[**Ka Kite, Bro by Willie Davis**](http://one-raised-eyebrow.blogspot.com/2008/05/ka-kite-bro-by-willie-davis.html) ****

A moment of silence. Heads bowed and tears quietly spill to the floor. Hupe strings and runs and is wiped away.

‘Aue!’ screams your heart.

‘Aue!’ scream your memories.

But all that can be heard is the shaking of your body as you sob quietly. I battle inside. I scream.

‘I want to wail.’

‘Not here, Tama.’

‘I want to sing. It’s my way, it’s the way Maori have always done it.’

‘Not here, boy.’

‘Why Dad?’

‘We’re different, boy. They have their own way – we have ours.’

‘But, Dad.’

‘Shhh, boy.’

‘Thank you, school.’ The speakers explode and words smash the silence. You open eyes and people breathe again.

‘The funeral will be held tomorrow, all those who wish to attend the service make sure you see your form teachers.’

‘Stand, school.’

We do, and the teachers file out.

‘School dismissed.’

The school hall empties and I sit and think.

‘Hey, Tama.’ yells Pete. ‘Wipe your nose, you big sook.’

I stare and yell: ‘Piss off, Pete’

‘Come on, Tama, I was only joking.’

‘Not in the mood to laugh, bro.’

‘Sorry, Tama.’

‘Yeah, whatever…’

‘Just leave you alone again, okay.’

‘Yeah, good idea!’ I snap, and off he slinks.

An empty school hall and me. Rows of chairs, rows of photos all of students of the past.

‘I guess they’ll have to put your photo up there, too, bro.’

*Darryl Parker – Winger in the 1st XV 1993.* I remember and cry some more.

‘You’d better not take off before I get to say goodbye.’

No Darryl. No reply. Not even a grunt.

‘I’ll drop in later. I promise. You always were a quiet bugger.

‘Tama.’ echoes Mr Watson’s voice in the hall. ‘What are you doing here? Who are you talking to?’

‘Nothing, sir. No one, sir.’

‘Pull your socks up, tuck in that shirt and wipe your nose, boy.’

‘Sorry, sir.’

‘Now get to class. You’re not going to use your friend’s death as an excuse to skip class now, are you?’

‘I wasn’t , sir.’

‘And, boy, try and keep control. You know, like what you Maoris say … how does it go … keey … yaar…kaar…haar.’

‘Kia kaha, sir.’

‘Yes, that’s it. Be ahhh...’ and twiddles his fingers to remember. ‘Be ahhh..’

‘Strong, sir.’

‘Yes, that’s it, be strong.’ And he punches the air and repeats his new-found wisdom ‘Be strong.’

‘Whatever,’ I mumble.

‘Pardon, Tama.’

‘Whatever you say, sir.’

‘Good lad. Now, off to class.’

It felt strange walking to class. It was like not having a shadow. Darryl had always been quiet. I’d talk. Mostly he’d just nod, let out a grunt. In some way he was still there. I just couldn’t hear him grunt anymore.

*Back in class.*

‘Miss.’

‘Yes, Tama?’

‘I’d like to go to the tangi tomorrow.’

‘The what, Tama?’

‘The funeral, for tomorrow.’

‘Oh, yes, of course.’

‘I want to hongi him.’

‘To what?’

‘Press noses together, you know.’

‘I hope not, that’s disgusting.’

‘It’s not, miss. It’s how we say goodbye to the ones we…’

‘I don’t care, Tama. This is not one of your *tangys.* It’s a funeral!’

‘Tangi, miss, not *tangy*.’

‘Whatever, Tama. You keep your culture and your nose to yourself.’

‘But, miss…’

‘Not … another … word.’

Anger and hurt added to more anger and hurt. Inside I battle again.

‘I want to wail.’

‘Not here, Tama.’

‘My pain and tears want to sing.’

‘Not here, boy.’

‘But…’

‘Shhh, boy.’

Grit and teeth rub together. Bell rings and shatters the class to attention, but not my mate. Homeward I trudge. I just want to say goodbye. I cry some more. I remember some more. I head towards Darryl’s home. I’ll just pop in for a little while.

I knock. The door opens. Mrs Parker greets me.

‘Tama, come in. And leave your shoes on.’

I take them off anyway and follow her into the lounge, expecting to see Darryl in his coffin. No Darryl. The lounge is like it always is.

‘Is he in his bedroom, Miss Parker?’

She stares and tears form.

‘He’s dead, Tama.’

‘I know, miss. I thought you’d bring him home so you could have the …’

‘I understand, Tama. We’re different to you.’

‘Where is he? He’ll be alone, he’ll be scared. Can I visit him?’

‘He’s at the funeral home. I don’t think you’ll be able to visit. He’ll be at the church tomorrow. You could see him there. I nod and leave.

‘He’ll be all alone, Dad.’

‘I know, boy.’

‘He might be scared.’

‘He’ll be all right, boy.’

‘You ever been to one of their tangis, Dad?’

‘No, boy.’

‘Can’t be all that different.’

‘Don’t know.’

‘Dad, if Maori leap off at the top of the Cape, where do Pakeha spirits leap off?’

‘No idea. Maybe you’ll find out tomorrow.’

‘Yeah, probably will.’

‘See you later, Dad.’

‘Where you off to?’

‘To see a friend.’

Off I run to see my mate, to the funeral home. I push doors, the buzzer sounds. A lady peers at me over her glasses.

‘And what can I do for you, young man?’

‘I came to see my mate, Darryl Parker.’

‘He doesn’t work here.’

‘No, he’s one of the dead fellas.’

‘Pardon?’

‘My name – I came to say goodbye.’

‘You want to say goodbye.’

‘If I could, miss.’

‘Look. I think you’d better go home. It’s not a very funny joke.’

‘I’m not joking.’

‘Leave or I’ll call the police.’

I turn and push through the doors. That night, I slept and dreamed and Darryl visited me to say goodbye. This time, he did all the talking and I listened.

‘I’m sorry. Forgive me. See you later.’

And he left.

The next day. The tangi. We arrive through a gate, along a path and the church rises before us, grey and dark.

‘Spooky, eh.’ shivers Pete.

‘Yeah, spooky all right.’

‘c’mon lads.’ yells Mr Watson. ‘Line up.’

‘Sir.’

‘Yes, Tama.’

‘Will they pass the stick today?’

‘Pass the what?’

‘The stick. You’re given the walking stick and then you speak to Darryl. When you finish you pass it to the next person.’

‘I don’t think so, Tama.’

‘When do you speak?’

‘I don’t know, Tama. You’ll just have to wait and see, won’t you. Now, get inside.’

In we walk and they grey concrete rises. Light through the stained glass dances across the pews. The church is packed. A hymn squeezes and pumps from the organ at the back.

Everyone stands. Darryl arrives. I wait for the wail and screaming to begin for the karanga to call, but tears squeeze out rather than flow, sobs are controlled rather than wiri and tangi.

‘Why don’t they cry, sir?’

No reply, but his words echo again inside. ‘Try to be keey…yaar…kaar … … … … haar.

But I stand and cry without shame and let my hupe run.

‘Wipe your nose, boy.’ says Mr Watson.

No response from me.

The minister stands and starts to prattle on. He didn’t even know Darryl. A couple of times he calls him Darryn. I wait for my chance to speak. Finally, he opens the floor for those wanting to speak. I don’t hesitate.

‘Tama, sit down, boy.’ barks Mr Watson. I head to the front. The minister stands staring at me.

‘I just want to say goodbye to Darryl.’ He hands me the microphone.

‘What’s this for?’

‘To say goodbye with.’

‘I’m only saying goodbye to Darryl, not to all you fellas.’ I hand him back his microphone. I bow my head and karakia. I lean over the coffin and whisper and cry. My tears fall on to my mate’s cheeks. He cries with me.

‘I know you’re sorry, mate. Everyone’s been jumping down my throat. All I wanted was to see you and say goodbye the only way I knew how. Well, it’s more like, see ya later than goodbye, bro. Better not muck around, eh. Everyone’s staring at me. I bow and hongi.

I press my eyes shut and remember.

*Warm flesh presses cold*

*Maori presses Pakeha*

*Tangi hongis funeral*

*Ka kite ano. bro. ka*

*kite ano.*

I sit beside Mr Watson and wipe my nose.

‘Good on you, boy,’ he says.

I never found out where Darryl’s spirit leapt off. I’ll probably find out later.