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Opening Extract from...

All at Sea

Written by Decca Aitkenhead

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all at sea

For Tony

You always said I should write a book about you.
It wasn't meant to be this one.

all at sea

Decca Aitkenhead

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prologue

The thing to remember about this story is that every word is true. If I never told it to a soul, and this book did not exist, it would not cease to be true. I don't mind at all if you forget this. The important thing is that I don't.

My three-year-old son asks me to tell him the story almost every day. 'Tell me the story about how Tony died-ed again,' he says. And so I do, until he knows the words and can join in, as if it were a well-worn nursery rhyme. He needs to hear the story to make it real for him. But the ritual makes it sound more like Little Red Riding Hood to me – just another fantastical fairy tale.

The first time I read the story of Tony's death, it was a news report in the *Guardian*, my own newspaper. I love newspapers. I have been a journalist for twenty years. Even

as a child I was a compulsive writer, but only ever of diaries, letters, lists – never fiction. Where would be the point in making up a story, when the truth is by definition always more interesting? And so for twenty years I have been reading and writing what I thought of as the truth. Then I read about my own family's tragedy in my newspaper, and the only thing I could think was: they can't be talking about *me*. They can't mean *my* family. This could never happen to me and my family. This is something that happens to other people.

'This happens to other people' is a recurring cliché of the random tragedy survivor's experience. I have heard it countless times in my job, from stunned interviewees recounting a bolt from the blue – and to tell the truth, I have always found it puzzling. What do they mean? Why would they imagine that other people are any different from them? Now here I was, thinking exactly the same thing: this happens to other people. And slowly, I began to see why.

We read about freak disasters every day, knowing perfectly well that the news is not fiction. And yet, deep down, what we are reading must feel to us made up. Why else would we be so incredulous when they happen to us? Even the journalists who report them must be in the same boat. I have been writing about real people for all these years, and apparently had not grasped that they were real.

Back in the early Nineties, among a particular type of London media sophisticate, something called postmodernism was the height of fashion, and dinner parties would

routinely be ruined by some cultural studies graduate boring everyone to death about the absurdity of constructs such as 'truth'. At the time I wrote it off as a fad for pseudo-intellectuals hoping to look clever. Now I wonder if they weren't onto something after all.

Because it isn't really possible to write about a real-life event without turning it into a form of fiction. Once an accident of chance has been organised into a narrative, it can be honest, and accurate, and illuminating. But it is only an edited version of a partial perspective, not the same thing as the truth.

So now I am afraid that by writing this story, I will make it untrue. Chapter headings and syntax and punctuation will elbow all my tears and grief out of the way, until the catastrophe has been reduced to just another piece of work, and my memories of what happened have been replaced by this printed version, creating a safe distance between myself and the horror.

Of course, in many ways this is enormously appealing. If I take control of this narrative and become its author, I will steal its power over me; I can detach myself from my own story, and escape. Who wouldn't want to do that? And yet, that is also the very thing I fear most.

For most of my life I have known how to control my feelings. I found that if you can control your feelings, you can pretty much control your whole world. It's amazingly effective. But Tony's death was beyond my control – and now, for the first time, so are my emotions. Tony always used to tell me to think less and feel more, but I never

could. Now that that's all I can do, I can see he was right – and if feelings are his gift from the grave, I'm afraid of taming them into words.

But if I don't write about him, I am afraid I will forget too much. I was almost ten years old when my mother died, and I can remember someone telling me at the time to write down all my memories of her. What a daft idea, I remember thinking. Where would be the point? I'm hardly likely to forget anything about her. I remember all that very clearly. Unfortunately, however, within a remarkably short time I found I had forgotten almost everything else. She had been my mother for one week short of a decade, and before I was even in my teens I could barely remember a thing about her. I lost most of a decade of my life.

Tony drowned just a few months before our tenth anniversary, and I am frightened of losing that decade too. So I write because I don't want to forget.

1

'Just having coffee down on the beach,' Tony calls over his shoulder, as he strolls down the garden path towards the gate. Still half asleep, he treads languidly, flip-flops flapping faintly on the soles of his feet. Our three-year-old son, Joe, is playing inside in his bedroom, but I can't spot his older brother. From the front deck of the cottage, I call down to Tony.

'Have you got Jake?'

Tony settles on the edge of a sunlounger, his back to me, gazing out to sea. 'Yeah, got him here.' I look again, and there Jake is, in his navy blue pyjamas, playing in the sand between Tony's feet and the water's edge. It is just after 8 a.m. on a cloudless Caribbean morning.

We arrived here ten days ago, for a holiday that feels not

so much recreational as medicinal. Tony and I have two small children, two full-time jobs, and the usual unmanageable levels of exhaustion and stress. Twelve months earlier we moved out of London and launched into renovating a sixteenth-century farmhouse with the naïve excitement of a couple who had no idea what living in a building site with two little boys would be like. After an interminable winter of dust and rubble, we are frazzled. The holiday had been my idea. I know we can't afford to go away, I had said, but perhaps we can't afford not to either? I put the trip on a credit card, telling myself it was not an extravagance but a necessity.

I first came to this scruffy little fishing village on the south coast of Jamaica almost twenty years ago. Too remote and untamed for the package-holiday market, Treasure Beach is not a resort but just a dusty muddle of potholed lanes and driftwood shacks clustered around two bays, Calabash and Frenchman's. To the east and west, the coastline is wild and deserted. On the hillside overlooking the ocean, farmers grow scallion and melons in blood-red soil.

I was first sent here to write a travel story about a new hotel called Jake's. Back then, in the early Nineties, Jake's was nothing more than a few artfully rustic cottages nestled in a rocky cove between the village's two beaches. But it is owned by a family of celebrated Jamaican filmmakers and artists, and over the years evolved into a boutique spa hotel with a boho hipster reputation among fashionable types who find St Barts and Barbados a bit bling, and prefer

not to be bothered by paparazzi stalking Simon Cowell. Treasure Beach's other guesthouses attract a more hippyish backpacker type, but even in high season tourists seldom outnumber the battered wooden fishing boats on the beach.

Almost two decades later, Treasure Beach feels more like home to me than anywhere else on earth. I have been coming here every year, beguiled by the discovery of epic melodrama concealed beneath its sleepy surface. This tiny Caribbean community contains more comedy and intrigue than I have ever managed to find in London. In 2000 I rented a house in Calabash Bay for nine months while I wrote a book, and some of my oldest and most precious friendships belong here in this village.

After all these years, Calabash beach is as familiar to me as my own reflection. It is a slender curl of sand between two rocky points no more than 300 yards apart, dotted with just seven cottages and villas. Over time I have stayed in all but one of the houses, and for this holiday we have rented the cottage at the eastern end of the bay, close to the corner where the fishing boats lie upturned on the sand. It is the cottage where Tony and I stayed the very first time I brought him here.

Before our boys were born, holidays involved late nights in local bars, sleeping until noon beneath the cool of a ceiling fan and lazing afternoons away in a hammock. Those days are long gone. Dusk falls fast in the tropics; it is inky black by 7.30 p.m., and on this holiday we have all been in bed not much later. Most mornings I have been on the

tennis court at dawn with my friend Annabelle, a ballsy six-foot motorbiker, while Tony wandered down to the fishing boats with the boys to see what the night catch had brought. We have been laughing at what an unexpectedly wholesome couple we appear to have become.

'Isn't it funny,' Tony had remarked after the first few days, 'how this is actually more fun than everything we used to get up to here?' We are slowly beginning to unwind, to feel almost normal again. I am even going to give yoga a go. For years everyone has been telling me to try it, and at last I am about to; my first lesson starts at 9 a.m. at Jake's. Feeling self-conscious about how creaky I have become, I had been stretching on the deck when a friend appeared in the garden, passing by on his way into the village.

Shugoo is a chef, and one of Tony's closest friends in the village. A great mountain of a man, he is practically round, and on first impression can appear rather solemn – even Buddha-like – for he tends to move majestically slowly, and is at ease in silence. But when Shugoo laughs, he explodes into peals of schoolboy giggles, and he and Tony are usually helpless with laughter within minutes together. The kettle had just boiled, so Tony made coffee, and the pair wandered down to the beach to leave me to my stretching.

The only yoga move I have ever tried is something very basic called a sun salutation. A friend showed me it years ago, and I'm pretty sure I don't do it properly, but I bend backwards and begin. Sunlight dapples the deck through the tangled branches of an overhanging calabash tree. I straighten and lean forward to touch my toes. Any second

now our son Joe will emerge onto the deck and demand we join the others on the beach, but for now all is quiet, and in the rare calm my mind drifts.

As I straighten a few minutes later and stand, my eye catches something in the sea. A head is bobbing in the water. The swimmer is clearly out of their depth – but how is that possible? The swimmer can be no more than 10 feet from the shore. On a normal day you can wade out 30 or 40 feet before your feet no longer touch the bottom. It must be a child, I think idly – a very small child. I scan the beach, wondering where its parents can be.

The waves on Frenchman's beach can often be fierce, but Calabash Bay has been like a millpond since we arrived. We have spent hours in the ocean most days, the boys astonished by the crystal warmth of glassy water. 'Dec it's like a giant bath!' they would squeal. 'Look, Tony, we can see our toenails!' They call us by our names instead of Mum and Dad, and it makes others on the beach laugh. We had planned to move to another cottage around the headland for the second week of our holiday, but this beach is so perfect for the children that we cancelled the other booking and decided to stay put here.

The villa to our left belongs to friends, and when guests had left the previous day the owners had let our boys use the pool. Jake is four, and on the cusp of learning to swim; he had spent the whole day in the pool with Tony, splashing about without his floatation vest. Tony had taught him how to tread water, and Jake was elated with his new buoyancy.

That afternoon, while they had been in the pool, I had glanced out to sea and saw the current had shifted. The bay was still fairly calm but a little choppy, no longer glassy. To anyone unfamiliar with these waters, the change would be imperceptible, but I understood its significance. Beneath an apparently benign surface, a treacherous undertow builds, doubling the depth of the water and sucking anyone in it out to sea. I have been caught in one a few times here, and the force can be startling. 'See how the current's changed?' I had called to Tony, gesturing out to sea. He had cast a brief glance, but could see nothing, and had turned back to Jake. We had this lovely pool to ourselves, so it seemed unimportant, and soon drifted out of my mind.

Now I take another look at the head bobbing in the water. It is only seconds since I spotted it, but already it has moved further from the shore. I scan the beach again, looking for Tony, when a sudden idea shocks me. My gaze snaps back to the swimmer. That can't be Jake, can it? Surely not. No, Tony would never allow him into the sea by himself. Besides, without his floatation vest on Jake can't swim. I stare again. Bloody hell, it *is* Jake. Is it? I squint, shielding my eyes from the sun. It can't be. But yes, I think it is.

He didn't take his vest down to the beach, did he? He must have. But he was still in his pyjamas. And Tony let him go swimming by himself? Tony is normally quite jumpy around water; he has never been a good swimmer, and is easily panicked when the boys are in the sea. I wonder what they can be up to. Vaguely uneasy, I turn and glance

around the deck. Swimming costumes and beach towels and sarongs are slung over backs of chairs. I see suntan lotion and straw hats scattered on the floor. I spot Joe's swimming vest hooked over a branch of the calabash tree, where I had hung it out to dry the night before. And then I freeze. I am staring at Jake's vest. He cannot be wearing it, because it is right there next to Joe's in the tree.

I'm flying down the garden path to the beach before my mind has time to calibrate the drama. That is Jake out there in the ocean, and he cannot swim. The panic flooding me is unlike anything I have ever known. But even as I sprint I can't quite seriously believe in my own fright. Surely this can't be a genuine emergency, can it? In real life, emergencies always turn out to be false alarms – and this one is palpably implausible. Jake is still only yards from the shore, after all. We are on holiday. I know this beach inside out.

But I don't stop running. Within seconds I am through the gate and onto the sand. I don't take my eyes off Jake. But then I see that Tony is already ahead of me, ploughing through the water towards him. Within moments he has our son in his hands, and lifts the spluttering child out of the waves above his head. Jake coughs and chokes, catches his breath, and relaxes in Tony's arms. The crisis is over. Tony wraps an arm around Jake and starts to head back to shore.

As I sink onto the sand to watch, the relief makes me giggly. Oh dear, I think, we are never going to hear the end of this. Tony is such a drama queen about water, he's going

to blather on about this all day. By teatime he will probably be claiming the waves were 6 feet high. Tony loves an anecdote, and this one is right up his street. Oh well, I smile. It may even be the highlight of his holiday.

But something is wrong. Tony and Jake are now vertical in the water, facing each other, submerged up to their chins. Although not far from the shore, Tony is already out of his depth. Waves are breaking in their faces; they are struggling to stay afloat. What can be the matter? And then I see. Tony can't manage to swim holding Jake. He can barely keep both of them afloat, let alone get them back to shore.

I leap to my feet and scramble into the water. Within moments I am out of my depth, but the swell is gentle and it doesn't occur to me to feel anything other than purposeful calm as I swim. Because really, what is there to worry about now? They are not terribly far away. I will just take Jake, swim him back to shore, and once Tony can use both arms he will follow.

If anything, what I feel as I swim towards them is mild embarrassment. I hadn't considered pausing to undress, but haring into the ocean with all my clothes on now strikes me as mildly melodramatic. I hope no one was looking. The only other person I'm aware of on the beach is Shugoo, and he will probably tease me all morning about my Baywatch antics.

Tony and I say nothing to each other when I reach them. We are both focused on Jake. Tony passes him to me, I flip him onto his back, twist onto my back beneath him,

cup his chin in my left hand, and with my right hand begin to swim for shore. It's surprisingly easy. My chief memories of school swimming lessons in the Eighties recall the shame of ill-fitting swimwear, and the malice of our swimming teacher. But now I find that I can also remember the basics of lifesaving. It is thirty years since I was shown the ropes, and I have had no cause to practise since then, but evidently it must be like riding a bike. I will have Jake back on the beach in no time.

There is a nervy moment when Jake wriggles out of my arm. 'I want to face you!' he protests, twisting onto his front, and at once we start to sink. Suddenly I am as helpless as Tony had been. 'No, Jake! You have to lie on your back! This is not a game!' I don't know if my scream frightened him, but he flips onto his back obediently, and once again we are swimming.

I am not sure how long we have been in the water when I turn to see the beach, but it feels like quite a while. A surprisingly long time, in fact. Surely by now we should be there? I twist my neck to look – and cannot believe what I see.

This can't be possible. The beach should be just a few feet away. But we are nowhere near it; we're not even halfway there. What is going on? I remember the undertow. Of course, that's what's going on. How could I have forgotten? We are trapped in its current. But it is nothing like any undertow I have ever known before. This feels more like the force of a gigantic magnet sucking us out to the horizon. And yet, even now, it does not cross my mind to panic.

I will just have to swim harder, I tell myself, and it is going to take a little longer than I had thought.

It still has not occurred to me to worry when I spot another head nearby in the water. The head turns and I see that it is Blouser, a fisherman I've known for fifteen years. He must be in his forties by now, but is still lean and fearsomely fit; his home is a tin shack on the beach near our cottage, and he more or less lives in the sea. We have bought fish from Blouser most days on this holiday, and Jake and Joe have been dazzled and fascinated by him, for he can sometimes seem more amphibian than human.

I open my mouth to call to him, but his expression silences me. Blouser looks frightened to death. He stares back at me across the water, his features rigid with terror and exhaustion.

What is going on? Why does Blouser look like that? What has happened? 'Blouser!' I shout. 'Are you okay?' He struggles to nod. 'Can you take my hand?' I yell, and he does. We swim together for a few yards, until I see his features relax. 'Blouser, are you standing? Are you in your depth?' He nods faintly, head tilted back, straining to keep his mouth above water. I swim on another yard or so past him, searching with outstretched toes until at last they touch wet sand. Hoisting Jake above my shoulders, weak with fatigue, I carry him out of the waves, lower him to his feet, and together we fall to our knees.

'Are you alright?' I gasp. Jake blinks back at me and grins. 'Yeah, fine.' Brushing sand off his pyjamas, he shrugs away the adventure as if it were nothing.

As I kneel and catch my breath I'm inclined to think he is probably right. There were a couple of dicey moments out there, certainly, and I am very glad it's over. But nothing significantly dangerous happened. Jake just got out of his depth, and needed help getting in. I don't know why Blouser looked so panic-stricken, but now that Jake is safely ashore he must be fine. I stand and turn to look for him on the beach, anticipating a hug and rueful smiles.

But I don't see Blouser. I don't even look for him. As I stand and turn, what I see makes me forget all about Blouser. Tony should be wading onto the beach by now; at worst he should be back in his depth. But Tony isn't anywhere near the shore. He isn't even where I left him. He is further out to sea, much, much further, 50 feet off shore, and isn't even trying to swim.

He is tipping backwards in the water, his neck lolling in the swell, as if the waves were an armchair. He raises an arm, but the gesture looks half-hearted, almost casual, and a moment later he lets it drop. He is shouting something, but the voice is not his. It sounds slurred and thick, more animal than human. 'Help,' I hear. 'Help.' But there is no urgency in his cry.

What is he doing all the way out there? Without thinking I race back into the water. A voice from the beach halts me. 'No!' Waist-deep in surf, I turn. Blouser is shouting, and his pitch of raw fear seizes me for long enough to turn again and register three men out in the ocean, yards from Tony, swimming hard towards him. One is Shugoo; I can't make out the other two. But whoever they are, they are

going to reach Tony long before I can. I wade back to the beach.

It's at this moment that time's rhythm becomes unrecognisable, simultaneously frenetic and slow-motion. Seconds begin to stretch like minutes, minutes feel more like hours. Time is passing, but nothing is happening, nothing is changing. Tony is still floundering in the waves, the swimmers still have not reached him. I am pacing frantically, pointing and shouting in confusion. Why are they dawdling? Can't they see he's in trouble?

'Go to Tony!' I scream, waving my arms. 'Help him! For God's sake, can't you see he's drowning?' Is he? I am shocked by what has just come out of my mouth. He can't literally be drowning, can he? I am being hysterical. But the hysteria in my voice has unnerved me even more than my words. Is that really what is actually happening? Tony is drowning? That's absurd; it's not possible. But Christ, can't they just hurry up and get to him?

People are streaming out of houses all along the beach. I see Michael, a friend who works in the guesthouse to our right, sprint into the water and fling a float attached to a rope – but the onshore breeze blows it back to his feet. Damian, another friend who works in the villa to our left, comes flying down the bank from the pool and hurls a life ring out to sea, but again the wind blows it back. As each rescue attempt flops, the scene begins to look like some sort of surreal slapstick pantomime; we are cartoonish in our frantic helplessness. For a fleeting moment I actually cringe, mortified to be the cause of such a public spectacle.

Because obviously Tony is going to be alright. For all the drama, he hasn't actually gone under. The swimmers will reach him any second now, and in half an hour he will be drinking a Red Stripe and complaining about sand in his ears.

I am right. The swimmers do get to him. Somehow they have Michael's float in their hand, and Michael is holding his end of the rope. The three men cluster around the float with Tony in their arms, and Michael stands in the surf and pulls. I take the rope in front of him, like a two-person tug-of-war team, and together we haul them ashore.

It is over. The panic has exhausted its jeopardy. Michael and I drag Tony onto the sand, and for the first time since I carried Jake out of the ocean I remember him. Now that Tony is safe, I turn my attention to our son. 'Sweetheart, are you okay?'

He has not moved from the spot where I left him, and is sitting with legs outstretched, squirming. His hands rake the sand. 'No.' He is staring past my legs at his father, wide-eyed and white, his voice thin with anxiety. 'No, I'm worried about Tony.' I turn, expecting to see Tony sitting up. But he isn't. His eyes aren't even open. He is just lying there.

What? For a fraction of a second I'm confused. Then I think I understand. Oh Tony, I think, I know this was a proper scare – but there's no need to ham it up and spin it out for the sake of the anecdote. Come on, Tone. Just sit up and open your eyes now so we can go back to being on holiday.

'Dec,' Jake says behind me. I turn back to look at him. 'What's that white stuff coming out of Tony's nose?'

And then I see it. From each nostril, snaking down to his chin, trickles a stream of white foam. It looks like whipped egg white. I stare at it in shock. I have no idea what that foam is, or what it signifies. I am not a doctor. But even I can see it looks sinister, and dread begins to wrap itself around me.

Don't be ridiculous, I tell myself. He probably just needs to vomit up a bucketload of seawater. But still Tony doesn't move. I want to scream at him, 'Wake up! A joke's a joke, now wake the fuck up!' But Jake is at my side, and Tony is surrounded by a semicircle of men, one of whom is kneeling over him and appears to be administering CPR. Tony really is unconscious. But he's going to come round any moment. It's just that the process will be messier than I had imagined. It is probably best, I think, if Jake does not watch.

'Let's go back up to the cottage and find Joe,' I suggest lightly, taking his hand. 'Joe's probably wondering where we've got to.' I lead Jake up the path back to the cottage, and find Joe on the deck, leaning over the railings, straining to see the commotion on the beach.

'Is Tony going to be okay?' Jake asks. 'I think so,' I say brightly, but even I can hear how brittle my breeziness sounds. 'I think the doctors will come and make him better.' Struggling to appear calm, I make my way into our bedroom to search for my phone. I think I have found it until I try to make a call and realise I am stabbing wildly

at an iPod. By the time I locate my phone and call Jake's, my fingers are shaking and I misdial twice before getting through.

A receptionist answers the phone with what feels like the longest greeting in the history of the hospitality industry: 'Hello, this is Colleen speaking, welcome to Jake's hotel in Treasure Beach. How may I direct your call?' Before she can get it all out I hear myself screaming, 'Send help now! Tony has been pulled from the water. He is unconscious. Send help now! Send someone, now!' I hang up in a blur of shock, worried that I will have frightened Jake and Joe, embarrassed about sounding deranged, afraid that I will have caused an unnecessary fuss, and scared that help will not arrive in time.

'We want to see Tony,' Joe says. 'Can we go and see him?' I don't know what to do, but think he must have come round by now, and the sooner the boys can see that he is fine the better. I take them by the hand and together we walk back down the path to the beach.

Where did all these people come from? Half an hour ago the beach had been deserted; now it looks like a carnival. People are streaming in from every direction; they are pouring through our garden, down the lane, along the beach. As we reach the gate I spot my friend Annabelle racing across the sand and falling to her knees beside Tony. Oh thank God, I think. Annabelle has medical training. Now that Annabelle is here, everything is going to be alright.

With Jake in one hand and Joe in the other, I lead them

past the crowds and down to the water's edge. From here we can see Annabelle's back as she kneels over Tony. She knows what she is doing. Any second now he is going to throw up and come round; it can only be a matter of time. Someone in the crowd shouts at me, 'Get your car keys, take him to the doctor!' But the nearest hospital is half an hour away; how is that going to help?

As we stand and watch, warm waves lapping at our ankles, my mind allows just one horrifying thought. What if Tony has been unconscious for so long that when he comes round he will be brain-damaged? Please God no. This idea is so unthinkably shocking that when I see Annabelle press two fingers to his neck, it takes me a moment to register the significance. I stare, bewildered. Why is she checking for a pulse?

Annabelle's fingers remain pressed to his neck. Then she looks up at the ring of faces gazing down at Tony and slowly shakes her head. I watch in disbelief. Is this some sort of joke? I keep staring, stunned. No. No no no no.

'Let's go back up to the cottage,' I hear myself say, and lead the boys past the crowd towards the garden gate. Suddenly we feel quite peripheral to the drama; we slip quietly away, as if this scene on the beach, this unfolding catastrophe, has nothing to do with us at all. And in my mind, it almost hasn't. What they all think is happening here right now cannot be true; it is not happening. We climb the path together in silence. I am too dazed to form words. As we enter the cottage a figure races past the open kitchen window and I hear him say 'Him dead', but still I

do not believe it. They are wrong. In a minute Annabelle is going to come and tell us Tony is conscious and fine.

'Will Tony be okay?' asks one of the boys. 'I hope so,' I reply. 'I think a doctor is on his way.' I look at them, and see that Jake is still in his pyjamas. They are caked in sand.

'Let's go and wash all this sand off,' I suggest, and as if in a dream I lead them into the bathroom. We are going to do something normal; it is going to make everything normal. I perch on the edge of the bath, and turn on the shower. Water explodes everywhere, drenching me. As I wrestle with the shower head I register the silence of boys who would ordinarily fall about at such comedic misfortune. I look up from the edge of the bath to the door and see Annabelle standing in the door frame. She gazes straight at me, unsmiling, and very slowly shakes her head.

I stumble into her arms. 'No!' I am shouting at her. She holds me tightly; I cannot stand. I lurch back, staring at her face, willing her to say I have misunderstood. 'Dec,' Jake says softly. He stares up at me, frightened. 'Why is your face like that? What's happening?' I open my mouth, but no sound comes out. Joe wraps his arm around my leg and peers up anxiously. 'Has Tony died-ed?' he asks.

I look down at my children. 'Yes. Yes, he has. Tony has died.'