice to be warm.

At school, if anyone asked me what my favourite subjects were I'd say they were easily: Art, English and PE, in that order. Mr Holden's getting us to try out some screen printing. It's the first time I've ever tried screen printing and I like it. Mr Holden said that my design looks really good.

"I like the way you're incorporating the traditional tapa designs into a more 'contemporary' designs."

He smiles and pats me on the back. I gotta say, when I look at it too, that it does look pretty good.

At English I'm really trying to concentrate and listen in class. Miss T is a good teacher, I learn a lot from just listening to her. Today we were looking at some more poetry and



she asked us to look at filling in some lines of a poem with our own thoughts. I really liked this exercise. This was my 'I' and 'me' poem:

### **An 'I' and 'me' Poem**

**I like** *art with Mr Holden*

**And I like** *English with Miss T and PE with Rambo*

**But I don't like** *Mr Bennet, he sux*

**I hate** *bullies like Jackson*

**And I hate** *my Dad when he tries to bully me too but he don't do that no more*

**But I do like** *school a lot better now that I got a mate like Scot*

**Sometimes** *I get mad and almost lose it*

**When others** *like my dad try and make me do things that I don't wanna do*

**But other times** *I don't sweat it and just lay back and take it easy*

**So don't tell me to** *stand up and talk in front of the class*

**Just let me** *learn by listening to you because it gives me time to think*

**And you'll see that I** *there's lot more to me than you can see*

**You'll see that when I** *finish from school*

**That I'm** *gonna make something out of myself and make my mum proud*

**And the future is a better place that I am** *looking forward to*

*by Ben*

Later when I got my journal book back I read her comments and it said that my poem was very thoughtful and encouraging. She even gave me a sticker with a neat smiley face. You'd think we don't need stickers but I love getting stickers, just like we did in primary school, and love reading her comments. I really like Miss T, she makes me feel good about myself. I think I'm getting gooder at English.

On the other hand with PE, we got Rambo. That's not his real name but the kids call him that cos he reminds us of the guy in the movie. Anyway, Rambo tells us that he's in

the Territorials for Army training on weekends and works as a teacher by day. He's got these big muscles and packed Abs.

"If you wanna get muscles like these, men, you've gotta train six days a week, in a split routine and sometimes twice a day for fun."

My class is in the storage shed of the gym, just having put away all our exercise gear. I look at Scot and he rolls his eyes at me. I smile and wonder what Rambo does for punishment.

"I only take one to two days off weight training but in between times I'm still doing my cardio and eating a healthy diet. Not the meat pies and fish n chips that you all wolf down."

Wow, we look at each other as he pauses to show off his biceps, his triceps and his calves.

"I also drink three eggs for daily protein at breakfast to build these guns and I'm in peak form."

We all screw up our faces. Yuk, who would wanna drink eggs but no one likes to challenge him cos he's sometimes big on punishment and makes us do situps or pushups or run the field if he thinks anyone's having him on.

"Okay men, we got us some time cos we've finished our exercises early. So I'll put a challenge out there. I reckon that no one's stronger than me in this class, does anyone wanna challenge my hypothesis?"

Everyone's quiet for moment and what does that big word mean? then Jackson, the 'big mouth' breaks the silence.

"Prove it," he says.

"Okay. For Jackson's sake, I'm gonna do me a little experiment as evidence to show you. Ya all didn't think you'd get taught science in PE, now did ya? Okay, I'll challenge anyone to an arm wrestle. Any willing volunteers?"

Rambo's got this deadly serious look on his face. No one steps up.

“Jackson, you gave the challenge, so you can go first.”

Jackson reluctantly backs away but other guys behind him push him forward.

“You got muscles behind those words Jackson?”

Rambo pulls out a tall table and stands beside it with his elbow propped on the table top waiting for his first victim. Jackson, no longer smiling, walks over cautiously to Rambo, positions himself then holds Rambo’s hand and gets pinned in ten seconds.

“Next?” he calls. He’s smiling and calls Timoteo to face him.

“Come on Timoteo, you look like a strapping young lad. Ya think you can getta piece a me?”

Timoteo is a big guy and walks towards Rambo slowly. He gets ready then Rambo takes him down twenty seconds.

“Anyone else, brave enough to take me on?”

He calls two more guys who try and fail. By now Rambo is bragging and he’s getting himself a big head.

“Come on girls,” he says, “anyone else wanna get shamed? Leroy, you look like you’ve been working out? Come on, let’s see what you’re made of.”

Leroy’s Tongan, of stocky build and he stands tall but is a bit shy like me but he shakes his head, he doesn’t wanna do it.

“I’m not interested in what you want. Just come and see whatcha got. Ya never know.”

He’s smiling away, like he’s unbeatable but one thing my mum used to say to me when she would see that kinda attitude: ‘the higher you are the harder you fall.’ Leroy goes over and Rambo pins him in no time at all. All the guys are now backing away, no one wants to take Rambo on now. He’s on a winning streak.

“Oh, come on ladies, isn’t there someone out there who would be a worthy opponent to take these perfectly honed guns?”

Everyone’s shaking their heads.

"Well there, I rest my case gentlemen. My case is closed. This hypothesis stand undisputed."

He stands up and proudly kisses his biceps. Then I hear Scot speak.

"Whattabout Ben?"

I look at him wide eyed and he nods to me.

"You can do it," he whispers. The other guys start pushing me to the front. I try to back out but I can see that they desperately want someone to beat that bragging head. Someone's gotta do it but I don't wanna be it.

"Nah, it's alright."

I shake my head tryin to back out. There's no way I wanna take on Rambo.

"Oh come on," says Rambo. He looks me in the eye.

"Ya think you got what it takes? You think you can take me on?"

He positions himself behind the table.

"No thanks," I say. I'm just standing there with my bag on my back.

"Come on, you a chicken or something?"

Now some of the guys are looking at me. I don't like it when people look at me. I hear the bell ring for the next period.

"I gotta go to Art."

But I can see that Rambo not gonna let me go and the guys aren't gonna let me get away without having a go. Rambo wants to try me out and add me to his list.

"Come on girlie, let's just get this over with."

I see Scot shaking his head and I can see an apology on his face. I wanna get outta this but I can see that I got me no choice.

"Come on, make your mother proud."

He gets me angry. Why did he have to bring my mother into it? I drop my bag and walk over to the table. Rambo looks a little surprised but he's got a smirk on his face. He squats and takes my hand in his. He holds it real tight. We get down. The wrestling begins. He's eyeballing me and I can feel that Rambo is very strong. He's got this tight grip on my hand and he's pulling my right hand down to the table top. I see Scot like in slow motion and he's calling.

"Come on Ben, you can do it."

I look at Rambo and I can see beads of sweat on his forehead and I know that he's not liking this. I decide I better take this seriously. All the guys are looking at me excitedly and calling.

"Come on Ben... Give it to him... You can do it... Give it heaps!"

More guys come in from the other PE class and they're watching as well. I push him back and this time put some effort into it. I see Rambo working real hard to try and pull me back but he can't. I keep pushing him back over now towards his side of the table. He changes his position and then I bring my hand over the top of his and just before I'm about to slam it down – he looks at me. Scared. At that moment, he reminds me of my father and I jerk my hand out of his and pull it back, real hard. The shouting stops. Rambo is shocked. I stand up, pick up my bag then walk away. The other kids are surprised and stunned. Then they start cheering and yelling 'you did it, ya let it rip, mighty man! ...' Scot's following me. I can hear Rambo calling.

"Hey, come back here. Ya didn't win? Ya never even pinned me."

But I don't care the bell's gone and I'm on my way to Art. Guy's are running past and patting my back saying: 'Well done man, Ya did it, you showed him...' I just smile and keep walkin. I don't say nothin.

We get to the corridor where Scot goes to the computing lab and I go to Art, with guys still walking past and patting me on the back with their comments.

"I don't understand. Why didn't you just do it? You could have pinned him bad!"

I don't reply and I try not to smile as I keep walking down the corridor. By the end of the day, lotsa kids have congratulated me. I just smile but don't say anything. Scot's telling everyone what happened.

"Ya should have seen Rambo. He almost cried."

People are patting me on the back and saying "You got balls man... serves Rambo right... he needed a lesson... way to go."

I walk home that day after school with my best mate smiling.

## **Ruth**

Miss T's been teaching us about poetry. I had no idea about what she was on about but after she explained different language features to us and gave us some examples to work through, I felt good like I was learning all these important words that I needed to know for my exams. Then she gives us this 'I' and 'me' poem to fill in the gaps and to share with the rest of the class if we wanted. I really liked this exercise because I had to really think about what I wanted others to know about me, except that I'm not going to share this with anyone else except maybe Miss T.

### **'I' and 'me' poem.**

**I like** *watching American TV programmes about lawyers because that's my goal*

**And I like** *my dad he's good even though he's over protective*

**But I don't like** *people who lie and have affairs behind their family's back*

**I hate** *it that girls get a hard time in life if they get pregnant at a young age*

**And I hate** *Jackson, he's a prick and I hope he gets his just reward*

**But I do like** *babies, I love the way they smell and how delicate they can be*

**Sometimes I get** *sad when I think of what my best mate is going through*

**When others** *would say that it was all her fault and blame her*

**But other times** *I'm just happy that it didn't happen to me 'cause I've got plans*

**So don't tell me to** *come and play with you at lunch times*  
**Just let me** *study in the library and keep gunning for my goals*  
**And you'll see that** *I'm going to be someone and leave this God forsaken place*

**You'll see that when I** *leave this school and move overseas*  
**That I'm** *going to be someone with lots of money and a nice house and car*  
**And the future is** *going to be great for me and I'll look back and remember*  
By Ruth

Miss T wrote a neat comment about how it's neat to have goals to aim for and that if my friend needs any help to just ask. She also gave me a sticker. I like that about her, no other teacher would dream of doing that but those neat little touches make her my favourite teacher.

There's just so much work to do and so little time. I've figured that if I wanna be a lawyer, that I gotta get good marks in my subjects. I reckon I'm doing good in my subjects. Which brings me to History, I think I'm doing okay and we have an okay teacher in Mr Samu but I heard that there's a protest on from one of the Palagi teachers, Ms Symonds, her class is boycotting his Samoan language class proposed for the juniors next year. I don't know, but I think that she's put her students up to it. I personally am not interested in taking Samoan language but if someone wants to take it, then good on them but if they don't, so what? I overheard some of the fifth form students talking about it in the library.

"Would you sign this petition?" one girl asked.

"What's it about?" I reply as I read the blurb they've written above the space for names and signatures.

"We're protesting that we shouldn't be teaching Samoan as an option at school for next year 'cause it would take the place of another subject that we could have instead like say French or some technology subjects."

She's got a pen ready for me to sign.

"I don't see a problem in learning Samoan for those who want to learn it."

She looks surprised at me and the others around her are egging her on to tell me more.

"Samoan can be learnt at home or in churches but you can't get a qualification in Samoan. We would be missing out on vital subjects and it would take the place of more important subjects and narrow our options in life."

She is very serious about her opinion but I wonder who put those words into her mouth.

"Who told you that?"

"Miss Reed," she says.

"Well, I don't agree with her and I'm not signing your petition."

"What's your problem? I've got over fifty signatures so far and that's from only two classes."

She looks at me jubilantly like she just won the lotto.

"My dad's Samoan and if I could have learnt Samoan when I was at primary school, then maybe I'd be able to understand him when he talks to me in the language."

She ignores my comments and goes to say something but then realises that I've made a point that she hadn't really thought about. I push her petition back to her and go back to my work. She gives me a dirty look and marches off to look for other willing students to sign up but if you ask me I don't really know what the big deal is but I know that it must bother Mr Samu cos he's the teacher who wants to teach it. He's an okay teacher, just can be boring at times. Don't know how it's gonna go but I reckon that that Ms Symonds is asking for trouble.

I'm kinda worried about Moana, I haven't seen her for a couple of weeks in school. The last time I saw her, she was trying to make a decision about what she was gonna do.



The really hard thing for me was seeing her so sad and how everything had changed for her almost overnight.

"I don't really think I have any other choice except to go to the abortion clinic. Would you come with me to get it done?"

We were talking at the park as Moana had waited for me after school. Even though I was expecting for her to be upset over it, I hadn't been expecting her to make such a big decision. I'd seen how good she was with her brothers and sisters, dressing them and feeding them like they were her own and I'd often heard her say that she wanted to be a teacher someday. And now she's gonna have her first one.

"I really don't know Moana. I mean, it's such a big decision. Maybe you should talk to an adult who can help."

I was stalling. It was just so difficult. What if she regretted her decision? I really didn't have a clue as to what I would do if I was faced with the same situation. Moana just shook her head and shrugged her shoulders. I guess there was no one else that she could trust.

"Look, you're my best friend but I'm just worried that one day you'll regret it. I mean, you love kids. So what if you look back and...?"

I couldn't finish the sentence. Maybe if I was in her same shoes, I'd do the same? This whole situation was just too big for me to deal with.

"What about seeing the school counsellor? She might be able to help."

I just knew that somehow she needed some outside help.

"I just don't wanna talk to anyone else about it."

"But what if they were able to help you and give you some information about what's out there?"

I looked at the slumped shoulders of my once carefree and happy friend. Now she was making adult decisions and she was only sixteen.

“What about your mum? Why don’t you just tell her? She might change her mind if she knew.”

I was pulling at straws, wishing that things could go back to how they once were. Somehow, I didn’t want her to make such a final decision in such a short time. It made me think of how I’d wanted a baby brother or sister all these years.

“I’m not even gonna go down that road with mum and her boyfriend. They’ve starting buying baby clothes and looking for baby gear. There’s no way that she’s gonna agree to having two babies in the house, let alone my brothers and sisters. There’s just no hope.”

With that she burst out crying and I cried along with her. Holding on to each other as if no one else in the world gave a dam about what happened to this precious baby inside her. After that she said that she had to go and we said our goodbyes and then I didn’t see her the following week.

After the third week of not seeing her, I decided to go visit her. My guess was that if she was gonna have the abortion that she would have done it by now and so I thought I’d better go and see how she was doing. After school I made my way to her house, I was a little bit worried about what I might learn. I walked up to the front door and knocked on it. I see a guy swaggering up to the door.

“Whadduh you want?” he asks me. He’s looks me up and down and smiles. I don’t trust him.

“Who is it honey?”

I hear someone else call from inside the house. My guess is that it’s Moana’s mum.

“I’m Ruth, Moana’s friend.”

I don’t like the look of him. He’s still smiling at me, he looks like trouble.

“Oh, it’s a mate of Moana.”

I then see Moana walking down the narrow hallway towards us.

"I've got it," she says as she walks past him to open the screen door. She smiles when she sees me and gives the guy a dirty look after he turns his back on us and leaves for the sitting room. I hear a giggle when he enters the room and see Moana's face wrinkle up.

"Yuk, let's get outta here."

She motions to me and I follow her outside to the far side of the front yard and sit beside her, under a willow tree.

"Good to see you. I was a bit worried about you."

"Oh, I'm alright, just tired and taking it easy," she says to me.

"So did you make your decision?" I ask.

"I'm still thinking about it but I think I'm ready." I look at her. I'm almost afraid to ask the question, so I stall.

"So did you tell your mum?"

"No way, did you see that guy? She's just crazy over him and there's no way I wanna get in their way."

It makes me feel helpless for her.

"But it'd be her first grandchild."

I feel like I'm pleading with her.

"She wouldn't give a damn, she's just not interested in anyone else except him."

I'm not giving up.

"But maybe if you tell her, you never know. She might even consider staying at home and looking after both babies while you go to back to school with me next year."

I miss my friend and I feel like I'm grabbing at straws trying to help her but they're all coming back short.

"There's no way she'll agree."

Moana looks sadly back at the house.

"But that's not fair, you mean she goes banging around and she gets to keep her babies and you don't?"

All of a sudden that world seems like crap to me. I could see that tears were beginning to take form in her eyes again and I thought to change the subject.

"Have you heard from Jackson?"

As soon as I asked that question, I regretted asking it.

"Yeah, he said that he didn't want anything more to do with me, even after the abortion."

I could tell that she still had feelings for him.

"What a bastard," was all I could think of to say.

"Ya know, I wish I had listened to you from the start."

Her tears are beginning to trickle down her cheek.

"Hey look, stop beating yourself up. You can't take all the blame. Just tell me what to do and I'll try to be there for you."

I don't think I sounded too convincing.

"Before you got here, I'd decided to go and see the school counsellor to talk to her about my options."

I felt relieved that now someone else might be able to help support her.

"Okay, I'll come with you if you want?"

"I really appreciate it but no, I got myself into this mess so I guess I'll somehow get out of it. I'll be fine."

I give her a big hug.

"Are you sure you'll be okay?"

"I'm gonna be fine, what have I got to lose?"

Then I get ready to leave for home.

## Ela

Today feeling a whole lot better. God is so good to me despite my own self doubt. My 'me' and 'I' poem lesson didn't seem too bad at first with most of the students responding positively in class but then later in reading the poetry that was written in student journals, I was surprised at how some had taken it really serious and had written some pretty fan-dangled poetry. I read Meke's poem and it was quite a laugh 'cos later I found out that he had dedicated it to me and I had thought it was for one of his many admiring girlfriends – what a laugh.

Ruth came up to me after class and asked about the mark that I gave her for an essay, I explained that in order for her to get full marks that she had to in a sense think like a lawyer to bring about the evidence to prove the statements that she was trying to make. I can see how keen she is and how she's really trying to come to terms with the things I'm trying to teach them. I know that she appreciates the hints that I can give. The sad thing is that in my other classes of thirty students, it seems that she is the only one that is so intensely concentrating that she may be the only student, in the class, able to achieve a lot of success but what about the rest? To be fair there was another middle group who were trying but I find that there is almost a culture in the class or school with a 'she'll be right' attitude that you don't need to worry about tomorrow, that everything's gonna be alright as they chat away casually in class. Don't they know that there is a rat race out there? It reminded me of my school days not so long ago in a similar school and how few would go to the library to study some more after class and at home and here I was some eight years later facing the same issues with these students. The problem was that now I was the teacher and I needed to do something about it.

I'm still wondering about this career choice and just how long can I stay here? But I'm finding that I'm really enjoying the senior classes 'cause I know what they need to know but the junior? They're just a big pain. Right now I feel run down not quite with it at all. Feeling tired, itchy all over, getting overweight from not going out to outrigging

anymore, pimples are worsening – the whole thing is driving me nuts! It must be all this stress, 'cause I've never felt this way before.

Also found out that Symonds had instigated a form 4 petition over the Samoan bilingual class that Mr Samu had wanted to develop. Talk about trouble making and bringing in the students to fight her battles. Don't like this at all. What chaos, so I tell Symonds that I don't really support her stance when she asks me about it and things get hot under the collar. Well, excuse me for common sense!

Today, I came home felling mentally sick. Teaching makes me sick. I don't seem to do anything else! I had an English teacher meeting and the other teachers seem to not be having the same problems that I'm having. No noise problems, no learning problems, nothing at all and here I am feeling more inadequate than ever. Only my counterpart, Fiona, has gone real quiet and doesn't seem as confident as when we first started. I can tell because she's not talking much, doesn't smile but if she is she's finding it difficult, she's not letting on and I'm definitely not sharing my problems with the English department, they might think I'm soft or stupid or something.

But I did find out that Jason, one of the first year teachers who started with us and joined the Maori department, has decided to leave for another teaching job and he hasn't even finished his first year. It was announced today, at the staff meeting, that he was going next week. I tried to hunt him down to ask him why but couldn't find him. I can't say I blame him and it makes me wonder about me. Now I begin to realise that I can either leave or play an important part in these young people's lives but I really don't like that kind of responsibility.

"We should have talked with him. I heard from another staff member that it was just too much for him so he's taking a job outside of teaching."

Fiona and I had left the staff room and we were headed for our classrooms. I thought about it and felt guilty at first and then I didn't. Perhaps it is the best for him, to start fresh again. Makes me feel so sad that perhaps I can't teach these kids after all? It made me wonder too whether I could really make a difference.

After school, I went with Sima to her team's volleyball game just to get a change in scenery and shouted the guys to a big fat juicy Watermelon after the game but I didn't feel so hot. Sima's really into coaching her teams after school and now that she has her own wheels, we don't keep in contact as much as we did. I just keep waiting for the weekends! This job just isn't for me! But what else could I do?

Today, I saw some guys fighting on the field again and I still can't seem to get over it, the fact that violence seems to be such a big part of this school, some kind of underbelly in the school and how I abhor it. I can't stand to have it continue and yet teachers just seem to walk on past ignoring it, like it's just part of the furniture and not at all wanting to get involved. Yesterday, I realised that the school seems to view the culture of fighting as an accepted practise here in that I saw two boys fighting on the field and then I saw one of the deans, Mr Bennet, take the two boys away and later I see them fighting again on the other side of the field. When I spoke about it to Sima she echoed my thoughts.

"I witnessed the same thing and it happened in PE. When the guys get sick of each other, they just go out and punch each other up."

I couldn't get over the fact that it seemed as if they condoned it as part of what happens here. It made me so angry to hear about it and when I talked about it to my parents they both agreed.

"So, what are you going to do about it?" mum asked me as I was helping her clear the dishes from the table.

"I don't know that there is anything I can do. It just seems that that's what they've been doing there for ages in letting the kids beat each other up."

I almost felt defeated. I mean what am I supposed to be able to do. I'm after all, just a first year teacher. I wasn't getting the sympathy that I was wanting.

"It's alright to talk about it but it's another thing to do something about it," dad replied as he began reading the local newspaper. I decided that the next time it happened that I was definitely gonna make something of it.

A couple of days later, I was busy working with a student when I heard swearing across the room and witnessed, Sifa, one of my Tongan student hurtling over a desk. When he got to the other side, he started punching up Lima. It all happened during my Form 3 class. At first I was shocked and then I got angry as everyone had just watched and some even snickered for one to beat the other up. I shouted at the boys real loud.

“Stop that fighting.”

I couldn't believe it – right in front of my nose.

“Tomo and Jeff, pull them apart.”

Which they did and then I walked smartly over to them.

“Sifa, you sit over here and Lima, you sit down there. Everyone else, sit down. We're gonna have ourselves a talk.”

I could see the class no longer excited at the prospects of what I was about to say to them. No one spoke as they all seated themselves and waited as to what I had to say to them. Nothing was going to hold me back.

“I was totally disgusted at what I just witnessed in class today. Now, I don't know what happened and I'll later get to the bottom of it later with Sifa and Lima, but what gives you the right to come into my class with that sort of behaviour? Hmm?”

The boys were now hanging their heads down in shame. I was angry and confrontational, and I had had enough.

“Just because you may disagree with someone else or something has happened that got you so angry with another person about that you want to knock their head in, it doesn't give you the right to pulverise any other person in my class. Now listen carefully.”

No one said a word.

“It is a privilege to be in this class and to be taught by me and if you want me to teach you then you're going to respect each member of this class no matter how you feel about them or what you think about each other. So now if all of you, and I'm talking to the whole class, if you don't agree with that then you might as well go look for another



English teacher cause I sure will not and never will condone violence in my classroom. Is that clear?"

Students all over the room were nodding their heads but I wasn't over yet.

"And another thing and I want to talk to especially the boys about this. If I ever see a fight starting in this class and the boys nearby are just standing by and allowing the fight to continue, I'm gonna hold you also personally responsible, especially you bigger guys who stand around and watch. It is not a circus in my classroom and that is not the way to solve problems. In my way of thinking you're just as responsible in condoning the fighting by not even doing anything to intervene and stop it."

Everyone's quiet and I could tell that some were surprised at what I had just told them. There was a quiet hush as I questioned the boys over what the fight was over.

"It was over a lost pen Miss," Lima promptly replied.

"Now how trivial was that? Was it worth getting into a fight over?" I asked the two boys. They hung their heads in shame.

"And yet you both have caused me to take time out of my busy schedule to deal with a small matter that you both could have solved easily. Next time, ask me for a pen or work it out without having to resort to violence. I promise you and everyone in this class that if this ever happens again in my class, that person will never be allowed to return into this class. Does anyone have any questions or would like to make comments?"

No one said a thing so I decided to continue with the lesson, somewhat half hearted. I came home that day disheartened with a nagging feeling that nothing was ever going to be done about it.

***Anger is like a volcano that spews forth that which has been bottled up long ago inside***

***Hate is like a knife that cuts through flesh and leaves scars behind***

***Depression is like a dark black cloud hanging over the day with no promise of sunlight***

***Hope is ...***

## CHAPTER 15

**Ben**

“Ya coming to my soccer game on Saturday?”

Scot’s asking his questions again.

“You never let up, do you?” I say to my mate. He sure is persistent.

“I’ll think about it.”

There’s not much to think about cos I don’t wanna go.

“I can come and pick you up?” he says. I know he’ll be disappointed if I don’t come and I know that I might sleep in again cos I got no alarm. I try to come up with an excuse but I can’t think of any.

“Oh, okay.”

He is so excited and he’s jumping around but I’m not.

“What time shall I pick you up?” Scot asks me, “but it’s gotta be around 8 am cos I gotta be on the field by 8.30 for a home game.”

I groan. Up early and it’s not even a school day.

“Sure,” I reply. I’m not really looking forward to it but he is my best mate and he does do a lot for me.

That night I don’t sleep too well. I keep waking up. I wish my house was the way it was before when mum was alive. She used to love gardening and we had a nice garden. Now all the weeds have taken over. We used to have a nice tidy house but now dad and all his mates have taken over and it looks like a dump. I see that lots of mum’s good plates and things are missing. I reckon dad’s mates have taken a lot of her things and now I also see cockroaches and some mice have moved into the kitchen. I know how mum would have had a fit, before dad moved in, but now things have changed. It used to really bug me but I don’t care now cos when she died, something in me died.

I'm woken by a knock on the door. I wonder who'd be knocking this early on a Saturday morning and then I remember that it must be Scot. I run to the door and he's smiling like he does.

"Good morning sleeping beauty."

"How did you know where I live?"

Scot smiles mysteriously.

"I have my sources."

"Look, I'll get ready. Could you just wait there for a couple of minutes, I'll be quick."

I slept in my clothes so that I would get ready before my dad wakes up but when I walk past his room, I can hear him snoring deeply. I've nothing to worry about cos he was boozing up with his mates till late last night and I don't expect him to be up until after lunch. Before long we're outta the house and walkin down the road. Scot hands me a brown paper bag.

"Here I went to the bakery and got us some breakfast."

I take it and open it up.

"Thanks mate."

He bought me a bacon and egg pie, my favourite, and a pastie. He got the same but said he'd eaten it after the game. So we went down the road talkin and eatin and laughin.

We won the game. I was quiet and shy to begin with but by the time it was half way. I was shoutin at them to get the ball and score a goal.

"Come on ya mothers, you can do better than that."

I had a few people lookin at me from the other team but I didn't care cos I know that I was the reason for them winning the game. Cos if it wasn't for me shoutin the other team down, they wouldn't have won by so much even though most of the other team

were pakeha. Scot scored two goals and after the game he invited me over just in case his dad shouted him.

“No thanks mate, I got me some stuff to do.”

He looked a bit sad so I said maybe next time. He said ‘okay’ and the coach dropped me off at the shops after the game then I walked home. When I got home, my dad was with his mates, as usual, but this time he had a BBQ going.

“Where’d get the Barbie from?” I asked as he got me a plate.

“None a your business cos maybe I won lotto?”

I doubt it and so I went into the house to drop my stuff and I noticed that the boxes that had been there for a couple of months had gone and new boxes now replaced them. Yum, I couldn’t wait to tuck into some BBQ’d meat. I hadn’t had any in such a long time and they sure were having a good time drinking up and partyin. By the time I got back outside to the Barbie, I noticed that there was plenty a sausages and meat and I got heaps loaded onto my plate. Man I wolfed it down cos I ain’t had a BBQ in a long time since mum’s been gone. After that I went in my bedroom and worked on my art work. I’ve decided to work some blue colours into my tapa paintings.

It took me back to when I was a kid and my mum used to take me to the a small creek where we’d watch eels swimming around and sometimes we’d take some old bread to feed them, that’s before it all got polluted. I remember that she promised me that she would take me to the beach one day when we had a car. I’ve never been to the beach, have only seen pictures in magazines and on the TV. I’ve never really been anywhere outside Otara. One day, I’ll keep her promise for her.

I got tired and decide to bed down for the night. I have a good feeling. I’ve been keeping up with all my art assignments and took one more look at my painting. It’s looking real good, my art is comin along well and maybe I could use in the future and I don’t wanna let Mr Holden down. He’s been good to me but it also reminds me that I gotta get me a part time job cos I wanna buy some more colours and stuff and don’t wanna be asking him for more.

## Ruth

I'm in the library studying for our midterm exams but I can't think straight. Mum dropped a bomb on us last night. It was her fortieth birthday and she'd said that she didn't want a party but would be taking a day off and going out with friends. I should have known that the writing was on the wall. She had a big fight with Dad last night but it was the first time that I'd ever heard Dad raise his voice to her cos she came home drunk. Loud laughter had woken me then the sound of screeching tyres followed by a loud knock on the door. I heard my dad walk over to the door and open it.

"What are you doing home drunk? You stink of alcohol."

He said this as I heard her stagger into the house with her high heel shoes on. She hit the roof and started yelling at him. I looked at my alarm clock and saw that it was after four in the morning. I partly opened my door as I didn't want them to know that I was awake. Not that my mum cared.

"Who the hell do you think you are? Ya lazy, good for nothing. I'm sick of you acting like you own me and you own this house. You can't even get off your fat lazy butt to get a job. Anyway, not my problem anymore cos I'm moving out."

Can't say that I'm very close to my mum but when she said that, I was shocked. Didn't she even care about me? That's when dad told her what I had been dreading all along.

"I know you've been sleeping around. Do you think I'm stupid or something? I know all about the phone calls that hang up whenever I pick it up. He's been picking you up for work, hasn't he?"

She denies it.

"What, you make up stories in your spare time? Don't you get enough of those stupid game shows that you keep watching? You got nothing better to think about?"

Her teeth were barred. I can tell that she's really pissed off.

"The funny thing is that one of your friend's felt sorry for me and she happened to tell me when I was shopping at Foodtown. So you can cut the lies, I know all about it."

So now the cat was out of the bag that my mum had been sleeping with one of her co-workers.

“So what? do you think I’m just gonna waste the rest of my life with you? you can’t even get a job, you can’t do nothing and I’m the one paying the bills. We don’t even own a car. This wasn’t the kind of life that I signed up for when I married you, you just gotta be joking. It’s over!”

I can hear her opening and closing her draws.

“So what? Ya want to pack your bags and go move in with him?”

It sounded more like a statement rather than a question.

“I love Peter and he loves me and I want a divorce so that we can be together.”

Talk about shock. Had she been planning this all along? My dad took it surprisingly well. I guess if he knew all about it, then maybe he had already thought about what he would do when she finally confessed.

“Just take all your things and get out, leave Ruth with me and don’t you ever come back.”

He walks out of her bedroom and slams the door. I could tell that he was angry but I also knew that he meant every word that he was saying.

“There’s no way I’m coming back to this hell hole and Ruth can stay with you.”

I just about cried. Here was the mother that I had once adored and now how easily she disowned me. Then I heard her talking to someone on the phone to pick her up and within half an hour there was silence again in the house. I cried myself to sleep that night, it was as if someone close to me had died. Eventually I went back to an uneasy sleep and overnight it seemed as if my whole life had changed.

Since that night, my dad’s gone very quiet. I don’t know what to say to him. It’s like he’s too embarrassed and doesn’t want to talk about it and I don’t know what to say to him. So I just act as if nothing has happened and hide in my room supposedly doing

homework but I can't concentrate anymore. I just can't believe this is all happening to me. This was supposed to be my big year. You're not supposed to be so selfish and do this to me mum but I guess she never really cared.

Now, when I go to the library I end up sitting there and staring out the window for ages. It's like I can't focus anymore, I mean, how am I supposed to be able to study when I'm hurting inside. Who's looking out for me? I've decided to write a journal entry and tell Miss T about how all of this is affecting me and to not tell anyone else. I'm sure that Miss T will be able to help me. I reckon I can trust her.

Later on, I see Moana, she'd been waiting outside my English class waiting for the lunch bell to ring. She takes me to the side and tells me her news. We sit down far away from the earshot range of others.

"I've gone and seen the school counsellor and I've decided that I'm not going to keep the baby," she says to me. My heart sinks. I can't look at her.

"I'm gonna adopt it out."

I look up to her and she is smiling. I give her a great big hug, I feel her relief and we sit down to talk about the details.

"Miss Bee's pretty good, it was the first time I'd ever been to see the school counsellor but she was so easy to talk to. I told her that I wanna keep the baby but I don't have any support. So she told me that there was a place called 'St Mary's House' that teenage pregnant girls like me can go and stay at, where they help to look after us and we can have the baby there. I thought it was a good idea and Miss Bee made a couple of calls and they said that they would help me to go there soon to have the baby and then when it's all over maybe I can come back to school."

I felt so proud of her for making such a hard decision.

"Are you sure about this?"

"I've never been more sure of anything else in my life. I want this baby to have a better chance and have a whole lot more than what I could ever give to her. Cos I think it's a girl."

She's holding her stomach and I can see that there's now a chasm of knowledge that divides her and I, and it makes me feel so selfish that I had judged her so harshly to begin with.

"Even if I were to keep her, I'd always be struggling with her and trying to juggle things with my mum and her boyfriend and their baby and my other lil' brothers and sisters but if the baby was able to go to a couple who would love her and give her all the right things that I couldn't, then baby would be better off. But you were right cos I do love kids, if I did go to the clinic, I know that I would have regretted it for the rest of my life, plus I also get to meet the step parents if I want to."

I feel so happy for her.

"And as for my mum, I'm not gonna tell her anything until the last minute when I have to go cos I know that she's only gonna make trouble for me with her boyfriend at home."

I give her a big hug.

"You're so brave, I don't know what I'd do if I were in the same situation."

She looked at me hard.

"You're the best friend that a girl could ever have. You made me really think about what I really wanted to do rather than what that creep wanted me to do. For that, I'll be forever thankful to you."

She gives me another hug and then she is off again. I decide not to tell her about my missing mum cos she's already got enough to think about without me adding further burden to her with my family problems. I know that her life will never be the same again but then again, nor will mine.



## Ela

Today, during the last period of the day I was busy with my class when I heard Fiona shouting at her class and we could hear every single word. Now the last time I'd yelled at my class it was over the fighting and every now and then I'd remind them to keep their noise down but this was not the same kind of shouting. I knew it was more out of anger and frustration. My class is just next door and my students went real quiet from their usual rowdiness and were looking at each other then at me. I told them to get on with their work and tried to ignore it. She must have gone on for a good five minutes although it actually seemed longer. Later after school, I saw her and she was red in the face and looked like she about to explode. I decided it was best not to say anything as I was too tired. Here I was thinking that she had it all together but in actual fact, she was probably more stressed me. Roll on the weekend.

Later on in the week I decided to talk with her about it, when we were both in the resource room using the new cubicles that they had allocated to us.

"The other day, my class overheard you in your class. I just thought to ask if things are okay?"

Fiona seemed relieved when I spoke to her.

"Things are pretty bad and I've been feeling stressed for the past couple of weeks."

She was also a vegetarian and she looked as if she'd lost a lot of weight since I'd last spoken with her.

"You know, to tell the truth, on weekends I dread getting up on Mondays it's so hard to get motivated to get up out of bed for school. I just hate Monday mornings. Do you feel the same?" she asked.

"The stress, yes, but Monday mornings? I guess my problem is more noise and trying to plan out my classes that run simultaneously in trying to work out the daily marking and planning for the upcoming days. That for me is never ending."

She on the other hand felt differently.

"I count the days until the weekend and then I feel physically sick that school's going to start again on Monday."

I didn't know what to say but I was glad to know that I wasn't the only one feeling bad.

"Maybe you should think about whether you really want to stay at this school or perhaps try another school that supports us first year teachers better."

She shrugged her shoulders and turned back to her work. We didn't say anything else much after that. I thought she probably needed some more space to think about what she wanted to do so I said my goodbyes to her. She didn't reply.

While walking over to my car, she made me think about what the problems were. She hadn't actually told me about her problems had been that had gotten her so angry in class but then I wondered whether it had to do with not understanding these kids and the culture of the school? I sometimes felt that I was babysitting these students than actually helping to make academic scholars, able minded future movers and shakers of tomorrow's society. I felt more now like a spoke in the wheel, just going around and round in circles. I knew how hard it was to make it through Uni, dedicating time and energy in the library, sacrificing now for a better tomorrow and now having achieved some success I wanted to pass on some of those gems and yet when I came here I realised that few are really committed to achieving success that was for both teachers and students or was it just me? What about parents?

My parents had always been on to us kids about achieving well at school. I remember well the words of my dad before he'd go to work and as we got ready for school.

"Go to school, do your work, try your best and listen to the teacher."

My mum was much the same.

"Try your best at school. When I was young, my mother died and we didn't have enough money to school all of us children but you have this opportunity, so try your best and you won't have to work at a factory like we have to."

As a result, I'd always tried to make them proud which then became a part of my life to achieve as best I can, somehow I didn't see those same values being carried on to this next generation.

During the weekend, I stayed home the whole time. The most morbid time I'd had in the whole year, I just felt like crying all day when I thought about Ruth and had just found out about Moana – now I'm in deep depression. It didn't help with by getting ordered around by papa and his family in making their tea and me not going anywhere cos I was too broke having fixed the old car rather than buying a new one. I need to get outta here!

Maybe it's because I'm getting claustrophobic being stuck in a class all day and not experiencing much success or finding a way out for these kids. I just couldn't seem to shake it off. It didn't help that I with the weight gain either with no more Outrigging.

It brought me back to the dilemma that if I don't get time to get out and about and find that special someone who's missing from my life then it might miss the boat all together and end up like Sima's auntie with a house of full things but no children and right now there's nothing I can do to change things. When will I find real freedom and true happiness with inner peace Lord? There's gotta be more to life than this!

## **Ben**

I got me a part time job. Scot came over on Saturday morning with the local paper and I had a look. Dad was out with his mates looking for car parts so he was gone by the time Scot arrived, and he'd be gone most of the day. Scot's a laugh cos he just fits in like he's been here all his life. He didn't seem to mind the cockroaches or the messy house. I like him cos he's just easy and he's a funny too cos he bought some breakfast with him from the bakery. There wasn't much in the papers but then when I'd almost given up, I saw this ad for people to drop off advertising papers in letterboxes.

"I think I can do this," I said to Scot and so I called the number and answered their questions. I got the job straight away. Now that was pretty good.

"Well, now you can shout us some lunch," Scot said laughing.

"Yeah, no more sponging off you."

We both laughed. It's been good having a mate like Scot. Scot doesn't have a game today cos they cancelled it cos it was raining hard but now the sun was shining bright

and it turned out fine. The man I talked to on the phone said that a few bundles of papers would be dropped off at my house and all I have to do was to take one of each brochure, fold them together and then put them into peoples letterboxes but I also had to make sure not to put them into peoples letterboxes that had signs that said that they didn't want any Junk mail.

"I can help you," Scot said to me. He's always wanting to be helpful even when I don't want him to.

"Thanks, but it's alright I can do it."

Then we decided to go and kick some ball at the park. I think my mum would be proud of me for getting the job all by myself.

I like going to English class with Miss T cos she challenges me think about stuff like today. I really like it when she tells us stories about some of the stuff that she used to do. It makes us sit up and listen trying to figure out whether I would have done the same thing.

Today, she told us the story about when she used to work for a big burger chain on Queen Street in town when she was at Uni.

"I used to work on the front counter of this big burger chain. Lots of Uni students would get whatever job they could to get by. Anyway, on Friday nights lotsa drunk people would come in to buy something cheaper than eating at the more fancier restaurants in town or before they would go out night clubbin."

I reckon Miss T doesn't look like a night clubber but she must have had a lot of guys interested in her cos she pretty and don't look much older than 21. I think she's maybe early 20s?

Anyway, she told us the story about how there was this Pakeha guy who was one of the managers there and he was a prick, although she didn't use that word. He used to like to boss the Uni students around cos he used to go to Uni but that he'd dropped out. I reckon he was probably jealous cos he didn't have a future.

“So one day he told me to go and sweep out the front path on Queen Street in front of the shop where everyone’s walking and it’s during lunchtime. It was real busy but it was my turn to go out and clean the trays and paper plates etc. off the table.”

We were all listening cos I was wondering whether she was gonna tell him to stick it, or shove it.

“Let me tell you, I sure didn’t want to be going out there in my burger uniform and sweeping out Queen street when it’s real busy in rush hour and I’m getting in everyone’s way but I went into the store cupboard and got out that broom and swept out the front street like I was told.”

We were all surprised. Big mouthed Jackson asked the question that was on all of our minds.

“Why did you do it? you could have told the manager to go and shove it!”

Heads were nodding around the class, even mine.

“Well, I needed that job and if I refused I might have gotten into worse trouble and it didn’t take me that long but while I was out there I knew that one day I would look back on that day and knew that I was gonna make it and would never have to do that again. And that was the last time he ever asked me to do it. Okay, class let’s get back to our lesson, now where were we...”

Well that made me think cos I know I would have walked out of that store and told that guy to go get stuffed cos there would be no way that I would go and do that but then when I think about it how did she know that she was gonna make it? and be tellin that story to a bunch of us kids. I think she wanted us to think that maybe when things are pretty bad in life that we can always look back and learn from it. That’s why I don’t mind about takin this job cos one day I’m gonna look back on this paper run and think I used to do that but now I made it too. I like Miss T, she makes me think.

## ***My Brown Town***

*Ain't no designer jeans in my Brown Town*

*No Gucci or Armani, or custom made jewellery*

*No fancy convertibles or the latest designer dogs.*

*Just lotsa 'Made in China' clothes and plastic junk jewellery*

*\$2+ bargain shops with their easily breakable goods*

*Most with Japanese used cars and guard dogs behind wooden fences.*

*You won't find any sophisticated cultured cafes here*

*Or any five star Master Chef Restaurants*

*patroned with carefully clothed customers.*

*Just liquor outlets galore and Indian dairies on almost every corner*

*Lotto dream shops and Chinese, Fish 'n Chips shops with fast foods aplenty*

*visited often by casually dressed, be-jandalled and baggy pants consumers.*

*It's not easy eeking out a living for government beneficiaries in WINZ*

*Our largest employee in town, in the biggest building of town*

*a towering glass windowed edifice*

*No telephone salaried jobs or overseas holidays in exotic places*

*Just getting by day to day from money machine to mouth, to put food on the table*

*some working for the largest amount of time on the smallest amount in wages*

*So don't judge us, or take pity on us, or think you're better than us*

*it's our lot in life that we have no choice but to accept*

*life's a constant struggle but if God has a sense of humour, may we get the last laugh*

*'cos maybe in heaven it'll be turned upside down*

## CHAPTER 16

### Ruth

I've been deliberately keeping away from Jackson. I so hate him and what he did to my best friend, and the mouse scene? If I had my way, I'd do something about it but Moana promised me not to tell anyone so there's nothing really that I can do. I feel as if my hands are tied behind my back and he's gotten off scot free. She's supposed to be studying with me and planning for our last year, next year as seventh formers and we could have been prefects too but now it's only me and she's having a baby. Today, I bump into him accidentally or maybe not so on his part. Just seeing him in my path makes me fume.

"Hope you're happy now," I said sarcastically as he looks at me.

"Well, it's none of your business, aye?"

He looks at me cautiously as if he doesn't want anyone to hear.

"Can't help it if she threw herself at me."

He knows that I know. I really wanna slap his face – cos I know that it was he who had done all the pursuing.

"Yeah, she did the best thing – to dump you. And that mouse was you."

His eyes slit and he starts to swear at me but people are starting to head down the hall and he doesn't want to make a scene. With those last words I turn and walk away from him in the opposite direction.

"She couldn't handle me, so I dumped her."

He's shouting now trying to restore his manhood. I stick a finger up behind my back for him to see. That's my reply.

Miss T read my journal and I glad that I had someone to talk to about what was going on with me. She asked me to stay after class so that we could talk.

“Ruth, is everything okay now? because if not, if you need someone to talk to, you know I’m here or even the school counsellor if that helps.”

I shake my head, there’s no way I wanna talk to a stranger.

“It’s pretty bad Miss. My mum’s left to live with her boyfriend but the thing that hurts the most was that she didn’t even bother about me. I mean, I knew that she was working real hard at two jobs and stuff but when she left with him she showed that she wasn’t really interested in my dad or me, I mean, I knew that we weren’t that close but to think that she didn’t even care? That really hurts.”

I promised myself that I wouldn’t cry even though I really wanted to. I could see Miss T listening carefully.

“Then I have this best friend who’s had to leave home because she got into trouble and now I won’t be seeing her again for a long time.”

I’m still keeping my promise in not mentioning Moana’s name. Miss T didn’t say a thing but just nodded and let me continue.

“Ya know, I really wanted this year to be my best, to my sixth form certificate and pass my exams with flying colours but now I don’t see that happening anymore. I mean, it’s hard to concentrate now, sometimes I just find myself looking out the window in the library and wondering whether it’s worth it. My dad’s talking about moving to Aussie, especially now that mum’s gone but I don’t know, I just think that things are happening too fast. I just wish that they could’ve waited for this all to happen at the end of the year, not now.”

I felt so frustrated, it was like all the adults around me were taking care of themselves and no one was taking care of me. Miss T, encouraged me to take it easy on myself.

“Just try to take one day at a time. Sometimes things happen in our lives that have to do with our parents and others that we have no control over but just try and ride it out, ask for help like you’re doing right now and know that things will get better, sometimes we just have to have a little patience and not stress out about it. Let them work out their issues and you concentrate on what you need to do to get where you want to go.”



I looked at her and we exchanged smiles. She again reminded me that if I need to talk to anyone that she would be there or the school counsellor and if there was anything more that she could do – to just ask. I wish that there was something more that I could do to help my dad. I know he's taking this even harder than me. I guess in a way we both feel rejected.

### **Ela**

I feel for Ruth, she's gotta be one of my top students and to find out that she's no longer motivated to study with her parents split and losing a friend. How she's supposed to concentrate on her exams when the world around her spinning out of control? It's so hard to fathom. If only more parents and teachers could be real supportive of these kids then maybe we wouldn't have this fall out? I guess her situation reminds me of how so many bad things happen to some of the good kids like with Mafi.

I found out today that Mafi, one of the more quiet students in my form class, ended up in hospital after running in front of a car when he was playing outside his house after school. Poor guy, I visited him in hospital with a couple of the kids from our form class. He seemed really depressed, I don't blame the poor guy as he'd lost a tooth and had cuts on his face that were swollen from his head being smashed hard against the windscreen of the oncoming car.

"I was playing Tag with my cousins on the road and they were running after me and I guess I was trying so hard not to get caught that I ran fast with my cousin behind me but I didn't see the car coming around the corner and it hit me. I must have passed out."

I couldn't help but feel sorry for the poor guy because he sure looked like he'd gone through an ordeal.

"The next thing I remember was ending up on the bonnet of this old palagi man's car and I must have hit the front windscreen cos it was smashed."

He said that his cousin's saw the old man come out of his car somewhat shocked and said that Mafi had run across the road too fast for him to brake on time and he kept

apologising for not being able to stop before hitting him. He also asked for them to call the police and ambulance.

One of his cousins had run back into the house to alert his mum on what had happened because his dad was at work. She came running out and started screaming when she saw the scene before her of her son lying still and bloodied on the bonnet of a car with blood gushing out of his injured head. Pretty soon the ambulance arrived and they got him ready to take to hospital. The old man explained the situation to the ambulance officers while his mum was there and he also told her not to worry about the car because he had insurance and that he hoped her son would be okay. Soon after, the police arrived and they took statements off different people.

I looked at him and marvelled that he was still alive and able to tell the tale. It also dawned on me that like many of my own younger relatives and neighbours, often children play on the street never thinking that a car could show up out of nowhere and cause an accident. In walking back to the car I hoped that he had now learnt the dangers of playing on the road but somehow I thought, he had, but other kids would continue to do so.

## **Ben**

I know when my dad's won at the races or a little jackpot from his tickets which gives him a little bit of extra money every now and then. Cos then he shows off and his friends will come over and then I can smell that sickly stink smell from the weed they all smoke in the garage. It's usually after they're been working on the cars and they've had a bit to drink then they bring it out and smoke that stuff. They don't bring it into the house no more cos they know I'll make trouble but I can smell it coming through the windows when I'm painting and I've gotta slam them windows shut.

If only my mum knew what they were doing, she'd have a fit and kick them all outta here with dad but she's not here no more, just me. Sometimes when I look out the window into the garage where they're smoking that stuff, I think of a time when mum was around, when we used to all get along fine, when he didn't need mates and I

wasn't as mean to him. But things will never be the same, my mum's never coming back and dad will continue to smoke that stuff even if it kills him.

I look at some of the girls that come along with the guys. I see them smoking and pouring themselves over the guys and I wish that my mum could talk to them. I know she'd tell them that they don't need to be around guys like that. Sometimes I feel sorry for them, when the men treat them bad and sometimes slap them around. Once I almost stood up to bounce another guy when he slapped a lady in front of me but my dad got in the way and told me to butt out that it was none of my business. That was the last time that they ever smoked in the house cos dad knew that I would have made a scene. There's gotta be a better life for them but for now it's all they got, like me. But things are changing for me – I just know it.

### ***Mainlining***

*Can't look in the mirror  
it crack/s*

*Veins like train tracks  
living  
for the moment  
of a psychedelic high*

*sugar in a vile  
shoot-it-up*

*while*

*she stands on a corner  
selling her soul*

## CHAPTER 17

**Ben**

I heard there's gonna be a Mr Southside competition. It's a bodybuilding competition and it's got all the guys talkin.

"You should think about joining it, ya never know you might even win."

Scot's been checking out my abs but it's more do with genes I guess.

"There's no way I'm gonna be posing in my short shorts. Yeah, I got me some abs but still you won't get me up there with lots of people gorking at me."

"Did you hear that Miss T is taking it?"

Scot was smiling. Well I couldn't believe it.

"Nah, you're joking. What does she know about bodybuilding anyway?"

I think most of the guys are interested just cos she's takin it but I reckon that they're just all talk and won't have the guts to do it like me. Still I think it's pretty brave of her to be doin it cos I don't know if she knows much about it, being a lady and all, and these guys would sure give her a hard time if she doesn't know.

"She's having a meeting today with the boys who are interested in going into the competition."

Scot found out from some seniors as it was only opened to Seniors in form six and seven. Although I was only fifteen I could easily pass as a seventeen year old.

"So are you gonna think about it?"

I know Scot would love to go for it but because he doesn't have the body for it – no one would take him seriously.

"No way, I'm not into that kinda stuff."

But Scot kept insisting that we should just go and have a nosey. I thought we might as well cos he's never gonna let up and I wanna know what Miss is up to and I need to be there just in case some guys give her trouble. So off we go and when we got to the

classroom there were heaps of guys waitin around for Miss T to arrive. In fact we had to stand cos all the seniors had taken the chairs. There's a whole bunch of senior guys that I knew and some of them don't even have muscles. I could see some of the guys sizing each other up and then lookin at me but no way, I ain't gonna make a fool a myself. I thought that they were just jokin about Miss T and then she arrived with Miss Stowers.

"Good morning gentlemen, nice to see the interest that we have in staging our own body building competition. Mr Tanner told me that some of you had asked for the challenge and so I'm here to assist you, if you are up to it."

If you looked at Miss T with her glasses on and in being an English teacher, I thought what most of the other guys were thinking in 'what does she know about bodybuilding?' although she looks slim enough I thought that it would have been Miss Stowers talking to us about it cos she's built with these big muscly calves and thick shoulders, she definitely works out.

"Let me repeat again, that this competition is for seniors only. Now, how many of you know about the three stages of a bodybuilding competition?"

Everyone looked at each other, shaking their heads and no one said a word.

"Well, not to worry, 'cause we're gonna show a video at the next meeting of a Mr Universe competition that's run annually in the States. Now, in the first part of the competition there are five main compulsory poses that you will each need to learn."

The guys are starting to talk now and making jokes about what those look like.

"The second part of the competition is where you will need to find some music of around three minutes and then come up with own posing routine."

That's when all the boys burst out laughing and were loud talking, this was surely gonna be big. I could see guys with stars in their eyes.

"Now, quieten down gentlemen, it's not over."

The guys stop talking and focus back on Miss T.

“The third part and the finale, this is the pose down, where everyone gets a few minutes to show their muscles off against each other, to some music, using whatever pose you choose to show them off.”

That was it, the guys were just about jumped outta their seats with excitement. Nothing like this had ever happened in our school. I just about burst out laughin and then I looked around and all the guys are serious. Then she gives out sheets with all the names of the muscle parts.

“Okay gentlemen, now that you’re aware of what the bodybuilding competition is all about, I’m giving you your homework.”

Some of the guys groan which was accompanied by more laughter.

“By our next meeting, you’ll need to learn all the names of the muscle groups so that when I start talking about each pose and show you how it’s done, you’ll know which muscle group I’m talking about.”

Some of the guys looked a bit embarrassed then one of the guys asked her about how she knew about bodybuilding competitions.

“When I was at Uni for five years, I’d go to the gym regularly cos it was cheap for us students and it helped me to focus on my studies. Sometimes I’d catch the early bus from Mangere to get into town for lectures and instead of sitting around drinking coffee and waiting for the lectures to begin, I’d get there early and have a workout before class.”

It was there that she had gotten interested in Bodybuilding and learnt a lot about it as some of the gym regulars went in for bodybuilding competitions.

“But I never went into any competitions cos my father would have killed me if he had known and I mean that literally.”

I don’t think she meant that for real.

“Okay, now I’m not gonna take up much more of your time except to ask that if you are interested and serious about entering the competition, please write your names on this sheet that I’ve got going around. And before you leave, are there any questions?”

Santos one of the guys who's Tongan and pretty stacked put up his hand.

"Miss, are there any prizes?"

All the guys are nodding in agreement.

"Yes, there will be three trophies, one for the first, second and third placings as well as certificates for participation. Are there any more questions?"

Another senior put up his hand.

"Miss, where's the competition gonna to be at?"

The guys were interested in how it was gonna be staged.

"Oh, my apologies gentlemen, I forgot to tell you the details. It will be a part of a fundraising Variety concert evening that Mr Tanner is being put on at the end of the term and it's open for anyone in the community to attend."

That was when it got really interested in that we all realised that this was gonna be much more than just a lunchtime competition. This was gonna be for anyone from the community to attend. That's when the buzz started. Lots of guys put down their names, although the more shy ones like me didn't.

"The next meeting is at the same time and place next week and it's really important for all those guys who wrote down their names to come and learn the compulsory poses and don't forget your homework is to learn all the names of the muscle groups."

Scot gave me a sheet and I took it home for no special reason except that I was interested in learning the names of the body parts. It didn't take me long to learn the names and then when I spoke to Scot, the next day, that we should go to the next meeting just to see what the guys were gonna be talkin about, he agreed.

At the next meeting, Miss T took us through all the poses after she showed us a video of Mr Universe in USA. Man, those guys had big guns and some had fake tans. She spoke about how one of the African American guys had won the title about five times and that there was also a Samoan guy who was climbing up the ranks in winning titles.

Then she showed us the different poses and explained how to stand tall and straight and in such a way as to show the definition of your muscles. A lot of guys were surprised at how much she knew and also when she showed us how to pose, we could see that she had definition too.

“Are you still going to the gym Miss?”

Miss T just smiled.

“Yeah, I used to go a lot but now that I’m teaching, I don’t have as much free time anymore, especially when I do extra things like this for you all.”

After that meeting I think a lot of guys had a lot of respect for her. I know that I sure had, in that I thought that this was just gonna be a big laugh but I could see that this was gonna be something big for some of the guys cos she also spoke about being careful of our diet and eating healthy and not the junk food that we usually like. I’m learning a lot and I think the other guys are thinking the same thing too. We’ve got a meeting next week and there ain’t no way that I’m gonna miss it.

At this meeting Miss T showed us some of the routines that the other professional bodybuilders did. Man, some of them were good but others looked really stiff. I like the guys who kinda could dance cos then they looked natural the other guys looked like they were as stiff as robots. That’s a simile, we learnt about similes the other day from Miss T. It’s funny cos Miss T doesn’t mind me coming with Scot, cos I think that she thinks that he’s just comin for a nosey and bringing me cos he sure ain’t got no muscles.

“Okay, gentlemen now while you’re thinking about the kind of music you would like for your routine, it should reflect the kind of music you like and also the poses that you would like to show. Remember, just keep your poses simple and don’t over pose.”

I guess she could tell that there were some of the guys were going overboard with the posing too.

“At the beginning of the competition, Mr Tanner has organised for some senior girls to walk you down a runway while being introduced to the crowd.”



The guys look at each other. Man this is getting better and better. But for me, I ain't gonna do that but I haven't told her yet cos we got six more weeks to go before the evening show. Don't even wanna think about it.

## **Ruth**

Haven't heard from Moana in a while but I did get a message from Miss Bee that Moana wanted me to know that she was doing fine. I guess her mum must know by now, now that she has moved into the House for pregnant girls. Sometimes I wish something exciting could happen to me like my dad won the lotto or something so that I could be whisked away from everything here and wouldn't have to think about my mum and not have to worry about my dad or even about exams. I could just go off and travel around the world and then come back, settle down and start at law school. Then when I become a lawyer my mum would regret that she ever left me and wished that she could have taken better care of me but then it would be too late 'cause I wouldn't even be in the least bit interested in her anymore.

Speaking of my mum, I haven't seen her in while. The last time I saw her was when she came to pick up the rest of her things and she couldn't look me in the eye and I just kept away from her – you'd think we were strangers from the way that we were not speaking to each other. Maybe she's ashamed of what she's done to her family? I doubt it or maybe she's a heartless bitch who only thinks of herself and her new boyfriend. He was waiting outside in the car. He kinda smiled when I was about to go outside not realising that she had come with him. I just ignored him and walked right on back inside. I just feel too hurt every time I think about her but I'm not gonna be like her, for sure, I know that I take after my dad and if I were to have kids, I'd surely not treat them the way that she treated me like I'm not important, like I don't exist. Anyway, my dad's still planning on moving to Auss and I just dread thinking about it but I'm hoping that if we are moving, that it won't be until the end of the year after my exams. I guess, come to think about it, not that it matters too much now cos just maybe things will work out better for me and dad my dad without her.

Just heard that Miss T and Miss Stowers are taking the senior boys' bodybuilding competition, those two teachers are such a laugh cos they do some of the most funniest things that I've never known any teachers to do, especially at this school cos in the years before they came, the teachers were pretty boring if you ask me. But now that we've got some young Pacific teachers, they put a bit of fun into the school, even if it's for the guys – I'm now more interested to find out what's going on but if it was Rambo, I wouldn't even bother cos he thinks he's all that – and he ain't.

I just remembered that I gotta get ready for school photos tomorrow. I hate that I still have to wear this skirt but I've decided that I'll just see if I can just borrow a skirt from someone else at school cos I sure as hell don't wanna have my picture taken with this skirt on. Just don't wanna show my thighs to the rest of the world. Oh well, beauty is only skin deep.

### ***Skin deep beauty***

*I've been told that beauty is only skin deep*

*But tell that to the models who strut their stuff on magazine catwalks*

*who make you believe by their airbrushing that you are far lesser than them*

*because you don't have their: petite face, fashionable clothes, careful makeup, bank balance, slim figure and perfectly bronzed shining hair*

*Instead when I look in the mirror*

*I see a blossoming woman whom you won't see in the magazines*

*No airbrushing or waxing, plucking or shaving graces this wider body*

*Just all natur-elle with eyebrows thick, a wide flat nose, full thick lips and darkened brown eyes, no makeup and a fuller figure*

*So what? if I'm no Hollywood beauty or a famous superstar or a well known rich celebrity*

*It makes you no better than I*

*As beauty is in the eye of the beholder*

## CHAPTER 18

### Ela

Today it's school photos. I decided to dress up in a really colourful jumper and dress pants for my first bonafide teacher and class photo. When I walked into the staffroom I witnessed that a lot of teachers had had overnight makeovers. Some of the men wore ties which they usually didn't wear during the week and others seemed to have remembered to comb their hair, not that it made much difference. I looked for Sima, she was dressed in her PE gear and looking trendy casual with her usual mischievous grin.

"Don't crack the camera," I said to her as I passed her in the corridor going towards my class.

"I can't, if you've already cracked it first!"

You could still hear our laughter as we traversed down the opposite sides of the corridor.

At staff meeting, we were told that they would probably start calling us sometime in the middle of the morning and for the rest of the day. A runner would pick us up and we would need to attend to the hall promptly which had been set up for taking photos. After morning tea break, I had my 6P4 class. After I called the roll for my class, a runner appeared and I quickly gathered up my class and we walked briskly to the hall. Upon arrival, we had to wait until the other classes in front of us took their photos.

Meanwhile, my students were changing jumpers with other class members and adjusting whatever needed to be adjusted. Primping and pinching cheeks, combing hair – doing whatever it was that would make them handsome – beautiful.

When it came to our turn, the palagi who was in charge of the photos arranged the students into height order and then directed them onto and around the chairs. Finally it was my turn to be added to the class he told me to stand up on a chair in the middle of the top row with the class students surrounding me. What a laugh! I'd never known of a teacher to have to stand on the top row of a class photo as if I was one of the students. Wow! Okay, so I look like a student but it just made me laugh thinking about

how I had to stand up on top of the benches on the third row with student seated below and standing up in front of me. It must have been my bright jumper.

Oh no, later that day I got tagged by Rambo to go on a Form 5 P.E. Recreation camp with his class. He's a funny guy he has a reputation as being a bit of a fitness fanatic even though he's in his early forties but he told me that he needs a female teacher to accompany him and two other male teachers. It didn't take me long to say yes.

"Sure, I could do with the break away from class."

All the stress of planning and marking, I could definitely do with time away from that. Hmm, but I was a little suspicious at his over friendliness – too friendly. He must be really desperate and made jokes about the photos.

"So did the photographer fancy you as a little angel and put you on top of the Christmas tree?"

I didn't think it was very funny but then again he might be jealous.

"It's because he couldn't find his Santa Claus with muscles," I promptly replied and hurried off to my next class. Towards the end of the day, I caught up with him again when checking my pigeon hole for more food in my lunchbox, by that time I was having second thoughts about the whole thing.

"What should I pack?" I said stalling and trying to think of a way that I can break it gently to him. I'm used to going on youth camps having been a church youth leader which I didn't think he needed to know. He gave me a whole long list of things to take that he'd given to the students including undies, shorts, sleeping bags and socks etc.

"And don't worry about taking any food cos we're already covered it."

For a moment there I worried if there would be enough food. Nah, if I go, I think I'll take my own stash without telling Rambo, just in case I get peckish in the middle of the night.

"Hey, I really appreciate your coming on such short notice because without you, the girls would miss out. Our departmental policy is that we have to find suitable female adults to accompany them, or else no go."

After he said that, I didn't have the heart to say 'no' and tried to look enthusiastic about the whole thing. So went running around last minute to buy a proper sleeping bag, mittens, scarf, tin cup, socks etc. Most of these were stocked at the army surplus store and he told me to pick up any camp supplies. I got me a really helpful sales assistant who told me all about camping, to use Vaseline, wear cotton clothing, not to wear a hat unless needed, to wear shorts, tramping boots (she reckons a must) to wear layers and a day pack. Either that, or she was on commission, 'cause I bought up quite a bit. So after church, I ran around to buy some canned food to pack and then Rambo phoned me, a little late. At first he said not to worry about food and then he changed his mind and decided that I should, just in case, but that he had bought plenty. 'Would you make up your mind!' I wanted to say. He also said that he would have been depressed to think about some kids not going and he would have been depressed if I hadn't gone. Hey, we just met and you're a married man! Ya skank!

Anyway, went to sleep at 1am after packing and making reliever notes for the poor soul who would be taking over my classes – at least I get to have a break from teaching them. Yeah!

On the day, I wasn't looking forward to going as there seemed to be heaps of things that I should be doing instead of going on this camp. Trust me to say 'yes' when I should have said 'no'. I'd thought to try and get out of it but when I couldn't contact Rambo and arrived early the next morning, I talked to Dallas, the other male PE teacher, and he said that he thought that I should go – as they would need a female adult to accompany them just in case they had any 'girl problems'. Oh what the heck! Since I'm all packed and ready to go, Camp Hunua, here I come.

### **Ben**

The Mr Southside competition is only five days away. I wish I had the guts to do it but I had to be honest and told Miss T, after she came back from the camp that I had to pull out.

"Sorry Miss, I just don't think I can do it in front of all those people."

She was fine and didn't make a big fuss.

“The truth is that, if I were me, I’d probably do the same, so no worries.”

I felt good that she understood.

“But since you’ve put a lot of time and effort into coming along to all the practices, would you like to come and help me behind the scenes with setting it up on the day?”

There was no way that I was gonna turn her down.

“Sure, but can Scot come to help as well?”

I needed to bring along my mate, after all it was his idea in the first place.

“No problem, he’ll be a good helper as well.”

Now I’ll definitely get to watch the show – should be a big laugh for sure.

My part time job is going pretty good as well. I just get the papers and off I go. It’s good exercise too except for the dogs that I have to sneer at every now and then but I think they’re getting used to me too, plus I’m getting to know my own local area. I even get to know now where some of the students at my school live, like that girl Moana and all her little brothers and sisters and even Jackson’s house. My dad says that I should get a real man’s job but I don’t listen to him. He ain’t got a real job so what’s he talkin about? plus this is just for the time being cos I gotta spend time on my art and now I have some money to buy stuff. I’m also gonna get me some new clothes as well. So glad that I did leave Mr Southside behind cos I have to concentrate more on my artwork and get my portfolio ready.

Mr Holden told us that next month we’re having a special showing for all the parents and anyone who’s interested – it’s like an art gallery display. I’m so excited cos it will be the first time that my art’s ever been on show for everyone else to see. With the pastels that Mr Holden gave to me, I’ve started playing with bold colours and designs for my tapa design boards. You’d think I knew a whole lot about tapa with all the designs I’ve come up with but it’s really because Mr Holden showed me a couple of books in the library and a children’s book that shows the background story of each Samoan design and it gave me a lot of ideas about how I could draw on a few of the

things from my life. I'm really enjoying this and only just the other day I showed Scot my artwork and he was amazed too. Mr Holden also taught me about the different types of paints there were and what to use in different situations. I definitely like oils which longer to dry but feels neat to paint with, it just glides on the surface. Acrylics are great too but I can't get into water colours, I think that talent is for someone else with a lot of patience. So now my paintings are taking on a whole different feel and I have a 'brighter interpretation' that's what Mr Holden says about it.

"So have you been to Samoa?" he asked as he smiled and looks at how my tapa theme. It has developed so much since I first studied it on his wall.

"Nope, have never been across the harbour bridge."

Mr Holden smiles and looks at me thinking that I'm joking but when he sees that I'm not joking he stops smiling.

"You're not joking are you?"

I try not to look so embarrassed. I shake my head, there's no one else that can hear cos the radio is always turned up in his room.

"Well, we'll have to do something about that," he says and walks into his back room. I don't know what he means by that but I soon forget and continue painting.

## **Ruth**

Things have changed a lot at home. The bedroom that my mum moved out of is now where I study and I've found a part time job at a local video store for Friday nights after school and all day Saturdays and on call on Sundays. It's a pretty easy job cos all I have to do is issue movies and return them, into the system, when the movies come back. I miss being able to sleep in on the weekends but we do need the money and it's actually quite nice to be away from home. We haven't really heard much from mum. I guess she's probably much more happier now with her new boyfriend. My dad doesn't like to talk about her and I wouldn't know what to say either.



There's lots of pressure to study and try and get all my assignments handed in on time but I've just lost the motivation. I just finish the work and hand it in. I don't study at the library anymore and I find that I daydream a lot in class. I mean why bother going through all that trouble and when I'll have to go to Auss and start all over again? I just can't wait till the Christmas comes around cos then I won't have to spend so much time in my room pretending to study when I'm actually just lying on my bed sleeping or daydreaming again. I'm a bit worried about dad though, I think mum leaving us did take a real toll on him. He just looks like he's lost weight and doesn't really seem interested in things. He doesn't laugh with his game shows anymore and I've seen that the weeds have taken over his garden. In fact, he only talks about how good it's gonna get when we move to Auss, before I might have said 'no way' but I think he needs to be with family who can support him. I think about what my mum did to me and it feels like rejection, as if we didn't matter, I hope she gets her just desserts.

"So when do you want to leave dad?"

"I want to go right now but I know that you need to finish your exams, so we'll leave after your exams and spend Christmas with your cousins, by then we'll have enough money for our passports and our one way tickets. I'm calling my brother tonight to see if we can stay with him until we can get ourselves sorted."

That means that we'll be gone before the end of the year. At night, I don't sleep too well anymore, I'm a little bit excited cos now I finally get to travel and a little bit scared cos I'm not sure of what it's gonna be like. I told Miss T about this and she was good about it.

"Just take one day at a time. You've been through a lot 'cause sometimes when a couple separates, it feels like a loss, but don't you blame yourself about why it happened. Leave that for your parents to work out, you just concentrate on what you need to do for your future plans. And don't worry about tomorrow cos tomorrow will take care of itself."

It felt good to be able to talk to someone that I could trust. I didn't feel so alone.

"How are you doing now? are you going to be alright?"

I could hear Miss T's genuine concern.

“I’ll be fine. I’m just more worried about my dad. He’s real quiet these days. I don’t think she cared about how much we needed her to help out with the finances but it’s okay now cos I’ve got a part time job on the weekends that helps out.”

I didn’t say anything about my studies but Miss T had noticed that I wasn’t motivated to do much anymore.

“I’ve noticed that I don’t see you studying in the library during lunchtimes anymore.”

I didn’t answer her straight away cos the truth was that sometimes I’d just go and sit on a bench outside the library and just watch the world go by. It’s like I don’t understand why things like this had to happen to my dad and me. It scares me cos it’s like no one really even cares about us.

“Yeah, I guess I’m just waiting now for our Aussie trip, maybe when things settle down again, I’ll be able to study again.”

I didn’t tell her that sometimes I just wanna burst out crying for no reason at all. I just don’t feel the same way that I used to. I thanked Miss T for her time in listening to me and then I left.

I got a letter from Moana, Miss Bee gave it to me. In it she said that she was doing well and was glad to get away from her family but she did miss her little brothers and sisters and hoped that everything was okay with them as when she told her mother, she pretty much threw her out with a bag of clothes and told her to get lost. I guess I shouldn’t have expected any sympathy from her.

‘I know she won’t know how to handle my kid brothers and sisters – she always left them to me, now it’s her turn.’

She said that the place that she was at was pretty good. She was learning how to cook and she had made a couple of friends with some girls who had similar stories to her own, some even worse.

I cried after I read her letter. I cried for her, for me, for my dad, for her brothers and sisters, for her baby. I reflected on how I sure was glad that I at least I knew who my

mum growing up, even though she'd abandoned me now but maybe this baby might get a better chance than the rest of us. I wondered about what it must be like to love something so much that you would have to sacrifice for it and how for the love of a baby Moana wanted to give her baby away to give it a better chance. Life can be so cruel.

### ***Brisbane beckons***

*With your golden sands and sunshine coasts  
your surfing paradise and Mediterranean sun  
you entice, a temptress  
offering so many dreamy opportunities  
to many a down and out kiwi caught in depression  
longing to take wing and fly  
the ditch only a hop, skip and a jump away*

*Unprecedented since the 80s  
we've been told, so many leaving in droves  
Movie world, Sea world, Dream world  
even the the big kids have playgrounds  
with governmental \$ for new home buyers  
fortnightly cheques for having kids and  
bonuses with rebates galore  
Wow! hit me now, too good to be true?*

*I see my cousins – nice houses, nice cars  
Carrar Markets not too far  
tolls on roads, only small – not worries at all  
long, long highways  
I sit and think to myself  
is it for me?*

*is this our future, for me for family?  
so promising, so alluring*

*We sit down and count the cost  
that so many have done before  
family, aiga, whanau we'd miss  
culture and heritage, family gatherings  
everything close at hand here,  
church, schools, and after school clubs*

*NZ will always be home, Samoa my home heritage  
if it is to be, but maybe only for a season.*

## CHAPTER 19

### Ela

Glad that I survived the camp. It was such a laugh with Rambo doing his thing 'man thing'. 'Leave your shirt on!' I wanted to say half the time when he'd be prancing around half naked, but he was a good laugh especially around the camp fire when I found that he couldn't sing for peanuts! But apart from Rambo being Rambo, I had a good time and I did get a bit claustrophobic when all the girls squashed into a tent that was only meant for eight but instead we ended up with fourteen with me pinned to the side with the ceiling just inches away from my nose. Needless to say that that was the last time that I spent in the tent and slept for the rest of the three nights sleeping on the back seat of the bus. But it was neat to get away and have a look around at the bush although nothing beats 'home sweet home' and mum's home cooking.

Today I met Lani in the corridor. I'd had a bad day with the junior boys getting on my nerves with their constant talking, was so glad to get rid of them and was trying to lock my classroom door but was having trouble putting the key into the lock. I got so angry that I threw the keys at the door. I hadn't realised that Lani had entered the corridor.

"Try putting the key into the lock."

I turned around and saw Lani approaching me. She was another Samoan teacher who'd been here a while but she had always kept to herself and hadn't really talked to me or anyone else for that matter.

"Boy, I'm just sick of this place." I replied. This time when I tried again, the key slipped easily through the key hole and I locked it. I could no longer hide my frustration, it seemed as if the more I tried, the harder it got.

"Tell me about it," Lani replied, "where are you off to?"

"Just needed to get outta the class and get some fresh air but I've got a class next period so I can't be bothered going out."

I was resigned to the fact that things were just getting out of control with my junior classes, my seniors were fine.

“Well, why don’t you come to my class? I’m free at the moment and I’m teaching next period as well.”

“Are you sure?” I asked, I sure could do with a bit of company as Sima was busy these days with after school practices and Saturday games and I hadn’t really talked with Lani except for the occasional ‘hi’ across the school corridors.

“No problem. I’m just taking a break from my seniors.”

She seemed calm and collected, ‘how does she do it?’ I wondered. We start walking towards the art room. She’s one of two art teachers.

“I don’t see you much in the staff room.”

We walked into her room and I observed that her class had some really interesting paintings on the walls.

“I try and avoid it like the plague.”

We both laughed and I started walking around the room to take a closer look at all the different types of materials she got the students to use.

“I’ll be back in a minute.”

She left me to have a look around and it wasn’t long before she returned with a couple of mugs filled with steaming hot liquid.

“Hope you like Milo? I’ve added just a bit of sugar and milk but sorry, no coffee or tea and you can’t say ‘no’ ‘cause I’ve already made it.”

I took the mug as was just what I needed to feel relaxed with and took a couple of sips. It felt good.

“Thanks, it’s just what I needed.”

I look around some more at the other side of her art room and see bold patterns, and lots of dark colours. I also noticed that Lani dressed a lot in dark colours of mainly black and dark greys with her hair dyed a midnight black that contrasted against her pale skin.

“Thought you might have needed one. I always have Milo on hand just in case any of the kids need to keep warm or want to talk.”

I continued to take long sips and it felt velvety nice and sweet as it slipped down my throat. It had been ages since I’ve taken time out between classes. Usually I’d be marking or planning or prepping. I felt tired but the warm cup seemed to soothe my thoughts.

“So how has your first year been for you?”

I looked at her but I wasn’t really sure of what to say as I didn’t know if I could trust her. This was definitely the first time that we’d ever talked. I think she saw my hesitancy and replied to her own question instead.

“My first year here was seven years ago just before Parker started. Things were pretty rough back then. You think it’s bad now? You should have seen it back then. You’d hear students swearing at each other in class, they’d be fighting all over the place and you’d see them smoking out on the fields. Teachers were pretty scared to do anything back then but when Parker came along – they were all scared of her and when she talked to the parents, she didn’t miss a single thing and students were sure to get a hiding after she’d been through with them. So in a sense, she brought some sanity back into the school.”

I think she was waiting for me to say something but I still didn’t know what to say. I just felt drained and no amount of talking was gonna take away this horrible sickening feeling inside me away. I decided to leave.

“Thanks for the cup of Milo. I really needed it but I guess I’d better go do some more planning before class.”

I got up to go.

“So what’s really bothering you?”

Her question stopped me in my tracks. It was like a flood gate opened inside me. I sat back down.

“Where do I start?”

She shrugged and smiled encouragingly.

“You really wanna know what bothers me?”

She nodded.

“I don’t feel like I’m getting anywhere, ‘cause despite what I do, I feel like I’m desperately trying to push a big trolley filled with student up a big steep mountain but it’s not moving anywhere cos the trolley’s old and decrepit and it’s got these small square wheels, that when I try and push it up, the students and some of the staff keep pushing it down.”

She looks thoughtful and I can tell that she’s considering what I’m saying. It feels as if a dark cloud has come over me.

“And you know the other thing that bugs me?”

She shrugs her shoulders.

“I reckon that there are only a few teachers who really care about whether these students pass or fail. It’s like they expect them to fail, so why bother teaching them much? I don’t necessarily think that I’m a very good teacher but at least I’m trying to sort things out but I just don’t get it, I don’t really think that many of the teachers here really care about whether these kids are gonna make it. I think about the stink resources, the fact that no one talks about success or achievement in the school. All I hear instead is about what they can’t do or they blame the parents and blame their backgrounds.”

I stop, maybe I’ve said too much. I see Lani looking at me.

“Do you?” she asks me. I look back at her.

“Of course I do.”

I almost wanna roll my eyes at her.

“Then why don’t you do something about it.”

“I am,” I respond, a little belligerent.



"Like what?" she asks.

"I'm forever planning and marking and looking for appropriate resources because half of the stuff we have in our resource room is at least twenty years old."

"And what about you," I dare to ask her.

"Do you care?"

Now the tables have turned I'm truly interested to see what she has to say.

"Ya know? I've been watching you since you first started. I've gotta give you credit, I didn't think you'd be able to last this long, like some people only come for a month and then high tail it outta here."

I look at her, not so sure of what to make of her. Can I trust her?

"Well, I don't know if I'm gonna be able to stay, I just don't like the feeling that I'm failing miserably at helping these kids. I feel as if it's out of my control."

That dark cloud feels like it's gonna roll out thunder.

"I'll tell you a short story about the mistakes that I made when I first came here in trying to fix things."

Now this would be interesting.

"I used to give my opinion in staff meetings but kept getting lots of resistance. I used to let them bring all their difficult students for me to problem solve while they went back to their pristine offices. I used to talk to all of the students that staff had problems with and I'd go and do home visits and talk with parents or whoever was the caregiver but I don't do that anymore and you wanna know why?"

"Why?" I replied.

"Because I had a nervous breakdown the summer before in trying to fix things. There I got it out."

I was surprised, I'd never thought of her as being emotionally frail. She looked like a really strong person but this information took me by surprise.

“So now, I don’t go to half the staff meetings, I don’t let them bring their hard cases to me. I let the management team deal with it now, that’s what they get paid for and here I was doing it for them for free. And you know what the really stink thing is?”

I shake my head in reply because this revelation was not what I was expecting.

“They get paid the same whether these kids pass or fail. You know why they really don’t care? cos their kids go to private schools or higher decile schools out of the area so they’ve got nothing to worry about. Their kids are taken care of so they just come here and babysit – who cares if these kids pass or fail, it’s not their fault, they just blame the kids or blame their families or blame the fact that they live in South Auckland. ‘What can you expect they say?’ – but really it’s because they’re damn lazy and bloody minded they don’t give a dam cos at the end of the day – it doesn’t affect them, cos they get paid and their kids are already taken care of.”

Again, I’m flabbergasted, I don’t know what to say. She’s looking at me.

“So whattaya think about that?”

I turn away shaking my head. I know what she’s saying must be true – but not for everyone. Then she looks at me hard.

“You really wanna know what else I think?”

I’m afraid to answer.

“I’m only going to say this once and I’ll deny it if you repeat it to anyone else but this is what I think.” I’m not sure that I want to hear it but I’m riveted to my seat. What we’re experiencing something between covert racism and classism. I’ve had time to think about it and have read about it in a different books and it goes like this: It’s not talked about, it’s not thought about. But it’s there. It’s hidden, but it’s not so hidden. You think it’s there, then you doubt yourself. It’s like a tumour hidden underneath it all like an underground volcano ready to explode. It’s insidious, it gets under your fingernails.”

I shift uncomfortably.

“The thing is that they don’t have a problem coming here to the ‘Southside’ to work – to rake up the money, run up the ranks and then they run. They don’t live here, or

shop here, they would never dream of sending their kids here and if they're really honest – they'll tell you that they're actually ashamed of working here because if they could, they'd find a job someplace else, but some of them have got retirement to think of and the higher decile schools to pay for or if they worked there they would be made more accountable."

I'm listening but I'm not sure of what to say in reply, so I say nothing.

"Now don't get me wrong 'cause it's not always a colour thing, 'cause sometimes it's our own brown people who look down on our own brown kids."

I take this in and think about what she's saying.

"But the sad thing about it all, is that they get paid well whether or not our children are learning, whether or not they pass or fail. There's little accountability, they don't really care and it shows in their teaching and their actions. That's why you've got twenty year old resources, that's why we've got a rundown school, that's why we've got old busted down sports gear and no school pride cos they can't be bothered so they blame the parents and blame South Auckland and blame poverty and belittle our people in their own circles."

I'm taking this all in and feel the weight of what she's saying.

"It stinks and it sucks but no one's gonna say anything about it. And do you know why? It's because they and everyone else believes that they're actually doing us a favour. Like we really need them because we don't know how to educate our children ourselves and that's the biggest lie that we've believed for so long – that we're not good enough, that they know best, that they know our kids better than we do and you know what? Sometimes they do."

She knows she's got my full attention.

"Do you see the problem? They've actually taken over as parents as well – that whole 'loco parentis' thing? They actually do take over because being the 'teacher' our parents think of them as 'experts' and so they get the respect and they get to know our kids better than we do, cos they spend so much time with them, moulding our values out of them and making them think that all they have to do is to get a job and

work for their whiter employers. And before long they start making decisions for them that our parents have no idea what they're doing."

"This is depressing and here is was always myself," I said shaking my head.

"And the sad thing about it is that we believe that they're doing us a big favour, and teachers like us get sucked into the system not knowing that they're sending us to an early grave and the next generations to come – all because we've all believed in the lie. It's brainwashing another generation into thinking that this is the only way and the sad thing about it – is that we believe it too."

I look at her and don't know what to say. Could she be right? Yet, deep inside me I know she's right. She is able to voice things that I would never venture to say out loud. I look away not wanting to share my thoughts. She can see that this is upsetting news for me.

"Look, I think I've said too much. Just forget everything I've told you."

I look at her wanting to ask her a question, 'say something stupid' but nothing comes out. I feel guilty 'cause now I'm part of that system doomed to fail these kids and here I was ready to pay my bills and high tail out of there to do my PhD. I could feel my ears turning red. The bell rings.

"Thanks for sharing that but I gotta go."

She smiles and then picks up my half drunken milo mug as I stammer out of there.

Driving home, I feel almost as if a weight has been taken off my back and replaced with an even heavier load. What she said seems to be true but surely not for all teachers. I know that I was trying to give it a go and I'm sure others were too but to what avail? The knot is still there but now I feel anger welling up inside me. Here I was feeling inadequate and thinking that I was hopeless to do anything about the plight of these kids but now knowing that some of it was way beyond me – but covert racism? classism? Now that's just a whole other ball game. So what do I do about it now that I know?

***School***

***You suck!***

*I Hate You*

*Teaching me your lies  
and deception for self destruction*

*Hear me*

*Listen!*

*Don't talk for me*

*Stop!*

*Let me speak*

*You don't hear*

*You don't listen*

*You suckle the Beast...*

## CHAPTER 20

### Ben

It's the night of the variety concert and I'm walking over to the gym to check on things with Miss T. When I was about to leave home my dad came in from the garage to get some beers from the fridge, when he saw me dressed up he looked surprised.

"Where do you get your gears from? Steal it from someone's washing line?"

He's smirking like he thinks he's real funny.

"Nah, I'm not like you. I bought it with the money from my part time job," I reply.

He snickers, takes a beer from the fridge and cracks it open, takes a long swig and out the door he goes. He's probably already drunk so I just ignore him. I look out the window at him working on a car and think, 'there's gotta be more to life than just this'.

Then off I go to the gym. I told Scot that I would meet him at the gym where they're holding the concert. When I see him, he's all dressed up in some new gears and looking pretty smart.

"Hey, you look good when you comb your hair," he says to me smiling. I got me a nice new shirt and some pants from the money I'd got from delivering papers. It took me a while to save up cos I really needed to get me some more paints but it felt good to be able to look good. I even found some hangers to hang up my clothes in the closet.

We walk in and find Miss T has just arrived. She looks good with her freshly washed hair like she's just stepped outta the shower. If she was my age, I might be interested. She gets us to check on the staging cos there are a few acts before 'Mr Southside' which is the grand finale. Some of the guys have arrived with their gears and they're starting to strut around. I see Gapelu and Santos, two of the big troublemakers of the school sizing each other up. I can sense that this competition is gonna be really good. It's then that realise that since this competition has been on, there's been no fights or trouble at school from the usual trouble makers, I talk to Scot about it.

“Yeah, I hadn’t thought about it but you’re so right. It’s like everyone is so busy working out in the gym and checking out the mirrors at lunchtimes that they’ve clean forgotten to beat each other up.”

The guys start filtering in and by 6pm all of them have arrived. I check through the curtains and see that it is a packed house with standing room only. Looks like everyone has come to check it out, in fact I recognise a lot of outsiders who don’t even go to school, comin in for a jack.

At 6.30pm the concert begins. Scot and I have found our seats that Miss T reserved for us in the front next to her. There are a few performances that aren’t too bad but everyone is really hanging out for the Mr Southside competition to see who’s gonna win. I missed the last rehearsals where the guys got to walk down with the girls to music. So when they turn out the lights and have this funky music on with dried ice blowing in all different directions, it’s gonna look pretty good and with spotlights – wow, this is gonna be something else.

## **Ruth**

I’d heard the buzz that there was gonna be a Mr Southside bodybuilding contest and that there a whole lot of senior guys who were really into it and were working out for it. I must say that I was really not bothered to even think about it much until I heard that Miss T was taking it and she surprised me again – like what does she know about bodybuilding? And it got me really interested so I thought I’d go and check it out. I thought it would be good to take my dad out for a night too. So I took some money outta my pay and paid for two tickets. I thought I’d surprise him.

On the night of the variety concert I asked if my dad wanted to come along to watch cos I just needed to get out of the house. I was surprised when my dad said that he’d accompany me, I thought I might have to come up with some excuse cos he’s never been with me to anything other than the parent/teacher interviews. I guess we just needed to take our minds off the trouble in our family and to do something together.

When we got there, there was a long line of people wanting to go in and lucky we got in early because by the time the lights were dimmed for the concert to begin, it was packed. I guess everyone wanted to check out who was gonna win Mr Southside.

## **Ela**

It was an extremely busy day today. So much to do and unable to do everything! But the Lord is gracious and helped me by getting me motivated and organised as well – it's so neat to have Ben helping out and he brought Scot along to help with the staging too. Managed to get a dried ice machine, the trophies and certificates for the prize winners, with bottles of sparkling grape juice for the judges – that should do for them. It was a good thing that Sima was free for the night cos she looks like a bodybuilder and Rambo was free – of course! Because he's the one with the biggest 'guns' in the school and we also got Joshua, one of the groundsmen who works out and looks beefed up to also help out as a guest judge.

Had to check with each guy that they had appropriate shorts to wear for the competition ie. No speedos and nor undies, no boxers or long shorts. They just needed to be appropriate sports shorts to show off their muscles. It was quite a surprise to see most of them arrive early with their families just before I sped off to have a shower and to freshen up before the comp.

It's quite funny because it reminded me of the time I had to be in Christmas plays and later directing Easter plays at church and here I am now working with some of the senior trouble makers in school. Funnily enough, I was reminded by Scot that things had changed a bit since we'd had the Mr Southside competition 'cause there hadn't been any more fights at lunchtime since we started this programme. I guess the guys are just too busy working out and checking out their poses rather than bashing each other up.

Still, working with the Mr Southside seniors and had been such a laugh in that whenever they ask about who's in charge, I knew the reaction was one of shock in wondering what I knew about Bodybuilding. Oh well, it's good for a laugh! I think Sima may feel a little left out on the credits but this is one item in which the kids needed a



lot of support with even though they came up with the idea themselves. It's a good feeling though supporting them with something I knew. We're all winners.

### **Ruth**

It's been a long time since I'd been excited over something and this show has definitely been worthwhile waiting for. I can kinda feel an atmosphere of anticipation with everyone wondering what's it's gonna be about cos I reckon that most of the audience have never been to a bodybuilding contest, I mean, I haven't either. I look aside to my dad and he's looking a bit excited too. He's never been to one of these so it's good to be doing something together and to get him out of the house. I squeeze his hand and then turn my attention to the dimming spotlights. Lights. Camera. Action!

The M.C. walks onto the stage and welcomes everyone to the final item of the night and there's a huge applause. I think lotsa people have been hanging out for this last part.

"Kia ora folks. Let's give a huge applause to all the acts who've entertained you so far today."

A big applause follows.

"I know that this is the time that you've all been waiting for. To see who our Bodybuilding champions will be and who will win the ultimate 'Mr Southside' trophy. These young men have been working hard for the past months, working out, eating healthy, and perfecting their poses to prime themselves up and to give you their best form for tonight. Now, just to let you know that they will be judged over three events. The first being the five compulsory group poses, followed by their own individual posing routine to music of their choice and the last event is the group posedown! Now before we get started, let me introduce you to the judges. Let's start with Mr Harrington, one of our groundsman and Miss Stowers, our P.E. teacher who looks like she just stepped out of the gym and Rambo, I mean Mr Anderson, now he looks like he owns the gym. Let's give it up for the judges."

The audience gives a nice big applause. Then the MC returns for his final words.

"Are you ready Southside High?"

More wolf whistling, clapping and shouting.

“Are you sure you’re ready Southside High?”

The crowd responds with a even louder response.

“Let’s.... get..., ready... to... rumble....”

People are clapping and shouting, shrill whistles and I’m holding my ears from all of the noise but this is so exciting.

The first couple is Gapelu and a senior girl. They walk towards each other from behind the stage curtain from opposite sides of the stage in time to the music. A loud applause is heard from the crowd with lots of yelling – the atmosphere is electrifying. They meet in the middle and begin to walk together down like on a cat walk, arm in arm, but then she lets his arm go as they get close to the end of the runway. She stops and he continues to walk a few more steps then takes off his robe, poses to show everyone his muscles then swings his robe onto his back, turns and walks back down to the girl and then they link arms and disappear off stage. The crowd goes wild. I can’t believe how loud everyone is. I look at Dad and he is laughing and smiling. This is much bigger than I ever thought it would be. The next couples come down, boy do they look good, for a minute there I wish it were me but then again I’m glad it’s not. I’d be just too shy to take a boy by the arm and then again, my dad might have a fit too. The song is quite long but by the end of it all ten contestants return to the stage, deposited by their female partner and then they all exit off stage girls on one side and guys on the other in single file. This is gonna be a night to remember.

The music changes and all of the guys come out in a single file all oiled with baby oil or coconut oil. They’ve got the song “Pump up the Jam” pumping through the speakers. I can see a few heads bobbing up and down in the crowd, in time to the music. I see they give the mic to Miss T and she calls out each of the five poses and the boys are flexing and straining to hold the poses for a few seconds. The audience is screaming and yelling out names and encouragement. Lots of wolf whistles and wow! I’m seated next to Scot one of the fifth form palagi guys. He looks at me and smiles and I return the smile, this is definitely not what I was expecting – we are both gob smacked. I can just hear Miss T as she goes through the last two poses as people are shouting. The

noise is deafening and it's just unbelievable. The boys then march out holding in their breath and shoulders wide like they've spawned wings and are about to fly. They're all looking good but my top three are definitely Santos, Limo and Gapelu all sporting nice tans, muscles and their abs looked pretty defined although they're probably second year or third year fifths looking a lot older than the usual sixteen and seventeen year olds.

## **Ben**

The next part is for each guy to come out and pose with his own chosen music for two minutes. The first guy to come out is Gapelu and he can dance but he doesn't really have a lot of muscle definition on him like Santos. Still the crowd is cheering him on and clapping and he even ends in the splits. Yeowch! I end up laughing and so does the crowd. Another guy comes up and he is stiff as, he looks a bit embarrassed but then he has a lot of friends whistling for him which seems to encourage him and at the end he poses showing a little muscle. But the best to me again was Santos, he's got some rock moves to the music and posed to the beat although he looked a bit stiff but still he clearly had the best muscle definition out of all of them. When all of the individual pose routines are finished, the boys all filed out and they had a pose down where they had this rock music that they had to pose freestyle to. Some guys were posing against each to see who had the biggest muscles and they just looked like they were having fun.

When the music stopped and the MC called all the contestants leave the stage for a couple of minutes whilst they had to await the judges final decision, a group came on lead by a fafine and he was dressed up with a tight pink dress and high heels looking like a girl with all this makeup on and a wig. If it hadn't been for Scot telling me, I would have thought that it was a girl. But upon closer inspection it was definitely Barry who called Barrina.

He was strutting his stuff with a couple of other guys who looked like guys dressed as girls. Then they go out to the audience and pull up a couple of guys. Barrina pulls up Jackson, he looks shocked and little unsettled but his friends push him up and he's

taken him up to the stage and Barrina starts dancing around him. If it were me, I'd have just run back down to my seat but Jackson looks a little shocked and doesn't seem to know what to do which gives the other two time for them to dance around him. Then he starts getting angry and finally runs off the stage right out the door. The music soon finishes with the fafaine running off stage with a lot of laughter following behind them.

It's time to announce the winners. The music starts again and the boys are back on stage in a line. The M.C. returns to the stage with three girls holding three trophies. The judges give their final results in an envelope to him. They dim the lights to announce the winners.

"Now what did you think of that? Wasn't that quite a show?"

There's a loud applause and more wolf whistles.

"And now I have the final results. And the results are:"

He opens the envelope and has a look at the results.

"Now, can I have Rambo, oops, I mean Mr Anderson to give these trophies away to the three place getters."

Rambo takes his place next to the MC and awaits the results to be announced.

"And the third place goes to Tony."

Tony is accompanied by lots of clapping and shouts of encouragement. He comes to the front of the stage with a big smile and is given a certificate and small trophy by Rambo he is directed to stand at the front to await the next two results.

"And the second place goes to Gapelu."

Again, there is lots of applause and a relieved Gapelu waves to the crowd, receives his certificate and trophy then makes his way to stand next to Tony. Now a quiet hush descends onto the crowd as they await the senior who will be gaining first place.

"And the first place goes to... Santos."

People are standing up and cheering as a happy Santos walks over to Rambo and receives his certificate and larger trophy. He is smiling from ear to ear and just so happy as the crowd cheers loudly.

“We’d like to thank you all for coming to our variety show, until next year, have a safe journey home.”

People come from the audience and on to the stage. The three place winners pose as cameras are clicking away. The hall doors are open and people begin to pour out of the halls into their cars to go to their homes. I stay behind and help Miss T, Miss Stowers and Rambo for a while and then Rambo says not to worry that we’ll finish it tomorrow. Everyone’s smiling from and laughing, looks like people had a good time. I see Miss T and she looks exhausted but happy. I’ve never been to a show in the school that was so well supported with so many people attending.

“Hey, do you want a lift home? my dad’s here.”

Scot’s got a red face from all of the excitement and shouting.

“No worries. I’ll be fine walking home.”

Scot leaves with a big smile and Miss T asks me the same thing but I just wanna take my time walking home and enjoying the moment.

I get back home and my dad is sleeping on the couch in the sitting room with the TV still blaring. It’s funny but when I see him like that I remember him when I was little and we used to do things together. We don’t do anything anymore and that’s too bad cos maybe he’s missing out on something too. It’s moments like these that I miss mum. We would have talked about it all the way home and she’d probably have told me that I should have gone for it but knowing that there’d be no way that I would put myself out there. I went to sleep that night knowing that things were changing in the school. Slowly, not rapidly but definitely and surely.

## Ela

It took me a while to sleep after seeing the positive support from the crowd and the way the boys had conducted themselves, they truly behaved like winners. I thought about how the 'Mr Southside' had grabbed their attention and went well with outstanding audience applause – the audience went absolutely crazy over the choreography and pose down routines. The guys did so well with the coordination of each segment – it was excellent. Later on, Rambo thanked me.

"I didn't know that we were staging a professional bodybuilding contest. That was absolutely superb. You are a teacher with many talents."

Then he was off dictating to students about what to do with the stage props. As I gathered my things to leave, Sima came up and slapped me on the back and we had a big laugh.

"It was fantastic and to see the guys get into it and with that kind of community support, the skies the limit."

I just smiled as she went on to say that that was the best variety concert that she'd ever been to and that they must have made a good profit with all the ticket sales. I forgot to ask what the funds would be used for.

The five poses had gone down great but I think it could have done with a bit more slickness – and to learn more free posing – other than that, it was excellent. I went home with a great feeling of relief that it all went well. A blessing that God has always been there for me at all times too.

Santos had come first and Gapelu and come second but to me it didn't matter because throughout the process, I'd taught them about eating healthily, looking after themselves and being self disciplined. I'm so glad the top two winners were the trouble makers 'cause it showed them that they didn't need to beat each other up to get attention but it was also good to know that many now have a new found respect for me in knowing that it was a female P.I. teacher who had shown them how to pose and taken them through the bodybuilding competition. Probably wouldn't have happened at any other school but it was a good learning journey for them and a good laugh for me.

I thought about how I'd congratulated Gapelu by shaking his hand and had heard about how Santos had dieted especially for this and had won it. Wow! Hard to calm down after the Mr Southside. Just don't know what to do next? To get over that feeling – that rush! The adrenalin with the audience cheering! An exhilarating feeling for sure.

That night, I still couldn't stop thinking about the competition. Felt like I saw a breakthrough in the way that people saw themselves and how they can achieve if they really put their minds into it. Funny also how the next day when I read a journal entry, one of the quiet students, Selena, dedicated a poem to me and asked if she could write it so that it could be stuck onto our wall. I said that it was all in her imagination but she insisted that she wanted others to read it and then Ake gave me an ink portrait of me that he had been working on in Art class.

"You're my favourite teacher Miss, no joke!"

That almost made me laugh too until I saw how serious he was. Maybe I am making a small difference, maybe not so much where it counts but just enough for students to see that you can make a small difference if only you just take a leap of faith.

### ***The unconditional love of unsung heroes***

*He leaves the porch light on  
every night waiting – hoping.  
She ran away, looking for brighter city lights.  
He awaits her journeys end.*

∞ ∞ ∞

*An open grenade lands in a campsite  
about to explode – others duck for cover.  
He dives on it, braced to take the impact  
and receives a medal in risking his life for others.*

∞ ∞ ∞

*He lies next to her, she doesn't recognize him.  
He squeezes her wrinkled hand reassuringly'*

*"In sickness and in health", he whispers and sleeps.  
her bewildered face softens with a tear.*

∞ ∞ ∞

*A fire disfigures her.  
"I do," he says and slips a ring on her thumb.  
No digits. She smiles. "I do too."  
He steadies her and kisses where lips once were.*

∞ ∞ ∞

*She feels the impact of the bullet.  
dying in the line of duty,  
piercing what was meant for her partner.  
He cradles her with an angry cry, wishing he could take her place.*

∞ ∞ ∞

*He kisses the bald head where silken hair once grew.  
"You are more beautiful now than ever before."  
She forgets the treatment and brings his hand to her wet cheek.  
"and so are you my love, and so are you."*

∞ ∞ ∞

*She visits him incarcerated, fortnight Wednesdays.  
A glass panel separates them. They sit.  
"I am so sorry mum." His eyes plead in silence.  
"You are still my son," she replies with a gentle smile.*

∞ ∞ ∞

*She almost lost her life with the last one.  
"Do not abort – no matter what!" She tells him.  
Her life hangs in the balance, as his love for their baby to be.  
She takes his hand to feel the tiny kicks in her belly.*

∞ ∞ ∞

*"I'll never do it again," he pleads.  
She's heard it so many times before.  
She takes the kids and calls for help. He gets help.  
He never does it again.*



## CHAPTER 21

### Ruth

My dad and I had a great time as we walked back home and he even said that it wasn't something that he had ever experienced in schools but he was glad that at least the boys were looking after their bodies and not getting into alcohol and drugs like some of the other young men that he knew when he was growing up.

I was just so glad to be with my dad, it's like we've gotten a lot closer even though we don't say much to each other and don't do a lot together. I think we just appreciate that we're there for each other. I'm also glad that Moana's found some people who can help her and Miss T was right, sometimes we've just gotta let things ride for a while and see how things go rather than getting into a panic. I'm glad that I her to talk with, it's just so important when everything's turning upside down to have someone who's steady and you can rely on. And even though I'm not in the library anymore, she's not on my case about it and just let's me figure it out without pressure. So if Sheryl's gonna get that academic prize again, I'm not worried anymore cos I'm off overseas to seek new heights in Auss, maybe that's where my future lies and not in good ole NZ.

The next day in school, it was all the buzz and those top three guys were treated like super stars at school. I think maybe we needed to have some heroes at the school cos we didn't have a Head boy or a Head girl, and the prefects didn't do a lot so maybe this was something new that us kids could relate to – even if it was a bodybuilding contest for boys.

Later on in the day, I heard that Miss T would be taking over Ms Larsen on the student council. There's now another buzz about how things might be new with her taking over. Miss Larsen was just hopeless, she would just let the seniors do whatever they wanted and the ball last year was stink although it didn't help that Lino and his boys wanted to have a fight just so that everyone would look at him but now that Miss T is taking over, maybe I'll start going to the meetings again.

## **Ben**

There's a rumour out that Jackson wants to bag Barrina, the Fafafine, who humiliated him. I've known Jackson for years and I know that he doesn't hold grudges well and will always lash out if he has too. I see him in class but I see that menacing smile. He's the kind of guy who doesn't sleep unless he's doing something mean.

We're still getting over the Mr Southside. The top three guys are treated like royalty but the neat thing about Santos is that he's not big headed. I reckon if it was some of the other guys, like Gapelu, that they would of been struttin around like they owned the world but this guy's okay. He just flicks his eyebrow whenever he goes past. I reckon they know that me pulling out gave them a chance to win. Ha ha.

For art now, we're getting ready for an exhibition of our work for our parents. As usual I didn't bother mentioning it to my father. Scot said that he would like to come as my guest which was fine by me. My workbook is almost finished now and my portfolio is looking pretty good. I just don't know what others will say about it but I really like it. My favourite piece is an oil painting with bright colours and indigo blues tapa designs with some of the icons of being Samoan which I found out from other guys as in the tattoo designs, kava bowls, fly whisks, coconut trees and sunsets. It's funny cos even though I'm Samoan, I don't know much about being Samoan, this has made me feel very much closer to my roots in finding out about all the different symbols that are used in tapa by different cultures. I reckon that maybe some kids who are Samoan probably don't know these things either. Mr Holden said that it was one of the best paintings he's seen in a long time. Thanks Mr Holden.

## **Ela**

Can't get over God's blessings – how he knew all along that taking an interest in my health and bodybuilding at Uni would somehow come in handy to assist me in helping the senior boys to stage their very own bodybuilding contest. I think it was a big shock for Rambo and Mrs Parker even announced it at the next morning's staff room.

"I'd like to thank Mr Tanner for organising the concert and all the staff who helped the students to make last night's show a very memorable one and I wanted to say a

particular big ‘thank you’ to Miss Tagaloalagi, and her gentlemen for making last night’s finale an entertaining show.”

There was a scattered applause.

“And I’d also like to say how good it is to have our first year teachers jump in to support this and how brave in being female and doing a show like that is just ‘over the top’.”

I didn’t know what to say, so I just smiled and backed away. It’s a real blessing from God, I thought.

After school, I had a long talk with mum and papa about school. Papa was on about respect and people looking up to me and I spoke to him about how the school has changed my perspective on things and how difficult it really is for me to help these students – I need God to help me to understand.

In the lead up to ‘Mr Southside’ I had clean forgotten about my conversation with Lani until I saw her a couple of days after the competition and walking down the corridor again outside my class. I had just finished class and was going to get my lunch that I had left in my pigeon hole.

“I heard that your contest did really well at the variety show.”

I smiled a little reserved having quickly remembered the seriousness of our last conversation.

“Yeah, it was just some fun to help out with the variety show. Don’t know if I’d do it again but it was well received.”

She joined me as I walked towards the staffroom.

“Did you know that Larsen’s given up on working with the student council? It was announced yesterday at the staff briefing for volunteers. I thought you might be interested.”

I had heard about it and I was interested but I had been so busy that I hadn’t really given it much thought.

“Yes. Would you be interested in taking over?”

“Nah, my days of student politics are over but I thought that you might be good at it, what with your coordination of students with the show. I know they have a lot of respect for you, especially the boys – to be able to pull off something like that. I’m sure they could use your productive talents to help out with the student council.”

“What about you? What are you planning for next year?”

I thought she might be interested in working out some contingency plan on helping to fix things in the school for the kids with a little help from me.

“Me? I’m hoping to take off on study leave next year before I become too much of a sleeper.”

“A sleeper? I thought you might hang around a bit longer, I mean you have so much knowledge to share.”

I was just getting to know her and now she was thinking of leaving?

“Yeah, there are four categories of ‘need to leave’ teachers that I’ve thought about over the years and I’ve become one of them, a ‘sleeper’ for too long, that’s the fourth category. It’s someone who’s given up on caring and just comes to school to sleep or just to cruise along and collect their pay but is not really interested in helping the students achieve well. For me I used to but when I burnt out – now I just take it easy.”

This was new to me, I’d never heard of such a thing.

“But you don’t seem to me to be sleeping.”

I looked at her to see any hint of a joke but she looked deadly serious.

“Look, when I had that breakdown, it was because I was burnt out and I’ve been sleeping ever since. I’m just in and out of school, no longer motivated, just looking forward to getting paid and going out on the weekends. So if I get that study leave, it’ll give me a year to get paid to study while I think about what I really want to do with my life.”

"So what are your other three categories?" I asked. We had reached the door to enter into the administration block where the staffroom was. We stopped outside the door and continued talking.

"Well, the third category I've called the 'climbers'. They're the ones who use south Auckland schools to get to their place of destination, be it senior management or principal, it's about making a name for themselves. They just come to schools like this so that they can climb that ladder to their success, but they're not really interested in the student's success because they're no. 1, numera uno."

I look at her and think about what she's said.

"Want me to go on?"

I nod.

"The second category I've called the 'blamers', they look for anybody else to blame about why these kids aren't doing so well without ever really doing anything to make a difference. Because then it takes the responsibility off them to change things, like their lazy way of teaching. Like, they blame the kids or they blame the parents or the culture or society or poverty or the system or the school or the senior management or whatever. On and on, one thing leading to the next."

I look at her and wonder was this what I was trying to do? But no, I never wanted to be a teacher. This was only because I'd wanted to pay off my debts and then to go back to studying. Why she was telling me these things anyway?

"But the first category is the worst, they need an exit strategy, I'd say, because they do more damage than good and they often go unchecked in schools and I've called them the 'haters'. They hate everything about the school and the community and the kids and usually the culture too. They often see the students and their cultures as quite primitive and second class and often look down on parents and their families. They say some racist things but they're veiled to look darn right. And if you said they were racist they'd call you a liar and tell you prove it because they've been so careful to make it look as if it's the student's fault and not something they've done or said but the kids know, they all know if someone's fake and being a pretender cos you really can't hide that kinda attitude it has a way of making itself known."

I look at her I guess I'm blown away again.

"So, why are you telling me these things apart from the fact that I asked?"

"I guess, now that I've made motions to leave this place, I wanted to pass it on – what I'd learnt, that maybe you can do more than I could ever do in this place to help more kids to achieve cos I've just become a burnt out, past it, 'sleeping' teacher who's ready to sign out of teaching and into something not so demanding and maybe more rewarding like opening a little gallery or a little craft shop or something where I can age gracefully with and not have to deal with any pressures or my conscience."

She looked a little sad. I didn't agree with her that I would be able to make a great deal of difference but it did seem incredibly important that something be done about it, even if I didn't know what that might be.

"I've gotta go now but I'll keep what you said in mind and I'll consider putting my name for the student council."

Again, I was gobsmacked as to how to reply to her. I just needed time to process all that information she'd given.

"I'll see you around."

And away she walked.

"All the best with your application," I called as she waved her hand in acknowledgement, without looking back. I turned and walked towards the staffroom. Now what was I gonna do about that?

At church that weekend, while an itinerant minister was busy preaching away, I thought about what Lani had said. Was it really true that there was a whole bunch of teachers who just didn't want to be there and were living pretentious lives at school? I looked back at the preacher and wondered about his vocation. Could they be classed as sleepers, blamers, climbers, haters? I looked around at some of the people who had been here for years and whom I'd known as almost my second family. If we didn't make it to the pearly gates could they be blamed? Was it really their responsibility?

After all, weren't ministers just like teachers too? Some were effective and some were lazy and some had fat bellies. It made me stop and think about whether this job of teaching was really for the light hearted when you were working with peoples' lives, be it youth or aged. I turned my gaze back to the preacher and wondered if he really believed in what he was doing.

### ***Hippo-crat***

*On a pulpit of velvet and lace*

*He stands erect*

*Puckered lips, arms outstretched*

*He throws back his head*

*(stops and thinks of Sunday roast...)*

*then crucifies that man*

*to fill his rotund belly*

*A parasite of congregations*

*He gives sermons to back walls*

*blank faces*

## CHAPTER 22

### Ruth

At the first meeting Miss T said that she would now be working with us to get things on track for the end of the year after we told her that nothing much had happened with the Council during the whole year. She also got Christina, a senior to take minutes and that we would set an agenda for each meeting. She promised that we'd all get the minutes before each fortnightly meeting.

There was a pretty good feeling afterwards. I'm just glad that Ms Larsen left cos she was so hopeless and just let last year's senior year run the show and they didn't even ask us about what we thought. Anyway, it serves them right that their ball got jumped from the kids at Manu High cos I would have told them not to have door sales but they thought they were smart so that's what they got.

Looks like I'm gonna have my last year ball after all. It doesn't seem fair though that I'll be there without Moana having more important things to think about. This would have been our last year together. Too bad, I hope this isn't the last ball for her. At least I have the ball to look forward to before we head off to Auss and it's good to have the job with the video club cos I can buy a nice dress that's not too expensive. I just wish that I had someone nice to take me but I don't really have anyone that I wanna go with cos most of the guys here are either taken, too ugly or I'm not even interested in them. I think I'll just go by myself and see what happens. Who knows? I might get lucky but then again, I doubt it.

There's this one palagi boy who's been lookin at me, so odd cos he's shorter than me and a year younger than me but he seems nice. I think his name's Scot. He was sitting next to me at the show with his friend Ben and asked if I wanted to share his Jaffas but I said no. He just seemed nice and not like those other guys who just wanna jump on you. Later on, when my Dad and I were walking out, I looked back to see where he had gone and I saw him watching me, he smiled and waved but I didn't wave back. It just seemed weird cos I don't really know him. Besides, I didn't wanna give dad the impression that I had been sitting next to my boyfriend.



## Ben

On the night of the exhibition, I got there and Mr Holden was happy with quite a few parents already there having a look at the different paintings. Mr Holden had put mine up on a special painting easel and it looks pretty good. Then I saw Scot coming to see me with an older man who looks like his father. He introduced me to him.

"Hi Ben, this is my Dad. Dad meet my best friend Ben."

I was surprised cos he hadn't told me that he was gonna bring his father to the exhibition. I shook his hand and smiled cautiously. What if he doesn't like my art work?

"Hi Ben, nice to finally meet you. Scot's told me a lot about you. So which of these paintings is your artwork?"

I look to Scot and he's smiling and gesturing for me to show his father my artwork. I take him over to see my art and he has a good look at it then strikes up a conversation with some of the other parents who are also having a look at my work. I walk away and pull Scot aside to confront him.

"Hey, you didn't tell me that you were going to bring your dad here."

He's taken me by surprise and I don't like surprises.

"Yeah, I didn't want you to freak out and tell me not to bring him."

How did he know?

"Well, you could have warned me."

I looked back up to see his dad smiling and talking with the other parents.

"Well, you can't really blame me, I just told him to drop me off because I wanted to come to see your art classes exhibition. He said that he wanted to come along to have a look at some authentic south Auckland art because he needs some art work for his offices and he wanted to meet you too."

I looked at him like I wasn't really happy with him. I just wasn't ready for any criticism.

"What? Are you joking?"

Scot doesn't have time to reply as his dad calls for him and Scots runs off. I walk in the opposite direction. I'm not really ready to talk to anyone about my art or to explain anything. I pretend to be interested in looking at some of my classmates work. I then see Scot taking Mr Holden over to his father to introduce him. Mr Holden then calls me over to the small group who have arranged themselves around my paintings.

"Ah Ben, Scots dad here has a proposition for you."

I look over to Scot wondering what this is all about. Scot just smiles and doesn't give away any clue.

"Ben, I'd like to commission you to paint a few pieces for my offices. I've spoken briefly with Mr Holden and he explained that these particular pieces are for your art folio but if you're interested in painting another series similar to these for my offices, I'd definitely be interested in paying you and it would be much better than some of the paintings that I've been looking at. I see it as an investment of an upcoming and coming artist. Would that be all right? And it wouldn't have to happen until your exams are over. No rush."

I didn't know what to say. Mr Holden was smiling and nodding his head. I nodded my head as well and tried not to smile as widely as I felt. I can't believe it. Someone wants to buy my paintings.

"I particularly like the way you've used these colours and I like the fact that you've used oils. Some of the acrylic paintings I've seen just don't have the same look like as oil paintings. So if you can paint another three panels along these lines. I can provide the three canvases and I'll be happy to talk with your parents and Mr Holden to come up to an amicable payment."

I'm still not saying anything. Just nodding my head and watching the other adults smiling as well. Just then I see Miss T walk in with Miss Stowers. They instantly see me and Scot's dad shaking hands and they come to see what the fuss is. Mr Holden introduces them to Scot's dad.

"Thanks for coming. This is Scot's dad, Mr Henley he wants to commission some paintings from Ben."

Miss T and Miss Stowers shakes everyone's hand in our group, starting with me.

"Congratulations Ben, you are so talented and I knew it when I first saw some of your work."

I'm just still shaken with all this attention.

"I've gotta go and get me a drink."

I motion to Scot to follow me and we get some drinks and snacks that Mr Holden arranged for the guests. Scot still smiling like he just won the Lotto. Miss T and Miss Stowers have a look at all the other artwork and then say that they have to go leave early cos they have somewhere else to go. We say goodbye and I go and munch on some other snacks.

"So whatdayah think? Pretty neat aye?"

Scot is enjoying the moment. I keep nodding my head.

"Thanks Scot."

Is all I can think of to say.

"Don't thank me, thank Mr Holden. He got this all together and I only thought that my dad was going to drop me off but when I told him that I wanted to come to see your exhibition he said that he wanted to come along to make sure that you weren't a figment of my imagination."

We both laughed.

"And so I've got you to thank for that cos now my mum can believe that I'm not throwing all that extra food she makes for my lunch away in the bin."

We both have mighty big grins.

"And now that he knows that you're for real and not my pretend friend maybe he'll come over more often. And maybe my mum will start coming to that 'God forsaken school'. That's what my mum says."

We both start laughing. Later on we walk home cos his dad needed to leave earlier and I had wanted to help Mr Holden pack everything away. Scot had wanted to stay back and help out too. We walk and talk, I'm on such a buzz.

"Was your dad too busy to come?"

He just broke my buzz.

"Yeah, he's always busy."

Probably fallen asleep with a can of beer in his hand.

"Will I get to meet your dad one day too?" Scot asks.

"I doubt it. You wouldn't like him. I don't like him either," I reply.

"What did he do to make you hate him so much?"

"He's just my dad, I guess. I just don't wanna talk about it."

I don't like talking about my personal life to others. They just wouldn't understand.

"How about your mum?"

I guess I owe him, so I answer his questions.

"She was the best but she died couple a years ago."

His question takes me to another place.

"I'm so sorry to hear about that. What was she like?"

I don't really wanna say much but at the same time Scot's become a good friend that I can trust.

"She was a great cook, loved to garden. Always has good advice for me. When she died everything changed. She would have loved my art, she was always saying that I could be anything I wanted to be."

We'd come to the intersection.

"I don't wanna talk about her anymore."

It brought back memories that were too deep to mention.

“See ya tomorrow,” Scot said as he turns and walks home.

“See ya and thanks again.”

I walked home, lost in my thoughts. Later on when I was at home by myself with dad out with his boys, I wondered how life can change in an instant and how when I keep trying hard at doing something I’ve got talent in, it opens the doors for opportunities to come in.

## **Ela**

We’ve got a class challenge against Mr Sommers class. He asked if my class would like to challenge his class to a Romeo and Juliet quiz. It’s the Shakespeare play that both our classes are studying. I asked my students and they were very positive.

“Of course we’ll take up the challenge, Miss. T. You just wait and see, we’ll cream that class.”

I had my doubts but there was no backing out. I guess Mr Sommers wanted to show me how his many years of skilled and experienced English teaching could show up how green I was or was it that he’d enough of hearing about the different things that I had done with the students and wanted to put me in my rightful place. I wasn’t sure but one thing I was sure about and that was that he wanted to teach me a lesson.

I had read extracts to the class and I had tried to be as thorough as I possibly could in helping the students to understand the themes and the characters of the play but I still wasn’t sure if the ideas had all clicked with them. I expressed to the class that if they were really serious about winning then everyone needed to have finished reading the play and needed to skim it again so that they would be able to answer any anticipated questions. Often I’d had to explain a lot of the old English phrases and words to them and had also read important parts of the text with them out loud to explain their significance. Only Leti was let off from having to read the original text as he had recently arrived from Samoa at the beginning of the year and had found it difficult to

follow. I gave him one of my abridged copies to read to help him to understand the storyline better. He was very grateful.

The day arrived and I had to take my class to Mr Sommers who had a very satisfied smile on his face. I could tell that he was ready to cream us instead and was expecting our defeat. I wasn't sure how my class was going to fare as I wasn't sure about what questions were going to be asked but I still had faith in them that they were going to try their damdest.

Mr Sommers started asking questions and except for a few blunders from both classes, they seemed neck to neck. It isn't until the last question that surprisingly no one was able to answer, then Leti put up his hand and gave the correct answer. Mr Sommers was in shock and so was I, as I had expected them to win and here we were. The class cheered for Leti, who was beaming. The thing that made me smile was that Leti had tried his best to understand the text even though English was his second language and he knew the answer because he had read it through and that made me so proud of him.

For our prize we received a rather large box of chocolates that I later shared around the class and a few spot prizes to those seated. I didn't know what to say to Mr Sommers upon leaving, as my class marched out of his not so happy home and took with us his anticipated chocolates that he probably thought was going to go to his class. I was pretty sure that he would chew their ears out for having let us win. Oh well, we deserved it.

Funny how sometimes I enjoyed teaching but as Lani had alluded to in the fact that there weren't many rewards financially for those of us who did extra work but I didn't mind, although I wondered if sometimes in teaching we are 'slaves' to the kids and what they perceive as their need and also a slave to the establishment in that we never really get into the nitty gritty of what students really need in order for them to achieve.

I'm still thinking about a career elsewhere but not right now as I need to see this year out although it is too long suffering. Have seen a lot this year – it's just amazing, like Lani said, to think that I'm still here when success-filled side of me tells me to go.

***You've gotta make that change***

*Sometimes when life throws a spanner in your works*

*And everything seems to be going against you*

*It means that you've gotta stop*

*whatcha doin and make that change*

*Don't just keep doin the same thing that stops you from achieving*

*Cos it's what you've been used to day in and day out*

*Throw something back and dust yourself off*

*Cos there's so much that you can do instead of getting down in the dumps*

*Take a fresh look at yourself in the mirror*

*And tell yourself that you can do it, that you are somebody*

*Don't believe in the lies that society tells you about who you are*

*Just because they don't know where you've been*

*Cos you count! No matter what you've been through*

*Or how much money you don't have, or who your parents weren't*

*you are somebody of significance, you were meant to be*

*Just because you are! not because of what you do or don't have*

*So just keep on smiling*

*keep on truckin and*

*look forward to each brand new day!*

*And make that change!*

## CHAPTER 23

### Ruth

In class, I'd told everyone that Moana had to drop outta school cos she had to help her mum look after the kids cos her mum is so sick. That sounded legit' to them so there are no more questions. I've known lotsa other kids who'd left school for less but I gotta say that it's just not the same, now that she's gone, it just kinda makes me think about whether I really have a chance. I mean, why do bad things seem to happen to kids like me – like Moana? What did we do to deserve it? I haven't seen Jackson lately either, not since that fafafine dragged him up to the stage and danced all over him. He was totally humiliated but I reckon if it wasn't for him freezing on stage he might have knocked that fafafine out. Although the fafafine is pretty big too and might knock him out.

It was so funny today, cos we had a class quiz against Mr Sommers class and we won. What a laugh! I reckon Mr Sommers was pissing his pants cos he would have been so angry with the last question being answered by Leti, who speaks English as his second language but he had been reading the copy that Miss T had given him because he was finding it hard to understand the old English terms in the original and he was the one who won the contest for us. Everyone was giving him high fives and he was the hero of the day. I'm sure it's something he won't be forgetting for a long time. I answered a couple of questions but because I don't really study much anymore, I didn't know all the answers but it was cool winning it for Miss T, she really deserved it cos she's a good teacher but that Mr Sommers, what a shame, maybe next year.

Dad got me to call into our local travel agent to find out about the prices for our Brisbane trip. I've also gotta got our passport forms filled in and sent in with the fee. This is starting to feel exciting, we wouldn't have had to even think about this if things hadn't happened the way that they had. I feel as if we are gonna be going on an exciting journey. Who knows what Brisbane holds for us?

### Ben



Miss T announced that she's gonna start coaching classes on Saturdays and that we're all welcome to join her. When she asked if anyone was interested to come, not many people put their hands up. Scot said that he would but he had to go to his Soccer games. Other kids had other excuses like looking after their brothers and sisters or doing house work but not many were really interested, I mean who wants to go to school on a Saturday? that was the day that most cruised, but most I guessed were too lazy.

"If I'm not doing anything, I'll go," I told Scot.

"I wish I could but there's no way I wanna let my team down because we're on top of the table. Ya know we might even come first this year."

I know Scot would have liked to come but he loves his soccer too much to let down his team.

I went to the first coaching class on the Saturday after I'd delivered my papers. I got there and there were only a couple of other girls who'd arrived before me. Miss T welcomed us and got us straight into looking at the different sections of the exam and how to plan and time ourselves. She also showed how to answer the questions and how to carefully plan our answers. I felt good being there, cos I knew what she was talking about having been listening in class for so long. She even asked a few questions and I knew the answers.

After a while we had a break and she went to her car and got some cheezels, French bread, margarine and a drink. It was neat to talk with her outside of class and to share lunch. She didn't even mind that we hadn't bought any. She's neat like that. It seemed funny to be there on a day when most teachers were off for the weekend. Then after that we got straight back into it and practiced some short paragraph answers. I like the way she teaches. It's like she makes it easier for us to understand. After the class was over, Miss T asked us if anyone would like a lift home. One of the other girls said that she needed a ride and other said that she would be going to the shop. I said I was fine and thanked her. I feel better and not so nervous now with exams as Miss T is getting us ready for them.

## Ela

Now I feel stink for volunteering to take the School Council. What was I thinking? Just because I took it when I was at school what makes me think that this will make any difference? Oh well, can't back out of it now. Roll on Christmas.

Today was a chaotic day with my Form 3s and I'm starting to realise how tightly structured my lessons need to be otherwise a real big noise and work problems can happen. Today was also my first meeting with the School council. Ms Larson quit and didn't leave any notes or anything behind for me to work with. So here I am, after they asked at the staff meeting and no one put up their hand, I volunteered – after all, I had been on the Council meeting at school back when I was at high school and church meetings count too?

I've started my coaching classes after school much like the Sunday school coaching classes that I used to have for exams when I was a kid. Not a lot of students have taken it up but at least they know that it's available to them. Didn't bother taking it through any meetings or asking for space, I just use any class that happens to be open and the caretakers don't mind me coming in as they're just across the road. Sometimes I bring along some snacks for the students to munch on – so it doesn't really seem like a normal school day, once we had it under some trees due to the caretakers not being in but that was okay, because it just added to the specialness of the day.

Although, it's funny because I realise that now I'm starting to step out of the classroom and into working outside of my classroom since 'Mr Southside'. Before, it seemed as if I'd been in retreat and not wanting to not include myself in anything to do with putting my feet out there with so much to think about but now - 'full steam ahead.' Oh well, the Council meeting went all right, I knew a few students and others I'd seen around – they didn't really seem to follow an agenda so will look at organising it a bit more next meeting with minutes and an agenda. Just needed to see how they operated.

At the following Student Council meeting, the students expressed that they wanted to have a ball but because some ding-dongs from last year had smuggled alcohol into the venue and some outsiders had bought tickets to get in and start a fight, the police got called in and then they had to shut the place down. As a result the principal told the

council that they could not be trusted to host another ball and the student council was rapped over the knuckles but where was the appointed teacher in all this?

“Who was the teacher in charge?” I asked. The answer was apparently another teacher who had since left that Ms Larsen had appointed but she had been too busy with the goings on of the staff last year that she had pretty much left it to the seniors to prepare everything. When asked if there were any of the ball committee still in the student council today, I was told that they had all been seniors and none had returned back to school. The seniors asked me if I could please attend the next board meeting to ensure that they could have another end of the year ball.

“I don’t know,” I told them.

“I’ll have to think about it ‘cause it’s quite a big commitment and there’s only a couple more months until the end of the school year but if I can get a really good ball committee running then I will definitely give it serious thought.”

I was having enough trouble as it was with teaching, marking and planning – did I really want to add more onto my already bludgeoning plate? What the hell. Sure count me in. I’ve always been a sucker for punishment and a good time.

## **Ruth**

I’m helping to set things up as one of the ball committee. It’s good too, cos it helps me to take my focus off my family problems and our impending move to Australia. I haven’t told anyone yet and I don’t intend to. I haven’t confirmed with Miss T yet, I just don’t want to see her disappointment cos I know I would have done well this year but the fire of study has gone outta me and I now prefer to just concentrate on the ball. Dad said that he wants to spend Christmas there and get ready for a new start next year.

“Sure, that’s fine with me. We can start fresh.”

When I get to Auss and we settle down, I’ll make it all happen.

It's funny cos I see that guy Scot in the council meeting as well, I guess he's okay but he's both too short and a year younger but otherwise I think I'll just have him as my friend besides my dad wouldn't be too happy if he thought that I might be hooking up with someone. He's got enough to deal with.

## **Ben**

Scot's asked if I can come to his Soccer Club's annual prizegiving cos on Saturday he thinks he's getting a prize or something.

"Is anyone else from your family is going?"

He looked all excited until I asked him that question.

"Nah, I had been hoping that my family would make it but at the last minute Dad had to change his mind 'cause he's got too much work to catch up with and my mum had to look after my two sick sisters."

He didn't look too happy.

"But I bet if I was in a rugby team, he would have definitely made the time to come."

I looked at him and saw his disappointment.

"Sure, I'll come along."

Immediately his smile returned and we made plans for the pick up.

On Saturday, I met Scot at the school cos it was half way and his coach picked us up and took us to their clubrooms. Pretty flash I thought. The prize giving was pretty good too. All the players in each team got certificates and then there was a MVP trophy for the most valuable player for each team. When it was Scot's turn he got the biggest cheer from me and when he got the MVP trophy, I whistled as loud as I could and didn't care when they all turned around, most of them were palagi and his team also got the Second division trophy for coming first as well. When his captain picked up the big trophy Scot got to go with all his team mates to the front for a photo. After the prizegiving, I got to have a feed of these little pizza, cute cupcakes, mini pies and my

favourite fancy sandwiches. I couldn't help having a big smile on my face as I helped myself to the feed but not as big as the smile Scot had with his trophy in his hands.

"You know, I don't even mind that my family couldn't make it."

I was watchin Scot tryin to eat as much as me. He looked so funny trying to stuff his face. That boy can sure eat even for a small fella.

"What?" I said, "Why?"

"Cos I'm glad I got a friend like you."

I lightly slapped him and he slapped me back. This time I pretended that he conked me out and we had a big laugh all the way back to school then walked laughing all the way to the intersection where we went our separate ways.

Scot just announced that he was going to volunteer to be the new school councillor for our class.

"What do you wanna do that for?" I ask. You wouldn't see me sitting in a boring meeting watching people talk and stuff.

"Well, no one else was interested and 'cause we need to have a say in what happens in our school. Besides, I heard that Miss T has just taken over with Ms Larsen quitting. Something to do with the problems they had at last year's ball."

Now that got my attention. Miss T taking the school council? Now this was gonna be good.

"What? Are you sure?"

I didn't know anything about what happened last year or Ms Larsen but I was sure was interested now that Miss T was gonna be in charge. Maybe things would get better cos nothing much happened with the school council.

One of the first things she did was for the school council to get badges at our school assembly and have the principal shake their hands. There were big cheers and we were all surprised cos this has never happened before. I wish I was in the student council,

nah, I just wanted to get a badge. Scot looked real proud as he got up and received his badge. I think everyone's gonna take this serious now cos Miss T has taken over, although she does like to have a laugh but I've also learnt that she doesn't muck around.

When Scot came back from their second meeting he told the class that there was going to be a ball this year at the end of the year. We were all surprised cos we heard a rumour that there wasn't going to be one cos of what happened last year. Scot was real excited, he said that he liked to dance. Funny dude, cos the guy can't dance.

"Would you come to the ball if we had one?" he asked me after one of his meetings.

"Are you asking me? Nah, just joking - Sure, I'd come along for the ride."

Cos I know that if it wasn't for Scot I sure wouldn't be interested and it would be the first one that I'd ever been to.

"There's gonna be a ball committee which will help Miss T to organise the ball and I'm going to find out what they're going to do."

Scots a lot braver than me cos there's no way you'd find me volunteering for any committee.

That night when I was at home working on some more drawings for my port folio, I thought about how I don't really go out. There's a whole world out there and I seem to be stuck in this place. We don't have a phone so Scot can't call me and we don't have a car cos my dad totalled it on one of his many drunk drivings binges years ago when I was little. Anyway, he's not allowed to drive with a suspended license and with all those drunk driving tickets he's had in the past. I reckon when I finish school, I'm gonna get me a job, move outta home and out of this neighbourhood. Gonna get me some wheels and go for a cruise.

I saw Mr Holden again today and he said that he had a surprise for me. When I asked him about what it was, he said that he hoped that I wouldn't mind what he did.

"I heard about an art exhibition for secondary schools and I entered some of your paintings into the secondary school art exhibition. The prize was that they'd give some prizes to the art department of the school. Now, you've one of the finalists and we got to get a whole lot of art supplies because they liked your paintings and are going to display them along with some of other schools students artwork in a gallery in town next month."

Wow, I was blown away. I thought it doesn't get any better than this. I had gotten over a hundred dollars a piece for the three paintings that Mr Holden helped me to sell to Scot's dad cos he was gonna get it professionally framed. It was funny cos when he gave me a cash cheque I didn't know what to do with it but Mr Holden told me that I could swap it for cash or I could bank it into my bank account.

"No worries Mr Holden. I don't want to spend it right away."

He said they're opening the gallery for a week next month and that he'd take our class on a class trip to the city. Boy I can't wait. I've never been to the city. Just seen it on TV just like the harbour bridge. Mr Holden said that the beach isn't far from the city either and that maybe we could go there for lunch. I can't believe it. This could be my lucky year.

### ***Winners and Losers in Education***

*Private fee paying Education Decile 10*

*paid by high earning families or monetary ascholarships*

*at the cutting edge with high expectations*

*Parents keeping a watchful eye on their protégés*

*ensuring that they get the best Education that money can buy*

*with quality results for future successes.*

*Public free education decile 1*

*paid for by tax payers money*

*riddled with teacher low expectations*

*whilst parents believe that they are doing their best  
entrusting their children's future  
to a system that is failing them.*

*What would you like for your birthday?  
they ask of the child who has almost everything  
Future entrepreneur, family business, a profession  
CEO, an employer, old money inheritance  
You'll drive the latest Merc, BMW or European car in style  
order Top of the line, State of the arts  
Movers and shakers, Top Decision makers  
Cultural capital for money speaks loudest  
You  
The winners*

*What do you want to be when you grow up?  
they ask of the child who plays on the street  
get a job, career, be a good employee  
no savings, no inheritance, in debt till the grave  
you'll drive a Mitsi, Subaru or bus-about, it's cheaper  
whilst learning mediocrity with feel good subjects  
'tall poppy' syndrome – "you a scholar?" what a shame!  
Culture is the capital, where you come from matters  
you  
the losers*



## CHAPTER 24

Ela

Feeling so beat today after a full day of teaching and meetings, three in total including interval for an English meeting, whanau meeting and Form 6 teachers meeting, so tiring as well. Not really looking forward to my crit lesson tomorrow but just can't wait until tomorrow is over then 'Home sweet Home' for the weekend.

Really feel bummed out after today's crit lesson. Got Ms Parker instead of the principal cause he was too busy to be able to make it. No problem for me. Kids had jumped around before class to try and wear school uniform with Ms Parker, the uniform police coming into our room. This made me laugh 'cause usually I forget about uniform but with Ms Parker coming, they knew that they might get an instant detention if they didn't follow the rules.

The crit lesson started and Ms Parker sat at the back, taking notes. It was a bit disconcerting at the beginning so I did a lot of 'eyes on me' at the backboard work, then I had some group work, an energiser game called 'man overboard' which the class really got stuck into it and some over enthused themselves in the process. I was rather glad that Principal hadn't been able to make it because then I just pretended that Ms Parker wasn't there either and just continued with my lesson although the lesson was very teacher directed and I had to keep referring back to my hypothesis as this was the kind of teaching style that I'd seen most teachers teach like. Although, I had been told that it was a very ineffective teaching style when I was at Teachers college, however, I taught them lots of ideas and the guys got really noisy and even Ms Parker had to tell them to quieten down but I think that I really wanted to teach as I normally do. Glad it's all over and finished with, despite my nightmares of the Principal going coming after me. Yuk! That was the worst nightmare that I've ever had!

The next day, at the school assembly, I gave my school councillors their badges and got the principal to shake their hands. I wanted to make sure that if I was going to be doing it, that it would be taken seriously and that we would do it properly. It did made me feel real funny since I hadn't really made a presence in the school in the first couple of

terms, I feel now as it I've been thrust into the limelight. Think I'll stay at school for one more year although not still sure at this stage.

Yahoo! Only one more term to go and I won't be a first year teacher anymore. On the weekend I stayed home – eating heaps and taking it real easy as well. Sometimes when I think about my situation with parents and cultural church it can be very discouraging. Not being able to really praise and worship God and even feeling inhibited by the way I have learnt and been conditioned. But then I think about the many more blessings that God has offered me in this life. This quiet nice bedroom of mine where I can hide or seek solace in. It's comfortable, it's me and I feel right at home here. Where I can just be myself. I think, deep in my heart I feel so happy. I just seem to be eating heaps this weekend. I guess the first time in ages of having time completely to myself and not feeling the pressure of things too. Praise God.

## **Ruth**

As I'm talking with Scot cos he's on the school ball committee, I think he likes to talk to me and I guess that he might have a crush on me. I can tell cos of the way he looks at me with his puppy dog eyes. We're in a student council meeting and he's seated next to me and we're discussing the possible theme of ball. Students are throwing up all sorts of ideas for themes like: Black 'n white Ball, fairytale Ball, star struck Ball and on and on it goes. Miss T has told us that it needs to be something special that will inform the decorations, possibly the menu and things will just fit in accordingly. I'm charged with trying to work it out but nothing seems to be clicking until Scot asks me a question.

"So what's your favourite colour?"

I look at him like that's not very imaginative for a ball theme.

"Blue," I reply back to him which he then decided to share with the rest of the student council.

"What about 'Blue Moon Ball as a theme?"

There's a new buzz in the room. They like the feel of it, the sound it makes as it rolls off their tongue.

"Okay, if that's unanimous with no other suggestions?" Miss T asks.

There are none.

"Then it's confirmed. Your ball theme for 1991 is the 'Blue Moon Ball. I guess you'll be wanting a blue moon to be suspended from the ceiling? Is that right? okay."

Miss T is cool. She gets it!

## **Ben**

We finally get onto Queen Street, the heart of the city, Mr Holden tells us. We have to park our van a bit further from the gallery but it's nice going for a walk and seeing all the different shops along the way. But boy some of those things are really expensive.

We finally get to the gallery and there's a whole lot of other senior students from other schools there as well. Most of them are pakeha kids and they've got these flash uniforms: long socks for the boys, long skirts for the girls and all lookin smart and not a hair outta place. Some are wearing blazers with all these colourful pins with the words 'prefect' or 'Head boy'. I look around me and we're just wearing our stained yellow polo shirts and chocolate brown shorts, short socks each with their own colour. Lookin like rotten banana's, we stand out. Mr Holden sees us lookin uncomfortable and tells us to follow him. There's a man at the door checkin out all the different schools who've come to view the art. He checks out our school name and lets us go through. There are two storeys to the art gallery, there's the main floor with lots of really weird looking objects and paintings that we have to go through to finally get upstairs where the finalist paintings are hangin. We're given a pamphlet that has all these numbers with different names and titles of the piece of art and I see my name. Wow!

"That's me," I say to Mr Holden and pats my back with a smile.

"You deserve it Ben."

I'm over the moon. I notice that the other schools stay in bunches around their teacher but our group is all over the place and Mr Holden has to keep tellin them to come over and keep quiet. But I can't blame them, it's like it's the first time that we've been let out of our banana cages, ha ha. The taste of freedom, plus the fact that some of the boys are just plain showin off to some of those pakeha girls, tryin to act tough and cool at the same time which is pretty hard for some of them.

Some of the guys find my paintings and see a group of girls standing around it with their teacher. Mr Holden motions for us to be quiet and to see what it is that they're saying about it. I walk a bit faster so that I can hear what is being said but by the time we get there. They finish and move on to the next piece of work. Suli, the class clown mimics like he's the teacher explaining to a make believe crowd how awesome and fascinating the painting is. We all laugh.

When they've all gone to view the next artwork I stand there and think about my mum. She would have been proud to know that I had made it this far with my art. To think that my paintings were picked out of a whole bunch of other students in Auckland. She always did say that I could do it, that I should believe in myself. Funny, how I don't think a lot about her anymore now that I hang around with Scot and all the school work I gotta do. I guess I can just let her rest in peace.

Mr Holden calls us that it's time to go. He has to almost pry some a the guys off trying to chat up girls with their fancy uniforms from those private schools.

"I've got a surprise for Ben," he says mysteriously and makes me sit in the front with him. Before I know it, we're making our way over the Auckland Harbour Bridge! Weeee! This is the first time that I've seen such a huge bridge and going over it was amazing. I could see the boats sailing below on the beautiful blue sea and a little island on the left. I couldn't help myself from smilin and could see Mr Holden smilin along with me. The others in the bus were making a big deal about it but I didn't care, this was something I had only thought about.

"But it's not over yet Ben, there's more to come."

Then Mr Holden turns us around after going off the motorway ramp and then back on again and we drive over the Harbour bridge like before but this time I've got my hands

up like I'm riding a roller coaster, just like I've seen on TV, cos I've never been on a roller coaster either. Mr Holden is laughing like mad and everyone else is having a good time.

"Thanks Mr Holden, I really appreciate this," I say to him and he knows I mean it.

"You're very welcome Ben."

I swear it almost looks like he has a tear in his eyes but then I look back out on the road and pretty soon we're at the beach. I look back at Mr Holden and he's smilin like crazy.

"We're here at Mission Bay boys, let's get out for some ice cream. My shout."

So while Mr Holden runs across the road the crew. I go to the golden sand and sit there sifting sand through my fingers. Then take off my shoes and wade through the water. This is what my mum had promised me, so long ago and here I was finally feeling it. After a while, they all come with their ice cream and Mr Holden got me a special sundae.

"Thanks Mr Holden, I really appreciate all that you've done for me."

I say it and mean it.

"Hey Ben, you deserve it. Plus I think that you'll go a long way – so one day I'll say that I knew that famous artist when he was a boy."

We're laughing away and the guys who have finished their ice cream are playing with the water and sand.

"Hey, don't get wet 'cause then you'll have to sit like that in the van."

This stops the horse play that the boys are getting into and then we all file back into the van. On the way back to school, I'm real quiet thinking about what just happened today. Maybe Mr Holden's right – I will be rich and famous someday? Nah!

### ***Permission to Succeed***

*Don't put yourself down  
Cos everyone else can do that  
Think up! Look up and then you'll see  
That you can do anything that your heart desires*

*Don't give up or give in  
Just keep tryin and keep on livin  
To see the next day and do those things  
That'll bring you closer to your goals and dreams, then you'll see*

*That no one else can tell you  
That you're dumb without you givin them permission  
Cos you're not and they need to know that they're the ones  
Who need to change their perspective, cos you're gonna make it*

*So give it heaps  
Settle down and make it work  
Ask for help, find the right friends  
And make it happen and it will be with your permission*

## CHAPTER 25

### Ela

Running around for papa who is driving me nuts with his fix the roof project from the leaking ceiling which should have been done ages ago and is sure being a big pain – 'cause I have to wait around for the servicemen to come around and explain everything while my parents are at work but it's not that bad, I guess, when I really think about it. It's just me not wanting to take anything else on with school stuff taking up some much room in my head space.

Plus I feel real broke on money, just can't seem to be able to handle my money affairs well with my car and petrol and havin to sometimes buy things for school and clothes. I think part of it is not having a budget and sticking to it. It's neat that I don't have to pay board but I do try and help out with some of the bills and things that we need during the week but I know that it's really me. I just gotta get on to it. It was neat to make flower biscuits with Mum on the weekend – something that has nothing to do with school and everything to do with just enjoying being with my family.

They asked at school if we have any cultural things that they could use for decorating up the hall for prize giving. All I can think of is the large tapa cloth that mum hardly used that was in the garage. I'll ask her if they can use it and then bring it back. I must remind myself to do that before next week.

Today, I also feel so blessed by the Lord – spring is in the air for sure and I feel blessed in my work as well. Spring is my favourite season of all. I still have a long way to go as far as learning to budget and to save my dollars but I just feel as happy as a lark in my heart today – Praise God! I feel so happy and at peace that it's such a warm and light feeling too. Many things to plan and pray for too. Got to go and get some more resources ready for my coaching class tomorrow with the kids but before I leave I did a bit of cooking but burnt papa's pig head – oops sorry dad!

## Ben

I've been to all the English coaching classes with Miss T and I feel now ready for the exams. A whole lot of things make sense to me now. Like she broke them down and explained it really well so that I feel like I know what to expect. I'm so glad I had her for a teacher. On our last coaching class she shouted us lunch. I'm gonna miss her and hope that I get her again next year.

We've also got prize giving to look forward to. I've never been to a prize giving cos I've never got a prize before but when they said that all the prize winners must go to the prize giving rehearsal, Scot got the class prize for English and I was really surprised when they called out my name and said that I had won over all first prize for fifth form art and also got another special certificate for my paintings being a finalist at the city exhibition. We had to go to the hall and practice marching up the stage in order and shaking someone's hand before receiving our certificates. Scot walks backwards and gets a laugh from the kids there and a big growling from Ms Parker.

"Scot, if you do that again I'll put you on detention. Do you understand?"

Scot nods his head apologetically and smiles. You don't wanna cross Ms Parker when she's stressing out. It's a little scary standing up in front of everyone but I sure feel good about doing it.

There's a buzz about with only days before prize giving and also the last day of school for seniors with exams. But now that school's getting ready to close for the year I realise how fast the days have flown past and I'm not looking forward to school ending for another year. Hard to believe that I'm actually looking forward to each day and what I can do for that day. Our art portfolios have long gone to Wellington to be marked and then will be returned again sometime next year.

I've started painting the paintings that Scot's dad wanted. It feels good that someone likes my art enough to wanna buy it. Wow! Maybe something can really happen for me but I wanna keep going to art with Mr Holden, cos I'm learning so much and I've now got another two years of art to look forward to.

The day comes for prizegiving. It's during the day and we're all supposed to dress in uniform. Now we all look like a bunch of squashed bananas. I see Miss T there and all



the teachers looking smart. There's lots of speeches and then when it comes to getting our prizes I can hardly remember hearing my name then walking up and shaking the guest speakers hand with my sweaty palms then coming down with my special art trophy, they said that I was the first student to get it. I look over at Mr Holden and he shows me the thumbs up. He's a pretty good teacher. Scots parents are there too. I can just make them out but I don't wanna talk to them. Scot says for me to come over to talk to his mum. I don't really want to talk to her so when it's all over, I can see him trying to call me over but I pretend not to hear him and get lost in the crowd and walk all the way home. I look at the trophy and marvel at how I could have won it. I never thought that I would ever get anything like this. I lie down to sleep with a smile on my face.

## **Ruth**

It's prize giving, I feel like I didn't really deserve to be up here with the prize winners but I got good marks in a couple of subjects. I didn't get the over all prize, Sheryl got it again but then again she didn't have her parents break up in the middle of my important year and she deserved it cos she was working consistently. I'll just try again for another year when we get to Auss. Not long now, as my dad and I have saved up enough money for buying our one way tickets. I'm glad my dad agreed to wait until after exams and the Ball. After that, we're giving ourselves two weeks to pack and sell what we can and then we'll be going.

When dad told mum that we would be going to Australia at the end of the year, she just about had a fit. I guess she thought that we would always be around for her to look down on. She gave dad a list of things that she wanted.

"When you left this house, I told you to take all your things. I'm just telling you so that you can say goodbye to your daughter."

She was none too pleased with that.

"Half of what's in this house is mine."

I didn't like the way she talked now, she talked to dad as if he was stupid or something.

"Look, if you want half of everything then just take me to court and get a divorce. I know you've got heaps of money to pay for a lawyer or just ask your boyfriend. And don't worry, I don't want any of your things. I'd just want Ruth to have my half anyway."

He knew she didn't like calling him her boyfriend she preferred partner.

"Well, maybe I'll just do that."

And she walked out of the house without even saying 'hi' or 'bye' to me.

It was good to see my dad at prize giving, I think he's growing a bit more confident and is able to stand up more to my mum now. I'm also glad cos in a way it's brought us more closer to each other and he really believes in me, even if he doesn't say much.

After I received my awards, we went to the prize giving reception and had something to eat but I knew that my dad was a little shy so I went and said goodbye to some of the teachers and especially Miss T before walking home with my dad. When we almost got home he told me that he had a gift for me. He gave me a little package that was wrapped with a little purple bow. I carefully unwrapped the package and found that it contained a little box. I opened it and was surprised that he'd given me a little heart necklace.

"Thanks dad."

We both had tears in our eyes as I gave him a hug, something that we hadn't done much in our home.

"You make me so proud and don't you worry about your mother. You just do your best and I know that you can do well."

I just wish this year was over, I'd kinda lost the motivation when my mother left, like a part of me left too but that's not gonna get in my way next year. We're gonna start again and this time even if anything gets in the way, I'm gonna give it my best cos I know that my dad's got my back.

## Ela

Got so mad at Mr Tanner, 'cause he was the head of the Prize giving and to see my tapa getting stood on! They made me so mad that I couldn't concentrate on the prize giving. I had given it for them to put on the wall but then found out later that they didn't have enough tacks and couldn't find sellotape and so they decided to put it on the floor. Okay, so sometimes we do stand on our tapa for special occasions like weddings and funerals but this is neither and you'd think that they'd ask if they can stand on it before I find them doing it on stage! I was livid but it was too late but what did change my attitude was when I overheard a few comments from the students that they'd never seen such a big tapa before that made the ceremony special for them, even if they weren't Samoan or Tongan – I guess they appreciated the sentiment but for me? ugh!

A busy day – went to get the car fixed again and Tom was real neat to have it sorted again. So glad that he doesn't mention that creep Lawrence anymore since they had their falling out. Then off I went home and took Mum shopping then felt tired. My bedroom's a mess and I haven't really touched schoolwork but do need to just tidy up things a bit.

I love spring but lately been feeling really lonely – really pray I had a neat boyfriend or friend to share things with me but instead ended up going to the gym and doing the Super circuit, man was I pooped but it was good a workout then came back home and watched a DVD, with sore muscles. I sure love my weekends and just wish I had someone nice to share it with. I'm so glad that Lawrence is now out of the picture. Tom found out that he was playing up and being creepy with some other women friends and was trying to break up Tom with his sister when Tom confronted him. I'm glad that he finally woke up to his senses but the best thing is that I won't be seeing that guy around again. Goodbye and good riddance creep!

Now that the seniors have gone I can just take it a little more easier with just having juniors. So just stayed home – listening to love songs after watching TV and instead of feeling sad and melancholic in being alone tonight I felt pretty good in the Spirit. I'm happy that I have such loving parents, a cute little brother who's fun, a neat brother who cares for me a lot and especially my car so if God one day blesses me with a neat

guy, well then I'll be very happy too. So it's pretty neat just listening to these songs and wondering what it would be like to share with a guy – but I don't want to sacrifice my family at all. Would be nice to have a guy to go to the Ball with but I think all in the Lord's good timing. Let go – let God.

I attended the Board of Trustees meeting and everything went well as I reported to the following Council meeting. What they didn't know was that I had already spoken with the Board Chairperson before the intended BOT meeting about the request that I would ensure that all recommended compliances would be made. He agreed to support it at the meeting and it slid through unchallenged. So it was pretty good behind the scenes work too. Now to get this Ball on the road.

Have finished my Saturday coaching classes that only a few students came for but it was good in that I was able to offer extra classes to those who felt that they needed a few more tips. It also made me realise that I took my love of reading for granted and that many students just don't read at all – next year I need to think of some kind of research for my kids get those skills honed more. And now that my seniors have gone I have more time to do things and to also start planning for next year.

Pili's front tooth came out and I'm the tooth fairy with \$10 under his pillow. I'm glad prize giving is over and how fast the year has gone by. Pili asked if I could go to school with him just to sit with him. Kinda feel guilty, 'cause I've spent so much time with the students and not much time with him like we used to. I decide to skip the morning briefing and take him to school but I wasn't expecting that sometimes bullies forget who's watching.

### ***Long Hair***

*The sun shines blindingly today as I sit quietly with my little brother on the benches outside his class waiting for the bag bell to ring. A figure looms overhead casting it's*

*shadow upon us. He is an older boy. He hops onto the bench, catching a ball with a menacing smile.*

*'He's a girl! He's got long hair.'*

*A finger points accusingly at my little brother, his head droops. I look up into the shadow.*

*'He's a boy! Because I've got short and you've got short hair so you must be a girl!'*

*He jumps off the bench with a startled look of puzzlement and then runs away. I turn to my little brother and see the twinkle in his eyes as the sun smiles brightly.*

## CHAPTER 26

### Ben

It's the night of the Blue Moon ball. I reckon if it wasn't for Scot, I wouldn't have been the least bit interested in it but because he's put so much effort into it. I guess I might as well go. I decide to just go in the same clothes I bought for special occasions: a pair of black pants, a white shirt and jacket and some socks and shoes that I picked up at the local Otara markets.

I told Scot that I'd meet him there but he insists that he'd pick me up, that's if he can get his busy dad to drop us off. I explained that I'd rather we just walk there and back cos it's not that far but the true is that I just don't feel comfortable around adults except for Mr Holden and Miss T, cos other adults just make me nervous.

I must have fallen asleep. I slowly get up and get my clothes ready and then I hear a knock on the front door. I hear my dad go to the door but I thought he was going out for the night with his boys. I hear muffled words, bits of conversation. I quickly get changed and head for the door fast. Who could that be? I see Scot standing in front of the door all dressed up.

"Hey, what are you doing here? Remember I was gonna meet you there."

I look beyond Scot and see a four wheel drive parked in the driveway.

"No worries. I just asked my dad if he could pick us up. Thought we'd look cool getting dropped off in the family limo."

He laughs and looks at me quickly tucking my shirt into my pants.

"And didn't want you getting lost along the way," he said.

I can see my dad watching Scot in front of me. He's blocking the doorway.

"What's your name boy?"

Scot looks at him and smiles. I know there's gonna be trouble.

"My name's Scot – I'm Ben's friend."

He turns and looks at me then looks at Scot. Instantly I know that he's gonna tell him. He has that smile on his face. I can tell he's been drinking again.

"I thought you were going out with your boys."

There's a warning tone in my voice.

"So what do we have here? Aye? You never told me that you had a friend - going somewhere?" he asks innocently. Scot doesn't have a clue.

"Yeah, we're just going to the senior ball," Scot pipes in.

"We gotta go now," I say but I can see that Scot is really interested in him.

"A ball aye? So what are yous gonna be doing at the ball? Looking for some girls?" he snickers.

"Will see you again later," I say and make motions to move but he's standing right in front of the door. He's not letting Scot in and he's standing in my way to get out.

"Hey, what's the rush? At least introduce me to your mate," he's stalling me, he doesn't want Scot to go.

"This is Scot and we gotta go."

Scot looks like he wants to talk to him. I signal him with my eyes that we gotta go, I brush past him heading towards that door.

"It's time to go."

I'm ready to head off.

"Nice to meet you, Ben's dad," Scots says and we turn to go.

"Nice to meet you too but I'm not Ben's dad," he adds too quickly. He's got our attention now.

"What?"

Scot stops in his tracks. He turns to look at me and then at him.

"I don't understand," he says. I don't want to explain.

"We just gotta go, I'll explain it to you later."

I want to go away fast. I know it's comin.

"Didn't Ben tell you about me?"

He's got that smirk on his face again, he's asking for trouble.

"No," Scot replies, he's standing there waiting for an explanation which I don't wanna give just yet.

"I just thought you were Ben's dad."

I freeze. I know it's coming. I gotta get outta here fast. I look around but I can't go. Scot's standing there just looking at me.

"Oh, Ben just forgets to mention me every now and then," he says too casually.

"Don't you boy."

He reaches over to scrunch up my hair like he used to do when I was little. I jerk my head away.

"And did he tell you about his mother?"

He starts laughing. I can feel my heart racing. He wouldn't.

"I know she died a couple of years ago," Scot adds innocently.

"No, my sister died giving birth to him. I've been looking after him ever since."

I can feel my heart beating.

"You mean, you're his uncle?"

Scot looks confused. He starts laughing like the crazy alcoholic that he is.

"Yeah, your friend is a bloody looney. He pretends that I'm his alcoholic dad and that his mom died yesterday. He didn't even know his bloody mom, don't even know who his bloody dad is!"



That's it! I lunge out at him and smack him through the open door into the wall. I feel his body collapse onto me. I then start choking that voice outta the bastard. I can hear Scot yelling at me to stop and tryin to pry my fingers off his throat. I don't stop until I hear a loud voice and big hands tryin to pull me off a him.

"What the hell is going on here?"

I look up and it's Scot's dad. I can't see him through my tears. I let go and wipe my tears away. He's holding onto his throat coughing away.

"Your son's... hanging out... with a ravin lunatic," he says coughing abruptly, I can see the redness of his throat where my hands had almost crushed him.

"Scot, get into the car," his father says.

"But I ..."

He doesn't look at me. He can't finish his sentence.

"I said get in the car. We're going – now!"

Scot hangs his head and walks out the front door. I expect the worse now with his father looking at me.

"Now, I don't know what the hell's going on here but I think it best that you don't hang around my son anymore. Do you hear me?"

I look up. I don't say anything, I nod and look down. He's out the door and then I hear their four wheel drive scream outta the driveway. I look down at him and he looks up at me and starts laughin again. I wanna punch him up bad. Instead I punch a hole through the wall close to his face. I've gotta get outta here, I run out the front door and slam it behind me. I can still hear him laughing but I don't care. I think I've lost my best friend.

## **Ela**

The Blue Moon Ball. The big day. Finance is the biggest worry! I hadn't wanted to have door sales but with the slow sale of tickets, I didn't have any option but to also sell

tickets at the door to make sure that we broke even. It was good though cos when I got to school, I went straight into decoration mode and was really surprised when Lani arrived with her junior art class and asked if we needed any help.

“Hey, thanks for that, I really appreciate your help,” I said genuinely surprised that she’d come out to help considering what she had told me.

“Well, I had to do something since it will be my last term of teaching forever.”

She is smiling at me.

“You mean, you got the teaching award?”

She nods her head and smiles. I extend out my hand to congratulate her and she takes it and gives me a big hug.

“Congratulations, you deserve it.”

Even if I don’t know her well, I know that she must have put up a very impressive application to get paid for a whole year’s salary whilst studying.

“So what would you like for my class to do?”

I showed her the plan for the seating and told her about the dinner arrangements, a local catering company who would be bringing along the finger food but that we would need to serve ourselves. She got straight into ordering her class to finish setting up the chairs.

Earlier, I had invited all the staff to the ball as I had noticed that many hadn’t purchased any tickets. But even if they didn’t come, it didn’t worry me as I was gonna follow through come rain or shine. However, my problem was not the teachers but with all the councillors as I had discussed for them to come as soon as they could to help with the set up and decorations. So far, only two had turned up and that was Scot and Ruth who were busy working on the decorations of putting up blue streamers all over the place.

By lunchtime a few more councillors turned up and we went to pick up the balloons for the kids to blow up. I could see that we would need a lot more people to buy tickets because there just wasn’t enough money to pay for the catering and any special

decorations with the sparse money that had come through. This made me feel just lousy. Why did I get myself into these kinds of situations?

I had decided that each of the tables would have centrepieces of flowers to set the scene with blue cellophane so went and got some flowers from my aunty's place as well as from home and asked for some of the councillors to make the required amount of posies for the tables whilst I went with a couple of senior councillors to pick up the drinks.

Throughout the day, students were still buying tickets at the office so when I went to the office to check, I found out that we had sold twenty tickets since the morning. Great, maybe we were getting somewhere now. So I went with Ruth to pick up chocolate logs for the dessert, in fact it was neat to have her available as she went everywhere with me.

By afternoon tea, we were pretty much set up and met with the Karaoke guy whom we'd hired, a student's uncle who looked about my age. He was dressed really for the night and seemed quite enthusiastic about the whole thing. I just hoped that it wasn't his first gig too cos I couldn't afford to have problems with the music. By the end of school day, I showed some of the senior councillors how to fold serviettes into pretty fan designs like we did at family dos. It was getting really late by now and all we needed was the food to arrive and the music to play for the many tickets that I was hoping to be sold at the door.

So off I went home to have a quick shower and dress. My mum and papa had been kind enough to cook tea but also had some sausage rolls ready just in case I was racing. I quickly grabbed the food container and took it with me into the car after saying my goodbyes to my parents and little brother.

By the time I had arrived at the ball, all the councillors had arrived and were looking good so I gave them a quick briefing. It was then that I realised that the reason I hadn't seen half of them was because most of them had been busy getting haircuts, getting primped and polished all ready for the ball. I quickly forgave them and took my station at the door. Tonight I was going to be on door sales with some of the senior male councillors took turns to check with me.

By 9pm the Ball was into full swing, with more people paying at the door than we had anticipated. Rambo came in 'for a gander' and said that he would stay and help out to the end. He looked trendy casual and Sima came in a bit later and stood at the door with me but then would go have a workout on the dance floor every now and then. Lani came in for a time but then had to leave early and a couple of other teachers came in and left shortly thereafter. At 9.30pm supper was served as the catering company came and spread all the food onto the main tables and within ten minutes of the saying Grace, all of the food disappeared along with dessert and the drinks. Ruth came out to give me a report before she left early and Sima also got me a plate of food before it was all gone but due to the fact that we hadn't expected the numbers, it ended up being 'first come – first served' with a few missing out on the supper and only getting dessert.

As I waited by the door, I could see many students enjoying themselves dancing and laughing and all looking like they were having a good time. The senior Councillors were excellent at helping out and I only managed to steal in one dance. That night the students really enjoyed themselves but I felt pretty tired and called my parents if they could come and take the excess dollars home after I'd quickly counted it with Sima, as I didn't want to any dollars going missing and would return first thing on Monday so that it could be counted out again against the tickets that we had sold to make sure that we had broke even. By 11pm the dance was over and I stayed to unpack and lock up with the help of Rambo and Sima.

## **Ruth**

I walked out of the school ball to get some fresh air, after having had a quick feed and a little dessert. I wanted to walk home early and didn't feel like hangin around since I didn't have a close friend to laugh with. I really missed Moana but then I guess she's in a better place and it was really neat to be able to help Miss T out, so I was a little tired too. I walked out into the cool late Spring air and closed the hall door behind me. They're all way too happy and I'd be just a drag to be around so going home would be nice to just shake off all the tiredness. My dad said he'd walk up and pick me up at

about 11pm but I thought that I'd surprise him. I looked at my watch, it's only 10.30pm. I said 'goodbye' to Miss T on my way out.

"Are you going home so soon? Is someone picking you up?"

She had that genuine parental concern.

"Yeah, my dad is. Don't you worry Miss T, I'll just get some fresh air and wait out here. I'll be fine."

I reassure her as I walk towards the door. Someone else goes over to ask Miss T, some questions about the food and I don't hear her reply as I'm out the door. I didn't realise just how cool it was outside. I hug my jacket closed and walk into the evening night. In the shadows I know there are a lot of couples under the trees, some talking, some snuggling – I bet some of their parents don't even know that they're here with their boyfriend/girlfriends. I walk out to the carpark and out of the corner of my eye I see a figure moving between Miss T's car and another. I turn and take a closer look and I can just make out someone crouched down facing Miss T left rear tyre. I move closer and see that it's Jackson. Just my luck to have to bump into him when I least expected it.

"What the hell are you doing to Miss T's car?"

A startled Jackson looks up and stands caught out. He has a knife in his hand and a can of Lion Red in the other. Just my luck the bastard is drunk. His speech is a little slurred.

"Whaddah you wanna know for? Ya nosey bitch."

I back away I can see that he's drunk and can't even stand straight. Of all the people to meet on the night of the ball and to catch him messing with Miss T's car. Just my luck.

"Well, ya shouldn't be touching her car cos you know you're gonna get in trouble for that."

I look around to see if I can see anyone to catch their attention. I can't see anyone and I don't trust him.

"What? Ya gonna tell on me, like you told everyone else about me getting that stupid friend of yours pregnant?"

I don't like the way he's talking to me.

"Hey, it wasn't me."

As if I cared about what he thought.

"What makes you think that I would wanna tell anyone about my best friend's worst nightmare in you. Ya drunk bastard."

His groggy eyes looked surprised like he's tryin to figure out who else would have told. He looks down momentarily and then back at me.

"Then who told?"

He looks genuinely surprised.

"Don't ask me, ya creep. It was probably one of your friends."

I can tell his alcoholic addled mind was trying to figure out what to say to me. Then he takes a final swig at his can now emptied and throws it over his shoulder. I hear it clattering when it falls then I hear the sound of metal hitting the tarmac.

"Oh shit! I've lost my knife."

He stoops down to look but can't find it in the darkness of the night. I've had enough of this and I turn to walk away fast.

"Hey, wait up. I'll walk you home," he says, reeling towards me but I'm off on a trot.

"No thanks. My dad's coming to pick me up," I say over my shoulder. I know I can't trust him and I look around again to see if anyone can see me but I know that in the shadows everyone else is too preoccupied to hear me if I were to scream. I decide to keep walking I'm sure there's no way that he can keep up with me.

"What's the rush? I can walk you home," he says continuing to weave his way behind me. I'm now out of the school grounds and on my way home in the night. I can still hear the dull thud of bass playing from the hall. I keep walking at a steady pace but stop when I see a dark figure walking towards me from further down the path. He's pretty big and tall. I don't know what to do, I decide to cross the road but before I can,

I feel a hand grab my arm from behind. I turn to smell the foul breath of Jackson's drunken state.

"What's the rush honey. Come on, let's go home."

He's holding my arm real tight from behind.

"Get your hands off a me."

I try to shake his arm off me but he has a vice like grip on me.

"Let go of me, Jackson."

I'm beginning to panic and try to push him away from me but instead he roughly hugs me into his body and begins kissing my neck. I respond by trying to shove him off me.

"Come on honey, I know you want me."

I'm frozen in fear, he's trying to force a kiss on me. I try to fight back but he's much stronger than me. He's trying to pull me off the path into some trees further in the darkness of a park. I have never been so scared in my life. I try to fight back but he's beginning to carry me into the shadows. All of a sudden I feel him jerked off me and turn in time to see the dark figure who had been walking up ahead now at his side holding Jackson's arm at an awkward angle behind him. Jackson's now squirming and trying to fight his way outta the guy's grip. I slowly back away but I'm too scared to run in case he runs after me. Then I hear a gentle male voice.

"What do you want me to do with your boyfriend? And don't worry, I'm not gonna hurt you."

I can't see his face but I can see that Jackson is scared and the more he squirms, the grip tightens on his arm even more. I see him wince at the strength of the stranger. By his voice, I make out that the stranger is not an adult but maybe a teenager too.

"He ain't my boyfriend but thanks for taking him off me. I was just waitin for my dad to pick me up."

I'm so grateful and I want to go but I want to thank the stranger too.

"Get off me, you bastard. Let me go!"

He's now knows what it was like for me.

"I've had a really hard day, just give me an excuse." I could tell that this stranger wasn't joking either.

"Get off me Ben – I know it's you. You'd better get off me, cos you're gonna it once I get you." That's when I remembered Ben, the quiet friend of Scot who'd tried to befriend me.

"You don't get it. I don't give a stuff cos I'm just gonna tell the judge that you just tried to rape the girl and I came to the rescue by breaking your arms off. Do you get me?"

I just about laughed but it was a sobering reminder about what I had almost confronted had it not been for Ben to come to my rescue. By this time Jackson has stopped squirming and I could tell that he was thinking real hard about what his next move was gonna be.

"So if I were you, I wouldn't be coming back to this school ever again cos if I see you again here, I'm gonna spill the beans on you and I won't give you a second chance."

He lets go of Jackson and Jackson takes off across the road half running and cradling his arm for life. Ben comes up to me. I'm a little apprehensive but I think I can trust him, he just saved me.

"You okay?" he asks.

"Yeah thanks for that."

I almost feel like crying and giving him a hug but I don't.

"Look, it's okay if you wanna call the cops on him. He's a bad fella but I don't think he'll ever come back again cos he knows I mean business."

I'm sure glad that he's a friend.

"It's okay, I won't be back cos I'm leaving for good to Oz in a couple of week's time."

There's a comfortable silence between us.



"I don't know what to say but thank you. And if you see your friend Scot, say 'hi' and 'bye' from me."

He doesn't say anything. I guess he's a man of few words.

"I gotta go now. I think my dad's on his way."

In the distance, I make out a figure walking towards us. He walks with a limp, the way my dad does.

"Yeah, see ya."

He nods and turns to go.

"Thanks again."

Ben walks off. I wanna say more but he's walked off into the darkness. Things could have turned ugly. I owe him my life.

## **Ela**

I thank God that it's all over. Praise Him – 'cause the only thing I couldn't work out was not having enough food and drink but then that wasn't my fault 'cause a lot of them bought their tickets last minute. The DJ was a local pain with his mob and having to stand all night at the door. By 11.00pm it was time to pack up, that's when I saw Ben walk out of the shadows.

"Hi Ben, I didn't see you come into the ball but I did see Scot for a time. He was looking for you."

I guessed that Ben must have backed out last minute and that was why Scot was looking for him. I was busy packing things into my car with the help of a couple of students. Sima and Rambo had offered to help as well.

"Nah, just came to help. Thought you might need some help Miss."

I smiled at Ben. He was definitely a gentle giant.

"Could really use your help with loading all that junk into my car."

He follows me into the hall and back out again with arms fully loaded.

“What’s this?”

I see something sparkling and bend down to pick up a small sharp knife. Someone must have dropped their knife tonight ‘cause I don’t remember seeing it when I dropped off all the gear.

“Oh well.”

I drop it into the rest of my gear for sorting out later.

“Sorry Ben, we ran outta food but I have some sausage rolls that were left over from my tea if you’d like something to munch on later.”

Ben shook his head but I refused to take no for an answer.

“I’ll give it to you just before you leave.”

We continue for another five minutes and then Sima takes off and Rambo says that he’ll drop Ben off as it’s on his way home. I give him the sausage rolls and he thanks me for it. We say our goodbyes and I’m glad it’s all over. Just need the weekend to take over and then I think I’ll be all right. I got home at about 12.15am and couldn’t sleep and kept thinking of the night and how all it all went well. Thank God, but the only thing missing for me was that I had wanted to dance with my missing partner. When will I ever find him? Roll on Christmas.

### ***Blue Moon***

*They say that when something doesn’t happen often*

*That it happens every blue moon*

*so what do you see on nights like these?*

*When lovers are loving and others are wanting*

*Can you make wishes come true?*

*for loners, like me, who wish upon a star*

*for a rescuing knight needed for a damsel in distress*

*or are you just a figment of my imagination and I just have to wait*

## CHAPTER 27

### Ruth

We've packed our things now. We've got our tickets and most of the things we've sold, or given it to our next door neighbours and other families. It was kinda sad seeing all the things that had been a part of our lives being taken away. But this is it. I know from the way that dad's talking that he's never coming back.

I don't think I'll miss anything either. I got to talk on the phone with Moana before I left. She told me that she gave birth to a healthy baby boy. He had come earlier than expected at seven pounds eleven. She said that she also got to meet the nice palagi couple who already have two older children who will be adopting him as their own. She said that they wanted her to be a part of his life and would keep in touch. I felt so happy for her.

"I won't be coming back to Southside."

I wasn't surprised.

"I've decided to stay here and will try and find a job and maybe study through night school. I just don't want to get back into the life style that my mum has and I definitely don't want to see that prick again. And since you won't be coming back then there's no reason for me to go back."

I knew what she meant. It was like we were both burning our bridges.

"Maybe, if things go well for us in Brisbane, then maybe we could keep in touch and you could come over and visit us there?"

Moana was thrilled at this possibility and we promised to keep in touch. It was time to go so we said our goodbyes. There were tears on both sides of the phone call. This was definitely a year that I wouldn't soon forget.

I went to see Miss T before I left and she gave me a Christmas card and a small gift. It was our class photo with Miss T at the top with her bright jumper.

"I knew you didn't have a class photo and this was a spare that they gave out and since I'd already bought mine, I thought you might like it."

She then gave me a hug and I gave her an even tighter hug and cried. She was like a mother that I wish I'd always had. Then I said my goodbyes and stepped out of that page of my life and onto the plane.

## **Ela**

It's the last week of school. Kind of an anti-climax for me. I showed a video during period one and ran around writing and giving out certificates and Christmas cards for all my junior English students.

"Did you hear the news?"

Sima comes over to have lunch with me on the field. It's my turn for field duty.

"No, what?"

I was busy eating my sandwich and asked her if she wanted any she shook her head, she'd already had some.

"Some kids were talking that on the night of the ball, Jackson got jumped."

I was surprised at this news.

"But I didn't see him there."

I did a quick back track in my mind of whether I had seen him at the ball when I stood at the door, but I hadn't.

"I was at the door all night and I practically didn't leave it, so I don't know, unless he was just hanging around outside. What did you hear?"

Sima smiled, shaking her head.

"He's such a drama queen, his friends said that he got jumped by a gang of guys on the night of the ball, that he got so beat up that he didn't come in and so he isn't coming back next year."

I found that unbelievable.

“Do you think he’s making it up?” I ask Sima.

“Who knows,” Sima replies.

“Can’t say I’ll miss him, remember that picture of his that I told you about?”

We both laughed at that reminder.

“Come to think of it, he was missing from the exams too. Oh well, I guess he had other plans?”

I wasn’t sure about what had happened to Jackson.

Ruth came in to say goodbye as she’s going for good to Aussie with her dad. It made me sad to realise that we were going to be missing such a brilliant student for the following year as a prefect and possible Head girl but now it was too late.

“Take good care of yourself, ya hear now?”

Ruth smiled and waved before leaving the classroom and the school for ever. I attended my last English department meeting for the year and didn’t think that Mr Sommers was too hot on my popularity with the students and I was also not too happy with my timetable for next year especially since I didn’t know if I really wanted to be there for another season. I wasn’t looking forward to the Pacific development day either that had been planned for the following week. I just could not wait for the holidays to begin. Roll on last day.

With only two more days to go before the end of my first year English teacher career, I reflected on how I sure had come a long way since dropping off my CV but I thought about how my parents said to appreciate the fact that I had been successful in my endeavours and now it was my time to help other students to make it through too. Although, in the back of my mind I keep thinking about how some tall, dark, handsome, caring and loving guy would come and sweep me off my feet. I pray – I wish! Looking how next year I’ll be 27 and still single. That’s okay but I never dreamed as a youngster that I’d not be married, where is he?

My first real day of the holidays and Sima has come over to visit. She's finally keeping her promise about taking me for a squash game.

"Don't worry, I'm gonna take it easy on you. Just in case I squash you."

Sima is still a hard case but I never let her have the last word.

"Not unless I squash you first."

We laugh and pick up our pizza.

"So whadduh ya think about teaching now that you're no longer a first year teacher?" I ask Sima.

"Well, I think that now I'll probably take over Rambo as HOD and then work my way up to Principal George's position as principal and then retire."

She's looking at me and we're laughing and cracking up as usual.

"And what about you? you still thinkin of going back to Uni and finishing that PhD off, leaving me all by my lonesome?"

She pretends to look sad like she's gonna cry.

"Well I guess that I've got no choice, because I'm still waiting for my knight in shining armour to come rescue me and then we'd ride off into the sunset. So I think you and the rest of the school are gonna be stuck with me for at least another year whether you like it or not."

We're cracking up again.

"So what kinda mischief will you get into next year?" Sima asks.

"Now, that's for me to know that the rest of the school to find out," I reply.

## **Ben**

It's a new day. I get up and remember the night before although it seems a bit blurred. I go out and see him hammering away under the bonnet. I've got my usual pile of

papers waitin for me to drop off to mail boxes. I look at the Christmas card that Miss T gave me, the Art trophy, the certificates that are now reminders of the things that I've achieved this year. It means a lot to me. Then I think of Scot. I pick up my three finished paintings that I promised for his dad and put them under my arm. I've got some unfinished business to attend to and some explaining to do and out the door I go.



## **Glossary**

of Samoan words

<b>aiga</b>	family, related, home
<b>ie faitaga</b>	a formal skirt worn by men for formal occasions
<b>ofisa</b>	office
<b>faalavelave</b>	important event
<b>faaSamoa</b>	custom, way of life, language
<b>matai</b>	titled family head
<b>measina</b>	fine mat, family valuables
<b>palagi</b>	Someone of European descent
<b>sefe ipu</b>	cabinet for crockery