

I WISH I COULD TELL YOU

Beth Awatere

It plays out in my head like a wind up film
On which nobody has yet called a wrap
I would spill all my sordid fears
Shame enveloping us both in unglazed blue
The edges of your mouth would turn up,
One side higher than the other
 To tell me it would be alright
Then three weeks, maybe a month if i'm lucky
And my pain would be thrown back in my face
Replaying again, twisted and distorted
The once round edges, now sharp
Tearing at my memory of the event
Until it no longer matches the familiar symphony
that plays daily in my head

I wish I could tell you

But this is not an unpublished manuscript
there is nothing novel in this pain
I have had twenty three years to trace
The lines of your insincerity
13 years old, I ask why you love her more than me
You could make it a little less obvious, I beg
In retrospect, I think I was asking for very little



Three months later, the reason for my acting out has instead
become my inability to see how hard you are trying,

It isn't your fault

That I don't feel included

Why don't I know that yet

16 years old, a boy won't leave me alone

And even today, my bitter feminist rage

is reduced to the day I told you I didn't feel safe

I cannot show my anger at the depravity of the world

Because you will remind me

I'm only angry because of that day I told you

A boy won't leave me alone

It is time to move on

The actions of a boy I didn't really know

Will forever be the only reason

You can find for my rage

I wish I could tell you

Far worse has happened since

But I fold it up

And hold it close

until the only place I feel it is in my throat

It is difficult to talk around

So most of the time

I hold my furor, choking in silence

I will not give you another reason



21 years old, i'm autistic, mom

Why won't you listen

It's not that complicated

I promise

We can learn together

Two years later,

it's my fault I haven't educated you enough

you've gone 50 years trading stories with the world

Nobody ever raised an eyebrow

Or asked for accommodations

You can't be that autistic

You tell me,

I would have known by now

Who is this therapist anyway

The one who is rewriting your sense of self

That is a piece of me I will keep to myself

A safe space you don't get to warp until

I stop feeling joy in the toys on the shelf

And the sandbox

Where I place lines of soldier figurines

And my therapist asks me

What are you trying to protect yourself from

I wish I could tell you

Childhood stories spin the truth

It's you who I should turn to when I'm afraid

If I got lost, at the beach, in the park



Find a mother, you said
She will protect you
Maybe it was easier to like me then
When you didn't need to rewrite the narrative
To make me palatable to society

But now, I am more afraid
of how you will repaint my shame
into a tapestry of your faults
It has become a mantra that replays in my head
I will never treat my child like this

Followed closely by

I don't understand, I don't understand, I don't -

I'm crying too loudly

The neighbors will hear, you say

God forbid I feel my emotions

God forbid my vulnerability makes you uncomfortable

There are many things they say that God forbids

But living isn't one of them

Sometimes, when the distance between us is greater than

The walk from the kitchen

To the dining room

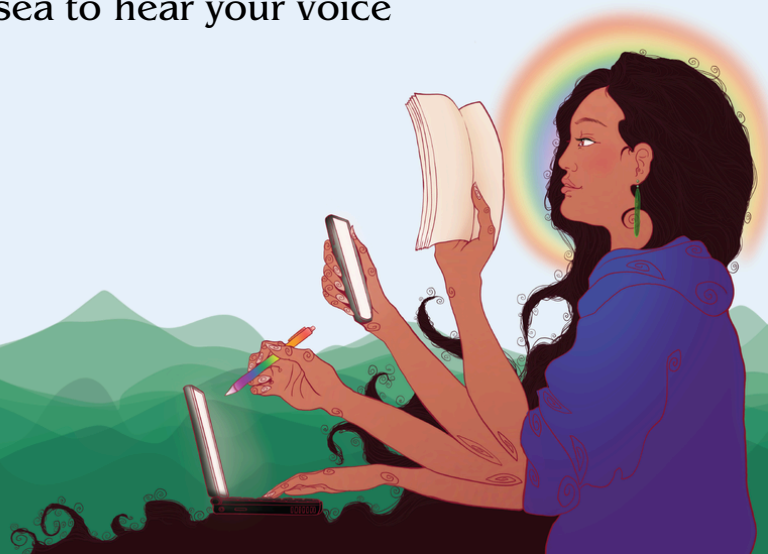
When I would have to cross the sea to hear your voice

It feels easier to be unafraid

And I start to wonder

Maybe it wouldn't be so bad

Maybe you've grown up



I didn't need a mother back then

This is a lie

A lie told by

Every daughter

In pain

I've learned how to survive

With the love I can scrape together

From my community

The wahine who listen and say

I'm sorry that happened

How you feel is valid

I've felt the same thing

It's okay to feel uncomfortable

Because we will always respond with kindness

It's in those moments

When you are an ocean away

That I think maybe it wouldn't be so bad

If I wish upon the North star

Maybe this time you will listen

But in the meantime I will make do

With the greatest gift you ever gave me

The realization that I get to choose

Whose words will have an impact

Which friend I will turn to for advice

The woman who offers me



Love the color of burnt pottery
Warm and rust-coloured
The Aunty I found through shared pain
Instead of shared blood
The marae I retreat to
When I feel my roots shredding
I get to choose

Yet,
Despite all this
There is a little girl inside me
She is missing two front teeth
Her hair isn't red yet
More of a strawberry blonde
She's so bossy
 You haven't told her to be quiet yet
She's a teachers pet
Who reads through her classes
Instead of listening
Indulged by teachers who know
She's reading to escape

That little girl
Looks out through my eyes
And wonders where her mother is



I wonder too
There is a litany of memories,
And shame,
And love,
And pain,

I wish I could tell you

