

What would it have been like ...?

A short story by Hemi Rau

The crying of the people could be heard afar. They had come from everywhere. Many travelled throughout the night. Others had arrived two, maybe three days ago. They had all come for the same reason — to grieve a man they loved.

The early morning sunlight began to brighten as the sun rose higher into the sky. The people began to awaken from their sleep — for some it would be their last — on the floor of the wharepuni. The cold damp mist surrounding the marae was slowly lifting as if it was grasping on to something, reluctant to release it, but slowly it was slipping away.

The chatter and laughing from the marae kitchens could be heard across the marae. They were not cries of enjoyment, rather cries of bereavement hidden behind their laughter. All trying to comfort one another before the big moment.

Movement inside the wharepuni was now busy. People cleared away their sleeping facilities as others cleared away the sleeping crust in their eyes, only to reveal swollen eyes and redness around the pupils. Others did not sleep at all, they had stayed awake all night as they found it difficult to sleep.

Their own power of guilt was too strong to resist. It would be the last time they would see the bereaved so it was necessary they should stay awake with him, to make themselves feel they were not pushing him into the other world, but were helping him on his way. We would all in time to come, meet him there. It was just a fact that he was leaving sooner.

The day was becoming older as the sun now sat high above the clouds. The mist had cleared and all the dining preparations had been prepared. The time had come for the funeral service to commence.

The wailing from the people began to sound clearer. Many were in tears as others tried to comfort them on their shoulder. The closer the service came to the end, the mourning from the people became louder. The close relatives began to go into a deep fit, resisting the others' comforting actions. It was sad to see so many cry.

How much love the people felt for him was now to be seen.

Tears began to trickle down my eyes. I did not know how they started, but maybe I realised that all this was not a dream but more of a reality. It was up to this moment that I realised what this whole thing was about. I was confused, and my confusion was reflected in my action to others. Maybe they were surprised at my actions, but the one I surprised most, was myself. I tried to tell myself that all this was just a dream. I refused to accept the plain facts,

that this was definitely not a dream, but a reality.

The time had come for the service to be taken to the cemetery. The people gathered around the body, to take a last look. Some glanced at him for awhile, others refused to hurt themselves more by allowing their memory to bring back the happy moments they had with him.

Sitting next to him, I saw many faces standing. They were faces of sadness and distress. Some were smiling, for they knew that the discomfort and pain he once felt was now gone. May your soul rest in peace. I could see he symbolized something to them. But what did he symbolize to me?

I was barely past my seventh birthday when he died, so I didn't feel the full effect of his life on me. But I remembered these things. To me he was kind, gentle and his touch had a feeling of love and care. He wanted me to grow up just like him. Hold your head well upon your shoulders, show respect and care for others, be educated; not from the Pakeha books but from your own heart. Don't lose your Maori heritage or maoritanga. Remember you are a Maori; you were born a Maori, a Maori you will die. Let your heart lead you into the future and not anyone else. Love your people as they love you. If someone is in financial difficulties, give to them your last cent, as he would. Your house is their house. Be honest to yourself and be honest to others.

I sat close to someone I love, as the lid of the coffin came down. We embraced each other closer. Words were ringing in my mind now. Who is he? What did he symbolize?

To me, I will love and idolize him for the rest of my life. To me, he was my father.

I was awakened by a strong nudge. I opened my eyes to see it was my mother, telling me it was time for school. I glanced above me to the calendar.

It was coming near to May 7. It would be near on nine years since dad had passed on, and where was I now, lying in bed, getting ready for school.

My mind began to wonder. What would it have been like, if he was still alive? I know many things wouldn't have happened. My life and mum's life would have been completely different. I began to imagine many things. I could see a vision of dad's face, smiling, as I tell him about our rugby team's success, or even the results of my recent School Certificate exams. But all this is a dream and not a reality. I'm afraid, I admit to myself, that a dream it will stay. Forever.

Jackets hide no scars

By Haare Williams

They bear patches
on their jackets
hiding scars and wounds
sprouting their own
accord of direction
and order

How do we prosecute
those already grieved
And how do we fine
those lost in the streets
of no direction

How do we heal
those slashed
in the flesh
when they are
slashed in spirit

To a fish in the sea
To a bird in the sky
To a deer in the forest
a man in their domain
is an intruder and
a vagrant

How do we remove
the chains
that bound flight
linked in outrage
And what happens
when we stumble
into the chains
of the real leaders
up front
when thirst and hunger
choke the life
of courtesy

Where is the
sure direction
when brother is exiled
from brother and whanau

Gone
is the steady
roar of the sea
The echoes of the hills
The voices of elders
invoking the ancestors
and rebuking the young
The tracks that cling
to the hillside
From whence
barefooted
they walked
and rode away
on their bikes

Gone

The physician
who healed from within
with his remedy
of trust and understanding
of aroha
has gone

Their jackets
hide scars
no more