He stared hard at the dark but he couldn't see anything. And there wasn't a sound. Yet he knew he was awake by the feel of the bed and his toothache.

Grandma, he said, grandma.

There wasn't a sound and he could see only the dark.

Grandma, he called out, grandma.

And he began crying.

Then he knew his grandma was coming, but he didn't leave off crying. And then he shut his eyes because his grandma was standing there with a candle, and he told her he had the toothache.

So his grandma picked him up and carried him and put him in her bed. And he stopped crying and watched her get out a tin full of powder and put it on the chair beside the bed. She was an old woman with only a few bits of hair hanging down, and she was big and fat in her white nightgown.

Then he felt the toothache again and cried, but his grandma blew out the candle and the bed went up and down as she got in. And a moment later her finger slid into his mouth and rubbed some of the powder into his hollow tooth. First it gave him a taste in his mouth and then he didn't feel the toothache.

His grandma was big and fat and warm. She held him in her arms and he pushed his face into her fat. She had a certain smell but he liked it, and it couldn't have been longer than a minute or two before he'd gone to sleep.

But his grandma didn't go to sleep. She was just a fat old woman with a few bits of hair hanging down, and she lay there, quite still, holding the boy in her arms.

And all night she was staring hard at the dark.

See what they do, these grandsons and grand-daughters of mine. Take these large stones from the river bed and put them here on the track where each day I walk. This is what they do, these mokopuna, and so to please them I walk with the bad leg that has in it a feeling of deadness. This way and that, round and about the big river stones to make these young ones happy.

Home from school they will say to me, 'Did you walk today Nanny? Did you see our stones, our big river stones?'

`Yes,' I will say. 'Yes, I walked. This way and that. Round and about the stones making the old leg all tired.'

`Ah Nanny. Soon we will have your leg all better. Soon. You'll see Nanny.'

And then seeing how pleased they are, I will be happy to have done this for them. Not much time left now to give hap­piness to these little ones. Soon this old light goes out.

And the mother too. This daughter of mine. Every morn­ing this daughter gives me the work of kneading bread in order to get the lame hand strong once more. Sad this daughter. Sad to see this old one hobble about with one side lame. And sad this old one to see the daughter with yet another worry on her.

I tell her, never mind. Never mind this old one. Look to the young. Look to the years ahead.

And yet this one asks herself what future there is for these dear ones of hers.

And a great sadness comes.

What future on this little corner of land, once enough to support many but now in these days merely a worry and a trou­ble. The ground dry and hard, and great round stones where once a river flowed. A great sadness comes, for this old one knows that soon these ones must go away from this place. The city must claim these loved ones of hers, and in claiming take its price. But nowhere for this old one in such a new place. Her place is here, and so the daughter has a sadness on her.

`Come,' she says. 'Come with your children. We cannot leave you here. Before when you were well, though not even then happily. But now, since your illness?'

`Each day,' I say, 'I am a little stronger. Here I can walk along beside the river bed. Still I can take a hoe in one good hand, still I can roll the dough for new bread, and have others here beside me. My needs are few.'

But she is torn in two this daughter.

I say to her, 'Here is the place where I was born and here is where I die.'

And the mokopuna who listen say, 'Don't talk so funny Nanny.' So I try to tell them there is nothing to fear. .

`No need to fear a life ahead without an old Nanny. This is just an old Nanny with her light getting dim who likes to see her days go by in this house, on this poor dried out piece of land where she was born.'

Then the husband, father of these little ones stands firm and says, 'We cannot leave you here and if you'll not come then we stay too. This wife of mine and these children would fret away in the town without their old lady.'

`Go,' I say. 'Here there is nothing.'

`And there?' he asks, and I know his meaning.

`The arrangements are made,' I say to him. 'And you must go.'

`Made before your illness,' he says. 'And now can be unmade.' The mokopuna listen and are glad, and the daughter too.

`We can get along,' she says. 'We have till now, and shall. This is a better place, a freer place, and our hearts are here.'

Look then at this daughter of mine, ageing before her time with so much work, and this good son-in-law with the worry of bills to be paid and future needs to look to. Then the children much too thin, and the older ones with little time for school work because of chores. A great sadness.

Yet suddenly all these ones of mine are smiling, laughing because the good son-in-law has said arrangements can be unmade, and they will stay here with the old Nanny in the dried up place.

`Ha, Nanny,' they say. 'We will stay here with you now and make your leg better with our rocks. You'll see, Nanny.'

`And cook special food for you as the doctor said so you can live to a hundred.'

All at once this old one is laughing too. 'Better for an old Nanny like this to keep her old habits and go away happy, than live to a hundred on dried up kai.'

Away then happy to their jobs. Laughing, and happy to work till dark on this thirsting soil, and leaving this old one minding the days gone past. Not long now for the light grows dim. Not long now will this old woman hold these ones here, for soon this light will go out. These ones of hers will go from this place with some sadness, remembering an old lady that once was their bond. But yet will depart with a new hope coming and a new life to make.

This old one awaits that time, which is not long away. Not long. Then this old body goes to this old ground, and the two shall be one, with no more to be given by one or by the other to those who weep.

And from the two – the land, the woman – these ones have sprung. And by the land and by the woman held and strength­ened. Now, from knowing this, the old one in turn draws strength as the old light dims, as the time of passing comes.

*Follow the yellow brick road,*

*Follow, follow, follow follow,*

*Follow the yellow brick road ...*

We're almost there! Almost at Wellington, the Emerald City! Me and Dad and Mum and Roha, we been travelling for two days now in our car which Dad bought from Mr Wallace last week. No dents and honk honk goes the horn. Dad, he said I could have a drive of it myself when we left Waituhi but then it conked out on the Whareratas and that made him change his mind.

- I told you we wouldn't get to Wellington in *this*, Mum said to him while he was fixing it up.

- We'll get there.

- But I want to get there in one piece! Mum answered.

- Throw some of your junk out then, Dad told her.

Our car sure is loaded down all right. Mum's stuff is in the boot, some belongings are tied under the canvas on the roof and there's even some squeezed in here with us. Boy.

But you won't conk out now, ay car? There's just one hill to go and we'll be there. So up we go, up the hill, slowly but surely. And who cares if cars bank up behind us! They can beep all they like. We got as much right to be on this road as they got.

Road, road, yellow brick road, yellow with the headlights sweeping across it. Just like in that book Miss Wright, my teacher, gave me before we left Waituhi. A neat book. About the straw man, the tin man, the cowardly lion and the Emerald City and ... we're almost there!

I bounce up and down on the seat. I can't wait to see all the sparkling green towers glittering in the dark ahead of us.

- Matiu, you just sit still! Mum growls. What's gotten into you, ay?

- Sorry, Mum.

Poor Mum. She's very tired and still unhappy about leaving Waituhi, our whanau, our family. Her eyes are still red with the crying when all the people had waved goodbye to us like little flags fluttering far away. At least she hasn't cried as often as Roha has for Hone though! Roha and Hone, they went round together and once I saw them having a pash. Eeee!

I grin at my big sister. Never mind, Roha. Plenty other boys down.in Wellington and you can pash up large with them when we get there, ay.

- What you grinning for, Smarty? Roha snaps.

- I'm allowed to grin if I want to, aren't I? I ask, suddenly hurt.

- All right, all right, you don't have to scream.

I make a funny face at her. It would teach her a good lesson if even the pakehas didn't want to pash with her! Lots of pakehas in Wellington. Not like in Waituhi. Makes me scared to think about it.

- Dad, will the pakehas like us in Wellington? Dad?

He doesn't answer me because he is driving carefully. He has to lean forward to see the road in front of him. It has started to rain.

Wish I was older and knew how to drive better. Then I could give him a rest at the wheel.

I press against him and he puts an arm round me. His face looks tired, just like it looked when we were walking to a garage yesterday after our car ran out of petrol. There we were, miles from anywhere, walking along the road while car after car sped past us without stopping. Some of them blared loudly at us. Others made a lot of dust come over us. And always as they passed the faces would be looking back and staring at us. I felt puzzled.

- Why don't they stop, Dad?

He had shrugged his shoulders.

- We're in a different country now, son.

I began to hate those faces. I wanted to throw stones at them all. But things will be different when we get to Wellington, won't they? And we will be happy, won't we?

Course we will. You just wait and see, Dad. We'll make lots of money and be rich as anything because Wellington is where the money is. And you have to go where the money is, ay Dad. No use staying in Waituhi and being poor all the time, ay.

I lean back in the seat and burrow under the blanket. It is getting cold and there is a draught coming through a hole in our car. I feel my bag of lollies in my pocket.

- You want one, Mum? You want one, Dad? Roha?

I pass the bag to Roha and she takes two, the greedy thing. I put one in my mouth and count what's left. Seven.

Boy, these are the dearest lollies I ever bought. When we stopped at the shop yesterday I gave the man thirty cents and he didn't give me any change. When I asked him for it, he told me thirty cents was how much these lollies cost. But he was lying. He was a thief and he stole my money. How would he like it if someone rooked him'? What's more, these lollies stink, just like him.

I watch the road as it twists ahead through the dark. Every now and then, there is a loud whoosh of a fast car passing us. Those fast cars don't like us. We're too slow for them.

Suddenly, I see two lights ahead like eyes glaring at us. The eyes open wider, grow larger, looking like the eyes of a...

- Dad! I yell, afraid.

A big truck descends on us with its headlight blazing full. I seem to see taloned fingers reaching out to claw me.

- Bloody hell, Dad mutters.

He swerves. The car kicks gravel. The truck thunders past, screaming in the wind.

I look at Mum. Her face is shaken.

- I better keep both my hands on the wheel, Dad says.

He lifts his arm from me and I feel suddenly alone. I begin to think of Waituhi, our whanau, and that makes me sad. All our family was there and Emere was our cow. Haere ra, Emere. And haere ra to you, e Hemi. You'll always be my best mate.

I start humming to myself. Quietly.

*- Follow the yellow brick road,*

*Follow follow, follow, follow...*

Miss Wright, she taught us that song at school. A neat song. We made a long line, joined by our hands, and danced crazy patterns over the playground and...

There is a snapping sound and the flapping of canvas. - What's that, Dad?

He pulls the car over to the side of the road and steps out. Mum winds down her window.

- What's wrong?

- Rope's snapped, he yells back.

- You better get out and help your father, Mum says to me.

I jump out into the rain. Boy, it's sure wet and cold out here. Dad is struggling in the wind to pull the canvas back over our belongings.

- All this junk! Dad mutters. No wonder the canvas came away. He takes a box from the top and dumps it on the side of the road. My books spill out and the pages fly away like birds in the wind.

- Dad. No, Dad...

I run out into the road in panic because those are my school books and among them is my best book. My best book.

- Matiu! Get off the road! Mum screams.

My best book. In the wind and the rain. My best book.

- *Matiu.*

And there it is. Lying there on the road. I run to get it and car brakes scream in my ears.

But I have it in my arms and hold it safe to me. And I don't care if I get a hiding. I don't care...

Mum hits me very hard.

-What you want to do that for, you stupid kid.

But I don't care. I don't care...

And the driver of the other car is saying angry words to Dad:

- What the bloody hell do you think you're up to, eh'? Letting your kid run out like that, what's wrong with you! Look, never mind about bloody arguing. Christ, you shouldn't be on the road at all. Your car's bloody dangerous loaded like that. And why the hell didn't you pull further off the road, eh? Oh, what's the use. You Maoris are all the same. Dumb bloody horis.

He steps back into his car and roars off. Dad comes towards me and his face is full of anger.

Go ahead, Dad. Hit me. I deserve it.

But he doesn't. Instead, he hugs me and asks:

- You all right, son?

- Yes, Dad. I'm sorry, Dad. That man...

- That bastard. Never mind about him.

I clutch my book tightly. I carry it into the car with me. Mum starts to get angry with me again.

Tuni tuni, woman, Dad says. It's all over now. Let's forget it.

- It wouldn't have happened if you'd tied down our things properly like Sam told you to do, Mum answers.

Sam is my uncle and we stayed at his place in Hastings last night. Uncle Sam didn't even know we were on our way to Wellington.

- Down to that windy place" he'd said. You fullas better tie yourselves down or you'll be blown away! Don't you know how cold it is down there'? Brother, it's liquid sunshine all the year round!

- We don't care, I'd answered him. We're going to make lots of money down there. Not much room left for pa living anymore. That's what you said, ay Dad.

Dad had looked at me strangely.

- No more jobs back home, he told Uncle. Plenty of the seasonal work, yes, but me and Hine had enough of that. We had enough of shearing, the fruit-picking and the going down South to shear some more. No, plenty of work in Wellington. Plenty of factories.

- Who told you that! Uncle snorted.

- Jim, Dad answered.

Uncle Jim is Dad's brother. He lives in Petone and we're going to stay with him until we find our own house.

Uncle Sam had shrugged his shoulders..

- Well, Jim should know, he'd said.

- I want us to have a good life, a new start, Dad tried to explain. A new start for my kids. Me and Hine, we've always had nothing. But my kids? They're going to grow up with everything. I'll fight for it, because they must have it.

But I'd seen Uncle Sam hadn't understood Dad's words. He'd simply shaken his head and wished us luck. And in the morning before we left he'd told Dad to tie the canvas down tight.

- Otherwise that wind will get under it and before you know it you'll be flying into Wellington!

Dad had tried his best with the ropes. He'd said to Mum:

- How about getting rid of some of this junk, ay?

She'd answered him  
- This junk is all we've ever had. I'm not throwing away one piece of it, wind or no wind.

It sure is windy all right, outside the car. The clouds are rushing in the night sky just like the Winged Monkeys. The wind moans and chatters and cackles among our belongings, and I must close my eyes and put my hands to my ears to shut out the sights and sounds of this night.

Then, suddenly, all the noises stop. Even the car has stopped.

- There it is, Dad says.

I open my eyes. Far away are the lights of Wellington, streaming with the rain down our window like glistening towers. And it looks so... so... beautiful. Just as I'd imagined it to be. Just as I'd pretended it would be. Emerald City.

- Isn't it neat, Muni'?

She stares ahead. Her face is still. - Roha? I ask.

My sister's face is filled with a strange glow.

- Dad?

He looks at me and smiles.

- You and your dreams, son.

He starts the car. We begin to drive down from the hill. I look at Dad and Mum and Roha, puzzled. How come I'm the only one to be happy!

Can't they see this is where our life begins and this is where our dreams begin'?

And dreams, they come true, don't they? Don't they?

I look out the car. I see the sign: STEEP GRADE. All along the yellow brick road there have been signs like that. STEEP GRADE. CHANGE DOWN. ONE WAY. LIMITED SPEED ZONE. ROAD NARROWS. STOP. WINDING ROAD. GO. CONCEALED EXIT

TRAFFIC LIGHTS AHEAD. GREASY WHEN WET. NO EXIT. NO PASSING. NO STOPPING.

Many signs, all telling us where we have to go and.... I begin to feel scared.

If ever we want to, will we be able to find our way back'?

I begin to sing to myself. Not because I'm happy, but because I think I want to feel sure myself everything will turn out alright.

It will, won't it?

*Follow the yellow brick road,*

*Follow, follow, follow, follow,*

*Follow...*