

FLYING

Written by

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Sculptures and paintings. The room of an artist. Murmur of waves, rattling of letters, of open books and magazines shifting in the circling air, the whispers of the restless curtains framing french windows open to the sea and sky.

The frame is drawn to the clear space between the twisting curtains, where it settles, framing sea and sky and sand; a canvas of cerulean, azure and ivory, the horizontals broken only by a single island, peaked, serrated and dark like a fossil shark's tooth.

A woman's voice, not young, middle-aged:

EMMA (V.O.)

I know this place as well as my own skin. Every line, every hue, day and night. The island, the headlands, the reefs, the sand at every tide, the shifts of light across land and sea. Always changing, always the same.

The frame moves back and turns, looking down at the woman asleep (or is she unconscious?). In the bed, EMMA SOMMERTON. Her age is hard to tell, because cancer has emaciated her face and aged her, but she is around 60. A fine-boned, symmetrical face suggesting of the striking looking woman she was. Medicines crowd the bedside table. A drip connects to her arm.

EMMA (V.O.)

And then there's me. This mask of skin and bone. This poor, broken thing.

DISSOLVE TO:

ARIEL PERSPECTIVE:

A car trails a fading ribbon of chalky dust through green hills rising like the backs of whales from the forested valleys. Ahead, the hills drop vertiginously to an arc of beach, bookended by volcanic bluffs. The Island sits on the edge of the ocean's blue dome far out in the bay.

Inside the car:

CHRIS SOMMERTON, mid 30s, with a sense of distracted, unhappy detachment around him, is driving. His daughter, JOSIE, 8 or 9 years old, dark hair framing a face dominated by intelligent almond-shaped eyes, sits next to him.

CHRIS
Quite a view, isn't it?

JOSIE
Which is grandma and grandad's house?

CHRIS
Just back from the beach near the far headland. Green roof.

Josie looks out over the town far below them with apprehension. Her father's mobile phone rings - she knows the ring tone and her face changes, opening up as if curtains have been pulled from a window.

JOSIE
It's mum.

She answers without asking for permission.

JOSIE (CONT'D)
(brightening)
Hey mum.

An odd expression crosses Chris's face, disguised almost as soon as it appears. Discomfort? Pain? Regret? There's some of all of those emotions in that moment.

JOSIE (CONT'D)
Good.
(listens)
Everything's fine.
(listens)
It's really pretty. Lots of islands. Not like Australia at all.
(listens)
We're nearly there.

CHRIS
Ten minutes.

JOSIE
(to her mother)
Dad says ten minutes...

She looks at her phone.

JOSIE (CONT'D)
She's gone.

CHRIS
Ok, so still no phone reception here. Some things never change.

He registers Josie's alarm.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

There's Skype and Messenger. Don't worry, you can still talk to Elise whenever you like once we're at the house.

3 EXT. A BEACHSIDE VILLAGE. DAY

3

They drive slowly through the village. No sidewalks, just green lawn to the edge of the road, oleanders flowering pink and red and white like garlanded fireworks, pohutukawas looming, dense with blood-scarlet buds. Neat, well maintained houses suggesting prosperous absentee owners. In the occupied houses, boats wait on front lawns, fishing rods cocked, lobster pots stacked. Others are being hosed down after the exertions of the morning next to rusted tractors.

Josie takes in this strange new world, not noticing how her father's face sets as he braces himself.

CHRIS

This is it.

He turns the car down a long driveway of the last beach front house, set into rainforest at the end of the road. The car comes to a halt, and for a moment, Chris just sits, looking at the place. The construction and design signal taste and affluence.

Chris's father JACK SOMMERTON, mid 60s, tall and lean with a hawkish face and a swept back mane of white hair, appears from the house. Josie sees her father hesitate, build himself up for the moment before he leaves the car.

She watches as the two men approach each other like strangers. An awkward handshake is as far as it goes.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

Josie, come and say hello to your grandfather.

Trying to disguise her trepidation, Josie joins them. Jack doesn't know what to do with his granddaughter. He seems about to bend to embrace her, but doesn't.

JACK

I suppose you don't remember me?

Josie can't, but softens the fact.

JOSIE

A little bit.

Jack smiles, but loss permeates everything about him.

JACK

Your grandmother's been looking forward to seeing you very much. She's asleep at the moment, but I'm sure she'll be awake soon.

4

INT. THE BEACH HOUSE. DAY

4

Josie and Chris follow Jack into the house. High ceilings, open and expansive with dark, polished timber floors. It is, all in all, a beautiful room, decorated with ceramics and small sculptural pieces. On the walls, prints and several large oil paintings.

But what captures Josie's attention is the blaze of ivory and blue flooding in from the front of the house, which she can now see opens onto deck at the very edge of the dunes, overlooking the beach.

Josie turns to her father, energised by the possibility of escape.

JOSIE

Can I go and look at the beach?

A momentary hesitation from Chris.

CHRIS

Stay right in front, ok? I want to be able to see you at all times.

She exits. Chris watches her run down the lawn and through the low dunes towards the beach.

JACK

You're in your old room. Josie's in the spare room next to you. Would like a coffee, cold drink..?

CHRIS

No thanks. I'm fine. We stopped for lunch at Manganui. Can I go in? I know she's asleep, but I'd just like see her.

JACK

Yeah, sure. She comes and goes. She might be awake by now.

There is a wariness, a formality in their interaction but mostly what manifests is an absence of warmth.

Chris starts to turn for the hallway.

CHRIS

You should have told us sooner.

Jack's reaction suggests that this has been discussed before.

JACK

Chris, we've talked about this. It was what Emma wanted. I couldn't go against that.

5 EXT. COASTAL LANDSCAPE. DAY

5

The frame moves above and between the twisting limbs of the pohutukawas hanging horizontally from the cliffs above the ocean. The first vermillion flowers are opening to enthusiastic bees. The throb of cicadas pulses through the bright air.

EMMA (V.O.)

A summer song of heat and salt. If I could disappear into a dream like this, let my thought separate like vapour in the sunlight.

The frame moves out now high over the bay.

EMMA (V.O.)

Without thought, without memory. Forever in that moment.

The frame finds Josie on the sand, standing lost in the pleasure of the white foam surging around the ankles.

EMMA OS

But not yet. There are still things unfinished.

DISSOLVE TO:

6 INT. EMMA'S BEDROOM. DAY

6

The beach scene fades slowly as the bedroom assembles itself around Emma. She opens her eyes to take in the room, her son framed against blue by the white curtains.

EMMA

Chris.

Chris turns and fashions a smile. He moves to the bed, leans down and takes his mother's frail body in his arms, a bundle of sticks now, no more. She holds him with a fierceness that belies the weakness of her frame.

EMMA (CONT'D)

Oh it's so good to see you.

CHRIS

I came as soon as I could.

She releases him, exhausted from the effort.

CHRIS (CONT'D)
I wish I'd known earlier.

EMMA
It wouldn't changed anything.

CHRIS
I would have been here.

EMMA
And do what? The last thing I
wanted was a house full of people
mourning me. Now is when I need to
see you.

CHRIS
I'll go and get Josie.

She stops him at the door with her voice.

EMMA
Chris.

He pauses and half turns.

EMMA (CONT'D)
It was my decision, not Jack's.
Mine.

CHRIS
Yeah. I know.

He leaves the room.

7 EXT. THE BEACH. DAY

7

Josie collects shells from the hard, flat low tide sand. Her
father's voice, calling.

CHRIS
Josie.

She ignores him, directing her interest to the shell she has
just picked up. He approaches, unimpressed.

CHRIS (CONT'D)
Josie, you must have heard me
calling.

JOSIE
No.

CHRIS
Your grandmother's awake.

Josie's been dreading this moment. She holds onto her shells like talismen as they head in silence for the house. Her father rests an awkwardly reassuring hand on her shoulder.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

I know this is hard, but it'll be fine.

But his attempt at reassurance doesn't change Josie's feelings of trepidation.

8 INT. EMMA'S BEDROOM. DAY

8

Jack enters.

JACK

Everything ok, Em?

EMMA

Can you help me sit up higher?

As he leans he forward to rearrange her supporting pillows, the pain hits Emma hard.

JACK

What's the matter?

EMMA

Nothing. It'll be fine.

But it obviously isn't.

JACK

Do you need the ordine?

Emma shakes her head, her words coming hard against the pain.

EMMA

No. It'll pass. I want to be here. I'm not here while I'm full of morphine.

Jack carefully lies her back down. She closes her eyes and tries to control her breathing.

The door opens and Chris guides Josie into the room. Josie takes it all in: the paintings on the walls. The vases of flowers. The thinness of her grandmother. Her grandfather sitting by the bed, the personification of loss. The medicine by the bed. The expectation.

Emma's smile is as fragile as a sand worn shell.

EMMA (CONT'D)

Here she is. My word, haven't you grown up?

Chris's hand is on Josie's shoulder.

CHRIS

Give your grandmother a hug.

Josie leans into an uncomfortable embrace. Chris brings up a chair so she can sit next to Emma.

EMMA

Its so wonderful to see you.
And what do you think of our beach?

Josie is struggling. She can feel the weight of expectation in the room. Everyone watching her.

JOSIE

Good.

JOSIE (CONT'D)

I expect it must look very empty
compared to a Sydney beach.

Josie forces an unsuccessful smile.

JOSIE (CONT'D)

Mm hm.

Emma can see how difficult her granddaughter is finding the situation.

EMMA

I've been saving something for you.

She reaches into a carved wooden jewelry box next to her, and extracts an intricate brooch, a stylised golden butterfly. The most beautiful object Josie has ever seen. She can only stare, speechless.

EMMA (CONT'D)

Go on, take it. It's yours.

Josie smiles, still lost in wonder, and accepts it.

JOSIE

Thank you.

EMMA

It belonged to my great
grandmother, and then my
grandmother, who gave it to me when
I was your age. So it's only right
that now it goes to you. She told
me that it's Celtic and very, very
old.

JOSIE

It's beautiful.

EMMA

The Celts thought the butterfly could pass into the Otherworld like a soul. They called it Tir na nOg, land of the young. Do you know who the Celts were?

Josie nods.

JOSIE

They fought the Romans.

EMMA

They did indeed. Before the Romans, most of Europe belonged to the Celts.

JOSIE

Is it really that old?

EMMA

My grandmother always said it was. So take good care of it.

JOSIE

I will.
(looks up)
Thank you, grandma.

Emma's pain is winning now. Jack, ever watchful, reads the signs.

JACK

We'd better let your grandmother rest now.

Chris moves to Josie.

CHRIS

Come on, honey. You can talk to your grandmother again later.

The moment is broken, and Josie's grandmother is once again someone dying in a bed.

Jack moves to the table and measures out the ordine as Chris ushers Josie out of the room. He helps Emma drink it. She reacts against the bitterness.

JACK

There you go. It'll stop now.

EMMA

I wish I could have lasted longer.

She lies back and waits, her breathing steady as the morphine takes hold. The room grows further away, framed by darkness.

EMMA (V.O.)
 (grimly)
 Not yet. You will not have me yet.

Black.

9 INT. KITCHEN/DINING AREA. DUSK

9

Josie, Jack and Chris sit at the table, eating some kind of primordially discombobulated casserole. Grey brownish and viscous, it doesn't look appealing and clearly Josie isn't finding it so.

CHRIS
 What's time's Ali flying in tomorrow?

JACK
 Flight's scheduled to arrive at ten.

CHRIS
 So you want me to pick her up?

JACK
 If you wouldn't mind. I should stay here.

An alarm goes off on Chris's phone.

CHRIS
 Sorry everyone, but I have a Skype scheduled for seven.

He takes his plate through to the kitchen.

JACK
 Odd time.

CHRIS
 Midday in LA. Leave me some cleaning up.

And he's gone outside with his laptop, leaving Jack and Josie alone.

JACK
 You want to help me clear up.

JOSIE
 Sure.

As they clear the table into the dishwasher:

JACK
 (to Josie)
 I hear you're a talented artist.

Josie is acutely uncomfortable with this second hand praise.

JOSIE
I like painting.

JACK
You know your grandmother was an
artist.
(catches himself)
Is an artist.

JOSIE
Dad told me. He said she was
famous.

JACK
She is. Do you see those two
paintings?

He indicates the two large expressionist oils on the wall.

JACK (CONT'D)
Those are Emma's. When we met, she
was at art school. I was just
starting out as a lawyer. Those
were the first of her paintings
that I saw. I bought them at an
exhibition.

For this first time, he smiles, remembering.

JACK (CONT'D)
I actually bought them simply to
have an excuse to meet Emma. She
was very annoyed when she found
out. You see, I was a bit of a
philistine back then. I came from a
home where the only thing on the
wall was a calendar and a form
guide.

He brings himself out of the memory, and starts to clear the
table.

JACK (CONT'D)
Anyway, she forgave me and I
learned about art. That beautiful
young woman in the painting on the
left? That's your grandmother at
twenty four.

And Josie is transfixed by the painting of a beautiful young
woman who was once her grandmother now dying in the room down
the hallway.

10 EXT. THE FRONT DECK. NIGHT

10

The bay in a moonless night. The waves breaking in plumes of white, catching the lights from the house. The island a dark silhouette against a star strewn sky. The sound of the surf mixes with night sounds of crickets and frog calls.

EMMA (V.O.)

Another dream. I can feel the dark feathers of the breeze on my face, smell and taste the moist salt in the air.

The darkness begins to take a form. Dark liquid, moving. A sound, building.

EMMA (V.O.)

The sea, the sea, keeper of secrets. What you will you show me now?

11 EXT. A DINGY IN THE OPEN OCEAN. NIGHT

11

A hand reaches down into frame. A child's hand. The sound of an outboard engine. The water rushes around the hand like a river, trailing a wake of tiny, swirling suns in black space. A child's laughter.

Reveal YOUNG EMMA as a child, 8 or 9, fair hair catching the moonlight as the dinghy pushes through the black water. She watches the water, entranced. A man sits at the tiller - her father, TOM, lean and wiry, around 40. A good humoured face that's seen a lot of sun. Sharp, intelligent eyes.

The boat cuts across the dark sea. Young Emma looks up to the herring bone wake illuminating the dark water in its phosphorescent passage.

EMMA (V.O.)

Oh yes, I remember this night. The ocean was full of lights. Phosphorus, you said. A liquid universe of microscopic stars.

TOM

Remember this, Em. You'll probably never see it again.

Emma trails her in the starry water.

YOUNG EMMA

I never did see it again. But I didn't forget.

She looks up at her father.

YOUNG EMMA (CONT'D)
I've missed you so much.

TOM
Just as well I'm here then.

Emma puts her hand back in the water.

YOUNG EMMA
I'm sorry.

TOM
For what?

YOUNG EMMA
The way I took myself away from
you.

TOM
Don't regret, Em. That's what
ghosts really are. All the things
we might have done.

Emma watches the stars trail from her fingers.

YOUNG EMMA
So many ghosts...

And the constellations of stars trail from each of Emma's
fingers in the black water, the lights fading, vanishing.

12 INT. JOSIE'S ROOM - DAY 12

Josie wakes to the sound of surf, a rumbling, deep throated
roar very different to the softness of the previous evening.
She looks out through the window to find the ocean
transformed. Surging plains of white foam line the beach,
running to the falling mountain ranges of the new swell.

The house is completely quiet. She quickly pulls on her
clothes, pins her new butterfly brooch, and heads outside.

13 EXT. THE BEACH - DAY 13

Drifting salt mist draws a translucent white veil across the
steep volcanic bluffs bracketing the beach. The air ripples
with the sound of surf.

The sole other inhabitant of this empty new world of rolling
horizons is a lone surf fisherman a short distance further
down the beach, his fishing rod cutting a swinging arc
through the bleached light as he casts into the waves.

Foam sweeps in around Josie's ankles, painting her footsteps
smooth again, stranded bundles of kelp shining like varnished
wood.

Twenty metres down the beach, a Black-back gull rises up vertically and deliberately drops something large down on the sand. It drops down, picks it up and does it again.

Curious, Josie approaches. The bird grudgingly flies off a short distance, where it waits, disgruntled. A shellfish lies on the sand, broken open into a white butterfly with a an abdomen of orange flesh. Each wing is nearly as big as her hand.

The fisherman's dog, rangy and black, built for running, bounds up and drops a stick at her feet. The dog backs away, waiting, ready to explode into a sprint, willing the stick into Josie's hand.

A voice calls her back in a discernible American accent.

ROB (O.S.)

Milly! Come back here! Come on.
Here.

The dog momentarily looks back towards him, but, faced with the choice between master and stick, chooses the stick. The fisherman, ROB TALBOT, has no choice but to come and fetch her, leaving his fishing rod embedded in the sand. Tall, tanned and wiry, with a beard and mop of unruly hair, he's about the same age as Josie's father, maybe a little older. He has an open, friendly face, but Josie has been well schooled to beware of strangers.

ROB (CONT'D)

Sorry about this. Don't throw the stick for her. If you do, she'll never leave you alone. I'm trying to train her out of this. It's working great, as you can see.

He looks down at the shellfish with interest.

ROB (CONT'D)

Don't see those very often.

Josie's curiosity wins over caution.

JOSIE

What is it?

ROB

Toheroa. Used to be a lot of them, but the fishing boats catch too much snapper and the snapper eat the crabs which eat young toheroa, so there's too many crabs, which means the toheroa are on the way out. Wheels within wheels.

He picks up the shellfish.

ROB (CONT'D)

Once upon a time there were so many of them they used to send em off around the world in cans.

JOSIE

To eat?

ROB

Yeah. I've tried em. Didn't think much of them. Tough and sandy. Anyway, they're protected now. Unless you're a bird. Shall we give the blackie back his lunch?

Josie nods. Rob tosses the broken shellfish back towards the gull, which immediately snatches it up and flies away down the beach.

ROB (CONT'D)

You here on holiday?

Josie doesn't know how to answer.

JOSIE

We're here to see my grandma.

Rob looks at the butterfly brooch and realises.

ROB

Oh ok. Would I be right in guessing you're Josie?

JOSIE

How do you know that?

ROB

Emma's a friend of mine. She told me you were coming. I'm Rob.

Behind the American, suddenly, a movement: the fishing rod, taking on a life of its own.

JOSIE

Your fishing rod!

Rob turns to see the rod skittering across the sand into the water. He sprints after it through the water, sending sheets of spray flying in all directions, only settling the pursuit with an undignified dive.

Josie runs across to him as he backs out of the water and onto the wet sand, water dripping from his beard.

ROB

Thanks Josie. I owe you one.

He strikes the rod hard back over his head and reels fast as he brings it back down.

ROB (CONT'D)

Man, we really got something here.

JOSIE

What do you think it is?

ROB

Maybe a big kahawai, though its running a bit hard for that. Maybe a kingfish. You like kingfish?

JOSIE

Yeah. Kingfish is mum's favourite.

ROB

Looks like your lucky day, then.

Fifty metres away, a flash of silver and blue twists spinning into the air before falling back into the surf.

JOSIE

I see it!

ROB pulls back and reels hard.

ROB

Not a kingfish. Wrong shape.

Another flash, closer, then another; a twisting blade of light in the shallows, a tail thrashing the surface, and Rob brings the fish skittering and pirouetting onto the sand.

Josie looks at the beautiful fish beating futilely on the sand and can't help but feel a twist of regret.

ROB (CONT'D)

Well I'll be. It's a yellow fin.

(to Josie, explains)

A tuna. Dunno what its doing in here. Really is our lucky day.

Josie stands looking down on the defeated fish, lying on the sand, gasping, the gills flowering red in the unfamiliar air. The sheen on its skin, the great shining eye.

A knife appears in Rob's hand and in a swift, sure arc he drives the slender blade in just behind the fish's eye. A crackling sound as the wafers of bone give way to the point of the knife, and the fish goes bolt rigid for a moment, straining with every fibre of its being.

Then its gone, like a light has been switched off. The knife withdraws and blood wells up in the wound, red as carnations. Down into the great eye it runs now, circling the rim, red on black like the corona of an eclipse.

JOSIE
 (uncertainly)
 Is it dead now?

Rob looks at Josie's face and realises his unthinking callousness.

ROB
 (uncomfortably)
 Yeah, its dead. You gotta kill em straight away otherwise they get so hot from flopping around that the meat actually cooks on em. See, in the ocean the water keeps them cool.
 (a beat)
 Plus of course you shouldn't let them suffer. It's kinder to kill em straight away.

Josie stares at that black eye and the fish that wasn't there any more.

ROB (CONT'D)
 You like tuna?

JOSIE
 (distractedly)
 I've only ever had it in tins.

She reaches out and runs a finger along its satin flank. The American smiles, trying to restore some lightness to the conversation.

ROB
 Well, I'll tell ya, there's nothing like fresh tuna. How about I cut you off a some steaks for you to take home?

JOSIE
 (brightens)
 Really?

ROB
 Sure. Like I said, I owe you.

EMMAS POV:

Above the scene, looking down, as Rob cleans the fish. A slit the length of the belly, a precise cut each side of the pectoral fins, then deep down through the spine.

CLOSE IN on Josie holding the eye of the fish in her gaze.

EMMA (V.O.)

To look in the eye of the fish,
seeing the sky then seeing nothing.
For all of us, first death. And a
last.

Rob pulls and the head separates from the body, taking the entrails with it, all pinks and browns and purples shining smooth on the sand. Close in on Josie again, watching, fascinated and astonished.

EMMA (V.O.)

All these hidden, unexpected
things. Such is the apparatus that
drives us.

Rob throws the head and entrails to the gulls, and they fall upon the wreckage of the fish in a shrieking whirlwind of white wings and vermilion beaks.

EMMA (V.O.)

Already the crabs and the
sandhoppers are burrowing at the
soft flesh from the sand below.
After the crabs have finished the
sea snails will polish the ribs,
the spine, the fragile gothic
architecture of the skull, to
shining alabaster; then finally the
waves, patiently grinding the bones
to sand, building the beach grain
by grain.

A child's feet on the sand.

EMMA (V.O.)

Grain by grain under my feet.
Sharper, more real than a memory.

Now the frame is rising, turning up towards the sun.

EMMA (V.O.)

Give me this dream, not the
darkness. Let me disappear into the
sun.

Her own voice answers, but it's different. Hard.
Unforgiving, cold, with an edge of mockery.

EMMA (V.O.)

Like Icarus?

EMMA (V.O.)

No, not like Icarus.

EMMA (V.O.)

Or perhaps like the butterflies the
Celts thought were the restless
ghosts of dead children? Or had you
forgotten that?

14 INT. THE BEACH HOUSE - DAY

14

Josie stands facing her father, holding a plastic bag
containing the tuna.

JOSIE

But he's a friend of grandma's.

CHRIS

I don't care who he is. You *do not*
just disappear without asking, and
you *do not* talk to people you don't
know.

JOSIE

(with a weary sigh)
Yes dad.

CHRIS

Don't use that tone with me. I mean
it.

JOSIE

Yes, dad.

Her tone says she's not at all sorry. They both know it, but
Josie can see her father lacks the will to carry it on.

CHRIS

Have you had breakfast?

Josie takes her unappreciated catch to the fridge.

JOSIE

(flatly)
Yes thanks.

CHRIS

Can I see?

But the joy has been lost for Josie. She holds out the bag.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

Wow. Ok. So it's really yellowfin?

JOSIE

(flatly)
That was what Rob said. And it had
yellow fins.

CHRIS

Ok. Well I guess we've got dinner.

Josie ignores his attempts to lighten things up, stowing the bag in the fridge. Jack appears behind them, coming from Emma's bedroom.

JACK

Josie, Emma's awake. She's asked if she can see you.

15

INT. EMMA'S BEDROOM. DAY

15

Emma waits, watching the sky through the window. She turns at the sound of Josie pausing in the doorway. A moment as Emma gathers her energy, working to conceal this from Josie.

EMMA

Hullo darling. How are you this morning?

Josie remains uncomfortably in the doorway, not sure where her eyes should rest.

JOSIE

Good thanks, grandma. How are you?

She is immediately aware of the inappropriateness of the question and hovers, uncertain as to what to do next. Emma smiles.

EMMA

I'm fine thank you. How could I not be on such a beautiful day.

She looks back out the windows.

EMMA (CONT'D)

I was just watching the clouds. I never grow tired of watching clouds. The more I watch them the more beautiful they become.

She turns her attention back to Josie.

EMMA (CONT'D)

Come in. Sit next me. It's good to be able to talk with just the two of us.

Josie enters the room and sits tensely on one of the chairs next to the bed, facing the windows. Now she notices the photos on the table next to Emma. One of them is her, taken at her last birthday party. Nine candles and a cake like a butterfly.

The other photo shows a family at the beach, a man, a woman and a boy with football who looks the same age as her, and a girl, younger. Everyone is brown as roasted cashews and smiling.

EMMA (CONT'D)
Recognise the boy with the ball?

Josie shakes her head.

EMMA (CONT'D)
That's your father. That's your aunt Ali next to him. And me and Jack, of course. That was here, before the house was built.

JOSIE
You were very pretty nana.

EMMA
Once upon a time.

The words are for herself. She comes back to Josie.

EMMA (CONT'D)
The brooch looks lovely on you.

JOSIE
Thank you. It's the most beautiful thing I've even been given.

EMMA
I should tell you a bit more about it. The frame's gold, and the red stones are garnets. The clear stones are zircons. The blue stone there in the middle is a sapphire.

JOSIE
Sapphires are my favourite stone.

EMMA
Why sapphires?

JOSIE
Because they're the colour of sea. The deep sea.

EMMA
Well, that's particularly appropriate, because it was given to my great grandmother by her father, who was a sea captain. He brought the brooch back from one of his trips back to England. On the dresser - you see that photograph?

Josie looks. There's a framed photo, quite small and faded black and white, of four masted barque in harbour, its sails hoisted on the booms.

EMMA (CONT'D)

That was his ship.

EMMA (CONT'D)

Really? So it was a sailing ship?

EMMA (CONT'D)

Yes it was. There were still sailing ships then. Amazing to think, isn't it?

(she smiles)

Your brooch sailed across the sea on a ship with flaxen sails.

The thought delights Josie. She looks down at the brooch with new appreciation.

EMMA (CONT'D)

Darling, listen, I want to have a good time while you're here. I know that must sound strange, but I'm so tired of sad people. I know they can't help it, but you see what I really need around me is happiness.

She opens a book and extracts a neatly folded piece of paper.

EMMA (CONT'D)

Which is why I made you a map of things to do around here. So you wouldn't be stranded in the house. Because it's such a lovely place, and I want you to actually see it.

Josie notices that her grandmother's hand is shaking as Josie takes the folded paper.

It opens to reveal an exquisitely drawn map. Everything is on it - the island out to sea, the beach, the house, forest - and in the forest a path leading to a clearing and a seat marked with a butterfly just like the brooch, and beyond that the path continues to a waterfall, and after the waterfall, the stream runs through the forest to the sea.

EMMA (CONT'D)

And if your father makes a fuss, you can tell him that I said that it's perfectly safe for you to explore using my map.

JOSIE

Thank you, grandma.

Her eyes rove over the map while Emma watches.

JOSIE (CONT'D)

You've put the island in. I've been wondering the island.

EMMA

It's the thing I love most about this place. Have you heard of the kakapo?

JOSIE

No.

EMMA

It's a giant green parrot that can't fly and comes out at night.

JOSIE

(laughs)
Really?

EMMA

Very precious. Only sixty left in the world. Some of them are on our island

JOSIE

Can you go and see them?

Emma has wait a moment to gather the strength to continue. Her voice is fading with each response.

EMMA

No. It's a special place just for the creatures who live there.

JOSIE

Dad told me there aren't any leeches or snakes or spiders in the forest here. Is that true?

EMMA

Absolutely true.

JOSIE

So you can go into the forest at night and nothing could hurt you?

EMMA

Absolutely.

She has to close her eyes now. Her voice shows her fatigue.

EMMA (CONT'D)

There's one more thing, Josie - the waterfall.

(MORE)

EMMA (CONT'D)

You'll see on the map that here's a cave behind it. It doesn't look like there's anything there, but don't be fooled. You slide in with your back to the rock.

(pause)

I'm sorry, darling. I have to rest. But you've got the map now. That's the important thing.

Emma closes her eyes. At the end of her bed, the room becomes the open sea, and the frame moves towards it until there is nothing but the shifting sea with the sun shafting spears of light into the dark infinity.

16

EXT. THE OPEN SEA. DAY

16

Reverse reveal 9-year-old Emma in (what will become) her signature blue dress (the frame looks back up through the surface of the water). Emma is looking down into the water, fishing rod in hand.

On the boat now. The same battered dinghy in the night scene. Emma looks towards her father.

EMMA 9 YEARS

I hoped you'd come again. I've missed you so much.

The skin furrows into deep, easy lines at the edges of his mouth and eyes.

TOM

Well, I'm here now.

EMMA 9 YEARS

Because I'm dying?

TOM

Because I love you.

Emma watches the water swaying against the silver skin of the boat.

EMMA 9 YEARS

Is this the drugs?

TOM

Does it matter?

Emma reaches over the side of the boat to touch the water, lifting a dripping finger to her tongue. But when the hand touches her tongue, it's the dying Emma that's there.

TOM (CONT'D)

Reckon we oughta go and look at the island some time. What do you think?

Emma turns her eyes out towards the smoky shape of the island.

EMMA

Are there kakapos there?

TOM

Don't see why not.

EMMA

All the time I've lived here, and I've never set foot on that island. I always meant to. You always think Another Day. Another day. All the days. Where can we live but in days.

Emma looks down into the water and there's nothing but the spears of light shafting down into the sea

And looking back up to the surface, there's no boat, no Emma young or old. Just the shifting of the fractured surface.

17

EXT. COASTAL LANDSCAPE. DAY

17

The car tracks back long the road coiling through the hills behind the bay, trailing twin scarves of dust behind it. Chris's attention is fixed on the road. Josie looks out of her window towards the island floating darkly on the horizon of bifurcated blue.

JOSIE

Dad?

CHRIS

Mm? What?

JOSIE

Why haven't been to see grandma before this?

A slight pause before Chris prevaricates.

CHRIS

We didn't know she was going to get sick, Josie. No one did.

And while this is true, Josie can tell it's not the truth.

18

EXT. TOWN GENERAL STORE. DAY

18

Town is a general store and a school and a disorder of do-it-yourself houses by a long sandy estuary.

Josie waits for her father in the dusty heat outside the shop. Around the petrol pumps, flowerbeds of swaying lavender bloom in purple profusion through a haze of bees. A tethered goat stares at her with dead eyed disinterest, chewing stoically the grass neatly clipped around it in the exact circumference of its chain.

In the estuary the tide has pulled the ocean back into cobalt veins in the biscuit coloured plane of sand. A small silver boat meanders upstream, the drone of its engine just audible over the bees and cicadas. Along the edges of the channels, scattered groups of figures bend over the sand, buckets next to them, collecting shellfish. She is so absorbed in the scene that she doesn't notice at first her father appears next to her with his bag of shopping.

CHRIS

Got you an ice cream.

He passes her a Magnum, condensation glistening like dew over the smooth, oily chocolate. He registers her hesitation.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

What's wrong?

JOSIE

Why doesn't grandma eat anything?

A hesitation before her father answers.

CHRIS

When you get that sick, your body can't process food anymore.

JOSIE

But everybody has to eat.

CHRIS

(softly)

She's dying, Josie. She's not dying because she can't eat. She's dying because she's got cancer.

Josie looks at her ice cream, the brightness and colour of it, the hard ice sheen starting to run to sticky liquid at the bottom in the sun.

Almost involuntarily she catches the drip on her tongue. And she tries imagine never this ever again.

19 EXT. THE BAY. DAY

19

Emma's vision POV. The frame glides over the red and green mosaic of pohutukawas arching out from the black volcanic cliffs.

EMMA (V.O.)

The land sings in the heat.
Cicadas, bees, flowers, the frozen
lava flows, all singing the song of
the sun. Pohutukawas arching arms
upwards and outwards impossibly
from vertiginous stone, gathering
light, harvesting heat in spreading
hands of leaves.

Time shifts to a flickering time lapse of the trees and the ocean to match Emma's words

EMMA (V.O.)

If I could hold still long enough
to let time slow to a drip, I could
watch their ancient dance through
the eyes of trees, in the time of
trees. And in the time of trees
watch the sandbars dance green and
gold through the shallows of a sea
moving in a flickering shimmer
between day and night, and night
and day. I would like to see these
things through the eyes of trees.
But not yet. Not yet.

The frame falls down, down into the sea.

20 INT. EMMA'S BEDROOM. DAY

20

And the sea becomes her bedroom. She wakes.

EMMA

(a whisper)

Not yet.

Jack looks up from his book.

JACK

Oh, you're awake.

EMMA

I'm so thirsty.

Jack rises from the chair and puts the glass of water to her lips, but Emma swallows only with great difficulty.

JACK

It's ok. Take it slowly.

EMMA

(snaps)

You don't have to tell me how to drink.

(catches herself)

I'm sorry.

JACK

Don't worry, Em. It's fine.

Chris and Josie appear in the doorway.

She musters a smile. But her attention is on Josie.

EMMA

How was town?

JOSIE

Good.

EMMA

Jack, could you get some ice cubes please?

JACK

Sure.

He leaves the room. Emma musters her energy, determined not to let this moment escape.

EMMA

(to Josie)

Tell me everything you saw.

JOSIE

It looked lovely. The tide was out. The water was like blue veins in the sand.

EMMA

(smiles)

The sand dries to that beautiful tawny gold. It always reminds me of a lion's skin.

JOSIE

And there was a boat. A silver boat. And people doing something. Bending over with buckets.

EMMA

Collecting cockles.

JOSIE

Cockles? Like in the nursery rhyme.

EMMA

That's right.

The pain hits her like an unseen fist as Jack reenters the room.

CHRIS
Mum? What is it?

Jack knows what to do. This time the dose of Ordine is ready to go.

JACK
It's alright. It'll be fine.

Josie watches with dismay.

EMMA
I'm sorry, Josie.

Jack helps her drink the Ordine.

CHRIS
(to Josie)
Come on, you can talk to grandma later.

21 INT. THE HALLWAY. DAY

21

JOSIE
Is grandma alright?

CHRIS
She's just getting a little bit of pain. Grandad's giving her some medicine. She'll be fine.

22 INT. JOSIE'S BEDROOM. EVENING

22

Josie's room has a small table against one wall. She sits at it now, working on a painting of the harbour, realised with remarkable dexterity. She clearly has talent.

Her father appears in the doorway.

CHRIS
What are you doing?

JOSIE
Painting the harbour for grandma.

He comes over to the desk.

CHRIS
It's beautiful.

JOSIE
Thanks.

CHRIS

You want to come and help me cook
the tuna?

23 INT. THE BEACH HOUSE. EVENING

23

CLOSE ON the tuna steaks sizzling furiously in the pan.

CHRIS

Ok, is the two minutes up?

Josie times her father using his phone.

JOSIE

Nearly. Five, four three two one.
Off!

Chris flips the steaks onto waiting plates with salad on the side. The phone rings with the same distinctive tone and the display shows ELISE.

JOSIE (CONT'D)

(answering)

Hi mum.

There's just a flicker on Chris's face, and Josie sees it.

ELISE (O.S.)

Hullo my darling girl. What are
you doing?

JOSIE

Cooking yellowfin tuna.

ELISE (O.S.)

Really? Wow. Lucky you.

JOSIE

An American friend of grandma's
caught the tuna on the beach while
I was there. Such a big fish.

ELISE (O.S.)

Lucky you. What else have you been
doing.

JOSIE

Grandma gave me the most amazing
brooch. It's a golden butterfly
with sapphires. Dad? How do I
send a photo?

CHRIS

I'll show you later. Say hello to
Elise for me.

JOSIE
Dad says to say hi.

ELISE (O.S.)
Say hi from me too.

JOSIE
(hopefully)
Do you want to talk to him?

Chris switches off the pan and moves to take as much food as he can carry outside.

CHRIS
Josie, this is all ready.

Elise can't quite disguise the relief in her voice.

ELISE (O.S.)
Sounds like you'd better go and have your dinner. I was just calling to see how you are.

JOSIE
Ok. Well I'd better go. Love you.

ELISE (O.S.)
Love you too.

Josie hangs up and joins Jack and Chris outside.

JOSIE
Mum said to say hi.

CHRIS
How is she?

JOSIE
Good.

JACK
Tuna's perfect.

JOSIE
This is so good, dad.

Chris smiles.

CHRIS
Thanks.

JACK
(to Chris)
Remember that time, you were about eight, we found ourselves in the middle of that albacore feeding frenzy?

The warmth of his exchange with Jose immediately leaves Chris, but even so there is a moment of difficult connection as he remembers.

CHRIS

Yeah. That was something.

JACK

We had some good times out in that bay.

Josie sees the shutters come down on her father's face.

CHRIS

Yeah. We did.

There's a finality in the way he says it and they eat in silence after that. But there's something like a hint of loss in his voice too, and Josie looks from father to father, watching their silence, wondering why.

24

INT. EMMA'S DREAM SEA. DUSK

24

Emma lies in her bed, looking out into the exquisitely soft spring dusk, the voices indecipherably threading the surf and evening bird sounds.

EMMA

Oh Annie, how I envy the quickness of your death. The not knowingness of it. Here then gone. No waiting. No wondering. No fear. No loneliness.

EMMA ALT (V.O.)

How do you know what she felt?

EMMA

I didn't mean...

EMMA ALT (V.O.)

Didn't mean what? She died because of you.

EMMA

I'm sorry. I shouldn't have said that.

EMMA ALT (V.O.)

You didn't tell them, did you? Silent as a little mouse, you were.

EMMA

How could I? I could never ever tell anyone.

Male hands stroke her hair.

TOM
Shh. Sleep now.

EMMA
I'm sorry.

TOM
I understood.

EMMA
Mum didn't.

TOM
She tried.

EMMA
Do you remember how she made a cake
that first birthday afterwards and
none of us could eat it. It was
awful. It just sat in the fridge.
If she'd had to choose between us,
she would have chosen Annie.

TOM
Em, let it go. None of it matters
now.

EMMA
The last time I saw her, in the
rest home, she thought I was Annie.
She was so pleased. She thought I
had died and Annie had lived.

TOM
She didn't mean it.

EMMA
But that's the thing. She did.
That's all she is now. What she
feels.

TOM
Be careful, Em.

EMMA
Of what?

TOM
Of wanting what you can't have.

EMMA
But everything I love is being
taken away from me. How can I not
want what I love?

And his hands are gone and there's only the sound of the sea.

A dark shape in the doorway. Josie, as indistinct to Emma as the rest of the room. She glides into Emma's room, as silently and anonymously as a ghost and carefully places a square of paper, propped up on the table next to the bed, then leaves.

Emma reaches out a hand, and as she touches the painting. The paint is still wet. Emma turns her hand towards her. The colours on her fingers glow with startling brightness in the darkness.

EMMA (CONT'D)

(a whisper)

You will not take this from me. You will not.

25

INT. COUNTRY AIRPORT. DAY

25

Josie and her father watch the passengers disembark from the silver tunnel of the small plane and cross the tarmac. A slim, dark-haired woman in her late 20s, ALI, smiles and waves, removing her sunglasses.

CHRIS

There she is.

He and Ali meet and embrace.

ALI

Hi brother.

CHRIS

So good to see you, Al.

Josie watches the affection with which her father and aunt greet each other. She's not used to seeing her father like this. Ali turns her attention to Josie.

ALI

Well, look at you, Josie. You have grown up so much since I last saw you. Do I get a hug?

They embrace and separate.

ALI (CONT'D)

You and I have some serious catching up to do. And I don't want to be called 'auntie'. I don't feel nearly old enough. You call me Ali. Ok?

Josie smiles self consciously.

JOSIE

Ok.

CHRIS
Any luggage?

ALI
Only this.
(raises her backpack)
If I need more clothes, I can hit
the op shop in Manganui.

They begin walking out of the terminal towards the car park.

CHRIS
Ah yes, the op shop queen. How
could I forget?

They walk on for a moment.

ALI
So this is what it took to bring us
all together again.

26 EXT. RURAL LANDSCAPE. DAY

26

The car on the road:

ALI
How is she?

A beat before Chris replies.

CHRIS
Not great. But you've been talking
to her doctor, so...

ALI
I meant in herself.

A moment before Chris answers.

CHRIS
She seems ok. We've only been
there since yesterday afternoon. I
don't know, Ali. I don't know how
you expect someone to be. She's
very focussed on us being here, on
you arriving.

Ali leans her head back against the seat.

ALI
God, I'm tired. I need to summon
some energy from somewhere.

She looks out the window, then suddenly flashes with
frustration.

ALI (CONT'D)

I could've been here, the whole time. I can't believe they kept this from us. I mean, for fuck's sake.

(catches herself)

Sorry, Josie. You didn't hear that.

(continues)

What's the point in being a doctor if you can't look after your own mother?

CHRIS

It was mum's decision. They both say that.

ALI

Yeah, I know. Fuck.

(catches herself)

There I go again. Sorry, Josie. Where I work, we kinda let loose with our language. I know it makes me sound a bit crass.

CHRIS

Sound?

ALI

Oh shut up.

Chris laughs. Josie is listening and watching keenly. This isn't a side of her father she sees.

ALI (CONT'D)

(tone shifting)

How's dad?

Josie sees her father stiffen.

CHRIS

He is what he is. We'll get through it.

ALI

Jesus, Chris...

CHRIS

What?

ALI

Don't you think it's time to bend a little? He's losing his wife.

CHRIS

And we're losing our mother.

ALI

I think you don't understand loss.

CHRIS
So what's this?

ALI
It's different.

CHRIS
How?

ALI
(sharply)
Because it is!

Her sudden vehemence takes both Chris and Josie by surprise. An uneasy silence follows.

ALI (CONT'D)
Sorry. It's just...

Josie watches as her father looks across at his sister, who resolutely keeps her attention outside the window. Ali's reaction suggests something else going on.

CHRIS
No, you're right. It isn't the same.

Ali turns around towards Josie, determinedly bringing back her slipped brightness.

ALI
Don't mind me and your father arguing, Josie. We always argue. That's what brothers and sisters do. Especially when someone's as annoying as your father.

CHRIS
(protests)
Hey!

ALI
Well, you are. The most fucking annoying human on the planet when you want to be.
(to Josie)
And that swearing, Josie, is totally justified. Don't you agree?

Josie is delighted to be brought into the exchange. She smiles and nods.

JOSIE
Yep. Definitely.

CHRIS
Uh huh, so this is how it's going to be?

ALI
 Yep, and you'd better get used to
 it.

She turns and exchanges a conspiratorial smile with Josie.

INT./EXT. UNDERWATER/EMMA'S BEDROOM. DAY

The image fades up from black, the black becoming grey then grey green. Emma floats in the sea, her eyes closed, as if in bed asleep. Sounds over the images: a car pulling in, stopping; doors opening, closing; voices in flux of sound but indecipherable as words.

EMMA (V.O.)
 Is she here already? Have I really
 been here so long?

Emma opens her eyes.

HER POV: the bedroom, and herself, as if seen through ocean water, looking past the surface that almost touches her face.

EMMA (V.O.)
 Come back. I must come back.

Through the watery surface the door can be seen opening, and Ali entering. Her voice comes from far away, filtering through the sea.

ALI
 Mum?

CLOSE ON Emma's "sleeping" face.

EMMA (V.O.)
 Let. Me. Go.

And she breaks the surface.

In her bed she opens her eyes. Ali sits in the chair close to the bed.

EMMA
 My darling, darling girl.

EMMA (CONT'D)
 Hi mum.

They embrace for several long seconds.

EMMA (CONT'D)
 I didn't want you to come. I would
 have understood.

Ali is working hard for cheerful normality.

ALI

Yeah, mum, really. I'm not going to come back. Honestly.

EMMA

You must be exhausted. How many flights did it take?

ALI

Kinshasa to Johannesburg, Johannesburg direct to Auckland, then here. Not too bad. It's actually quite easy to find your way to the world's biggest clusterfucks these days. Any idiot can do it. And they very frequently do.

EMMA

(laughs weakly)

That's my girl. No nonsense.

ALI

Would you mind if I lie down next to you? I urgently need to be horizontal, just for minute.

EMMA

I can't think of anything I'd like more.

Ali lies down next to Emma on her back with her head on the spare pillows and closes her eyes. She takes Emma's hand.

ALI

Oh that feels so good. It all felt interminable for a while there.

EMMA

You can sleep now. Nothing to stop you.

No answer. Ali's already asleep.

EMMA (V.O.)

What's happened to you? Something has. I can see it your eyes. A mother can see these things.

(closes her eyes)

A mother can see...

At beyond the end of her bed, the room becomes the open sea, and the frame moves towards it until there is nothing but the shifting sea with the sun shafting spears of light into the dark infinity.