The phone rang at work. It was Dad, ringing me in Wellington from Waituhi, my whanau.¹

'Can you take a week off work?' he asked.

'But Dad!' I answered. 'If I take any more time off, my boss'll go crazy!'

'It's your Nani Tama,' Dad said. 'He wants you up here, son.'

'What for now?' I asked.

'Here, you ask him,' Dad said.

The phone went silent, but I could hear Dad saying to Nani Tama, 'Old man, you're just trouble to him.'

Then Nani Tama's voice called to me.

'Is that you, mokopuna?²'

'Yes, Nani,' I sighed. 'I'm here.'

'I need you, mokopuna. I need you.'

And when I heard his soft voice repeating those words, I knew I would have to go to him.

'All right, Nani.'

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¹ birthplace
² grandfather
³ grandson
'I need you to help me. The work is almost finished now, mokopuna. The whakapapa is almost done. But I must go to Murupara to finish it. I want you as my driver, not the other fellows. Too fast for me, ay.'

'Don't you worry, Nani. I'll come.'

I went in to see the boss.

He took one look at my face and said, 'Not again!'

'I'm sorry,' I said. 'My grandfather wants me. So I have to go, I just have to.'

For some time now, Nani Tama had been busy. After the whakapapa, the genealogy of the village, was destroyed, he began to write it all down again.

Before this, the whakapapa had been in Nani Tama's old house. It was written in large books and kept in a special cupboard. But then came the night of the fire, the fire that ran through the house and destroyed our past. Everything that we loved was lost: the coats made of feathers, the silver sports cups, the piupius, the special clothing worn for formal dances, everything except the piece of greenstone, as softly green as the river from where it had come.

In one night, all gone. And Nani Tama, so Dad told me, had gone crazy, looking at the fire and crying out the name of his dead wife, 'Miro! Miro!'

It was a sad time for everyone, but most of all for Nani Tama. He went to stay with his daughter, my Auntie Hiraina, not talking to anyone, trying to find a way out from the ashes of the past.

Much later, he had found that way.

'I need a good pen,' he said one morning. 'I need some books to write in. Hurry, I may not have much time.'

He began to write the village genealogy again, to join the past to the present once more. And the village went quiet and listened to his chanting, as he sang the names of the ancestors. Along the lines of the genealogy his voice travelled, searching back, always further back to the first canoes, back across the centuries, joining the past to the present.
His long years of training in whakapapa helped him greatly. His memory was like a sharp knife, cutting deep lines into soft wood, finding forgotten routes into the past. And as he chanted, he wrote down the names. Slowly. Carefully. At times, he was almost angry with himself at his slowness.

'The memory is working well,' he used to say helplessly, 'but the hands are old and cannot write fast enough.'

So my cousin Timi was chosen to help him. As Nani chanted, Timi wrote down the names.

There were some lines in the genealogy that were difficult to remember. Often Nani Tama's voice suddenly stopped in the middle of a chant. Then the village used to wait in worried silence, wait until, at last, the next name burst out of Nani’s mouth. Then the village used to sigh: 'Aaaah, the old man, he remembers...'

It took Nani Tama almost a year to write as much as he remembered of the whakapapa. During the next year, he checked his work, angry when he found a mistake or a line of missing names.

And sometimes while he worked he used to shout:

'E hara te wa hei haere maku. E hara! I cannot go yet. Not yet.'

He was talking to somebody - but there was nobody there.

Now the old man wanted me back home. He wanted me to drive him to Murupara. The gathering of the whakapapa was almost done, but it needed one more thing to give our past back to us.

'They don't want him to go,' Dad told me. 'Your Nani Tama, he's a sick man. Your Auntie Hiraina says he mustn't do any travelling anywhere.'

We were on our way to Waituhi from the railway station where Dad had met me. Nani Tama wanted to start for Murupara immediately: There was not much time left, he said.

'How sick is he, Dad?' I asked.

Dad did not answer me, but I saw for myself when we arrived at Auntie Hiraina's place.

'Look here, Nani,' I said, 'I'm not taking you nowhere. You hear? You could conk out on
me, Nani, and I don't want that to happen.'

He was sitting on the edge of the bed, and he was dressed to go. It was a shock to see him; he was so thin and his skin seemed so grey.

'You must take me, mokopuna,' he whispered. 'We leave now.'

'And who's going to give you your injections?' shouted Auntie Hiraina. 'You make me wild,' Dad!

Nani Tama looked at each of us - Dad, Auntie Hiraina, my cousin Timi, and myself. His eyes were angry.

'You fellows want me to die here in this room? Looking at these four walls? When the whakapapa is not yet finished? Ay, Hiraina? Ay?'

Auntie Hiraina began to cry.

I sighed and touched Nani Tama's face.

'All right, old man,' I said. 'You drive me crazy, you really do. But if you can walk to the door by yourself, without help, I'll take you to Murupara.'

The old man held on tightly to the side of the bed and cried out as he stood up. Every slow, painful step hurt him. But he did it.

'You're really hard on me, mokopuna,' he sighed.

I picked him up and carried him to the car. Timi arranged the blankets around him. At the last moment, Auntie Hiraina appeared in her coat, with a small black bag in her hands.

'Well, someone has to give him his injections,' she said.

I started the car.

'Drive carefully, son,' Dad said. 'And bring our grandfather back to us soon.'

We travelled all that night, silent most of the time, listening to Nani Tama chanting in the darkness. It was strange to hear him but wonderful too. From time to time, he burst into a waiata, which he had taught Auntie Hiraina. Together they sang, lifting up their voices to send the song flying like a bird through the sky.

We stopped to give Nani his injections, and later to buy some

6 very angry

7 song
kai\(^8\), and just before midday, we arrived at Murupara. A small place. Quiet. Not many people around.

'Who have we come to see, Nani?' I asked.

He looked straight in front of him, unsure.

'Where do we go now?' I asked again.

He did not reply, but he was searching inside himself, staring at the small houses as we drove slowly along the road. Then, at a street corner, he told us to turn. We came to a house with an open door. An old man stood there, waiting.

'We are here, mokopuna.'

I stopped the car. The old man came to meet us. He smiled and gently welcomed Nani Tama.

'I have been waiting all night for you. I did not think you would come so late...'

In his eyes I saw the message, 'We must hurry.' We carried Nani Tama into the house.

Now that day seems like a dream to me. I remember the two old men sitting at the kitchen table, and the soft sounds of the Māori words as they talked. The noise of the pen as my cousin Timi wrote down the names that Nani Tama repeated to him, all through the quiet afternoon and into the evening. And always the work, the gathering of the whakapapa. And the strange feeling that there were other people in the room, people from the past, looking over the shoulders of the two old men, making sure that the work was correct.

Until it was finished. Until it was done.

'You got time for some kai?' the old man asked Nani.

Nani Tama did not answer and the old man understood.

'Haere\(^9\), friend,' he whispered.

Crying, they pressed noses to say goodbye, and Auntie Hiraina phoned Waituhi to say we were on our way home.

It was early morning and still dark when Waituhi appeared before us. All the lights were on at Auntie Hiraina's place and the village people were waiting for us.

\(^8\) food

\(^9\) Goodbye. Farewell.
'Huh?' Nani Tama said to them. 'What's wrong with you fellows!'

Many hands reached out to him. He was carried onto the verandah and made comfortable. Smiling, he lifted up the whakapapa and offered it to the village. And our hearts were full, because our grandfather had saved our past for us.

He smiled again, our Nani Tama. Then his smile became tired.

'Na kua tau te wa hei haerenga maku,' he sighed. 'At last, I may go now.'

And he closed his eyes.

'No, Dad!' Auntie Hiraina cried.

The sun burst across the hills.

- THE END -