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Ganefs and Prophets, Philosophers and Fools: Literary and
Genre in Contemporary Fiction

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Cassy Green
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Abstract

This thesis comprises two sections: a critical research essay focusing on Michael Chabon's 2002 novel *The Yiddish Policemen's Union* and the first ten chapters of a detective novel entitled *Te Ngaio Road*. In both sections, I explore the critical evaluation of literary and genre fiction and the influence different genres have on literary authors. The critical portion of the thesis investigate the historical, cultural and ideological underpinnings of the perception of knowledge, contemporary perceptions of literary and genre fiction, including the formation of the canon and the postmodern concept of innovative literary fiction. Using Chabon's novel *The Yiddish Policemen's Union* as a focus, I argue that the dismantling of boundaries between literary and genre indicate a post postmodern trend and a new literary form rather than a continuation of postmodernism. In *Te Ngaio Road* a detective genre framework is used along with a modernist stream of consciousness and multiple points of view. There is also a postmodern focus on the aesthetic form and innovation, and an overlap of literary and genre influences to trace the investigation of the murder of a small girl in a conflicted community.

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Introduction

This thesis contains two sections. The first section is a 12,000 word critical research essay that challenges the assumptions that underpin contemporary perception of literary and genre writing. The second section of the thesis is 23,000 words of a creative work, presented as the first ten chapters of a detective novel *Te Ngaio Road*.

My own creative work is influenced by both literary and genre writing. An attempt to define evaluative criteria between the two types of fiction is problematic. Philosophical, historical, sociological and cultural aspects reveal the transitory nature of categorisation as a whole. Significantly, both modernism and postmodernism accept a literary hierarchy that is ideologically unsound, and contemporary criticism accepts this evaluation without examining the precepts underpinning those judgements. In fact contemporary critical review cannot bear close scrutiny; this is especially noticeable when contemporary literary authors choose multi-genre writing careers, embracing forms as diverse as Pulitzer-prize winning literary fiction, graphic novels, screenplays and comics. It is now possible to write the best literature, while still indulging in multiple forms, common tropes and using frameworks from romance, detective or science fiction genres.

Contemporary criticism often adheres to the belief that the inclusion of genre elements must be in postmodernist form, where elements of genre are used only to innovate the literary work. This only serves to highlight hierarchal precepts no longer accepted as meaningful. In this thesis I use Chabon's work as a lens through which to focus on the issues and assumptions that surround literary and genre writing, and differentiate his writing from postmodernist works that only allow genre elements in a prescribed form.

The new breed of author, like Chabon, uses both literary and genre forms to create a hybrid novel, disregarding any outdated precepts of hierarchy. Chabon's removal of those boundaries dividing literary and genre writing, and any postmodern preconceptions of evaluation, suggest a new form of fiction writing. Andrew Hoberek writes in his introduction to *After Postmodernism: Form and History in Contemporary American Fiction*, "any effort to distinguish post-postmodern trends must... adduce specific aspects of fictional form that both occur across a range of contemporary writing and depart in some way from postmodern norms" (237). An analysis of the literary and genre influences in *The Yiddish Policemen's Union* and the works of similar contemporary authors illustrate a new form in fiction which levels the playing field for literary and genre writing, and helps to dismantle outdated postmodern evaluative precepts.

Like Chabon my own literary influences criss-cross the literary-genre boundary. Enid Blyton and Sir Conan Doyle are stockpiled next to Tolstoy, Maugham, Dickens and Kipling, Jules Verne next to Dostoyevsky and Asimov next to Homer. Distinctions of "low-brow" and "high-brow" have done little to curb my appreciation for both literary and genre writing. The creative section of my thesis is the first ten chapters of a detective novel, with a working title of *Te Ngaio Road*. The creative project falls firmly into the conventional evaluation criteria for "genre" writing, specifically detective fiction, however the piece of work is also inspired by William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*, and his ingenuous ability to tap into the minds of his characters. The pace, the sharp detection skills and the raw energy of genre writers like Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler influence the framework and characterisation of my novel, and authors such as Faulkner, Vladimir Nabokov, Michael Ondaatje and Annie Proulx influence the aesthetic elements of the

novel. Like Chabon's cauldron of influences, and disregard for postmodern literary/genre strictures, my intention is to use a detective genre framework without relinquishing the aesthetic quality and innovation inherent in literary style, and I draw no evaluative distinction between any of these influences.

The novel is placed in a fictional Mount Maunganui, told by four main characters: the first is an elderly man suffering from a rare form of dementia; the second is a disgraced policeman who has fled his past to hide in a small coastal town; the third is a local policewoman, inexperienced and with her own secrets to resolve; and the fourth character is a woman central to a criminal dynasty that affects the entire community. When this woman loses a child, her vengeance precipitates events that impact both the community and each of the main characters.

Creating a piece of writing influenced by both genre and literary work raises questions around inspiration, influence, contemporary categorisation and hierarchal evaluation. Should a writer consider Chabon's "ganefs and prophets" in *The Yiddish Policemen's Union* (368) an inferior influence to William Faulkner's "philosophers and fools" in *The Sound and the Fury* (63)? Should emerging writers steer away from genre unless used in a prescribed postmodernist manner? More importantly, can we be assured that contemporary critical evaluation reflects the fluid literary landscape in which we find ourselves today, where boundaries are frequently revealed as flimsy constructs based on ideologies long past. The aim of this thesis is to challenge contemporary evaluative supposition and release my own work from anachronous boundaries and precepts.

Part One: Collapsing Boundaries: Literary Fiction and the Genre Form in Michael Chabon's *The Yiddish Policemen's Union*

In 2007, Pulitzer prize-winning author Michael Chabon saw the publication of his novel *The Yiddish Policemen's Union*. At the time, reception of the hard-talking allohistorical detective novel pegged it as a hybrid work that reflected Chabon's fascination with the blurring between genre and literary writing. His imaginative use of low culture themes like comic books, detective stories and science fiction while still focusing on the aesthetic of language defies easy critical categorisation. Chabon intends for this to be the case; he is critical of contemporary criticism which lauds the literary over genre and forces authors to vie for literary consideration. Michael Chabon publically addressed this segregation of literary from genre in 2003. He wrote an introduction to *McSweeney's Mammoth Treasury of Thrilling Tales*, which served as a scathing diatribe against the elevation of literary fiction and the categorisation of genre fiction as "low art." Later reprinted in longer format, as "Trickster in a Suit of Lights: Thoughts on the Modern Short Story" in his book *Maps and Legends* (2008), the essay aired his frustration at the status quo, saying that, as writers, we are "foolish to restrict ourselves to one type or category" (5). In his argument, he arbitrarily substitutes "nurse romance novels" for literary novels in an effort to convey how tedious it becomes having only one genre considered worthy of the canon. He describes his own, award-winning, literary work as "sparkling with epiphanic dew," but as ultimately "boring." Chabon explains his own attraction to other genres, genres with "rich traditions" by authors as diverse and as highly regarded as Balzac, Wharton, Conrad, Graves, Maugham, Faulkner, [and] Twain (6-7). He believes that before the 1950s, when the sharp divide between

literary and genre did not exist, authors had much more freedom to practice their art (5).

Postmodernism still defines genre as governed by formula and convention, and this mundane engineering supposedly distinguishes it from literary fiction. But Chabon posits that literary fiction is just as formulaic and conventional:

The genre known (more imprecisely than any other) as “literary fiction” has rules, conventions, and formulas of its own: the primacy of a unified point of view, for example; letters and their liability to being read or intercepted; the dance of adulterous partners; the buried family secret that curses generations to come; the ordinary heroism of an unsung life (10).

Critical response to Chabon’s essay was initially enthusiastic. *Time Magazine* ran a review by Lev Grossman suggesting that Chabon’s remarks capture “literature in mid-transformation, the modernist bleeding into the postmodern and beyond.”

Grossman agrees that the division between literary and genre is no longer as clear-cut as critics presume:

The tough, fibrous membrane that used to separate literary fiction from popular fiction is rupturing. The highbrow and the lowbrow, once kept chastely separate, are now hooking up, which is why we have great, funky, unclassifiable writers like Margaret Atwood, Neal Stephenson, Susanna Clarke and David Mitchell (2004).

Despite these enthusiastic responses, and an awareness of an era of literary change and innovation similar to that which ushered in postmodernism, Chabon’s views did not challenge the status quo. His subsequent novels, *The Final Solution* (2004) and *The Yiddish Policeman’s Union* (2007), both exhibit his usual literary style, despite

his use of counter-factual history and detective genre tropes. As the genre framework traditionally provides a cultural reference, allowing the novel to be interpreted within a familiar context, the novels were critically reviewed as genre and therefore “low art.”

Chabon’s work is also problematic to postmodernist interpretations. While postmodernism celebrates the blending of high and low culture, it has a very distinctive and limiting concept of the use of low culture. Andrew Hoberek, in his introduction to *Twentieth Century Literature after Postmodernism*, writes that holding contemporary fiction up to postmodern standards, “perpetuates hierarchal view[s] of culture that confuses aesthetic questions about literary form with sociological ones about the constituencies for such form” (233). Postmodernist literary authors must deconstruct the genre framework, usually in the form of parody, imitation and pastiche, or create a metafictional narration to “play” with the form, similar to works like Vladimir Nabokov’s *Pale Fire* or Thomas Pynchon’s *The Crying of Lot 49*. In these instances, genre is still considered “low art” unless appropriated by authors for literary work (Todorov 43). In contrast, Chabon does not appropriate genre for literary innovation, he uses genre as he would literary form. He therefore disregards the assumption that literary fiction is an elevated form and genre fiction is simply there to be “appropriated.”

The Yiddish Policeman’s Union is an acclaimed novel. It remained on the *New York Times* bestseller list for six weeks, and picked up a laundry list of genre awards including: the Nebula Award for Best Novel (by the Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America); the Locus Award for Best SF Novel; the Hugo Award for Best Novel (World Science Fiction Society); and the Sidewise Award for Alternate History for Best Novel. It was also shortlisted for two more awards; the

British Science Fiction Association Award for Best Novel and the Edgar Allan Poe Award for Best Novel. Despite this stellar reception, the novel received no nominations or prizes from literary award-giving panels.

Contemporary criticism struggles with hybrid novels such as *The Yiddish Policemen's Union*. Reviews tend to concentrate on the detective tropes, one calling it, “an excellent, hyperliterate, genre-pantsing detective novel” (Anderson). In a review in *The Quarterly Conversation*, Scott Esposito suggested Chabon’s literary nous was not up to scratch in *The Yiddish Policeman's Union*, thus making it a genre novel:

Amusing definitely, and certainly well-written, but this kind of narration doesn’t make Landsman anything more than Chabon’s lonely detective. As a piece of genre fiction, Landsman’s fine, but as a literary character he feels half-formed, the eternal butt of jokes, running smack into iron poles only to bounce back up and go scurrying off in another direction.

Slate Magazine’s Ruth Franklin accused Chabon of “trying to drag the decaying corpse of genre fiction out of the shallow grave where writers of serious literature abandoned it” (2007). A literary novel using a genre framework still results in, at least for some critics, an excellent genre novel with literary pretensions.

The critical evaluation which summarily genre is a postmodernist outlook, and one which ensures the perpetuation of a strong evaluative division between literary and genre works. Critical reception based on postmodern evaluation often forces literary authors to actively defend their works from being defined as “genre” or “low art.” Postmodernism’s devaluation of genre works also allows literary authors to “appropriate” genre elements, often without crediting a genre author’s

work. A close reading of *The Yiddish Policemen's Union*, a novel that exhibits elements of literary fiction, dystopian science fiction and the genre framework of detective fiction, illustrates the lack of clarity in the categorisation of contemporary fiction, and investigates Chabon's claim that literary and genre fiction now exist in the "borderlands," where boundaries are revealed as ideological, and as such cease to function, or collapse altogether. (*Trickster*12). Post-postmodernism and the continuing cultural and sociological evolution of the canon now often situate literary and genre fiction in similar territory, bringing into question the precepts that underpin this division between literature and genre, and rendering postmodern distinctions blurred, unpredictable and sometimes arbitrary. I believe this shift towards the levelling of literary and genre work marks an advance from the somewhat elitist concepts of postmodernism towards a new form of criticism.

This essay starts with a foray into the philosophical, cultural and sociological background that charts the historical evolution in the categorisation of knowledge, and therefore literature, in society. I will consider the canon as a sociological construct, and expose the historical and cultural influences that assist in molding our views of literary hierarchy. Secondly, I will explore the reception of similar contemporary fiction by literary authors that struggle with the explicit boundaries of postmodern theory, with specific reference to the works of literary authors whose works, like Chabon's, sit across the literary/genre borderlands. Thirdly, I will analyse *The Yiddish Policemen's Union* with a discussion of the novel's literary and genre influences and his unique blending of literary and genre without postmodernist strictures.

In *The Order of Things* Michel Foucault establishes a timeline that indicates the major shifts in perception towards the representation of knowledge in Western culture. He writes that, until the end of the sixteenth century, “mimesis” or “similitude” reigned, where language is “a form of repetition: the theatre of life or the mirror of nature” (19). In the seventeenth century the limitations of mimesis became the subject of language itself, “leaving nothing behind it but games... the chimeras of similitude loom up on all sides, but they are recognised as chimeras” (56). Foucault cites *Don Quixote* as the first modernist work, where literature first becomes self-aware and exposes the limitations of language:

The cruel reason of identities and differences make endless sport of signs and similitudes; because in it language breaks off its old kinship with things and enters into lonely sovereignty from which it will reappear, in its separated state, only as literature: because it marks the point where resemblance enters an age which is, from the point of view of resemblance, one of madness and imagination. (54)

The age of order and reason that follows elevates taxonomy and rationality as the only means of interpretation, however, by the end of the eighteenth century a new perspective emerges, Foucault writes, and “the visible order, with its permanent grid of distinctions is now only a superficial glitter above an abyss” (273).

Mimesis and rationality are replaced by the “theory of representation” where the relationship between the sign, the concept and the object to which they refer becomes entirely arbitrary. (270). The shift in perception represents “pure forms of knowledge” negatively, as “isolated, attaining both autonomy and sovereignty in relation to all empirical knowledge” (270). This is because representation removes the assumption that mimesis and identity can be used as foundations, and leaves just

a splintered vision of knowledge; an aphasic, scattered approach that arbitrarily arranges and rearranges infinitely. The result is the joke in Borges' imaginary listing of a Chinese encyclopaedia:

Animals are divided into: (a) belonging to the emperor, (b) embalmed, (c) tame, (d) sucking pigs, (e) sirens, (f) fabulous, (g) stray dogs, (h) included in the present classification, (i) frenzied, (j) innumerable, (k) drawn with a very fine camelhair brush, (l) et cetera, (m) having just broken the water pitcher, (n) that from a long way off look like flies.

(xvi)

Representation unhinges perception from empirical knowledge, but in doing so imbues perception with “reflections on subjectivity, the human being” (270). The human condition no longer stands outside of language, but instead becomes integral to the process. Foucault argues that this constant redefining of our perception of knowledge is essential, and that the process results in continuous and necessary evolution. Literature written in the ages of similitude, classicism and representation reflect this evolution and serve as a window into past perceptions and cultural judgements. It serves to remind us that literature is not created in a vacuum, but written within a historical, cultural and societal context.

In *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, French philosopher Jean-Francois Lyotard views representation in the light of metanarrative. He identifies modernism with the concept of a complete or total system that depends on grand myths or narratives which authenticate and support the way a society functions. These narratives are cultural stories, theories and philosophies which impart the practices and belief system of a society, and support order in a society. Lyotard defines postmodernism as “incredulity toward metanarratives ... the

narrative function is losing its functors, its great hero, its great dangers, its great voyages, its great goal. It is being dispersed in clouds of narrative language elements—narrative, but also denotative, prescriptive, descriptive, and so on” (xxiv).

Foucault and Lyotard accentuate the fact that society eventually becomes aware of the underpinnings, limitations and inconsistencies of each overarching philosophy, and that postmodernism ultimately reveals that there is no overarching philosophy. Postmodernism becomes self-aware of grand narratives, and therefore aware of the inconsistencies in society that the grand narratives serve to hide. In aesthetic terms, postmodernism has surface similarities with modernism; both blur boundaries between high and low art, reject strict genre boundaries, and manipulate or play with language (Foucault’s “chimeras”). However, modernism underscores the lines between chaos and order, whereas postmodernism attempts to reject order and reflects the subjectivity of the social construct, the fluidity and reflexivity inherent in self-consciousness, and the resulting fragmentation and discontinuity. While both modernism and postmodernism attempt to blend literary and genre, both still retain value judgements and consider literary and genre writing as separate. It is this residue of hierarchal order that I see dismantling in contemporary novels such as Chabon’s, but due to postmodernist fragmentation and fluidity, it is a development that will be easier to document in retrospect. Lyotard explains the true dilemma of literature both in the postmodern era and beyond:

A postmodern artist or writer is in the position of a philosopher: the text he writes, the work he produces are not in principle governed by preestablished rules, and they cannot be judged according to a determining judgement, by applying familiar categories to the text or to the work. Those rules and categories are what the work of art itself

is looking for...Postmodern would have to be understood according to the paradox of the future (*post*) anterior (*modo*). (81).

French philosopher Jacques Derrida offers a different perspective when the focus is on literature as a form of knowledge. In his essay “The Law of Genre” Derrida argues against such stable and hierarchic structures altogether. He points out that creation of a boundary that defines something like genre immediately presupposes an “other.” According to Derrida, “when a limit is established, norms and interdictions are not far behind: Do, Do not says genre, the word genre the figure, the voice, or the law of genre” (52). Any attempt to establish limits and boundaries is bound to fail, as attempts to limit incursions cause endless exceptions and alterations, reaffirming the other as much as the genre. He argues that the concept of “literariness” is now in flux, as genres “evolve—through their own internal development, but also by competing with and modifying one another, and hence moving up or down the hierarchy of genres” (29). David Duff, in his introduction to *Modern Genre Theory* agrees that the, “concept of genre can be seen as self-defeating,” and “individual texts frequently elude classification...because the textual signals which indicate membership of a genre cannot themselves be part of that genre” (219). Russian author Yury Tynyanov also describes the fluidity of literature in his essay, “The Literary Fact”, stating that we have reached, “a period when a genre is disintegrating, it shifts from the centre to the periphery, and a new phenomenon floats in to take its place in the centre, coming up from among the trivia, out of the backyards and low haunts of literature” (33). These philosophical debates leave the categorisation of literary artefacts in flux, and suggest that all categorisation of knowledge and genre should be approached with an open mind, and

an awareness of how ephemeral each cultural and ideological system's metanarrative can be.

The aspect of literature most affected by cultural and ideological metanarratives is the formation of the canon. Historically attempts to create an objective canon based on aesthetics alone have been plagued by the same issues raised by Foucault, Lyotard and Derrida: representation, metanarrative and the evolution of genre. The canon is charged with misrepresentation on a cultural level; of having an imperial backbone that excludes minority groups and unpopular opinion. In *American Literature & the Culture Wars*, Gregory Jay dismisses aesthetics as an indicator for canonisation entirely, suggesting that what is needed is a “rethinking our literary history in terms of cultural work, the struggle for representation, and the social construction of aesthetic values” (201). Jay's investigation of American literature shows that, between 1890 and 1950, literary focus narrows considerably. The combined cultural pressure of “aestheticism and American exceptionalism” fine-combed the canon until only “exemplars of aesthetic greatness who expressed the American essence” remained. Many great literary works were cast aside for cultural or socio-aesthetic reasons. However, the reasons reflect historical values, resulting in a devastating loss of literature deemed subversive within that historical period.

Postmodernist theorists of the 1960s and 70s question the literary merit of the canon, specifically this side-lining of literary works on a historical, sociological and cultural basis. The main criticism is the canon's overwhelming reliance on works that are imperial, or “reflected the Anglo-Saxon bias” and that the canon historically, “fabricated a symbolic consensus ... that papered over real social contradictions and

racial conflicts.” This imperialism results in literature chosen to maintain a society’s grand narrative at a particular time in history. Indeed, Jay points out, “many of the writers resurrected after 1970 [by the postmodernists] had been importantly featured in anthologies and histories prior to 1920” (180).

Jay also examines the overarching assumption that literary works find their way into the canon by the test of time. He notes that, “once one recognises that the power of a text to move a reader is a culturally produced effort--that literary ‘taste’ is not natural but taught, and taught in a way that reproduces values that go beyond aesthetics---then the issue of power becomes of vital pedagogical concern” (209). Jay’s awareness of the cultural influence upon the canon supports Lyotard’s theory of postmodernism as incredulity toward metanarratives, and the exclusion of literature which fails to uphold the majority precepts of a particular society.

However, in contrast to Lyotard, Jay believes metanarratives are still in place, and postmodernism’s incredulity does not dismantle the bias in contemporary society. He considers postmodernism a “fashionable tag” that categorises the “self-reflexive fiction white men,” citing Barth, Coover, Barthelme, Vonnegut and Pynchon. Jay argues against Lyotard’s assertion that postmodernism is without “metanarratives,” stating that metanarratives still exist and “belong to ideological apparatus” that are welded to “identifiable institutional and historical groups” (204). He suggests that any decay of metanarrative is simply due to post-colonial restructuring. Jay’s essay serves to highlight social, cultural and historical forces influencing the canon, and while supporting Lyotard’s concept of metanarrative, he also suggests that these metanarratives may not be as dismantled as postmodernists believe. Jay’s comments serve to highlight that it is postmodernism’s metanarrative that genre is “low art” unless appropriated by literary authors writing “self-reflexive

fiction.” It is this precept that collapses when literary authors like Chabon use both genre and literary forms together without hierarchal scaffolding.

Jay’s note of the severe cropping of the canon between 1890 and 1950 is important, as it still directly affects contemporary critical evaluation today. Theo D’Haen’s essay “Genre Conventions in Postmodern Fiction” casts a light on the efforts to categorise and define literature during this period. The most influential categorisation was F.R. Leavis in *The Great Tradition* (1948), who defines the literary novel as one that depicts “life in its entire physical, emotional, and social complexity...by primarily realist techniques” (qtd. in D’Haen 406). D’Haen writes that this definition, and Leavis’ elevation of “psychological or sociological works” rapidly became an accepted cultural precept. D’Haen believes Leavis made a value judgement that affected the canon’s historical works and future works, and inflicted his own time’s preferences even on the contemporary canon (406). Both Jay and D’Haen emphasise the danger of assuming contemporary critical value judgements will be valid in the future, as this has not been the case historically. Paul Copley also reminds us of the transient nature of categorisation in any era. In “Firing the Canon” he argues that contemporary criticism cannot see the process behind historical texts achieving canonisation nor consider future considerations that may decide the fate of work being produced now:

To accept at face value the accounts given by canonisers would be to assume that contemporary readers’ evaluations always coincide with those of future cultural historians--an assumption which is not borne out by the neglect of hundreds of works which have been popular and significant in their time. (Copley 22)

Jay, D'Haen and Cobley raise cultural, critical and historical considerations that affect the canon and the inclusion of canonical works, revealing it as an ideological construct with a chequered past. Thinkers like Lyotard and Jay call for the inclusion of a wider range of literature in the canon, and to include works that may not have been accepted in past regimes. The canon has expanded in recent times, for example, post-colonial works and feminist works are now represented, but on the other hand, genre works are still excluded, mainly due to the postmodernist perception that treats literary fiction and genre fiction as an entirely different species. The postmodernist acceptance of "low art" within literary works is just that, grudging acceptance, and this view hampers any real evaluation of literature across the full spectrum.

Chabon's irritation with the elevation of one genre (literary fiction) to the canon above all other genres is understandable when one considers that over the last three decades critical reviews have become culturally functional in the practise of awarding literary merit and literary awards. If critical reviews treat a novel as "literary fiction" it gains a position in a cultural hierarchy at a level from which judges select canonic works for such prizes as the Pulitzer and the Booker (Norman 38). All authors are at the mercy of critical review, and the "necessity for consistent endorsement by high-status cultural intermediaries whose judgement cannot be guaranteed or even predicted" (39). The postmodern metanarrative of hierarchy is based on defined literary characteristics which function to elevate or downgrade the works it includes. As Hoberek points out, instead of postmodernists focusing on the aesthetic, it has become more about criteria or "constituencies" of form (233). Therefore, a post postmodernist trend would be to dismantle or collapse the boundaries set between literary and genre works, based on the constituency of form.

Initially, this might seem to be a continuation or movement within postmodernism, as Hoberek believes; however, a dismantling of hierarchy exposes postmodernism's perceptual limitations, and dismantles almost all of its literary techniques.

Postmodern theory recognises the hybrid genre/literary novel, and is forced to find a way to deal with the dialogic without compromising literary fiction's elevated status. It is quite specific when defining literary works that "play" with genre elements. In Tzvetan Todorov's essay "The Typology of Detective Fiction" he argues "that detective fiction has its norms; to 'develop' them is also to disappoint them: to 'improve upon' detective fiction is to write 'literature,' not 'detective fiction'" (Todorov 43). Todorov's claim is that only detective fiction that is "developed" or "improved upon" can be considered literary. Todorov's views rule out detective authors such as Edgar Allan Poe or Arthur Conan Doyle, both of whom wrote straight-forward detective fiction. Todorov is instead considering the appropriation of detective genre elements seen in postmodern authors such as Umberto Eco, Jorge Luis Borges, Thomas Pynchon, and Vladimir Nabokov. In making such a case, Todorov creates a loophole through which postmodern literary authors can escape the stigma of being a genre writer while still incorporating elements of the detective genre into literary fiction.

In her book *The Doomed Detective* Stefano Tani builds upon this argument, which valorises literary fiction at the expense of genre fiction. She bases her own theory firmly on the postmodern value judgements implied by Todorov. She suggests that "serious novelists" are in the habit of culling the detective genre in order to create "new narrative techniques" and use the formula "like the spare pieces of an old car" (34). Her argument forces an even larger split between detective fiction labelled as belonging to the "popular and mass-produced current (the

mechanical one)” and detective fiction labelled as that of the “intellectual current (the lyrical)” (17). In her discussion, Tani dismisses the former outright and concerns herself only with “intellectual” or literary detective novels. She writes,

The literary authors “deconstruct” the genre’s precise architecture into a meaningless mechanism without purpose: they parody positivistic detection. They dismantle the elegant engine Poe constructed, pulling apart the once functional machinery and removing its pieces (now the plot, now the suspense technique, now the clichéd detective) to do different things with them. (34)

Tani’s theory buys directly into the cultural evaluative hierarchy that the literary canon prescribes, in that she only assigns value to the literary detective novel. Tani states that most literary detective fiction is written by literary authors who assume the structure of the detective novel for literary purposes. She notes that, “The literary detective novel...is nowadays written, generally speaking, by people who are not primarily detective writers, but who assume the structure and techniques of the genre for a different end” (32). Tani lists several literary authors to prove her case—“the highbrow literary detective fiction of Borges, of Nabokov, of the nouveau roman and of all the even more recent writers (Pynchon, Gardner, Hjortsberg)” (32).

Tani goes on to break the literary detective genre into three distinct categories. The first is the “innovative anti-detective novel,” in which she places John Gardner’s *Sunlight Dialogues* and Umberto Eco’s *Name of the Rose*. This category contains novels that “play” with the solution. The second category is the “deconstructive anti-detective novel,” which frustrates any attempts to find a solution, such as Thomas Pynchon’s *The Crying of Lot 49*. The last category is the “metafictional anti-detective novel,” characterised by heightened textuality and the

interplay between author and reader, for example, Vladimir Nabokov's *Pale Fire* (43).

If one were to follow Todorov and Tani's logic, the only category *The Yiddish Policemen's Union* could conceivably be forced into is Tani's "innovative" category, similar to Umberto Eco's *Name of the Rose*. Tani lists some of the postmodern elements indicative of this group:

There is an original setting, a somehow parodic protodetective, a free use of conventional rules... There is a solution; a culprit is found, although he is not directly responsible for all the deaths. (72).

Tani description of an innovative, literary detective novel includes a "social preoccupation related to crime" which always presents itself in "the hard-boiled school." Novels in this category, she claims, do not cannibalise the conventional detective novel as much as; "the conventional rules of detective fiction are freely used or twisted but not subverted; some partially satisfying solution is still present." Chabon, like Eco, might be said to utilise the conventional detective formula without "subverting" it. The solution, while identifying the murderer, points to a larger conspiracy which is so widespread as to be unstoppable, which makes the solution unsatisfying. The protagonist, Landsman, fits Tani's prerequisite of "detectives who cannot maintain their detachment [and can] no longer be the perfect detective—his human nature dooms or saves him despite investigative work" (43). No critic mentions this postmodern definition of Chabon's work, and nor should they, since it is obvious that he does not attempt to be innovative in this way. While it may be convenient to shoehorn an established literary author like Chabon into the innovative postmodern loophole, he has gone beyond what Tani considers acceptable in his appropriation of the detective genre form. The wholesale use of genre leaves the

novel in the category Tani considers “the mechanical one.” Tani’s conclusions display the postmodernist “investment...in [seeing] difficult formal innovation as the defining characteristic of serious literature” (Hoberek 234). While postmodernism celebrates literary pastiche, imitation, parody and innovative tinkering with genre, the core assumption remains; that genre is a form of “low art.”

The Yiddish Policemen’s Union is not an innovative, deconstructive or metafictional novel; nor a literary novel appropriating genre elements. It is not, in fact, a postmodern novel. Chabon is deliberately placing his novel across multiple genres, including the literary genre, and thereby attempting to redefine what the term literary means. Hoberek believes Chabon is looking beyond postmodernism’s experimentation. The “blurring of high and mass culture” suggests the on-going influence of postmodernism, however, Hoberek writes, “while postmodernism embraced popular forms in ways that modernism never did, there is a difference between the transitional but still self-consciously “literary” appropriation of popular genres... and a newer tendency to confer literary status on popular genres themselves” (237-8).

The cultural hierarchy created by a postmodern ideology results in some exceptional behaviour by contemporary literary authors. Several authors use genre in their literary work to the same extent as Chabon, but in contrast they vainly attempt to remain within the postmodern definition of literary fiction. Literary writers such Margaret Atwood and Cormac McCarthy produce works that employ popular science fiction genre tropes. Critics deem these novels literary, partly because the author’s accepted status, and partly because of compliance to the postmodernist precepts genre trope appropriation. However, Ursula Le Guin’s review of Margaret Atwood’s

The Year of the Flood highlights the ambivalence authors feel at having to portray their work as either literary or genre fiction in the first place:

Margaret Atwood doesn't want any of her books to be called science fiction... She says that everything that happens in her novels is possible and may even have already happened, so they can't be science fiction, which is "fiction in which things happen that are not possible today." This arbitrarily restrictive definition seems designed to protect her novels from being relegated to a genre still shunned by hidebound readers, reviewers and prize-awards. She doesn't want the literary bigots to shove her into the literary ghetto. (5-6)

In a similar scenario, reviewers lauded Cormac McCarthy's novel *The Road* as a literary work despite the obvious science fiction trope of the post-apocalyptic world.

McCarthy and Atwood's novels are defined as literary, and therefore realist, in that everything that happens in the novels is possible. This stance, aside from suggesting Isaac Asimov's robotics novels will soon become realist literary fiction, is designed more to disguise genre influence, or hide it entirely. Jason Sanford in the *New York Review of Science Fiction* points out that, such is the disdain for genre authors, literary authors are often able to dabble in genre without giving credit to influential authors in the "genre whirlpool." He uses *The Road* as an example of a novel uniformly accepted by critics as a literary novel, and canonised by reviewers who fail to inventory genre conventions clearly apparent in McCarthy's work.

Sanford argues that, "any literary critic who praised *The Road* without mentioning *A Canticle for Leibowitz* is either poorly read (inexcusable for any serious critic) or made a conscious effort to ignore one of the twentieth century's most important books." Sanford states that the only truly worthwhile review of *The Road* was the

one written by Michael Chabon, who easily locates McCarthy's novel within the matrix of both literary and genre fiction:

[Chabon] places *The Road* within the larger realm of post-apocalyptic literature, going so far as to quote Walter M. Miller, Jr. (author, in Chabon's words, of the seminal *A Canticle for Leibowitz*) as saying that what most characterizes the post-apocalyptic genre is how a novel's protagonists are haunted by the ghosts of the dead. (2008)

Sanford concludes that genre and literary fiction overlap extensively and, "in short, McCarthy is one of the leading novelists of our age in large part because he has no fear of crossing literary genres." Chabon agrees, in an interview with Scott Timberg in the *LA Times*:

When a writer of unassailable literary reputation, like McCarthy, does produce a work of genre fiction...the critical machine prints out and issues a pass to a writer: "This isn't science fiction, because it was written by Cormac McCarthy." Or, "We think all science fiction is bad, unless it's written by a Margaret Atwood or Cormac McCarthy"...Ultimately with any great work of art, whether it was written by a Ray Bradbury or a Philip K. Dick or Cormac McCarthy, it's really the intensity with which it's been imagined and been brought into language.

Both science fiction and detective fiction tropes are often used by literary authors, as Chabon's *The Yiddish Policemen's Union* illustrates. Another detective novel, *The Night Train* (1997), by the literary author Martin Amis, also failed to win literary praise because of a genre framework, similar to Chabon's. Both novels used a detective genre framework without parody or pastiche, and did not "appropriate"

genre elements, in a postmodernist fashion. In the case of *The Night Train*, the novel received “vociferous” literary criticism despite Amis’ literary standing, and it was deemed “a repudiation...a genre holiday for a highbrow... [or] a misjudgement of the shifting criteria for cultural legitimacy” (Norman 54-55). Moreover, negative critical reception insured that Amis would not receive large advances for any further genre writing. For both authors the mistake of not following postmodernism’s narrow precepts around genre result in their novels being summarily removed from literary consideration.

The intensity and plasticity shown by the above novels is in part generated by their authors, allowing their writing to twist and turn through myriad genre and literary influences, adding layer upon layer of complexity over detailed aesthetic surfaces. New forms and original directions appear continuously and contemporary literary fiction uses genre frameworks again and again to reveal the blurred boundaries of the literary/genre divide. Chabon has left postmodernism behind, along with its uneasy definitions of literary and genre, and despite unwieldy explanations of constitutes the difference between the two. There is a move away from the postmodern scaffolding into new territory altogether, where boundaries are revealed as a contemporary and ideological construct, and collapse when brought to light.

In *The Yiddish Policemen’s Union* Chabon uses a detective genre framework but places the story in a counter-historical setting. He writes in a literary style reminiscent of his *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay*, which won him the Pulitzer Prize. Throughout the novel it becomes clear that Chabon is influenced by a wide range of literary and genre authors, genre models and literary novels. He does not attempt a postmodernist “formal innovation” and strip the science fiction and

detective genres for “spare pieces of an old car,” like Pynchon or Nabokov would have done. Chabon rebuilds the genre form like a muscle car, bristling with optional literary extras and souped up engine power. His style is highly texturised, and the result is neither genre, nor literary, but an equal meld between the two, emphasising Chabon’s lack of differentiation.

The first chapter in *The Yiddish Policemen’s Union* introduces the protagonist, Detective Meyer Landsman, on the very first page. This initial characterisation has a striking resemblance to Chandler’s acerbic similes and wry humour. Meyer Landsman is a hard-drinking, decorated policeman who “has the memory of a convict, the balls of a fireman, and the eyesight of a housebreaker” (2). His personal life is a shambles; divorced from his boss, living in a rundown hotel, on his off-days, “his thoughts start blowing out the open window of his brain like pages from a blotter” (2). This riffs fairly closely to the idealised detective described in Chandler’s essay “The Simple Art of Murder”—where the detective is an “honourable” man of limited means, with a strong sense of justice and a hint of loneliness. Landsman captures the essence of Chandler’s Phillip Marlowe, in that he “talks as the man of his age talks—that is, with rude wit, a lively sense of the grotesque, a disgust for sham, and a contempt for pettiness” (18). Chabon makes good use of Chandler’s fast-paced style and the hard-boiled detective genre as a whole. In an interview with Jon Wiener, Chabon admits Chandler is his “favourite” and he often revisits the author’s novels, “particularly Chandler’s detective novel *The Long Goodbye*...I think it’s one of the great American novels.” Chabon also studies Ross MacDonal’s novels; and believes that they “surpass Chandler’s on a

technical level, in their construction". During his characterisation of Landsman, Chabon kept Chandler and Macdonald's protagonists in mind. Chabon explains

Chandler's hero, Philip Marlowe, and Ross Macdonald's Lew Archer are in the same mold: solitary, isolated men. They don't have girlfriends; they live alone in apartments, drinking themselves to sleep at night over their books of chess problems. I wanted to play with that, in the most fond and affectionate sense." (Wiener)

Chabon's emulation of genre characters is done without the usual postmodernist techniques, and in the same interview he points this out, "I'm not trying to write parody or pastiche" (Wiener).

The Chandler-esque hard-boiled detective tropes evident in *The Yiddish Policemen's Union* are the initial surface texture. Closer analysis uncovers the influence of Russian Jewish author Isaac Babel. Babel's collection of short stories, *The Odessa Tales*, set in the ghetto of Moldavanka, introduces a Jewish gangster called Benya Krik. Chabon sees these tales as much an influence as Chandler. He says, "there was some strange kinship between Babel writing in translation and hard-boiled detective fiction, a kinship to Chandler" (Cohen). In a conference paper "When Crooks (and Gumshoes) talk Yiddish," Lee Williams' remarks on the many touch points between Babel and Chabon: Babel has a gangster protagonist, whereas Chabon chose a gumshoe detective, however, both authors "parody the gangster genre as well as the closed Jewish societies in which the criminals conduct their mischief. The result is a stylised, self-conscious narrative" (1). Williams highlights Babel's story "How things were done in Odessa" as a modernist approach to self-conscious parody, using "buffoonery, exaggeration, and blatant attention to writing as craft." The use of "hyperbolic descriptors and an ambivalent narrative attitude"

are hallmarks, not of the detective genre, but literary techniques reminiscent of modernist author Isaac Babel's work, Williams argues (1).

Babel's eight tales all feature his Jewish gangster Benya Krik, a prototype Yiddish gangster that is a rich characterisation of the Odessan criminal in as much as Chandler's Philip Marlowe is the iconic American noir detective. Williams writes that Babel's tales are, "marked by an exuberance in speech and plot that both laud and vilify the Jewish gangster, and that elevate religious observance while at the same time mocking it. This double capacity to hold two contradictory positions, to pay homage and at the same time trivialize, marks Babel as a modernist." Chabon's work manages to weave Babel's laconic wit and religious lampooning with Chandler's world-weary cynicism, resulting in a singularly self-aware character full of humour, contradictions, loss and regret.

Babel's influence also surfaces in Chabon's use of the first person "I" which dissolves the fourth wall. Babel's first tale beginning with, "Let's talk about Benya Krik. Let's talk about his lightning-quick beginning and his terrible end" (qtd. in Williams). Chabon's narrator has a similar wisecracking and blasphemous edge, quipping, "This conversation is the equivalent of Landsman's kissing the mezuzah, the kind of thing that starts out as a joke and ends up as a strap to hang on to" (39). Both Babel's Benya and Chabon's Landsman ridicule religious paraphernalia and the blind faith of believers. In Babel's tale "How Things Were Done in Odessa" Benya Krik consoles the mother of one of his victims, saying:

Everyone makes mistakes, even God. This was a giant mistake... But didn't God Himself make a mistake when he settled the Jews in Russia so that they could be tormented as if they were in hell? Wouldn't it have been better to have the Jews living in Switzerland,

where they would've been surrounded by first-class lakes, mountain air, and Frenchmen galore? Everyone makes mistakes, even God.

(191)

Chabon has adopted this wise-cracking stance and made it his own. Williams writes:

Chabon's introduction of a Messiah figure...a gay junkie who ties himself off with tefillin... [and] prayer straps (two small black leather boxes worn on the left arm and forehead by observant adult male Jews)...the worst crooks here are Hasidim; everybody calls one another Yid; Landsman tools around in a 1971 Chevelle SS Super Sport, the Nazi inference confirmed by "the "inflammatory double-S on the grille" (102); and Israel is denigrated as "the camel lands." (77)

While Chandler has influenced Chabon to add that extra dash of hard-boiled noir it is a study of Isaac Babel's Benya Krik that makes for a deeper understanding of Chabon's characterisation. Chabon has also taken Babel's description of insular and isolating ghetto life as a template for his own hopeless community perched on the icy edges of Alaska.

Both Babel and Chabon texturize language with cultural and historical signposts.

Babel frequently uses Yiddish syntax to highlight speech patterns of his characters.

Like Babel, Chabon uses Yiddish syntax and fictionalised jargon imbedded throughout the text of *The Yiddish Policemen's Union*. He pulls vocabulary from many sources in order to fit the alternate reality the protagonist Landsman inhabits.

Author Adam Rovner's article "Alternate History: The Case of Nava Semel's *Israland* and Michael Chabon's *The Yiddish Policemen's Union*," tracks down some of Chabon's more imaginative word choices:

Calling a gun a “sholem”—a Yiddishization of the biblical Hebrew “shalom,” meaning in this case “peace,” as in the American Western and pulp idiom that refers to a gun as a “peacemaker.” Telephones in the novel are termed “shoyfers”—another Yiddishization, for “shofar”—a ram’s horn blown in ritual practice to call Jews to assembly. (145)

Chabon also uses language to create an allegory between literary versus genre and Hebrew versus Yiddish, suggesting that it is pointless to regard one as having more value than the other. Chabon’s Sitka Jews use Yiddish while eschewing Hebrew as an almost dead language. Landsman’s universe identifies Hebrew with the counter historical demise of post war Israel:

It sounded to him like the Hebrew brought over by the Zionists after 1948. Those hard desert Jews tried fiercely to hold on to it in their exile but, as with the German Jews before them, got overwhelmed by the teeming tumult of Yiddish, and by the painful association of their language with recent failure and disaster. As far as Landsman knows, that kind of Hebrew is extinct except among a few last holdouts meeting annually in lonely halls (286).

Chabon seeks to disparage the way Zionists’ embrace of Hebrew represents a rejection of Yiddish as low-class. Here Chabon has attempted to reverse this contemporary ideology in order to show its meaninglessness. History could so easily have made Yiddish the dominant language. In Chabon’s world “what if” exposes arbitrary value judgements. This echoes his essay’s substitution of nurse romance novels with literary novels.

On the subject of language, Chabon adds yet another layer by giving his universe the bureaucratic language of Esperanto, a simplistic language designed to create a neutral linguistic platform. In the first few chapters Landsman rides the elevator with the night manager, “squeezing into the Zamenhof’s lone elevator, or ELEVATORO, as a small brass plate over the door would have it. When the hotel was built fifty years ago, all of its directional signs, labels, notices, and warnings were printed on brass plates in Esperanto” (3). Chabon names the hotel after the Jewish creator of the language, L.L. Zamenhof, and in doing so “indulges in a knowing wink at his own glossopoeia, as well as a nod to the Jewish influence on Esperanto” (Rovner 146). Chabon creates a strong Jewish sub-culture set in isolation against a background of fanaticism and organised crime, and which strongly echoes the ghetto communities Babel represented in Odessa.

For Chabon language and aesthetics is of primary importance, despite current ideology suggesting that this is reserved for literary novels alone. His word choice reflects Chabon’s preoccupation with both Yiddish and the hard-boiled jargon used by Chandler and Hammett. In his review Lev Grossman notes this balance and notes the effect:

It's instructive to watch a literary writer operate in a genre environment, where plot and pacing trump beautiful writing, where the thrill of what comes next is more important than the nuance of the now. When Chabon gets a little flowery, instead of marvelling at his elegant prose, one makes mental let's-hurry-it-up-already gestures.

(2004)

Chabon's Yiddish jargon, hard-boiled character and aesthetic use of language is a layer cake of both literary and genre influences, invents a depth of history, accumulating concrete detail for precise locations.

The lack of explanation in the form of flashbacks is characteristic of the detective genre where the only flashback tends to be the murder. However, this can be seen as both a genre and a literary trait. Chabon rests his alternate reality on plausible counter-historical events. For example, Roosevelt's Secretary of the Interior, Harold Ickes, put forward the idea of Alaska as a proposed refugee site, and the bill got to Congress before its rejection in 1940 (Rovner 144). Chabon puts forward the theory that if this bill had gone through, the establishment of a Jewish settlement of Sitka, Alaska would have been a sanctuary for Jews during the Holocaust. In his universe this would save four million Jews and Landsman talks of the "grim revelations of the slaughter of two million Jews in Europe" (29). Chabon tweaks history to include Marilyn Monroe as First Lady (201), Berlin laid low by an atomic bomb (136) and Jerusalem as a ruined war zone, "a city of blood and slogans painted on the wall, severed heads on telephone poles" (17).

Most of the counter-historical mentions are left unexplained. Chabon does not belabour the events preceding the action in his novel, giving only glimpses of changes that have resulted in such a bizarre settlement in Alaska. His focus is on the present, during which the U.S. government is dismantling Sitka and evacuating its population. This unsettling of the inhabitants is a major theme in the novel and Landsman sums it up at the end of the first chapter:

On the first of January, sovereignty over the whole Federal District of Sitka... will revert to the state of Alaska. The District Police, to which Landsman has devoted his hide, head, and soul for twenty years, will

be dissolved. It is far from clear that Landsman or Berko Shemets or anybody else will be keeping his job. Nothing is clear about the upcoming Reversion, and that is why these are strange times to be a Jew. (7)

Jehanne Dubrow points to the lack of counter-factual explanation as exposing Chabon's literary tendencies, stating, "[O]ne does not read a Chabon novel to learn how the narrative will conclude. Chabon is one of the most accomplished prose stylists of his generation but, as previous novels have proven; plot is neither his highest priority nor his forte" (145). Evelien Corveleyn agrees that the less revealed past is for "aesthetic (stylistic) purpose rather than a semantic one" (57).

Roth, like Chabon, uses genre as a framework rather than a formal innovation, and is thus another literary author outside of postmodernism's definition. Roth, similar to Chabon, habitually explores Jewish culture and the counterfactual question, "what if." Two of Roth's novels, *The Plot against America* and *The Counterlife*, consider a fictional present dramatically altered by counter historical details. *The Plot against America* was published a couple of years before *The Yiddish Policemen's Union*. It is based on the premise that Nazi sympathiser Charles Lindbergh becomes the American president, ousting Roosevelt, leading to a rise in anti-Semitism parallel with Nazi Germany. Hoberek writes that Roth's novel

[p]rovides a concrete example of how such recent deployments of genre fiction depart from high postmodernism's use of mass cultural materials. Rather than incorporating genre elements into a nonrealistic, fragmented, and metadiscursive narrative... Roth adopts the science fiction plot wholesale as a framing device. (238)

Unlike Chabon, Roth is less likely to break from the literary ranks. Hoberek notes that Roth denied having a model for the story, suggesting that this was a disingenuous attempt at distancing himself from genre writing. Hoberek believes that Roth:

retains enough of a residual commitment to the distinction between serious and genre fiction to...actively disavow the connection between his book and the huge corpus of science fiction novels...The point here is that Pynchon or Barth wouldn't have to disavow their borrowings from science fiction, since these borrowings are so clearly subsumed into a properly "literary" framework (239).

Chabon uses a genre framework in *The Yiddish Policemen's Union*, rather than “playing” with individual elements. The difference, however, is that Chabon does not distance himself from the influence of genre. Roth is still thinking like a postmodernist, but Chabon certainly isn't.

Many detective novels use chess as a motif; the fascinating and intricate creation and solving of puzzles dominates both the game and the formation of a mystery. Chabon uses chess as the dominant theme throughout the novel, influenced by both detective novels and the mental intersection between chess and the writing of fiction, imbuing the novel with a metafictional edge. The murder victim in *The Yiddish Policemen's Union* is a fellow inhabitant in Landsman's “crap-ass hotel” (3), a heroin addict who dies face down on his bed next to an unfinished game of chess, “a cheap set, the board a square of card that folds down the middle, the pieces hollow, with plastic nubs” (4). The night manager, Tenenboym, identifies the man as Emmanuel Lasker, “a chess-playing yid” (4). The murder victim turns out to have been a master chess player, something that makes him an outcast to his Verbover

family, a religious group that has outlawed chess. The chess link marks the way in the journey Landsman takes. It also binds the victim and the detective together in a shared past: Landsman's father forces him to play as a youth, and consequently he hates the game, whereas Shpilman loved to play it as a rebellion against his own father. There is also the concept of Shpilman as a piece in a chess game, a pawn which must be positioned in Jerusalem as part of a prophecy, in order to win back Israel, and Chabon imbues this concept with a sense of inevitability, of being a small part of a larger picture (Corveleyn 63). The narrative returns again and again chess as a metaphor, as an activity, and as an overlying grid to Landsman's investigation.

A closer look reveals that Chabon overlaps a common detective genre motif with the more subtle aesthetic influence of Vladimir Nabokov. Chabon's fascination with Nabokov's work relates to the way Nabokov aligns chess and fiction writing. Nabokov believes, "that competition in chess problems is not really between White and Black but between the composer and the hypothetical solver (just as in a first-rate work of fiction the real clash is not between the characters but between the author and the world)" (290). Chabon has his protagonist, Landsman, ruminate about his room number— "The door to his room hums its simple lyric: five-oh-five. It means nothing. Lights in the fog. Three Arabic numerals. Invented in India, actually, like the game of chess, but disseminated by Arabs" (372) — and in doing so he invokes Vladimir Nabokov's imagery of the bishop in chess, "The bishops move over it like searchlights" (290). Nabokov compares chess and fiction in his memoir *Speak, Memory*, where he writes,

It is one thing to conceive the main play of a composition and another to construct it. The strain on the mind is formidable; the element of time drops out of one's consciousness altogether: the building hand

gropes for a pawn in the box, holds it, while the mind still ponders the need for a foil or a stopgap, and while the fist opens, a whole hour, perhaps, has gone by, has burned to ashes in the incandescent cerebation of the schemer. (290)

In fact, Chabon has hung the entire mystery on Nabokov's master of the game of chess. When Landsman discovers that the chess board next to the murder victim, it initially thought to be an interrupted game. It turns out to be an unsolvable problem:

"It wasn't a chess game," Landsman says after a moment. "On the board in Shpilman's room. It was a problem. It seems obvious now, I should have seen it, the setup was so freaky. Somebody came to see Shpilman that night, and Shpilman posed him a problem. A tricky one."

The game turns out to be Nabokov's particular chess problem known as "Zugzwang," where the chess player is at a disadvantage and must play a move that will cost chess pieces in the game. Ultimately, this chess move is a metaphor for the Sitka District itself, as reversion forces the inhabitants into a costly move and a self-defeating evacuation. Landsman explains the mechanics of the situation to the others and then explains the connotation:

"They call that Zugzwang," Landsman says. "'Forced to move.' It means Black would be better off if he could just pass."

"But you aren't allowed to pass, are you? You have to do something, don't you?"

"Yes, you do," Landsman says. "Even when you know it's only going to lead to you getting check mated." (400).

The chess theme is further complicated when Landsman's sister dies when her plane crashes into Mount Dunkelblum, named after the famed Belgian chess master Arthur Dunkelblum (Corveleyn 63). Landsman's impression of the interrogation by CIA men is related, "Their questions are like the fundamental moves of the six different chess pieces, endlessly recombined until they number with the neurons in the brain" (363). Chabon moves his protagonist around the fictional mystery the same way Nabokov would create a chess problem, in that "a problem's value is due to the number of "tries"—delusive opening moves, false scents, specious lines of play, astutely and lovingly prepared to lead the would-be solver astray" (290).

Chabon's use of the chess motif and Nabokov's chess problem highlight the focus Chabon maintains on the aesthetic form of the text, and the influence postmodern writers like Nabokov have had on him. In the afterword to his novel *Lolita*, Nabokov's states, "For me a work of fiction exists only in so far as it affords me what I shall bluntly call aesthetic bliss" (313). Nabokov is very much a postmodernist, and he strongly defends his novel *Lolita* as a literary creation despite what was considered pornographic content in his era. Nabokov decried both genre and the readers of such writing, saying "pornography" carries the stench of "mediocrity, commercialism and certain strict rules of narration." Those "rigid rules" he states, cater to readers who prefer the traditional approach "as, for example, fans of detective stories feel," that it would not do if "the real murderer may turn out to be, to the fan's disgust, artistic originality." (311). Nabokov felt that his novel was postmodernist, using only elements of genre, manipulating the conventions but staying true to literary form. Nabokov and Chabon elevate the aesthetic, however, Nabokov stays strictly within postmodern strictures, while Chabon exhibits a similar style and uses genre without any sense of conflict.

Chabon's gift for rebuilding the genre detective without being slave to outdated tropes is refreshing. *The Yiddish Policemen's Union* continues to combine both genre and literary elements as it unfolds, and Landsman diverges from the stereotypical American hard-boiled detective with the introduction of his sidekick partner, Berko Shemets. Chabon creates a mythic element to Shemets, a personification of the displacement suffered by both sides of the Alaskan settlement. Shemets is a half Jewish, half Tlingit "shambling giant" who is "a minotaur, and the world of Jews is his labyrinth" (41). A surprising contrast is Landsman's ex-wife Bina Gelbfish; as Detective Inspector, and as such his boss. Their recent separation is still raw enough to dampen Landsman's mood and the novel introduces Bina as she points at some dumpsters in a manner reminiscent of, "the angel Michael casting Adam and Eve from the Garden" (53), similar to Landsman's removal from his marriage. Chabon has made his female character strong and feisty, and any resemblance Bina had to the traditional noir femme fatale—inevitably controlled, beautiful and somewhat vulnerable—is removed fairly quickly. Chabon takes her in another direction, leaving Landsman as the more inept marital counterpart. Bina is wearing "a bright orange parka with a blazing dyed-green ruff" (52), and her "corkscrew" red hair is out of control. Landsman notes that "somebody has already pissed her off once this morning" (53). While Landsman ignores her directions to drop the investigation he never loses his respect and his love for her, leaving the inevitable patriarchal theme of feminine downfall for Chandler's noir works.

Chabon is developing both sides of his character in a literary manner, without conforming to a full "realist" depiction of a conflicted protagonist. Most of the characters in the novel are larger than life, in some way striking, and easily remembered. Chabon has given them elements of caricature, moving away from the

realist tradition of literary fiction. He is painting on a large landscape, and he uses his characters as microcosms of the larger issues.

The theme of loss and regret runs through *The Yiddish Policemen's Union* on several levels. External events make Landsman's position pitiable: Jerusalem has been lost, the settlement of Sitka will soon vanish and with it a way of life that includes Landsman's career. His personal tragedy stakes out the introspective and literary theme. Landsman and Bina's marriage has failed over the heart-breaking decision to terminate a first pregnancy because of suspected birth defects. This leaves Landsman with a deep sense of loss and regret. Moreover, it becomes clear that had they persevered with the pregnancy the child would have been healthy. When Landsman asks the doctor about the whether the child's remains could be of service, the doctor inadvertently reveals that the child was perfect. When asked what was wrong the doctor replies:

“No. Nothing at all. The baby appeared to be normal.” He remarked, too late, the look of horror blooming on Landsman's face.

“Of course, that doesn't mean there was nothing wrong” (376).

Landsman does not tell his wife about the conversation, carrying the regret alone. He wonders “what if” the child had been born and the marriage survived. He keeps these thoughts a secret, believing that, “the ultimate fate of the little body, of the boy Landsman sacrificed to the god of his own dark hunches, was something he had neither the heart nor the stomach to investigate” (376). Corveleyn remarks on Chabon giving his protagonist such a dilemma, especially in an allohistorical novel. This is a “metafictional moment” where Chabon allows his protagonist to think counterfactually, just as the novel represents a counterfactual exercise, and this acts to, “draw the reader's attention to the counterfactual history of the novel itself” (62).

Most detective genre novels fail to explore any interior life of the characters, leaving them as place markers within the puzzle of the mystery.

Chabon takes elements wholesale from both literary and genre works, but the result is seamless. Due to the reversion Bina closes all unsolved police investigations, and does the same to the murder of Emmanuel Lasker. Landsman and his partner choose to ignore Bina and begin an investigation by visiting the Einstein Café, a haunt for Yiddish chess players. This visit, in turn, leads them to Verbov Island, the home of the Verbovers, a group of Hasidic Jews who control Sitka's numerous criminal activities. Chabon's gangsters are reminiscent of Babel's Benya Krik, but also follow Chandler's advice that they should inhabit a desperate world, where "gangsters can rule nations and almost rule cities" (17). His love of language and the aesthetic shines through, and he uses words that often have several meanings. For example, the term Verbover is similar to the "Bobover Oasidim...the nineteenth-century Galician dynasty largely destroyed in the Holocaust and resurrected in Borough Park." The "Oasidic dynasties" were the Jewish equivalent of the Italian mafia, and Chabon stays close to this interpretation when he builds a picture of the lives of the Verbovers (Corveleyn 59). This extends to the use of the boundary maven Zimbalist, from the custom of demarking areas in Jewish lore, to the portrayal of Shpilman's father as a Godfather protected by layers of bodyguards and assistants. Landsman's investigations reveal many twists, turns and dead ends, much like Nabokov's chess analogy. On the journey he finds out that his sister's death is linked to Mendel's and a cover-up points to international conspiracy. The clues lead him to Peril Strait where there is "some kind of honor ranch... for religious Jews that get hooked on drugs and whatnot" (243). Landsman travels there only to find red Ayrshire cows with fake white spots, which disguises their real

purpose as traditional sin offerings for when the Temple in Jerusalem is rebuilt. Mendel's incarceration and Landsman's sister's death turn to be due to a conspiracy to rebuild the Temple of Jerusalem. At this point, it seems we are to experience an ending in postmodernist style, where the detective is overcome by the sheer scale of the conspiracy and admits defeat. This would tie in with Tani's definition of an "innovative literary detective story," which includes Eco's *The Name of The Rose*. Eco's protagonist, William of Baskerville, partly solves the puzzle but admits that no tidy solution is possible. Chabon does not attempt a postmodern ending like Eco's. He ultimately uncovers the way Mendel really died, and the story ends with Landsman telling the local journalist, "I have a story for you." (411).

Chabon has created an authentic and gritty counter-historical backdrop for his characters and the detective story is an event that unfolds against a much larger landscape. There is a strong detective genre framework, characterisation modelled on Chandler and McDonald's dark American noir novels, and a setting that explores the counter-factual territory carved out by literary authors such as McCarthy and Roth. Chabon's Jewish heritage lends his characters a cultural depth, enriched by the influence of Babel's Odessan ghettos and his modernist parody of the Yiddish gangster. Above all, Chabon uses language with great skill, drawing on Nabokov's chess allusions as a major theme, commandeering the language play and following "aesthetic bliss" so important to Nabokov and other postmodern writers. The aesthetic and genre elements in the novel combine and overlap in a way designed to collapse any boundary between contemporary literary and genre fiction, and create a novel that is well and truly unidentifiable as either category.

The Yiddish Policemen's Union is only one of an oeuvre of novels Chabon deliberately attempts to place in these “borderlands” between literary and genre fiction. Rather than “literary appropriation” of genre, evident in postmodern authors such as Barth and Pynchon, Chabon’s technique is to simply level the playing field between the two forms, and treat genre as literary, literary as genre. Postmodern theorists, such as Tani, might consider *The Yiddish Policemen's Union* “innovative” detective fiction; however, her postmodern perspective curbs her ability to see that Chabon’s fiction functions in a different way. Franklin concurs

Chabon has finally made the only use of genre fiction that a talented writer should: Rather than forcing his own extraordinarily capacious imagination into its stuffy confines, he makes the genre—more precisely, genres—expand to take him in. This novel bursts with so many forms and styles; it's hard to know where to start: It's a noir thriller, a Jewish family saga, a counterhistorical fantasy that manages at once to be utopian and dystopian.

The Yiddish Policemen's Union easily won all the mainstream genre awards, but doing so barred its entry into any literary competition, since there are no mainstream awards that consider both literary and genre novels. Many authors are now writing novels using a diffuse literary/genre style, for example McCarthy, Roth, Atwood and Amis, exploring genre as a whole, instead of using accepted postmodern practices or “appropriating” parts of it. In the future this style may be recognised as moving beyond postmodernism and beyond the accepted cultural and social hierarchies that still define postmodern contemporary fiction. Indeed, Hoberek considers Chabon part of a new wave of writers that will shake off postmodern strictures, He writes:

Chabon's trajectory suggests the way in which a movement within postmodernism has produced a potentially different formal possibility, even as it militates against thinking of this stylistic shift in epochal terms, as a dramatic break from everything that has come before. (239).

The trend away from postmodern views on genre is not a sharp or dramatic shift. It is a gradual awareness of outdated precepts that underpin the evaluation of literary and genre fiction. Foucault, Lyotard and Derrida describe changes of perception as dramatic and enlightening events, but these shifts are often built on a series of arguments over a period of time. Hoberek writes “cultural sea changes only retroactively take the form of dramatic paradigm shifts, and appear first in processes of gradual, uneven, cellular transformation (239). This essay highlights the conflict that arises due to postmodern evaluation applied to contemporary fiction, where critical reviews vacillate between considering Chabon’s novels literary, with low culture elements (in the case of *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay*) or genre fiction with literary pretensions (in the case of *The Yiddish Policemen’s Union*). Multi-genre authors disregard postmodern strictures, where genre elements can only be “appropriated” as a lower form of art, or genre fiction influences and elements are hidden or denied in the fear of a “literary ghetto.” Chabon’s defiance exposes a rift between postmodern and contemporary thinking. He writes:

“All literature, highbrow or low, from the Aeneid onward, is fan fiction....Through parody and pastiche, allusion and homage, retelling and reimagining the stories that were told before us and that we have come of age loving--amateurs--we proceed, seeking out the blank places in the map that our favourite writers, in their greatness and

negligence, have left for us, hoping to pass on to our own readers-- should we be lucky enough to find any--some of the pleasure that we ourselves have taken in the stuff that we love: to get in on the game.

All novels are sequels; influence is bliss.”

Chabon’s shift away from postmodernism and onwards is still viewed as an aberration rather than a new way of considering literature. However, postmodern genre boundaries have been breached, and seem set to crumble and collapse as contemporary authors combine literary and genre into new forms and open the canon to a more capacious definition of good literature.

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Part Two: *Te Ngaio Road*: A Novel

Chapter One

He is eighty-one, and he stoops slightly, as if the back of his head is being nudged forward. He has a lantern jaw, bushy grey eyebrows and an intense blue stare that drills through the surface of anything he focuses on. A neat white moustache frames his small mouth. It is only when he smiles that he seems approachable. He has no idea how he got to this place, high up and buffeted by a strong morning sea breeze. He raises his arms stiffly outward and stares out into a blue sky. Perhaps he has learned to fly.

There are whole skeins of memory that have unravelled in the old man's head. Entire decades have tipped into the dark hole swirling slowly in the centre of his brain. Wars he has lived through, years of marriage he cherished, children he had, the deaths of loved ones, houses that took years to save for. None of it remains. It is as if he is being washed clean, one memory at a time. But he remembers his wife, and he remembers bones.

He counts twenty-seven bones so far. One hundred and seventy-nine to go. He picks up the delicate curve of the scapula, with its arched exterior. The inside is curved like a Chinese teacup, and he turns it in his fingers, feeling the delicacy of it, softly running his fingers along the wide ridge, where it would have nestled on a shoulder. He has examined the other bones as well, the ulna, a femur, a tibia, the fibula. He knows that they belong to a child. Even if he were not an expert the drifts of dirty white cloth and one small shoe jumbled with the remains would have

informed him. The storm water runs off in a sheet across the granite rock, bringing new debris almost to the old man's feet. The teeth he picks from the water are baby teeth. He rolls two vertebrae across his palm like dice. The small skull sits tilted to one side on the rock, cranial plates still intact, elegantly stitched with a saw tooth design. He keeps the black spiders away by brushing them off gently. The spiders and their long crooked legs are with him most days now.

There is so much bones can tell you; deranged bones, tiny, old bones, long slender bones with airy cavities where marrow once filled them. Bones weigh less with age; they develop a patina of soft-tinged yellow and develop empty cells of air that make them brittle and friable. Very old bones are dark brown, a translucent amber developing as they complete the journey back to the earth, indicating how far they travelled. Fractures, dislocations. The worn head of a long bone or hairline cracks creeping across the surface.

But the bone he has in his hands now is fresh and white. It retains the heaviness of youth, and there are no signs of damage along the porcelain length of it. It is a femur, and it is beautiful. He puts it down and chooses another. An olecranon, a helmet for the elbow, and there, a tarsals. He gives a little grunt of pleasure. It is like a puzzle, and he hums as he places each bone in the right place on the expanse of rock.

The sun is hot on the back of his dressing gown and on the crown of his head. He looks over the edge of the rock he is perched upon. Far below he can see the glitter on Pilot bay's crisp half-moon of beach. Above him the cliffs of the Mount loom, lush green and carved with water furrows from the recent storms. He was born and bred on this peninsula. His father had been a military man, decorated in World War One. His mother a stout Irish Protestant with a rousing backhand and an

aroma of sweet almond biscuits that she made on a weekly basis. He can remember that warm-baked smell.

His wife, now, he cannot remember her name. It has been erased and refuses to come back. He can see his wife, here but not here, standing with her hands on her hips, brown hair tumbling across her shoulders. She wears the rust coloured polka dot dress he likes so much. He talks to his wife under his breath, an endless litany of the mundane. A khaki-clad soldier sits in the nodding ferns. The webbing on his uniform encases evil bronze hollow-tipped bullets. The old man turns away. He knows the soldier is not there.

He has lost a slipper.

His fingers brush against the striations in the notched pelvic bone. He can see the girl now. Not tall, but lithe and energetic. A white dress he thinks, but he does not touch the dirty strips of fabric on the ground. Dark hair, like his wife. His creation stands in the thin blue air, just off the ledge. He feels the leap of anxiety, jerks to catch a child falling, but then sweeps the thoughts away. She is a not here. She cannot be hurt now. A finger bone so small he brings it to his eye to see a roughness. A patch of callus. Broke your finger, once. A bone in your forefinger. Too small to set.

It is tactile, this love. To touch the smooth surfaces and feel the texture of the grain. In his youth he read of Egyptian bonesetters, the Roman skeleton men that inspire him. It is the purity of form, the tension between the muscle and the bone, which seem poetic to him. Some bones hold a history in their curves; tell him about their lives, their loves, even their deaths.

To handle a bone is an intimate act, and he reverently takes his time, stroking away the grass and the soil, digging out tiny foot bones, the coccyx, wiping the long

leg bones clear of dirt. He cleans the pelvis, a fragile helix which frames the dark grey in the centre of the puzzle. It is quiet but for the wind and the water gurgle of a tui bird, with only an occasional hollow knock echoing against the hull of a moored fishing boat far below in Pilot Bay. He picks out wrist bones, eight in all, their alien shapes fitting together to make a disc with the circumference of a sparrow's chest. The presence of others encroaches, and the old man can no longer tell if they are here, or not here. He ignores them, drifts from the puzzle and carries the femur to the edge of the rock. He stiffly lowers himself to sit on the edge, where his wife's feet were a moment ago. The wind feels good against his face. It is all blue air.

Chapter Two

Detective Sergeant Batian King is hiking up a set of stone stairs leading to a higher track, the treads set half-a-foot too high for a comfortable stride. Below him, Mount Beach is a rim of dazzling blonde sand, three surfers drift amongst green swells, floating with the current. Conical islands sit off to the left and on the right the mainland crouches on the horizon in a haze. The path is threaded with storm water run-off from the night before. A few uniforms stationed along the path, then between some boulders, under the stone face of the mountain. Police have spread out in the bush, with a loose half circle of uniforms at the old man's back. King sees the sergeants co-ordinating—Todd Porter and two others—but no senior officers.

“Detective.” A uniform approaches but King waves him off. He wants to look at the scene first.

The old man is perched on the crumbling edge of a bleached tongue of granite; before him a vista of the whole peninsula, shaped like a narrow-waisted girl. The man's grey and blue checked dressing gown is belted loosely round his waist, stained a little at the collar. One dark red velvet slipper dangles from his right foot. King can guess where the other slipper is. The old man's hands are large for his frame, with knotted knuckles and thick veins, and they cradle a long delicate white bone—a femur, King guesses. Behind him on the ledge there is a pool of rainwater stained rust. In the water more bones are placed: the elegant outline of a small child. A little skull tilts on the flat grey surface, scraps of white material flutter around a pelvic bone. A child's white shoe.

King returns to where the sergeants are milling about with a small group of civilians. “Forensics?”

“Making their way up.” Porter gestures towards the policewoman at his side. “She says he’s her great-uncle.”

King looks at the woman. Tall, blonde, a long and gentle face with light blue eyes. She looks capable enough.

“Sergeant Fisher, sir,” she says. She nods and points to the old man. “Major Fletcher. Major Reese Fletcher. He is hallucinating. He has Dewy body dementia. He won’t know he is in danger. And his balance is compromised.”

“Can you get him off the ledge?”

The policewoman nods, “Yes.” King notes the tiny beads of sweat on her upper lip. “Also,” she says, “it might help you to know that Major Fletcher was a military pathologist in the New Zealand Army before his retirement.”

Major Fletcher sits on the very edge of the rock. His feet swing in low arcs above a hundred feet of crystal clear air, pulling him ever closer to the edge. He cradles the stem of the femur bone, running his thumb slowly along the grain like a sculptor. If he leant forward he would vanish.

“OK, do it. Porter, back her up.”

Fisher hurries out onto the ledge, careful to tiptoe over the neatly aligned bones. She crouches by the old man’s right side, talking to him, her hand lightly on his shoulder. The old man’s head tilts. He begins to shuffle backwards on his buttocks, his free hand searching on the warm rock behind him. Fisher stands and tucks her hands into his armpits, talking all the time. Porter goes forward to help her lift him back and up. Within moments Major Fletcher is on his feet and being led away by Fisher, the femur bone gently prised from his grip.

Now that the scene is clear the uniforms move in, unrolling yellow tape behind them. It is an awkward crime scene, halfway up a steep mountain face.

Evidence extraction must be fast, before it washes into the outgoing tide below and before the next summer storm rolls over the Kaimai hills. King walks carefully around the exposed bones, laid out in a semblance of a reconstruction. Given the old man's pathologist background, King is fairly certain that the layout is his. He follows the storm water, lifts his eyes along the source, across the track.

"Over here, sir." Porter says. He is crouching by the stream, staring at the contents with a camera in his hands. There is an overhanging lip holding a small eddy of clear water. Threads of hair waver under the surface; scraps of cloth. "It looks like the remains have washed down from up there, amongst the rocks."

King looks at a slope littered with large boulders, soil saturated with rainwater. The crime scene is directly in the path of a muddy avalanche should the cliff become unstable. Forensics are just setting up, lugging their boxes of equipment.

"Who called it in?"

"Birdwatchers in the caravan park...they called it in when they saw what he was playing with."

Fisher is back, and she brings two of the forensics team with her. King points to the remains in the small eddy of water. "Can we start collecting this?" The forensics duo kneel over the eddy of water. King gingerly starts up the slope parallel to the trickling water. The ground is sodden, the mud seeping into his shoes. Porter looks at the mud and hands Fisher the camera. She scrambles up behind King, then balances to take close-up shots. In the stream little bones bump under the surface, long brown hairs wrap around grass roots. The water meanders on its journey, seeping under rocks and winding through boulders. King keeps climbing, Fisher following in his muddy footholds. The sun is still slightly to the east and shadows

protrude from under the rock like pools of ink. King only sees the crack as he drops low to squeeze between two boulders. He lies flat, and looks into the depths of an underground pool. In the darkness there are glints of light, a rumpled texture to the water surface.

“Here! Can you get low and take a shot?”

Fisher lies down next to him, angling the camera through the grass and into the crack in the rock. They are both blinded by the camera flash, light ricocheting into a tiny cave. I need a drink, King thinks. He cannot process the image that flashes against his retina, but his brain is already suggesting a distraction, a way to push the vision back to where it came from. His eyes have afterimages that overlap. The pool of water is bobbing with human remains. A white strip of material appears translucent in the flash, and there is the other shoe, trapped on a flaking rim at the back of the cave. Hair matted against the lower edge. The water surface looks sinuous, oily.

Fisher sniffs, “Not much smell.”

“And no flesh...this isn't recent. Three, four years?”

“Easily, for this level of decomposition. Alkaline soil.”

Fisher ducks her head again and takes another shot into the cave.

“Buried?” King asks.

“Must have been. No scavenger marks on the bones.”

King leans back. Below them the town bustles onwards undisturbed, the beach-goers shriek amongst the waves, and curious walkers are being redirected by a uniform below. He sits up. His clothes are sodden down his left side

“OK. Let's get forensics up here.”

Back on the ledge Porter is waiting. King walks towards him. “Can you arrange engineers, to stabilise those boulders.” He walks over to the three birdwatchers standing in a huddle on the side of the path. Two wiry middle-aged men, a surly teenager in board shorts. The older of the two men steps forward and extends his hand. King takes it.

“Morning gentlemen. My name is Detective Batian King. Your names?”

“Frank Treloar,” says the older man, “This is my son, Paul, and our friend Simon McConley.”

“You saw the old man first?” They look at each other and nod.

“We were having coffee,” says Frank, “looking through the binoculars. Saw the old guy in his dressing gown. We were pretty relaxed until he held up that kid’s skull.”

“And then?”

“We came up, phoned 111 at the same time.”

“Did you talk to him. The old man?”

“We tried, when he was still arranging the bones. But he didn’t respond. He was muttering to someone.” Frank waves his hand beyond the ledge, into the sky, “Someone out there. He was mouthing words we didn’t get...like he was foreign?”

“Anything else?”

Frank shakes his head.

“Okay, we’ve got your details. Why don’t you go back to the caravan, finish that coffee, sit down for a bit.”

Frank looks relieved, bobs his head and ushers his son down the track. Simon follows them, hands in his pockets. King looks around and beckons to the nearest uniform.

“Follow them down; let them have something to drink. Then take them to the station. Statements from all of them.”

“Right.”

King heads back to the ledge, aims at Fisher, who is directing the forensics team up the hillside. She glances at him and then turns.

“Detective?”

“Where’s Clyde?”

“Here shortly. The team are already doing preliminaries.”

The medical examiner makes a habit of being late. It gets under King’s skin.

“OK, so far, what have we got?”

“A child. Girl, judging by the shoe. I’m thinking someone kills her, buries her on the mountain. Could be a missing kid, maybe a paedophile case?” Fisher looks down at the camera, turning it over in her hands.

“Murder?”

“Or accidental.”

“Someone went to a lot of trouble to hide the body.”

“Yes, but in a very public place. Fairly exposed spot, the mountain face. Entry and exit is seen easily from the town, tourists, runners.”

“So she died here? Got lost? Buried on purpose? Maybe it has some meaning to the perp?”

“Perhaps. Depends on trace. To find that cave though. You’d have to know...,” she says. She’s thinking.

“Maybe local.” King remembers some missing kid case a few years back. Fisher worked on that, and found the kid too. She had a nose for it. She was an archivist most of the time though. In the basement.

“Alright.” Kings says. “You know this area pretty well?”

Fisher nods. “Eight years. I know the major players.”

Mount Maunganui is a peninsula, but across the bridge is Tauranga, with suburbs that splay out across the mainland. The harbour between the two is one of the busiest in New Zealand. The Mount is affluent, a playground for the rich, while further from the coast the industrial parks appear, the low-rent areas and the council houses. It is a crisscross of city dwellers, tourists and wharfers, with an endless parade of foreign ship workers.

“Ever worked a murder before?”

Fisher shakes her head.

“OK, well I want you on this one. Is there anything you need to hand over?”

“Nothing urgent.”

“Ditch the lot. This is all you’ve got now.”

“And Ganley?”

“I’ll sort Ganley.”

“So I’m being seconded?”

“You’re an archivist right? And this looks like a cold case before we’ve even started. Get a list of missing kids in the area, girls in that age group, maybe four, five years ago...I’ll give the paedophile register to Porter, which ones were operating here in that time period. First off though, I want you to have a chat to your great-uncle. See if there is anything he might have picked up being at the scene first.”

Fisher nods, and then laughs. “Knowing my great-uncle, he’s solving it as we speak.”

“He’s that good?”

“The Major was a forensic pathologist until his dementia set in, about fifteen years ago. He worked for the UN, war crimes tribunal, specialising in human skeletal remains, human gross anatomy, specifically combat injuries...bomb victims.” Fisher smiles. “Bit of a language expert too. Sometimes we have no idea what the hell he’s saying. Demon of an analyst though.”

“Hope you inherited it.”

Dr Rosemary Clyde walks onto the ledge, swings her bag at the forensics team, scattering them like flies. She kneels down next to the bones, turns the skull gently with one gloved finger, and examines the teeth.

“Age?” King asks.

“Morning... four or five,” says Clyde. “And don’t ask me when. Too many factors.” She yawns.

“Sorry to get you up.” King knows she’s hung over.

“Whatever,” Clyde touches a few of the bones, and looks around and behind her. “Coming from up there?”

“A cave.”

“Poor mite. Been up there a while. My team will take these in, find more to match I imagine. No way will we find cause of death out here.” She gestures to one of her team, “Anything that looks like cloth, hair. Go under the ledge too. I want every scrap, OK? And soil samples, from here, from the cave.” He nods and walks off. Clyde gets to her feet and turns to King.

“That it?” King doesn’t really expect much else. Functioning alcoholics always irritate him.

Clyde looks around. “Pretty much. Get her to my lab sooner rather than later. You’ve another storm predicted for tonight.” She gives him a tight cold smile, “then this will all be washed clean. And tourist friendly again.” Around her the forensics team move in. Bones start to vanish into white boxes.

A small group is gathering on the main track, where two officers ensure they don’t duck under the crime scene tape. Local journalists and a few curious residents. Most of the media faces are familiar. King heads down the path towards them.

“Detective! Can you tell us what you’ve found? Detective?”

King has an easy relationship with the local press. There have been favours on both sides of the fence. More troublesome are the national television crews, who have yet to arrive.

“At this point we have found some suspicious remains on the mountain. We will have more information later...”

“Was it the old man? The man out here this morning?” “Is it true he was insane?”

King shakes his head. “No. We don’t believe the two incidents are related. The gentleman simply stumbled upon the scene.”

“His name? Where is he now?” Someone holds up a phone and takes King’s picture. Uniforms block the journalist’s path as King walks back to the crime scene.

Chapter Three

It is late afternoon by the time Sergeant Lily Fisher gets back to the station. The first of the forensics photographs arrive in a courier pack at the front desk. Fisher shakes them out and makes them up into a folder. She takes it to the Sunfire Retirement Home, a low-slung bungalow near the base of the mountain. Inside Fisher shows her badge to reception and asks for Major Fletcher. After a short wait a stocky, wide-shouldered woman strides into view.

“Lily, nice to see you again!”

“Olivia. Thank you.”

Olivia leads her through quiet, carpeted corridors to a small office.

“How he managed to jimmy the locks I don’t know, and then get halfway up the Mount. Pretty determined, as you know. But the exertion has taken it out of him.” Olivia sits at her desk and looks at Fisher. “Now I know you are keen to see the Major, Lily, but I think I need to explain his present condition—he’s had a major break from reality. Dewy body dementia is not straightforward. Same symptoms as Alzheimers or Parkinsons, but it comes and goes.”

“Just the forgetfulness?”

Olivia shakes her head. “Sometimes. But his periods of normality are interrupted by vivid hallucinations, often quite cruel and frightening visions. He has lost his ability to discern dreams from reality. He’s certainly not recognising any family right now.”

“He won’t know me at all?”

“I’ll just make him comfortable and then bring you through.”

On bad days the Major lays rigid under a coarse blanket, while the real and the unreal enter and leave his room silently as ghosts. On bad days black spiders climb under his skin and bruises appear on his body without cause. On bad days soldiers litter the milieu, each and every one with the face of some forgotten corpse from his table.

The nightmares always leave Fletcher desperately pulling himself up towards consciousness. He feels as if he is fighting to ascend from the bottom of a deep well, tearing towards the circle of light above. Relief floods him as the light grows and his senses bring him the cloying smell of disinfectant and the crisp feel of cotton light against his forearms. His limbs are locked rigid, and he lies to attention, with his jaw savagely compressing his teeth together. He keeps his eyes shut, he knows the apparitions that will swagger and leer should he attempt to see. There is a noise close by, a swishing of cloth near the door frame, that alerts him to another's presence. It can only be Olivia, he thinks, Olivia with another dose of morphine. His mind trills at the thought. She enters silently and there is a slight dip as she sits on the side of the bed.

"You can hear me can't you?" Olivia's hard fingers on his wrist. A beat of silence, then the cold steel spine of the needle sliding into the soft mauve vein in the bend of his elbow. An exquisite silence for a moment. Fletcher feels a rush of pleasure.

"A small dose, Major. Just to relax those muscles... easy does it."

He hears the clink of glass and her weight vanishes from his side. He opens his eyes, slitting them against the grey light. Olivia is moving around the room, but he can't follow her with his head. She is tidying, the plastic in the dustbin, clothes move the air, the click of the cupboard door. A sweet honey sensation runs through

him, melting the last spiky black legs of his nightmare. His muscles begin to soften and lengthen. He pulls his shoulder towards him, turns out his ankles. Small movements.

“Better?” Olivia sits on the side of his bed again. She watches him like a bird, head cocked to the side. Hard fingers on his wrist again; he pulls away gently. She smiles, relieved. Since his return he has suffered through relapse after relapse. Olivia strokes his arm gently as the drug unfolds his straight jacket of muscle and tendon. There is a tension to her also, he thinks. She has something to say. He slowly turns his head to her and looks up into her face.

“Lily is here,” she says, “About your adventure this morning. About the bones.”

He can't remember a Lily. A small flutter of panic starts in his chest. Olivia is still stroking his arm. She notes his expression.

“There is a young lady here. Her name is Lily Fisher. Just for a chat. Is that alright?”

The morphine makes Fletcher feel languid, and he closes his eyes, trying to remember what happened. His sense of time is almost gone now, decayed to the point where time seems to be an anachronistic habit of the people around him, like high tea or polishing shoes. He is still testing the limits of movement in his limbs; stretching a leg he feels a satisfying click in his knee. There is a heavy sensation in his bladder, and then it's gone, but he immediately smells the ammonia scent of the catheter bag. He clears his throat to distract her.

“This morning?”

Olivia stares at him. Her face is soft and flaccid around the jaw, lined from nose to mouth. But her eyes belie the blurred features, a glimmering blue with tawny flecks around one iris. He could drown in those eyes.

“This morning,” she says, “You went up the mountain and found some bones. The bones of a child. Do you remember?”

His mind latches on to the image of bones, and a shred of blue comes to him, delicate bones against a background of blue. His stiff fingers flex against his palms at the thought. He wants to get up, put on his dressing gown. He has visitors. He rolls to his side but his body locks like a cogwheel, catch and release, catch and release. Olivia nudges his arms through the sleeves of his dressing gown. She smells faintly of talcum powder, of garden mud brought in with her on the tread of her shoes. Through it all he stares into her luminous blue eyes.

This morning, he thinks, the bones of a child. Small moments of memory play hide and seek. The morphine relaxes him but dulls his mind as well. His voice sounds deep and cracked, alien to him.

“Did she bring the bones?”

Olivia laughs. “Don’t need any more old bones here, do we? No, photographs. But I think they want to see what you remember, about how you found them. Where they were...”

The Major barks an uneasy laugh. He trusts Olivia to make him presentable—he hasn’t looked into a mirror for years. When she goes out he sits quietly, his large hands resting on his lap, and he tries to imagine how the young woman will see his room. On his bedside table is a silver framed photograph of his late wife, a slim, dark haired woman with strong cheekbones and a warm smile. There is movement at the door, the rustle of clothing.

“Major, this is Lily. About the bones found on Mount Maunganui today.”

“Major. Good to see you.”

He nods and swallows. Fisher lays the folder of photographs on his lap and sits down. The Major switches his attention to the folder with relief. The thin cardboard holds 8 by 12 inch glossy photographs. Most are in situ or close ups of bones against a scale and a blank background. The photographs spill from Fletchers hands as he attempts to see them all. He pulls one out.

“You see that?” he says to her, “The plates in the skull hardly fused. Look at the jaw, milk teeth, and no molars. And the plates at either end of the radius bone in the arm are not formed yet. The child was about five, no more.” The Major sits back and looks at Fisher. “Average height for a five year old. A girl, from the clothing, shoes... embroidery.” He clutches at more photographs, spreading them against the light green of his eiderdown. “No antemortem trauma, no perimortem injuries. This child was not systematically abused. An unlikely cause of death.”

“What then? Was there anything...?”

He uses his knuckle to tap awkwardly at the drawer handle beside his bed. Fisher opens it and looks in, at the scattered pills and clotted tissues. Near the back is an old fashioned magnifying glass with a worn bronze handle. Fisher hefts it across to him. He takes it with only a small stutter in his movement.

“See. One fracture. Small. Her forefinger on the right hand. Well-healed with a small lesion, sub periosteal bone formation. Well before death.”

Fisher leans over to see what he’s pointing at. He can smell her perfume, sweat, chalk. Why chalk? He picks up another photograph.

“Here, see? No malnutrition, the girl was well-fed, cared for. All these small marks...” They both peer through the magnifying glass, “post-mortem injury, insects

probably. Buried directly into the soil, given a thorough stripping down. She would have been de-fleshed within a matter of months.”

“How did you come across the bones, Major? They were pretty far off the track...”

“I had to meet my wife. She likes the view from there. Waiting. I saw these in the storm water. My wife wanted me to help. Her.”

Fisher is looking at the framed photograph next to his bed. His wife is standing on a high rocky outcrop, all of Alexandria spread out behind her.

“Yes. My wife.” The Major smiles. “You look like her.” He looks at his wife and then back at the photographs on his lap. He realises the granite ledge in the photograph is similar to the one in the detective’s prints. There is an awkward moment as his mind slides around something he can’t quite grasp.

“Tea!” Olivia has arrived with a tray, a pot and some cups. The Major lets her fuss, fanning the photographs out on his lap.

“The girl didn’t die up there.”

“How do you know?”

Fletcher hands Fisher a photograph. In it is a close up shot of a femur, a long delicate bone that is surprisingly clean and white. He holds the magnifying glass up close to the photograph.

“You see that?”

Fisher leans in close and squints. All along the white surface faint lines spiral outwards, like dainty filigree work.

“Yes?”

“Tiny fractures in the bone. You’ll see it on the other bones as well. I saw this in Herzegovina, in the summer of ’96. We were doing post-mortem examination

and identification of individuals in mass graves.” Fletcher stops and wets his lips. Only a few memories came to him. He is relieved. Olivia gives him his teacup and he takes a sip. He taps the photo.

“Most of the skeletons had these same marks. We surmised that the victims had died in mid-winter, in freezing conditions.” Fletcher runs his fingers along the surface of the photograph tenderly, tracing the bone. “The freezing leaves these micro-fractures on the surface, where the wet bone has formed ice crystals. When they defrost it leaves this signature. Quite beautiful really.”

“But the bay hasn’t experienced temperatures below freezing in years.”

“True. Which suggests she died elsewhere, doesn’t it?”

Fisher nods. She leans closer, staring at the photograph through the magnifying glass.

“Somewhere cold, mountains perhaps, or someone stored her in a freezer.” The smell of her makes him feel unsteady. The room is becoming hot and the people behind her are crowding in as well, trying to get at the photographs. Their faces seem plastic, misshapen.

“Major?”

He raises his hands to push away the visions. He hears his own squawk of a voice and feels his body tense, then slump and torque. There is shouting. He feels strong hands on his shoulders, along his forearm. The steel spine of a needle, then falling, falling.

“Another day or two, perhaps,” Olivia smiles at Fisher and sets the hypodermic syringe down.

“Yes. I’m sorry. Is he OK?”

“He will be. Come back when he’s more rested.”

“I’ve never seen him this bad.”

“He didn’t recognise you, did he? A major episode; triggered by all the exertion. You have to remember that he managed to disarm our alarm system and pick the locks...and that was before his adventure.”

Fisher hid her smile. “Thank you Olivia.”

“Good to see you Lily.”

When Fisher gets back to the police station she checks in with Porter and then heads down to the archives in the basement. She unlocks a small padlock and then steps into a forgotten stockroom. It is empty except for the walls, where Fisher has, over the years, stuck hundreds of small notes. They flutter from the walls at different heights; some pinned with coloured tacks, others stuck with tape or knobs of blu-tac. For her it is a type of mnemonic, a map that she can refer to in order to locate a file, a connection, or information useful to another investigation. Some names appear and then submerge, never to be seen again. Others are so frequent that you can map their lives against Fisher’s little notes.

Fisher has over sixty years of criminal history laid out in a wayward Cartesian pattern that spreads itself down the back wall, the edge a jagged spill of paper and threads. She draws vertical lines for each decade, starting just below the ceiling and ending at the skirting board. If a name goes through a decade she ties a red thread to each pin on either side of the meridian. Behind the door it begins with criminals that served in World War Two, that crowd against convicted bootleggers and petty thieves. Criminals with rheumy eyes and dentures, or ones long dead, forever imprisoned under overgrown tombstones. Fisher hasn’t reached the third wall

yet, but she knows several of the characters that will inhabit the space. Some notes and threads run in waves around the room like architectural drawings or unfinished maps of exploration. Others make jagged graphs that last less than a ruler length. When Fisher steps into the room the notes ripple in the air, and it makes her feel spiritual, enveloped in a fiery intellect, with white hot focus. . It is Fisher's masterpiece, an evolving work of art like a medieval tapestry. It reminds her of the Major in some way.

Sometimes she sees a gap in the pattern, or files overlap into nonsense, and it haunts her until she figures out the reason; two people known by one name; the wrong person identified; a lie revealed; a wrong lead; a misrepresentation. Fisher learned to contain herself to local crimes, however strong the urge to request a file from Auckland or Christchurch on the recent activities of a local criminal, a gap in her notes, or an answer that left her threads doubled back and over-looped.

When an individual leaves Fisher's backyard she reverently ties their thread to a row of hooks along the skirting board. These threads often make a waterfall in times of economic hardship, an incomplete iridescent fall that reveals the dismantling of lives and the stuffed cars of departing men and women. If they reappear, she runs them along the floor and back to their place in the right time frame. Great splashes of colour mark the patterns created by families whose entire lives inhabit the borderlands of the legal system; solitary yellow threads follow sociopaths still learning to stay off the radar, brown strings are for the dark and disturbed, unable to stay out of Fisher's web for more than a few weeks.

The stockroom is adjacent to her desk, a long, dusty storage space that once held cleaning products, mops, paint tins ribbed with drooling colours and storage racks built with ratchets like meccano. Fisher cleared all that stuff out years ago, one

hot summer when the smell of ammonia and paint thinner made her head hot and tight. She swept out furred mouse droppings and spidery dust, used the leftover paint to coat the walls a bland shade of green, and created a clean little box of nothing. She even sanded the skirting boards and inside of the door and re-varnished them. From the outside it still looked like a disused stockroom, with a rusted padlock askew on its fittings. The old archival files had been indexed in some complicated and outdated system and the stockroom walls became her blank canvas. She took the names that hovered in the archives like a chorus and wrote them down, noting birth dates, report descriptions, pinning the notes on the clean walls behind the stockroom door. The map becomes almost predictive, small areas of pristine wall that denote a stall, a prison sentence, sometimes a secret. When the seismic rhythm interrupts it is like waiting for a heartbeat that takes a second too long.

Fisher shuts the door behind her and stands in front of the map. The bare bulb makes a cone of light in the middle of the room. As she walks along the wall she can smell the chalk dust on the floor. Fisher imprints the pattern on her mind, looking for the missing threads. She looks for gaps, lulls in the design, three or four years ago. Looking for missing girls, paedophiles; domestic violence. She marks each possibility with a nub of chalk, adding another layer of complexity. Above her head the world continues unaware, the sound of voices and telephones and the rasp of feet across a cell floor. Fisher knows she is looking for a cool, blank piece of wall. A place where someone's world stopped, where everyday life lost its gravity. Somewhere on this wall will be the loss of a little girl.

Chapter Four

When the sun begins to set and the granite ledge is lit like a stage against an indigo sky, King stands exhausted watching the last of the forensics team. Each bone has been photographed and tweezered into boxes, pieces of cloth carefully removed, shoes wrapped and packed. Uphill the sound of soft splashing from the pool ceases. White suits bob like ghosts on the track below, each taking their packages of evidence down the side of the mountain, merging with the orange glow of the town's streetlights.

The weather report promises heavy rainfall from 3am onwards and King doesn't want a killer to walk because they left a moment too early. It is the instinctive anger against cruelty, the roiling emotion that drives lynch mobs and causes riots. For a murdered child to lie undiscovered in such a scenic spot seems obscene somehow, a reflection upon the residents.

A flash of silver on the darkening track below catches King's eye. District Commander David Ganley. The man has presence, long bones and a lion's head, a warrior build, but it takes him a while to trudge up to the crime scene. King waits impatiently, if only because he knows what is to come. He looks at the crime scene through new eyes, trying to see it as his superior will. The Commander is a demanding superior, but a fair man. He has made a good life for himself. He joined the police force right out of school, worked his way through all the ranks while working in small towns on the west coast, then up to Auckland for five years before taking on his role in the Bay of Plenty. King and the Commander met four years ago, when the investigation into his partner Davis' death capsized King's life.

The Commander takes in the arc lights, the crime scene tent, the white suits bathed in the strong glare, King standing in the shadows beside the path.

“All in hand?”

“Yes sir.”

The Commander pauses to get his breath back. “Weather’s coming in.” He nods to the dark mass of clouds in the west.

“Yes, we’ve been flat out. Everyone is on board to keep working until the storm breaks. After that it will be too dangerous. The engineers have jacked up the main boulders, but they pointed out several more that are starting to sag even without a drenching.” Both of the men look up the mountain slope, sensing tons of rock scattered higher up the slope. The breeze is starting to pick up, slapping the white tent fabric against the poles. The last of the forensics staff are packing up, wrapping and boxing.

“I’m happy for you to lead the investigation, Batian. I’ve said as much to the journo scrum down there.”

King feels some of the tension ease from his shoulders. There are still major players in Auckland that would prefer to keep him away from public attention. And this case will certainly garner the spotlight.

“You’ll need a partner. One of the homicide detectives from Manukau or Hamilton...”

“No.” King feels tired. It’s as if the entire day and night has folded in on top of him. He rubs at his eyes with the heel of his hand. “I’ve taken Porter, and seconded Sergeant Fisher.”

“Porter, fine. Fisher? The archivist?”

“Sharp though. And it’s a cold case.”

“Neither have this kind of experience, King.”

“Porter’s solid though, and she’s good with missing kids.”

A knot of white suits stumble past in the dark, carrying plastic trays sealed and tagged for transport.

“What do you think our chances are?”

King shrugs. “Scattered bone, rough estimation three or four years of environmental contamination, shreds of clothing. I’d say identification of the remains will be the stumbling block. As it is we have no idea if this is even a murder.”

The Commander looks up in surprise.

“Child hides in the rocks, falls down a crevasse. Never found? A long shot but we can’t rule it out yet. And we have no proof of foul play.”

“A full report on what we have on my desk by 8am, King. The briefing’s at 9am. So, this could be missing person’s case, or a cold case murder?”

King nods. The Commander begins walking away. He reaches the edge of light from the arc lights and turns, pauses as if to speak, but instead carries on into the dark. King knows why. The last time King led an investigation people died, bullets punched through hearts and livers, and blood congealed in the tread of his shoes.

Losing a partner is much like losing a limb, King thinks. The drug raid four years earlier had become a series of comets, stray images that flashed across his memory. Soft rain pattering on a windscreen, Davis’s quick smile in the dark, an electronic voice sawing across radio waves. The raid had been special ops, carried out by men dressed in black, fully armed and fully co-ordinated. Sitting in a squad car two streets down, King and Davis listened over the radio, listened as special ops

turned the raid into a near riot, twenty people running from the house and into the streets.

King and Davis were sent to check out an address a street away. A suburban house with a slide in the front yard and the front door wide open. The crunch of broken light bulbs on the path. Dim fingers of light spilled from rooms that opened off a long hall. King heard a baby's wail, he'd gestured for Davis to go left and he'd followed the baby's plaintive calls. He'd found it in the kitchen, where an oven light flickered over three children crouching low. The oldest girl about seven, the baby in her arms crying in that endless thin voice., a six-year-old boy hiding behind the curve of her left shoulder, the rich red of a nosebleed soaking into his pyjama sleeve as he tried to staunch the bleeding. The soft rain muffled the sirens outside. A glint of steak knife between the boy's fingers. King had leaned down to ask them if they were hurt.

He remembers two shots. He remembers the girl screaming and launching herself at him, the baby lost between their bodies. He remembers looking up and seeing boots, pyjama bottoms, a concerned neighbour's face float above him. The girl with depthless fear in her eyes.

Two weeks before the raid King and Davis had road-tripped through Whangarei and Kerikeri on a lead. It was a good trip, with pies, sausage rolls and sandwiches, loud music and hard beds at run-down motels. Davis's contacts were eclectic—hardened criminals, tattooed and taciturn, judges, young housewives driving shiny new BMWs with tennis gear jumbled in the back. King remembered the last evening, outside a restaurant overlooking a small harbour, fish and chips on greasy newspaper, beer bottles as paperweights for the newsprint. The sky a deep

blue of a crisp winter afternoon, chill wind off the sea. Davis took a long, slow pull of beer, watching the newspaper flutter in the breeze.

“Frank was right.” Frank was the last of Jim’s snitches. They had seen him that afternoon, out past Ngunguru; King took a pull from his own beer and waited.

“Old faces are disappearing, new ones popping up. His Marie just took off one day and no-one saw her again.”

“Marie always disappears. She relapsed.”

“Never this long. She’s lived in Kerikeri all her life. Always goes back to Frank.”

“New people?”

“New faces doing deals. Frank’s never seen them before. Not the migrant workers but similar. Confrontations, even.”

“Could be just an influx of a younger, rowdier generation...”

“No, there’s a change of management somewhere up the food chain.”

“Do you think it has something to do with our investigation?”

Davis scraped up the last of the pale chips with his fingernails. He munched, wiped the grease from his mouth on the back of his hand.

“If you can write this report without the words, ‘I have a bad feeling,’ then go ahead. What I will do is put a missing person’s report out on Marie though. Frank has always been a canny bastard. If he says she’s missing, she’s missing.”

King’s report had detailed Davis’ misgivings. But they weren’t enough to stop the raid on a drug lord’s place two weeks later. King and Davis had expected it to be textbook. Special ops round everyone up, then a thorough search of the property and booking the unlucky few on the property. But everyone had

underestimated the size of the operation, the streams of buyers, the chaos that spread rapidly to the neighbouring house.

The night of the raid Davis had gone left, expecting a frightened couple, perhaps a hapless druggie caught up in the raid's expanding net. Instead he found a wife sprawled on the bedroom floor with a bullet through her brain, and a gun-wielding husband. No one had left the bedroom alive.

Davis dying had meant months of internal affairs, months of accusations. One mistake magnifies into a thousand facets of grief, King thinks. King's decision to retreat into homicide had freed him from the fluidity of the drugs squad and its underlying cartels and loyalties; hell, even relationships seemed too complicated for King now. He'd thought a small town would rarely produce dead bodies, but this one had proved him wrong. He was going to have to expand his vision to look for things Davis usually saw for him. He heads back into the lighted area. He needs soil samples from all along the stream edge back to the hidden pool and the thunderclouds are rolling in.

Chapter Five

It's still early in the morning and the storm has left soft rain. The house where Fisher and her family live sits awkwardly on Te Ngaio Road, one road back from the beach. It perches high on a sandbar, overlooking the glassy floating mirage of Rabbit Island, and the back deck balances on stilts over a garden filled with ponga ferns, swamp maire and ribbonwood.

Fisher's son Ben stands at the lounge window, enchanted by the debris that washed up along the dunes during the night. She wraps him up and they head out, down the damp wooden stairs and across the road, where the beach sand is dark and cratered with rain drops. Ben's raincoat glistens as he stumbles and kicks across broken spiral shells and plastic cup lids.

Wandering, Fisher picks her way between clumps of rust red seaweed, and green sea grapes. Grey fog hides everything further than three hundred metres and the rain clicks against her rain hood. Just beyond the breakers Rabbit Island crouches amongst fog and dark rocks, its jade coloured trees jutting at odd angles.

Fisher thinks of the strands that lace across her tapestry in the stockroom. In her mind she can follow each one, estimate the likelihood of involvement, set them aside, or mark them for further investigation. There are four big crime families in the district. Petty crime mostly, but some hard time between them. The Searanke and the Grahams can be considered drug dealing cartels, the Lazarus family extremely gifted thieves and con artists. The Heathers have strong ties with both Searanke and the Lazarus family. Fisher digs her toes in the sand, watching waves crash across the lines of foam and tangled seaweed. The Heathers. Most of the family descend from six brothers that grew up wild in the Mount during the 1960's. Between them they

cornered the crime in the area: car theft, drug dealing, break-ins, even some spectacular ship heists. The brother's families are still close-knit, and Fisher routinely puts their names against crimes on her stockroom walls. Three years ago a gap appears in her notes, big enough to flatten her whole hand on the cold concrete of the stockroom wall. It could be related, she thinks. At least three families are affected. She shakes the water from her hair. Reductive thinking, she thinks. Hers is a tiny microcosm in a country where people travel, tourists visit and ship workers enjoy shore leave. Due diligence means Fisher needs to check all the national, and even international, leads first. Still, a local person. Someone who knew those rocks. Perhaps hid in that spot as a child, and remembered the location.

Ben shouts and points, stuffing handfuls of damp treasure into his pockets. Crab pincers, whole shells, clams with arterial seaweed clinging to their lids. Tiny shells cling to the folds of Ben's fists. Puffer fish blown out of the sea lay on their sides swollen like footballs, tiny spikes stuck out of their blowsy shapes, little lips an O. They have empty holes where the gulls picked out their eyes. Fish skulls, fragments of spotted jellyfish and indigo bluebottles.

By the time Fisher gets Ben and his treasure back to the house Daniel is showered and is sorting out breakfast. Fisher smells bacon and toast and eggs as she lets the warm water run down her in the shower. In an hour they are all dressed, fed, and ready for the day.

"What time is the briefing?" Daniel is already collecting plates.

"Nine."

Daniel looks at the clock. Five to. "Go!"

Her gaze slides over to Ben. Daniel nods.

"We'll visit Nana. Do some shopping."

“Sounds good,” she says.

The police station is a cold white art deco box with sky blue trimming. It sits within the curve of Pilot Bay, where strings of cruise liners moor brightly on summer nights. Next door the fishing club issues ice creams and whitebait to fishermen who sit like dark beads along the wooden pier. Wally is the desk sergeant at the front desk, directing media and officers into the briefing room.

The room is already full, heaving with both local and national media, and their cameras and lights. Some of the uniforms are still streaked with mountain mud and storm water. The Commander stands at the front. Out of the window Fisher watches a container ship loom silently out of grey towards one of the wharves.

“... the bones retrieved make up the skeleton of a child, somewhere between the ages of four and five years. Due to the extreme decay and distribution of the skeleton we have no obvious cause of death. The bones have not been dated yet, but the clothing found with the remains suggests that this body was interred no more than three to four years ago...”

Fisher takes her notepad out and starts drawing circles on the paper. Recent burial, modern clothing, births and deaths, missing children’s register, foster homes from that period. She circles each note to herself.

The Commander is dismissing media, impatient to brief his team, and allocate tasks for the upcoming investigation. A ripple of concern charges the uniforms in the room. The ambitious want the front seats on the investigation, media visible with prospects of promotion. The lazy hope for an inside job and the squad members with young children pray that they won’t be spending weeks locked in interviews with paedophiles and perverts. A list of names is read out for the door to

door search of the area. It is only an area two blocks wide, but the Commander makes it clear that the search will extend right across the peninsula. Fisher hears her name mentioned under the research and investigation of known criminals.

“... Detective Sergeant King will be lead investigator on this case, Porter as second-in-charge and assisted by Sergeant Fisher. Roberts and Cuthers on evidence and crime scene management, interviews to be conducted by King and Fisher. Wright and Samuels, photographic and sample evidence cataloguing....

Fisher stares at Detective Sergeant Batian King, who stands to one side of the Commander, hands in his pockets, staring back at her solemnly. He looks exhausted, filthy, and serious. Fisher has heard of his reputation. A few years back there had been a flare of drug activity in the North Island, a shift from an old regime to a newer, international supplier. The body count had climbed and Fisher had seen the news, she had seen the body of King's partner carried out on a gurney in what looked like a suburban street war zone. She had felt for him then, with the detachment of a far off observer and tempered with the knowledge that he could be at fault.

A few months later King had arrived. Taciturn, newly divorced. He was tall, with a square face and sharp brown eyes, a nose bent slightly off true. He seems uncomfortable in his skin, with a shambling walk when approaching, as if tacking in a strong wind. She's noticed the crackling energy he throws off when crisis threatens, like a wildfire funnelled into the passageway of a house. It is that energy that Fisher mistrusts. When King arrived, it had only taken Wally a few days before the rumours about dirty cops, internal affairs and a messy private life spread through the station. Fisher has kept her distance. Wally delivers his files; she has murmured the occasional greeting in the corridor, nothing more. She has glimpsed kindness too; found him in a crouch, talking to child, or chatting with folded arms to a retiree

with bothersome neighbours. She wonders whether working with him will change her opinion. The briefing ends with a clot of people trying for the door and Fisher heads back downstairs to the archives.

Chapter Six

After the briefing King clears his desk of cases: A spate of break-ins over the summer, where the victims always received a visit by Jehovah Witnesses the day before. King fields it out to Thomas. The elderly lady Margaret Stafford, whose son habitually steals from her, yet she keeps his whereabouts a mystery, and four cases of domestic abuse. King hands them to Thomas' partner Saunders. He prioritises one case. Her name is Sacha and her four children range in age from six months to ten years, each one to a different father. King knows Sacha is being beaten by one of the fathers, but the culprit is also her drug dealer. King has been planning a sting at Sacha's house that Saunders will need to coordinate.

Porter calls in before ten.

"Have all the birdwatcher statements, sir."

"Anything?"

"Zero. Other than watching a disturbed guy produce bones like a magician."

King looks out the window. The rain clouds are clearing and below tourists saunter down Pilot Bay with bags of towels and picnic baskets. The morning sun is liquid warmth, bathing the beach in a glow.

"What about the paedophiles register?"

"Two main suspects. About four years ago a German national got shopped yanking school kids into his van. He's back in Germany now, banged up for forcing a kid into a toilet cubicle in a shopping centre. He's also ill."

King leans back and looks up at Porter. "M.O?"

"Not such a great match. Reynders tended to go for young boys."

“And the other one?”

“Local. Max Stratton. He got put away for molesting his partner’s five year old daughter. Also had a network going, dirty pictures, the lot. He’s been in Auckland prison for the last three years, but before that he lived in Arataki.”

Arataki is a bungalow suburb under the Tauranga airport flight path. It rings the big shopping centre on the main drag, where school kids hang out on weekends and tired parents shoo their kids into the multiplex cinema by themselves. Perfect hunting grounds.

“Just those two?” King figures there were more. Always are.

“Yep. But none around that time frame, especially in that age group, and with a preference for females. I’ve included Reynders because he wasn’t picky.”

King doodles the names onto his notepad.

“OK, let’s get an interview with Stratton lined up. Find out if there were any domestic abuse cases around that time as well. It might be an escalation gone wrong.”

“I’ll run it down.”

King starts punching in the names Stratton and Reynders into the database.

“He said the child was probably frozen after death.”

Fisher is driving into town, towards the pathology lab. King sits in the passenger seat, sifting through the folder of photographs.

“He said he’d seen it before, the micro-fractures on the bones, from his work in Bosnia. The medical examiner can confirm it. It means that the girl didn’t just get lost up there.”

“So the girl was placed there?”

“Probably. He estimated her age to be five, maximum.” She swings into the car park.

Dr Rosemary Clyde’s lab is in the basement of a squat grey building downtown, identified only by a small white sign at the side of the door. The temperature inside is chill after the warm sun, and the smell of antiseptic stings King’s nostrils. Fluorescent lighting hangs low over the tables, like a dingy pool hall, throwing everything except the bodies into relief. The next to last table holds the girl’s remains.

Jane Doe junior.

King approaches for a better look. The bones glow under the lights, all laid out in the correct alignment. Forensics recovered almost all of them, certainly enough to give a good representation of age and height.

“This is a preliminary report, King.” Clyde finishes with another body across the room, laying down the highly polished scalpel. “You know the drill. We’ll need some time to complete the rest of the tests.”

“How long?”

“A few weeks.”

“OK,” King takes a closer look at the skull, “just give me what you’ve got so far.”

Clyde picks up the notes at the edge of the Jane Doe junior’s table.

“Four or five years old. Female. Good health up until her death. No obvious cause of death in fact. Some friation of the bones, suggesting low temperatures...”

“Freezing?” Kings exchanges a glance with Fisher.

Clyde shrugs, “Could be. She was definitely buried, and only very recently disinterred by the storm. The bones were all situated close to the grave site. From the soil layers we can tell she was buried sitting, with her head on her knees, arms tucked in. Placed in a narrow hole vertically, probably. Dark hair, worn long, at least to her shoulders. A broken forefinger in her right hand, already healed.”

Clyde reaches behind her, picks up a plastic bag and hands it to King. Inside he can make out strips of cloth.

“What’s left of her dress; cotton. And can you see those brown bobbles?”

King sees two small knots along the hem. Hard to see, dark brown against dishwater brown. “Yes.”

“Hand embroidered roses. Green and pink originally. Summer wear, possibly a communion dress? It is a possibility the body was dressed especially for burial. The shoes as well...”

Clyde shows him one of the white sandals, encased in plastic.

“Heavy dress up shoe. Not something a child would wear to the beach, or playing.”

“Expensive?”

“Not excessively so.”

“Signs of abuse? Sexual violation?”

“No signs of abuse from the bones, but further than that I can’t say,” Clyde gestures towards the remains, “Nothing left to examine.”

“Can you give an approximation of when?”

“Summer of 2008. Closer than that, no, not until the definitive tests come back. This is interesting though...”

Clyde hands King another small plastic bag. Inside is a lump of wood, misshapen and darkly stained. King turns it.

“What is it?”

“A toy. She was buried with a toy. We’re guessing a horse, but it could be any animal really, with four legs and a tail.”

Kings puts it in his pocket. “I’ll get Samuels on it.”

Clyde nods, lifts the child’s skull and runs her finger along the inside of one of the eye sockets.

“Slight abrasion here. I’ve put it in the report but I have no idea what could cause this...”

King and Fisher leave Clyde pouting, still running her finger lightly over the bone in the back of the eye socket. In the car King turns the toy around in his hands. It is almost unrecognisable. King wonders which of the forensics team had been sharp-eyed enough to spot it.

“So she wasn’t mistreated before death, and then dressed in her Sunday best and buried tenderly with her favourite toy?”

“Hmmm. Almost ceremonial,” Fisher takes a left turn and pulls out into traffic, “if you ignore the fact that the body was forced into a crouch and then buried under a rock.”

“Two types of M.O.” King tucks the toy into his pocket, “Perhaps she was dressed and then given to someone else for disposal.”

“So we’re looking for two suspects?” Fisher turns onto the bridge, heading for the station.

“Well, it has the markers of a domestic. A mother dressing her child up, giving her a toy. A father less sentimental—possibly guilty—in charge of getting rid of the body.”

“I have to go through the missing kids today.”

“Don’t call any parents yet.”

Fisher smiles. “Don’t have to. It made the front page today. Reception is overflowing with parents.”

King grimaces and looks out at the shimmering harbour next to the road. “Rule out as many as you can. Arrange for DNA samples if there are any likelys. And note the parents that fit the profile, but don’t turn up, OK?”

“Will do.”

“Anything else?”

Fisher thinks for a moment.

“Not right now, sir.”

King watches as Fisher makes her way towards reception. He knows what kind of day she will have. Parents craving closure, wanting to know if it could be their son, their daughter. The media would have alerted the whole country to the possibility of identification and parents would be driving from as far as South Island just to make sure it wasn’t their Mary, or James. If Fisher is smart she’ll rule out as many as possible, as early as possible, and then concentrate on near-fits and matches, painstakingly collecting information that could identify the girl. King leaves her to it, glad that it’s not him dismissing those parents, or worse, putting them under suspicion of murder.

It only takes a couple of hours for King and Porter to arrange access to Max Stratton. A half hour flight to Auckland and a uniform picks them up and drives them to the prison, where an interview room is being made available. Auckland Prison, also known as Paremoremo or Pare, is on Auckland's North Shore. This is Stratton's third visit to the maximum security prison unit. His record shows a predilection for young girls, predatory tactics and kidnapping with intent. Porter points to one charge—hiding a four-year-old in a hole in his backyard. Stratton had made a wooden lid with some planks from a building site, and secured it with a solid steel lock.

“So we know he's good for digging then. And resourceful. And he's a repeater, same age group.”

Stratton is doing a ten-year stint for a grievous bodily harm. He smashed a girlfriend's face in when she allegedly caught him with her young daughter. The girl was too traumatised to give evidence but the girlfriend had had no such qualms. King and Porter are already seated when Stratton enters the interview room with two guards. They wait patiently while the guards thread Stratton's cuffs through the table ring. He is a short man, muscular and brown. Green and black tattoos curl around his wrists and disappear beneath his blue prison shirt. King can see his reluctance. Stratton knows enough to realise he's being sized up for a crime. Porter picks up his notes and starts off the questions.

“Do you know why we've called you in, Stratton?”

“No.”

“Ever been to Mount Maunganui?”

“Yep. Holiday place... a few brothers there.” Stratton wipes his nose, looks at King, then back at Porter.

“What?”

Ever been to the Mount itself? Gone up the mountain?”

“No. Why?” Stratton can see it coming. He looks away. “Someone said something, huh.”

“So you know.”

“No! I can see it on your face, man. And you can’t have me for it!”

“Matches your M.O.”

“And loads others. You know that.”

“Know what?”

“That...that there are loads of guys. That like girls.”

“Like you.”

“Yeah...doing my time. Lay off.”

“So you figure someone...like you...killed this girl?”

Stratton looks stricken for a split second.

“Killed?”

“Yeah.”

“No way. That’s not what it’s about. None of us are into that...” Stratton pales under the stubble on his face.

“An accident?”

“Look. I’m not psycho, like some of these guys in here. I’m not trying to kill anyone... I just like what I like.”

“Summer, 2008. You were in the Mount then.”

“Yeah.”

“Who were the other guys?”

“Retards. Online. I can’t remember.” Stratton looks upwards.

Porter turns to King. “We already have his list, sir. No hits.”

King leans forward. “Right now, Stratton, you are our best match for the murder of a little girl around that time. Right age, right place. No-one else coming forward to save your sorry ass.”

Stratton shifts in his chair, looking at the cuffs around his wrists.

“2008, summer?”

“Go on?”

Stratton is still uncomfortable. His skin looks oily. King can hear the scuff of the guard’s boots outside the door; feel the day’s heat against his skin.

“That summer. Yeah, that summer I hung with a chick. She was there, like, all the time. She had a daughter who stayed with her Dad, only visited.”

Porter cocks his head.

“Nothing happened! Jesus. The chick’s name was Viv, Vivien Cooley. You can check if you want. Nothing happened that year, I swear. You can check. The girl is fine!”

The questions continue, but both King and Porter know Stratton is the obsessive type. A stalker who spends months grooming his intended victim. After the interview a call to Vivien Cooley confirms that he lived with her that summer, and she booted him out when she saw signs of his infatuation with her six-year-old. She won’t vouch for him at all, but his fixation on Viv’s daughter casts doubt on his involvement in this case unless a direct match is made between the remains and Stratton’s DNA.

Porter is trying to drink water out of one of the airline’s tiny plastic cups. Rinse the taste of prison out of his mouth.

“So, a dead end?”

“I didn’t see it on his face. Doesn’t mean it’s definite no, but I’m disinclined to pursue it. He seemed surprised that he didn’t know though.”

“Didn’t know?”

“Stratton is part of a paedophile network. The list he gave up was part of that. If this is a paedophile he figures he would have heard about it.”

“Tons of peds aren’t part of any network.”

“True, but this one’s a killer. And paedophiles are observant by nature”

The looks from across the aisle are enough to stop the conversation. King is thinking it looks more and more like a family murder. Something private. No evidence of systematic violence or abuse suggests a fair upbringing, but why hide an accident? And how can you hide the disappearance of a child?

King thinks back to the children he’d found cowering in the kitchen four years ago. The seven-year-old girl with her death grip on the squalling baby, the young boy clinging to his sister with dark shadows ringing his eyes. He remembers them being taken away, a stern woman from child, youth and family had come for them. No one tried to explain the death of their parents. It seemed cruel, the lack of explanation.

“Porter.”

“Yes.”

“Who keeps tabs on all the kids in foster homes in the Bay?”

“I’ll find out.”

Chapter Seven

Fisher sits nursing a mug of hot coffee with her foot up on one drawer of her desk. The last of the parents have filed out, the phone calls returned and her computer screen has multiple windows open, as she checks records against location against time periods. Three sets of parents were looking for young girls, but one was blonde, another had been nine or ten, out of scope, and the last had only disappeared two years ago. Still, Fisher found their keening faces bone chilling, trying to ignore the tears leaking down their faces. One father, a man in his forties, aligned the details of his daughter's disappearance with this morning's media reports. He just wanted it to be over. After four hours Fisher had to phone Ben just to say hi, to hear his voice. She didn't want to think about how it would feel to lose a child, never mind identify the remains of one.

One missing girl's parents had not turned up; Amanda Helm's. Disappeared aged four and a half, dark hair, and approximate height. Her mother a divorcee with three other children. At the time of the disappearance, in February 2009, the father vanished too, but the mother still lives further down the coast, in Papamoa.

Fisher tries her phone number a couple of times but there is no reply. She passes Roberts on the way out. He is a young constable with toffee coloured hair and a broken nose. He is still cataloguing all the crime scene evidence from the night before.

“Any luck?” Roberts calls out to Fisher.

She shakes her head. “I'm going to check out an address down in Papamoa. A Katrina Helm.”

Fisher takes the beach road out of the Mount. The weather is clearing into a hot, still afternoon, and Fisher winds down the window to catch a breeze. The sea looks like strips of blue and green pastel crayons above the beach sand and she drives past the surfers and the cafes filling with summer tourists. Further down the coast the islands disappear and the street names become famous beaches: Bermuda Key, Santa Monica. Papamoa is built on reclaimed swamp land, low and prone to flooding. Reservoirs every few blocks sport water channels churning with ducks and eels. Still, since the property boom the houses are fast becoming expensive. Fisher parks outside an address just off Cayman Close. A typical three-bedroomed house, the garden studded with palms and scrubby grass, a grey SUV parked in the driveway. A woman opens the door when Fisher knocks. She is whip-thin, dark hair cut short, and her brown dress looks too large for her frame. She starts talking the instant she sees Fisher's uniform.

“Is this about the bones found at the Mount?”

“We're just ruling out...”

“It's not her.”

“Sorry?”

“Our Amanda. It can't be her. Amanda's father took her, in 2009. I've heard reports that they're living in Perth.”

“Reports?”

“A neighbour saw them. Look, I can't talk right now. I have to run.”

Mrs Helm is wringing her hands in front of her dress. Her eyebrows are held high and she looks tense. This is a confrontation.

“Why didn't you let the police know?”

“Oh, I didn't know where they were exactly or anything like that...”

Fisher gets the impression that there are others in the house. Perhaps her other children. She takes out her card and hands it to Mrs Helm.

“Can you come down to the police station tomorrow, and give us a statement on what you’ve heard, please.”

Mrs Helm takes the card and gives a lop-sided smile. “Yes, yes. Tomorrow. I can’t say which neighbour though. So many have moved away...”

She shuts the door while Fisher is still looking at her. Fisher stares at the door for a moment, and then makes her way back to the car. She drives round the block and then parks slightly further down the street, out of sight behind a giant oleander bush bristling with crimson flowers. She calls the station.

“Roberts?”

“Hey.”

“Can you come down to Papamoa?”

“Sure. What’s up?”

“The mother of the missing girl, Amanda Helm. Acting agitated. I’m going to sit tight for now, but I might need backup.”

“Address?”

“35 Cayman Close. Do a drive by and then park your car down the road. You’ll see me. Blue sedan.”

“On my way.”

Fisher opens all the windows and gets comfortable. Half an hour later the passenger door clicks open and Roberts slides in.

“Think you’ve got a live one?”

“Said that her husband had been seen in Perth with their daughter.”

“And she hadn’t reported it?”

“That’s not it. We flag the passports. No way Maurice Helm could have taken Amanda out of the country. A uniform at her door put her in a tailspin, and she’s not answering the phone.”

“You think the husband’s back?”

“Maybe. Maybe she knows it’s Amanda on the mountainside and she’s running scared. Figure we’ll find out if we wait a while.”

“Got it.”

After five minutes Roberts is restless. He glances at Fisher.

“Your husband? Is he Daniel Fisher?”

“Yeah.”

“The guy who made all that money...”

“He sells mobile apps.”

Roberts pulls out his phone. Fisher can see the red and white icon on the screen from where she’s sitting. “It’s really cool. Now that I have it I can’t imagine not having it, you know. Pretty smart guy.”

“Yes.” Fisher looks out of her window. She hates this conversation. She’s had it too many times. The street is quiet, except for the drowsy cicadas ticking in the oleander bush. She is sweating in the heat, even in the crease between her fingers.

An hour later the front door opens. Two teenagers with backpacks take off down the road, heading in the opposite direction. Fisher notes the time and direction, and settles back down. Ten minutes later Katrina Helm appears with a boy of about five in her arms. She straps him into a car seat in the SUV and drives off, again in the opposite direction. Fisher notes it down. Roberts is starting to fidget again.

“We could do a walk around?”

Fisher shakes her head. “We don’t know whose inside.”

“Looks empty.”

“Can’t tell.”

She waits another hour, until the late afternoon shadows appear and the air cools into an evening breeze. One of the teenagers, a pretty brunette, reappears and walks towards the house. She has her head down, listening to music. Fisher sits up and shoves Roberts.

“Move! Don’t let her see you.”

Fisher and Roberts get out of the car, leaving the doors open. They stay on the opposite side, behind the oleander, until the teenager turns her back to walk across the lawn and approach the front door. Fisher runs up behind her, crouches down and stays directly at her back. The teenager knocks twice and leans in the doorway, disentangling herself from her earphones. Roberts goes sideways, up against the wall of the house. A man opens the door and Fisher covers the last metre, pushing the teenager forward and through the door. Fisher looks at the man’s unshaven face, his dirty singlet. His mouth opens in shock at the sight of a uniform.

“Maurice Helm?”

The teenage girl turns and says it for him.

“Dad?”

He takes a deep breath and then he’s shouting at her. “No! No!” He moves much faster than Fisher expects. Shoving the teenager aside he hits Fisher in the chest with the heels of both hands. The impact sends Fisher back through the door and she sprawls into the garden, landing on her back and skidding on the path. The girl is standing at the door screaming, her hands still entangled in her earphones. Maurice is still shouting. His tracksuit pants flap against his skinny ankles as he

looks for an exit, trying to step round and over her legs. Fisher is trying to get her legs clear and up on her feet.

Roberts comes in unseen from the side. He executes a perfect flying tackle, hitting Maurice high up on the right side of his body. They both hit the ground hard and Fisher hears the wet snap of a rib. Roberts immediately rolls Maurice over, cuffs in hand. Maurice's shouts turn into shrieks of pain, and both of them hear the sound of fast footsteps in the house. The teenager turns and Fisher gets to her feet and runs towards the door to intercept. A nine year old girl appears in the doorway before her, eyes large at the sight of the melee. Fisher stops and breathes out.

“Amanda?”

“Please don't take Dad.”

Most of the evening is spent processing Maurice Helm. Statements from Amanda Helm and his teenage children. They round up his wife and son from Palm Beach Plaza, where they were finishing the grocery run. The couple had reconciled a few years before, and rather than Maurice facing charges they had simply changed Amanda's name and enrolled her in a different school. If the bones hadn't surfaced no-one would be any the wiser. Fisher charges Maurice with kidnapping, resisting arrest, and Katrina with obstructing an investigation.

The paperwork eats into her evening and by the time she gets home Ben has been asleep for hours. The weather is turning to rain again. She eats cold chicken and green beans standing in front of the fridge, then pours a glass of ice-cold chardonnay and pads barefoot into the study. Daniel is working, lit by a pool of lamplight. The three computer screens on his desk are all flickering; one is an old

movie, Humphrey Bogart in a bar; another blinks email messages, another scrolls programming code. She puts her hand on his shoulder. “Hey there.”

Daniel looks up at her, then swivels in his chair. “I heard! You OK?”

“Yeah. Found a missing girl. Just not the one we were looking for.”

“But that’s good, right?”

Fisher thinks about the family, the tears, hugs goodbye. The distress of losing their father again.

“Yeah.”

Daniel stands and pulls her in towards his chest, dropping the imprint of a warm kiss on her forehead. “The Major called too.”

“How is he?”

“Seems to have regained most of his marbles. Though I think he broke into Olivia’s office to call.”

“What did he want?”

“Wants you to update him, what else?”

She nods against his warm chest, breathing in his smell, loving the length of his body.

“Bed? Or bath?” he whispers. His hands drift towards her breasts, “or take your chances here...”

She raises her head and kisses him on the mouth.

“Bath,” she whispers against his teeth. She feels his smile against her lips.

“See you in bed then.”

The bathroom is a cathedral, a domed hollow space hung like a chandelier in the centre of the rambling house. Pale wallpaper curls along every seam and the bath taps drip with an ethereal echo. Fisher turns the water on full and peels off her work

shirt. Two fresh bruises on her chest, just below each collar bone. Ugly marks, dark against her fair skin. What makes a woman forgive a man kidnapping? The distress, the fear. The other kids? The relief at having a daughter back? Fisher had stared at Katrina Helm this evening, trying to read her face. She had seen nothing but despair.

Lying in the deep bath she can hear the wind rushing across the roof and whipping past the dome. Rain patters against it and a breeze gently whirls across her wet face. She lies still under the glass of pale green water. Ben's plastic animals tilt precariously on the bath rim, pushed into every crack and dip in the decaying mortar. He delights in complex patterns, lines them up along the sides, under the water, on the taps, like plastic kaleidoscopes of brightly coloured dinosaurs and pale baby rats.

Since she started at the station eight years ago, Fisher has read every single file in the archives. As she pages through the reports, names float up, names that reappear again and again, Searanke, Graham, Heather. Somewhere in there is the answer she is looking for. Lying back, she lets herself wander through all the notes in the subterranean stockroom, seeing them still, in the dark. The names linked to behaviour, to place to time. There is a chunk of wall that covers 2008, and she concentrates on that. It is her nature to detect patterns, something that she has passed onto her son, she thinks, one wrinkled finger pad transferring a water drop onto the back of a lime green tiger. She floats in the cooling water, until her mind clears. Something King had said earlier...two M.Os. What if it wasn't an individual? What if it wasn't two individuals? What if it involved a whole family? Wouldn't that affect behaviour patterns in a way that could be charted...? She sits up. She isn't looking for a person. She's looking for a group. In her mind the notes on the stockroom wall coalesce into known groups, families, conspirators across the bay. The tapestry glows with interconnected names, and the loners fade in Fisher's mind, as important

as the under stitching now. Wrapping a towel around her, she heads to the bedroom and sinks naked into Daniel's warm pool of blankets, burying her face in the back of his neck.

“Better?” He stretches and turns, draws her close.

“Oh yes.”

Chapter Eight

It is eight in the morning and King has them all in the briefing room.

“Right, so where are we at this point. Round the room. Porter?”

“Stratton is still in the frame, but not likely. Reynders is in a hospital in Berlin, on the waiting list for a kidney transplant. Might get something out of him. Otherwise, no leads.”

“Can you speak to him on the phone?”

“I can try.”

“If not, contact the federal police force in Berlin. Get a translator. Arrange for an interview.”

“Right.”

Kings looks at Fisher.

“Fisher, well done.” A few hoots and scattered clapping. “And Roberts. Nice to close that case. Pity it’s the wrong case. Anything to add on this one?”

Fisher shakes her head. “Nothing from missing children sir, no matches. We still have to check international records.”

“Check arrivals over that period, tourists put down as over stayers.”

“Okay.”

“Roberts? Anything?”

“No sir.”

Wright?”

Wright adjusts his uniform, where the buttons strain over a tight beer gut.

“All the photographic evidence is in. Everyone has a copy now. Thousands of images, guys, if anyone has the time.”

“Make the time. Samuels?” King watches as Samuels checks down his list of evidence.

“We retrieved over two hundred bones, enough to give us height and age. Most of the teeth. Also, both shoes and the techs are working on reconstructing the dress she was wearing. Cotton, handmade. The toy...” Samuels holds up the odd-shaped lump, “...is a material used by a Chinese figurine company. We are waiting to see if they can identify what kind of animal it once was.”

“Embroidery. On the hem?”

Samuels frowns. “We haven’t managed to get an idea of what it would have looked like before decomposition. Once we can get a fresh copy, we’ll see if anyone recognises the handiwork.”

“Cuthers?”

“The crime scene is sealed off sir, but the rains have obliterated any ground signs. The engineers had to stabilise several of the large boulders. Still working on it, and they are keeping their eyes open for more evidence.”

“Get them to report to me this morning.”

“Will do.”

“Anything else?” No-one stirs.

“Get to it then. Fisher, a moment.”

“Sir.” Fisher walks forward as everyone files out.

King gives her a cursory once over. “How are you? After yesterday.”

“Fine sir.”

“Good. There is something else I need you to check. It’s a long shot but can you look at drug trafficking in the area over that time period? Kids get neglected in P

houses, or if the mother gets put away. State care? Anything that catches your eye.

We may be looking at a child who got caught up in criminal activity.”

Fisher smiles. “Just what I was thinking. I’ll look at it today.”

King sits at his desk going through the crank calls. The officers on the phones know which questions to ask, to filter out the attention seekers, so most can be removed from follow-up. He sifts through the ones that might be leads. He knows he has to check in with Ganley. The media are baying for information but there is nothing substantial for King to give them without jeopardising the case. He picks up the phone, dials the first lead. The number rings out. He tries the second. It rings twice and someone answers.

“Mr William Newton?”

“Yes?”

“This is Detective Sergeant King. You phoned yesterday with some information.

“I did! I did! About that little girl! Now, I was working on the mountain a few years back.”

“When was that, Mr Newton?”

“Ooh. October 2008 to, well, February, March the next year?”

“Right. Doing what?”

“Volunteer. Helping the caravan park and the rangers. And I remember a woman, a Dutch woman. She got hurt.”

King picked up a pen.

“How did she get hurt, Mr Newton?”

“Tourist. You know what they’re like. Wandering off the tracks, falling down gullies. Anyway it was really late one night, when she was brought in, with a twisted ankle.”

“Do you remember her name?”

“Anna, I think. She had a surname like a kids story.”

“A story?”

“A man found her and helped her in. Really bad sprain, her ankle. There was a storm, and she’d got lost. He brought her down.”

“Why do you think she might have had something to do with this, Mr Newton?”

“Oh, not her! The man! The man that brought her in. He just dropped her off and left. But you could see she was shaken.”

“The man?”

“Had a full backpack on, but it was empty. Who takes a backpack up the Mount? He didn’t stay to see if she was alright, just walked out. He was filthy, maybe sleeping out or something. It was suspicious I tell you. I said to the wife; bet you he pushed her or something...”

King throws the pen on his desk and leans back.

“His name?”

“No idea. Come and gone, he was.”

“And the girl? Anna...”

“Um, Hood. No, I think Riding, or Roding...”

“When was this, exactly?”

“Oh easy. Big storm that night. November twenty-first, 2008. Remember? That’s why she got lost, I think. Blinded by the rain...”

“Mr Newton? Thank you. We’ll check this out; maybe get you in for a statement. Is that alright?”

“Yes! Love to! Anytime...”

King puts the phone down and calls in Cuthers.

“Run a check on Dutch tourists over November 2008. Surname Riding or Roding. See if you get a hit.”

“Will do.” Cuthers says. He leans against the doorframe. “There’s an engineer. Outside.”

“Send him in.”

A man in jeans and a neat striped shirt walks into King’s office. His face is weathered, faded with age, his eyes almost buried in wrinkles. He is carrying a soft, heavy briefcase. His hand jerks forward.

“Detective Sergeant. Dave Cresswell. You requested a report on the stability of the southern slopes of the Mount, over the current crime scene.”

Cresswell pulls a schematic from his briefcase and unfolds it. He takes a pen from his pocket, to use as a pointer. King can see that Cresswell has a detailed representation of the slope, with each boulder marked out, the degree of lean, the percentage of water saturation. “We have done some preliminary stabilisation to the site...especially with the cave site and surrounding boulders. However, there is a good chance of a slip if we get more heavy rains...and we will, this time of year. The site is adjacent to the track so we don’t need to close it, but anyone trying to work on the crime scene should be warned. Or...”

“Or?”

“We can undertake a full stabilisation of the hillside. That would mean heavy machinery, costs would be high.”

“I see. Can we let forensics back in around the cave site?”

“We can’t guarantee access after the next downpour.”

“Rains pretty much every day right now...”

King gazes at the map, tracing the best route up to the cave site. A red cross is marked twenty feet from the site, just under the cliff face.

“What’s this?”

Cresswell frowns, and stares at it. “I think they found something there. They would have handed it in though, to forensics at the time. I’ll find out.”

“Thank you. I’ll let you know my decision before the day is out.”

Cresswell tucks his map away and is gone. King thinks for a moment then walks down the passage and knocks on the commander’s door.

District Commander Ganley has another police officer with him. Someone King can’t quite place. “Sit down please. This is Detective Sergeant Stewart Hind.”

King shakes hands and takes a seat. He remembers now. Hind was at Auckland Central when he was at Manukau. Awkward sod. Ganley looks to King.

“Can you give us an update?”

“Still in the early stages, Commander. We are sure it is murder, probably manslaughter. We aren’t ruling out a paedophile attack gone wrong or a domestic.”

Hind interrupts, “Have you rounded up the local bums? The ones that sleep rough?”

“Funny you mention that. We had a tip this morning...”

“That would have been my first move.” Hind interrupts again, addressing Ganley. King stops talking.

Ganley crosses his arms and looks at Hind. “I’m sure King will have that covered soon.”

“Yes, but it points to the inexperience of the team. I am happy to take the lead on this for you, as I’ve said. Give some direction. With the media following so closely it is imperative that, for the reputation of this district...”

“I’m confident of my team, thank you.”

King leans forward. “How many murders have you covered, Hind?”

“Four actually,” Hind smiles. “Lead investigator on the last two.”

“Impressive. All solved?”

“No. Obviously there are factors that slow down investigations,” Hind pauses but King doesn’t bite, “and there is also media management to consider, investigation techniques, interview transcription, and forensics, all these things are advancing fast. We are on courses all the time up north and this is what is needed in situations like this—”

“Any solved?”

“Not at this time, but...”

“Not one?”

“Considering the mess you left behind in Manukau, King, it seems in bad taste for you to try and ...”

“Not even one?”

Commander Ganley stands in the silence and holds out his hand, “We appreciate your offer, Hind. We’re fine for now, though.” There is a glint in his eye.

By the time King has updated the Commander it is late afternoon. He takes his car and parks it at the base of the mountain. On his right waves roll into the curve of Main beach. He walks through the caravan park, cuts left and up the stone stairs. It seems the obvious route to the ledge above him. A few runners pound past him,

one or two tourists. Halfway up King steps off the path and heads under the stone promontory looming over the hillside. He steps into the windless lee of a granite cliff, known locally by climbers as Cables Wall. A narrow track tucked under the cliff-line. King can just make out a scab of a path that reaches round under the cliff face, rust flaking from the pitons left in narrow cracks on the cliff walls.

King picks a route that takes him around the cliff, towards the high side, under rocks the size of trailer homes. He studies each one and sees a dense outcropping of ferns between two of them. There. It is where the red cross marked Cresswell's map. This is where someone who knew their way around the mountain would access the hillside, coming in slightly to the left and above the ledge, then climbing up to the cave.

He steps off the incline and creeps in between the narrow cleft. Twenty feet on, a straight line. The boulder now has a steel jack on each side, where the engineers have slowed its journey down the slope. Below it is a shadow, the crooked black line that indicates the cave beneath. King looks around. It's pretty close, between the rocks and the wild grasses. No one on the track below can see him. He gets down on his belly and slithers into the damp cave.

The air in the cave smells like salt, damp, and rot. A sloping floor made up of soil and roots and bone-white shells. There is no water left, just marks where forensics scraped the soil out. A breeze runs through each side of the cave, and King feels the weight of the rock above him, balancing so delicately. The hairs on the back of his neck rise. Crawling to the back, he looks down into the deep hole where Jane Doe has spent the last few years. It is a layer cake of pipi, mussel, toheroa shells, pebbles, shiny beetle carapaces. King hunches his back. Space enough to dig, but not enough to turn around. He crawls backwards and manoeuvres himself out of the

cave. His hands are studded with small sharp rocks and he can feel grit on his skin. He moves back the way he came, down the incline, through the ferns, almost turning his ankle. He reaches the track and brushes off most of the soil from the knees of his pants, from the elbows. He is aware though, from the looks of passing walkers, that he is filthy. He looks down at the outline of the beach far below.

So this is how it feels.

“Ho! What happened to you?” Samuels looks at him as he comes through the office door.

“A little experiment.”

“Porter is looking for you. Something about Berlin.”

“Right.”

King finds Porter on the phone, and sits down wearily in front of his desk. Porter finishes the call and pushes some paperwork at King. “Reynders is not our man.”

“Alibi?”

“Doesn’t need one. He wasn’t here in 2008. Someone stole his identity and he didn’t report it. He did, however, end up in a hospital in Dunedin for a kidney infection. I spoke to one of his doctors in Berlin and he sent the medical records.”

King raises his eyebrows, “Isn’t there doctor patient confidentiality...”

“Oh, the doctor has permission. Reynders knew it would clear him. And he doesn’t want to compromise his treatment. German prisons aren’t fun.”

“Scratch him then. Any others?”

“I’m going through the network list Stratton gave in when he was arrested. Cross checking for priors. Also, there is a mole on the current paedophile network, monitoring activity. Must be the worst job in the world. I’ll speak to him tomorrow; see if any conversations mention the Mount, that sort of thing.”

King brushes dirt from his shirt. “Keep it to locals, or perps who grew up here. That cave is not a random find.”

“I see.”

Cuthers sticks his head round the door. “The tourist.”

“Yes.”

“Anna Ridings. Student visa, from ‘07 to ‘09. She went home May 2009.

“Where’s home?”

“Amsterdam. She’s now a postgrad at the university. Economics.”

King looks at him.

“And I’ll get hold of her...arrange an interview...” Cuthers vanishes from the doorway. King turns back to Porter.

“Where’s Fisher?”

Chapter Nine

The Child, Youth and Family Services have offices in a shady area on Tauranga's Gray Street. Inside a red haired woman is trying to explain to Fisher why it is so hard to get the names of children who had been in state care in this area.

"You see, many return to their families." She smiles tentatively. "So we don't have a fixed register. These children come and go. We have care plans, which documents all this, but you'd need to go through each one..."

"I understand Mrs Sutton. But you still monitor them, right? Once they return home?"

"Yes, however some leave the area, and are passed on to other regions..."

"I want a list of all the kids in care in 2008. And where they are now."

"Well, no. You see, I can give you the first list, it will take some time. But the follow-up? There's your problem."

"So if one of them had died since 2008, you wouldn't know?"

Mrs Sutton looks down awkwardly, "Well, you'd hope they'd advise us..."

"Can I have the first list then?"

"Certainly." She taps her keyboard and brings up a long list of names and addresses on the screen.

"Most of the children go to multiple foster homes. Would you like each address or just the last ones?"

"All of them."

"And this is 2008 onwards?"

"No, make it 2007 onwards."

There is silence as Mrs Sutton grapples with the enormity of her task. Fisher looks at the bookcase of toys and toddler's books. She bites her lip.

"Can I ask you to check something first for me? A bit more specific?"

"Sure."

"Check these four surnames for me, would you." She scrawls down the names: Searanke, Graham, Lazarus, Heather. "Got that? Any of the kids that were in care around that time, 2007 onwards. Ring me as soon as you have them."

Fisher parks down at the waterfront and returns a call from King.

"Nothing yet sir. Records are pretty flaky. I'll follow up any strays, whether or not they are still in the system. Probably worth updating CYF when we're finished.

"They don't know?"

"Hundreds of kids, sir." The harbour in front of her is choppy, bright glare in the sun. She shakes her shades from the visor. "And we don't have a solid time period yet."

"There's a possibility that we have. Not confirmed but 21st November 2008 seems a possible."

"How so?"

"Reports of a man with a large backpack. We'll follow it up with a witness. Is there a sewing shop near there?"

Fisher smiles. "Yes, called Elna. Biggest in the area. So I've heard."

"Can you ask them about embroidery? Is there a group? Maybe they recognise each other's handiwork?"

"I'll ask."

Next Fisher calls Mrs Sutton.

“Narrow it down. November 21, 2008. Give me a list of kids in care before that and after that. Yes, just the surnames I mentioned. When can I have that?”

“An hour?”

“Perfect.”

Fisher turns her car around and heads up the middle of Tauranga, where the big supermarkets and warehouses line each side of Cameron Road. Just before the boy’s college is a big sewing emporium, which has a small car park around the back. The girl at the counter is dressed in all black, with patchy black nail polish on all but two of her fingers. Fisher can’t imagine her in a sewing circle, but no one else is around.

“So... embroidery? Would you know anyone...” Fisher asks, leaning on the counter.

“Embroidery?”

Fisher points to a piece of cloth with bees embroidered along the hem.

“Oh, needlepoint!” The girl shakes her head. “Most of us do quilting here. And knitting is really big, like, later in the year.” She taps on the counter. “Though in Te Puke they do those handcrafts shops—something like that? They would probably know. What are you looking for?”

“Someone who can do really fine work, details on a dress? A rose design, perhaps?”

“Hmmm.” The girl pulls her hair back off her face, “You’d have more luck with that in Te Puke really. A couple of sewing circles that do christening dresses, bridesmaid outfits? Not much call for it these days. She searches under the desk.

“You know, call Celia Mathers, she runs one of them and she teaches as well. Let me

check...Here!” She pulls out an address book with a pin cushion stuck to the front. It doesn’t open well. The girl scribbles a number and hands it to Fisher with a big smile.

Fisher is still wondering how long it will take Mrs Sutton to compile the list when she arrives at the Sunfire Retirement Home. The gardens at the back of the bungalow are enclosed in a low, circular wall with a herb garden in the middle. Roses and foxgloves fill the flowerbeds and scent the rain-washed air. The Major is pacing before the herb garden, his large hands clasped behind his back. He is in his dressing gown, but on his feet is a pair of sandals, woolly socks bulging out of the toe.

“Major!” Fisher walks up to him. He looks well.

“The hyoid bone, Lily. Did they find it?”

“Intact.” Fisher, sits down on the wall and checks her phone. No calls.

The Major walks past her and back. “Not strangled. How tall?”

“127 centimetres.”

He put the side of his hand against his hip. “Yes, weight? Estimate, of course?”

“About 12kgs. You were right about her forefinger...”

“Yes, such a small injury. Caught in a door perhaps. No twisting or torque. Not treated, so very young, as a baby perhaps. How’s Ben?”

Fisher looks up at him and smiles. “Good... growing.”

The Major walks past her again. He’s agitated, but his walk is almost smooth and he has lost the stoop that was so obvious on the mountain. “The teeth, no decay on the teeth. She spent time somewhere with fluoride in the water system.”

Fisher frowned. “Auckland? Wellington? Time in a major city then?”

“An urban area, definitely. Too young for x-rays though. No dental records...”

“What if she had been in state care? What if she was being shuffled around?”

“Too healthy. No signs of abuse...a possibility but look at the clothing. Handmade. Someone cared.”

Fisher checks her phone again. “So the mother must have fairly responsible. No drugs?”

“Or older siblings.” The Major stopped pacing. “Sometimes older siblings shield a small child from a bad family situation. We have to assume the mother is not completely available, otherwise she would have reported the disappearance.”

“Detective King mentioned a man, with a backpack, in the timeframe.”

The Major stops in front of her. “One of those hiking ones?”

“Sounds like it.”

The Major put his head down. “She’s buried in a crouch. Maybe she was still frozen...backpack size...”

“You think?”

He looks at her sideways. “Anything else?”

Fisher shakes her head and stands. She’ll have to go back to CYF, it’s taking too long. “Is there anything I can do for you, Major? Anything I can bring you?”

“More photographs if you can. And keep me updated on any leads. Have you covered children at risk, missing kids?”

“I’m on that now.”

The Major walks to her and gently tucks his arms around her. “Thank you for the visit, Lily.”

Fisher is surprised by his tenderness. He is not a man to show emotion. She gets to the car park before she checks her phone again. She doesn't have her phone anymore. She heads back to the garden. The Major is chatting to someone on her phone.

"Which four names were those?"

"Major!"

The Major waves his hand at her, "Don't interrupt Lily."

Fisher glares at him and takes the phone.

"Mrs Sutton?"

"Yes, Sergeant Fisher?"

"Yes, carry on."

"As I was saying, we had several children under those surnames across that date..."

"Before and after November 2008. Are all of them still in care?"

"No. No... five children were removed from the system during 2008. There were the two Searanke sisters, Holly and Paula. They went to an aunt's house..."

"How old?"

"Four and ten."

"OK, who else?"

"A baby girl, Cecile Graham, returned to her mother July 2008. Another girl, Gloriana Heather, went to a grandmother."

"Age?"

"Four and a half. And a ten year old boy, Thomas Lazarus. He went to live with his father."

"Have any of them returned to the system after that?"

“No. None of them have entered our care again.”

“Thank you, hold on.” The Major is standing practically on top of her, tapping her arm.

“What?”

“Ask her... ask her if they had older siblings...”

“Mrs Sutton, did any of the children have older siblings?”

“Well, Holly had her older sister Paula of course. They stayed together. Gloriana has three older siblings. And Thomas has two.”

“Can you email me the details?”

Fisher finishes the call and keeps her phone in her hand. The Major is showing no signs of remorse.

“Why those names?”

“Just a hunch.”

“Based on?”

“No more crime sprees, Major.”

“Send the details to Olivia’s email. I can get into her laptop.”

“How does she feel about that?”

“I have no intention of telling her.”

Fisher drives back to the station and heads straight to her desk. Mrs Sutton’s email includes contact details, two family snapshots and some scanned forms. Not a lot of paperwork for five children. Holly Searanke is first up. She’s about the right age. The snapshot is grainy, of two girls in cherry stained dresses sitting practically on top of each other with shy grins plastered across their faces. There is a contact number for their aunt, Fiona Searanke. The name rings a bell.

“Mrs Searanke?”

“Who wants to know?”

“Sergeant Lily Fisher, from the Mount police station. Just an enquiry. Can you tell me if Holly Searanke is living with you?”

“Yes. Why? Is she hurt? She is supposed to be at school...”

“No, no. Just an enquiry. Could you tell me which school?”

“She’s at Tauranga intermediate. I’d appreciate it if you could tell me...”

“Just an enquiry Mrs Searanke.”

It only takes Fisher a few minutes to confirm that both Holly and her sister are at school. She drops her phone on the desk to find Roberts standing in front of her.

“Lead?”

“Nope. Dead end. What’s up.”

“King wants you.”

Fisher walks into the briefing room to find the team assembled. King stares out at a docking container ship piled high with its multi-coloured blocks of cargo.

“Any luck with the dress?”

“Not sure if it’s needlepoint or embroidery at this stage. There are some sewing circles specialising in that type of thing in Te Puke. I have a contact.”

King turns and looks at each of them in turn. “Alright, listen up all of you. Cuthers has contacted a tourist in Amsterdam. She was hurt climbing the Mount November 2008, the twenty-first to be exact. The man that helped her down was filthy and exhibiting odd behaviour. He was also carrying a backpack that she swears was full and then mysteriously empty. We have a general description: Caucasian,

dark hair, dark eyes, fit, intelligent. A sketch artist in Amsterdam will visit her later in the day. This might be one of our best leads so far...”

“Not a great one, if I may say so,” Roberts says, looking at his nails.

“It’s a cold case Roberts. Very little action, I’m afraid.”

Fisher steps forward. “Sir.”

“Yes.”

“I might have something. I’ve been looking at children in care over that date, and I have a few possibles.”

“A few? There would be hundreds of kids in care...”

“Not ones that left the system after that date. And ones with surnames that match criminal elements in the Bay...”

Roberts and Cuthers look down and smile. King frowns.

“How are you narrowing down the search, Fisher?”

“Local knowledge, sir.”

“It’s a long shot, in other words.”

“Yes, but it’s easily checked.”

Back at her desk Fisher bins the Searanke information and pulls out Cecile Graham. Too young. She bins it. She finds the release form for Gloriana Heather and two of her brothers. The brothers show continuing care. There is a number for the grandmother. Fisher picks up the phone.

“Mrs Mariama Heather.”

There is silence and Fisher wonders if she is deaf. She is about to repeat herself when she hears a deep, phlegmy voice, like syrup running down the speaker of a radio.

“Yes. What is it?”

“This is Sergeant Fisher, Mrs Heather.”

Fisher waits in the silence.

“Yes.”

“I’m phoning about your granddaughter, Gloriana Heather. Can you tell me where she is?”

“She doesn’t stay here anymore.”

Fisher hears the sour disappointment and softens her tone. “When did you see her last?”

“She went to her mother first. Useless, her mother.”

“So where is she now?”

“I don’t get visits.” A choking cough and a gasp of air. Clogged air pipes that can’t quite empty. “No visits.”

Fisher looks up the woman’s address. Te Puke.

“Where does Gloriana’s mother live, Mrs Heather?”

“North Shore... This about Rob?”

Fisher scans Gloriana’s form. The father’s name is Robert Heather.

“Probably just an error, Mrs Heather. You see, I thought Gloriana was living with you?” Fisher waits in the silence. She selects Gloriana’s care forms, and hits the print button.

“Not since 2008. Every summer. She was here every summer before. Where is she now?”

“I’ll check and let you know, Mrs Heather. Thank you.”

Fisher runs up the stairs and walks into King's office without knocking. She plants the care forms on his desk.

"I might have her. Look at these."

King shuffles through the papers. "Missing?"

"Yes. State care says she's with her grandmother in Te Puke. The grandmother says she's in state care. Her father is doing time. All of her siblings are in care as the mother is a crack head with a record. The family are known criminals..." Fisher tries to slow down her words.

"What does CYF say?"

"I haven't phoned them back. I brought it to you first. Before launching a search..."

King looks at Fisher. She knows she's flushed.

"OK. Put out a search on her. See what you find. Contact CYF and the mother. But do it gently, Fisher."

She's already heading out the door when he stops her.

"Why this kid?"

"The Heathers sir. It's a big family down here, with their fingers in a lot of pies. Something about their behaviour...plus the only other child is a boy..."

It takes Fisher until late the next afternoon. By the time she is back in King's office she is sure. She hands him a folder she has already labelled.

"We were right. She's disappeared."

Fisher watches as King works his way through the folder. He holds up a photograph Fisher found, an overexposed image of a child running in a grassy yard, against a background of jasmine flowers. The little girl has her head back, laughing, trailing a spill of dark hair. The printer has made the image flat, but affecting. King

lays out the care forms, along with typed rebuttals and scribbled addendums; Mrs Sutton's adamant reproach that they had signed the girl out in good faith. A list of matching details from Dr Clyde. DNA form, red stamped with prison authentication.

King looks at Fisher and smiles.

"Gloriana Heather."

There are twenty uniforms packed in the briefing room. Commander Ganley and two commanders from Auckland are arrayed at a long table in front. King sits facing them and Fisher and the rest of the team cluster on chairs nearby. Fisher can see several senior detectives from Auckland on the chairs behind her.

"Gloriana Heather," King says, "She was just about to turn five. Sergeant Fisher tracked the missing children in the area and found all the information in your folders." The commanders don't open their folders. The rest of the room flip through the pages, balancing the folders on their laps.

"Gloriana and her two brothers were removed from their mother's care early 2006. One of the boys received injuries from the mother, and as a result all the children were sent to foster care. On request of the father's family, foster care was arranged here, in the Bay of Plenty."

"Where was she staying when she vanished?" Commander Ganley asks.

"Her grandmother was the last carer. Mrs Mariama Heather. She always took the child for the summer, and other members of her extended family often cared for her for short periods of time." There is a restless moment as the detectives register the name. King takes a breath and continues.

"The Heathers are well known to us. They are a large family living in the Bay of Plenty. They have connections to organised crime, and several members of the

family have long criminal records. However there are many family members with no known criminal dealings.”

“So what about the father? Robert Heather?” Commander Sacker asks, a portly man in his sixties with silky white hair smoothed over his bald pate.

“In Auckland prison for manslaughter. He killed a young mother in a drink driving accident. He’s been in jail most of Gloriana’s life. He supplied the DNA that identified the remains.” King turns to a page in his notes. “Heather has a few assault charges in his youth, but no drug-related crimes.” He looks up and at the commanders. “It’s unlikely this is drug related at this point.”

“So? What is the conjecture?”

“Gloriana had a birthday party at the end of October 2008. She was seen by multiple family members. Her mother was not invited. After that it becomes less clear. Four years later her body washes down from the rocks on the east face of Mount Maunganui. It appears she was murdered soon after her birthday. That’s all we have right now.”

“So you’re not sure if she was killed here at all? Is that right? She could have died in Auckland?” Commander Garrett speaks quietly, with enough force to silence the room. He is a tall man with iron-coloured hair and shoulders like a suit hanger. King looks at him. King looks at Commander Ganley, but Ganley looks down and presses his lips together. King turns back to Commander Garrett.

“No, commander,” King says. “We have no evidence that conclusively shows she was murdered here. She lived here with foster families, and relatives. Her body was found here. We surmise she was killed here.” King frowns. “Are you suggesting otherwise?”

“Detective, I’m simply pointing out that her mother has a history of violence, and lives in Auckland. There is certainly a possibility that the child was harmed by her mother.”

King nods. “Still, commander, we have no evidence in Auckland...”

“Yet.”

“Yes.”

“So there is a good case for the Auckland branch to be involved here, I think. Have you interviewed the relatives? How far are you with the investigation?”

King shifts in his chair. “No sir, not yet. We are really just beginning. Sergeant Fisher has verified most of our information though.”

“And the girl’s parents?”

The room is restless. Fisher hears whispering and then muttering, especially between Cuthers and Roberts.

King flips through his notes. “We have spoken to Rob Heather. We have yet to track down the mother...”

Commander Garrett points to one of his detectives with his pen, who nods in response. Fisher recognises Stewart Hind.

“Detective Hind will locate the mother for you, King. He can stand as your Auckland liaison in this case. I’m guessing you’ll need all the help you can get.”

“We’ll manage fine, commander.” King says. Fisher can see his knuckles going white where he’s holding the folder.

“Detective, don’t take that tone with me,” Commander Garrett says, staring at him. “There is a growing concern, on such a high profile case, that you and your team will come under some scrutiny. I suggest that, with your background, it might be better to stay in the shade.”

“I see.”

“We have well trained detectives to assist. There is no reason why this cannot be collaborative investigation, King. Commander Ganley?”

Fisher goes straight to King’s office after the briefing. The rest of the team is already there. King walks in, sits down and rolls his eyes.

“So?” says Roberts.

“Well, we’ll have to live with Hind and the others grand-standing I imagine.”

“You know Commander Garrett?”

“Hmmm. He knows me. When my partner died he campaigned pretty hard for charges against me.”

“He’s an ass” Roberts says.

“We might have to get used to that. Face it; we might need the Auckland team. Let’s get the investigation underway and see how much trouble they can really be.”

Roberts and Cuthers sidle out of the room. Fisher looks at King.

“Where do we start, sir?”

“I’m thinking the grandmother.”

Chapter Ten

Mariama Heather sits on the steel chair in the interrogation room. Her boots are together and her handbag by her side, and she pulls her skirt lower over her knees with hands that tremor slightly. King presses on the record button and the tape inside wheezes into a spin. An angry red light flickers and settles to a steady glare.

“Can you start,” he says, “By telling us your name?”

“Mariama Heather”

“And you have come in on your own accord, with respect to the murder of Gloriana Heather?”

“Yes.”

“And you are her grandmother, on her father’s side? Rob Heather. Is that correct?” says Detective Sergeant King

Mariama nods.

“Please answer the question, Mrs Heather,” he says, and smiles. He has a nice smile. He waves his hand at the tape machine with its evil red eye.

“Yes.”

“Mrs Heather,” King says. “Can you tell us a bit about yourself?”

“A picker,” she says, “kiwifruit.” Mariama looks at the policewoman and frowns. She is tucked in a corner, scribbling on her notepad.

Kings follows her gaze and then looks back.

“It’s OK, that’s Sergeant Fisher. She’s just taking notes. Go on.”

Mariama folds her wrinkled hands into her lap. “Raised a girl and two boys in a shack off Te Matai Road, Te Puke, rented off those Robertson’s,” she lifts the

side of her mouth, “Twenty years, picking kiwifruit off the vines. Husband died three years ago staring at the bottom of a bottle. Doing all right, considering.”

Early morning pickup trucks, she thinks. Alder trees shaved into skyscraper windbreaks, cracked wooden leader posts, vines hung heavy with green or gold fruit. Cool, damp air, pearls of water on my arms. Canvas shoulder bags, soft white gloves, working side by side, like a ghost army through the glassy green shadows. Good money.

“The year of 2008, before the picking season?” says Detective Sergeant King, “Is that the last time you saw Gloriana?”

“Glory. We called her Glory.”

He waits.

“Yes, when I saw her. The last time I saw her. At her birthday party. She turned five. She was going to start school afterwards, at the primary.”

“Where was the birthday party?”

“My place, Te Matai Road. I can tell you about her birthday.”

“Can you tell us who was there?” He says, leaning forward in his chair.

Mariama looks up at the ceiling to remember, her tongue moving in her mouth. The tip fits neatly into the holes where the upper teeth used to be, all along the left side. They feel like tiny caves, hiding places, still a little tender.

“My girl, Shannon. And her two boys, Mark and Jay. They’re both teenagers now though, good kids. My son Keith, his missus, Petra, and their little girls. Mishka and Simone. They are a little older than Glory. Maybe nine and ten? And their boy Jack. Jack’s twelve.”

There is silence, except for Fisher’s lead sliding across the paper. Mariama looks around. Sad threesome we make, she thinks, sitting in this hot, airless box. The

chair is poking hard into my spine. The whole place smells like the hospital, strong chemicals, maybe bleach.

“And were her parents there? Your other son, Rob, and her mother Jacqui, is that right? His first wife,” he asks.

“No,” Mariama says. Her eyes slew sideways, “my son is in jail; hit a lady in his van. He was wasted. Jacqui, his ex-wife, she’s also a drinker. She lives in Auckland, doesn’t come down much. That’s why Glory was with me.”

“And their other children?”

“Just Glory. Two more in state care.”

Everyone calls this building the cop shop. Go in there, you don’t come out, they said. Detective Sergeant King called me ‘The Grandmother’ at the desk. Should be two grandmothers, no? Where’s that other bitch then? Anyway, what would she know, never around. This is Gloriana Heather’s grandmother, he said at the desk, come to give a statement. Great, said the desk officer, “A couple of forms to fill in.” Detective walks off. You can smell the metal in this building. Cold air and metal.

Mariama saw a man cut off his own hand once. Chainsaw slipped against a vine and went straight through his wrist with a chattering sound. He was still trying to switch the chainsaw off, even after his hand lay on the ground like rotten fruit. Just ignored it and kept trying to find the off button. The hot blood smelled like metal too, spraying across the green leaves, Mariam’s face, the other pickers. She wrapped the stump in her t-shirt and pulled her belt tight round his arm. Then his face pulled all wrong and he went over like a sack of potatoes. They sewed it back on, but it got infected. Said Mariama’s t-shirt was dirty. She wouldn’t do it again.

“I wanted to ask you, Mrs Heather,” King says. “Is there anyone that would want to harm Glory? A family feud perhaps? Anyone else that might.... Might have that kind of history?”

“Hirini.”

King leans forward.

“Who?”

“Hirini.” Mariama brushes at something on her arm. “A picker, from Gisborne. Broke into a fancy house, touched some twelve year old girl a couple a years ago. Got a suspended sentence. Fondled another little girl’s foot at some end-of-season party last year. Got off that one though. Skinny, face like soft dough.”

“You remember his last name?”

“Duffy. I think.”

He writes that down. “Anyone else?”

Mariama thinks. Where to start? Mum’s a drunk, broke her other kids arm at a barbeque, two cousins, carjacking in Auckland, I heard. Little Miss Oh-so-fine, Rob’s new wife, jabs needles into her kids to keep them in line. Bennie at the dairy, always leering at the kids when they get their ices. That red car with a cracked windshield that drives round the primary at home time...

“No.”

King sits back, tapping his pencil against his forearm. “What was Glory like, Mrs Heather?” he asks. “She spent every summer with you, right? Was she a good kid? Did she ever run away? Get into trouble?”

“She liked ponies.”

Glory sitting atop the fence posts, sun-warmed, chubby legs kicking back and forth, eyes shining, body trembling with excitement. Fat little ponies jumping over

rusted tin drums, knee-high jumps and stripy poles. Glory sticking her tongue out, small fingers splayed white on a stubby pencil. She tries to write down the colours of ponies; polomino, ginga, starlite black... The silver bracelet on her left wrist. We found it under the seat at a bus stop. A little heart pendant dangling from it. She wore it all the time. Liked her fingernails painted pink. Would hug you at bedtime 'til you pried her off your neck. Hated peas and beans. Watched TV with her thumb in her mouth. Had a giggle that welled up from the bottom of her heart. She liked strawberries and the rasp of cicadas. Ate a snail once. She liked strawberries better.

“She liked the colour of ponies” Mariama says, “and making up names.”

King smiles. Mariama looks back.

He's thinking about little kids riding on ponies. Glory never did though, just patted one once.

“So the last time you saw her was on her fifth birthday. Monday the 27th of October, 2008?” He asks.

Mariama shakes her head. “No. It was Sunday... the day before. We had the party the day before.” Mariama watches Fisher. The way she folds back the pages on her notebook like making the bed of a sleeping man, softly, softly. Detective likes her. Married though. Her head tilts when it sounds important, like when King looks over my head. Short nails, no make-up. Must have kids. Always spend your time worrying about kids. Cars whizzing down the road, big rocks lurking in the pond, dark drains big enough for little bodies. Fellas not quite right in the head. Nicks and scratches get infected. Headaches, is there brain damage? Truth is loving arms are the ones most likely to hurt. Isn't that true? Slap on the thigh turns into a raging bashing. Screaming and yelling cause you had a bad day. Some stubborn little kid

trembling in the middle of the room, staring you straight in the eye. Buy them something nice later, eh.

“And you didn’t report it? When she disappeared?”

Mariama shrugs. “No.”

“Why not?”

Mariama watches King. He’s looking at the wall behind her, as if it’s not an important question.

“She went with her cousins after the party, I say. All excited about a sleepover. I packed her some shorts, a pink t-shirt, two pairs of underwear. Sandals. They had toys at their house, computer games. She’d been before.”

“And she didn’t come back?”

“She stays with lots of whanau. Sometimes they keep her awhile. Sometimes not.”

“And when did you realise she wasn’t with ... wait, who was it, that she was staying with?”

“Her uncle Keith,” says Mariama, “and his missus Petra. Their three kids.”

Mariama heart turns over. They think I didn’t care. All these people walking the streets, eating their lunch, doing shopping, not one thought, all these years. They think I didn’t care.

“So, Mrs Heather, when did you realise she wasn’t with them anymore?”

“I got sick, and then I went to hospital. Pneumonia. Said to tell everyone. They said not to worry; Glory could go back to her Mum, in Auckland. I was in for three months. You can check.”

“And after?”

“I thought she was with her Mum. I took a while to get better. A couple more months.”

Mariama had told the hospital there was someone home to get out. Twilight house, dust piling up in the corners, curtains stayed shut. Taking the little blue pills, coughing them up. Coughing ‘til she couldn’t stand, ‘til she retched for hours. Clothes hung from her like drapes, the weight she lost. Teeth got loose and bloody. Pulled them out with her fingers, looking in the mirror at some shrivelled face with coat hangers for cheekbones. Took longer than a couple of months. Still on sickness benefit, but she’s not saying that.

King takes a cardboard folder out and opens it up on the desk. He pushes some photos around with his finger. Even upside down Mariama feels the dirt pouring out of those photos. She wants to claw at her throat, but she doesn’t. King doesn’t see. How can he see what’s not there anymore?

“So when did you find out she was missing?” He asks, still looking at the photos. Fisher stops writing.

“I phoned Jacqui,” says Mariama, “from Keith’s house at the beginning of the summer. We don’t usually stay in touch but Glory didn’t come down and I phoned. She said Glory was in state care. Just like that. We had words, you know. We had a fight. Glory should have come to me.”

“And that was when?” He asks.

“March. Sometime in March. The next year.”

A bad time. Mariama remembers Petra’s wide eyes staring, sitting at her kitchen table. She’d been a fright, so thin and bent over, like a skeleton wrapped in skin. Shouting hoarsely down the phone at that cow in Auckland. Glory was her granddaughter and they never even told her. Glory should have been with family.

Mariama wanted a name, someone to call, to get her back, but Jaks just hung up, like she was nobody. She cried then, yes she did.

Mariama shifts in her seat. “Can I have a break?”

The red eye clicks off and King shows Mariama where the toilet is.

Afterwards, she sits on a bench outside for a cigarette. A local paper fading on the seat. Headlines all sad these days; girl gets removed from bike with Jaws of Life, focus on polio, toddler drowns in bucket, kiwifruit disease decimates vines in Te Puke. Mariama pulls the nicotine into her lungs, trying not to cough.

It’s hard for pickers working on those diseased vines. Seeing the glowing leprous spots on the leaves, pulling the fruit off with hydraulic mulchers whining behind them. Chain sawing the vines down to the stump, watching it fall, wounded, twisted branches like drowning limbs. Clouds of dust and insects sticking to your sweat. Ripping orchards out like rotten teeth. Hands shaking as she takes another pull on the cigarette. Shouldn’t smoke, coughs still rattle across the bedroom at night. It’s getting late.

Fisher comes to get Mariama and they stop to make coffee in paper cups and take it back in with them. Red eye staring. King cuts right to the chase.

“The day of the birthday party. Do you remember what Glory was wearing that day?”

“Yes. That morning, I put her in the bathtub. Then we combed her hair and put it up in a silver bow. Then a little white dress with strawberries and sprigs of green leaves. She twirled. I thought she wouldn’t but she did. I hated the shoes, but she insisted. Big, clunky white things with a strap-over ankle like a 1920s flapper. She wanted a bit of lipstick too but we had to wait for Petra cause I had none. Stood her on a chair in the bathroom so she could see....”

“Is this the dress?” Detective Sergeant King interrupts and pushes a photo of a brown thing at Mariama.

Mariama’s hand goes to her throat. She can’t breathe. She can feel the dirt pouring down on her head. She can feel the dark. Because it is. It is Glory’s birthday dress. All stained and wrinkled and pushed flat on a table underneath the gleam of plastic. And then the tears start and she can’t blink enough. She just nods.

Mariama presses her lips together and just nods.

“Please answer the question, Mrs Heather, says King. He doesn’t smile, or pretend it’s for the evil eye on the desk.

No more Mr Nice Guy.

“Yes.”

“Is this what she was wearing when she left on the Sunday? To go to her uncle’s house?”

“No.”

“Sorry?”

“No.” Mariama wipes at her tears. “I changed her, when she left. I had to. You know how kids are. She had been playing and the dress was all dirty by then. There was a rip in the hem. She had dumped the shoes by the back door... I changed her before she went with her cousins.”

There is a long silence. The memories are welling in Mariama’s mind. She can’t stop them. Glory struggling out of her dress and into denim shorts and a pink T, desperate to be gone, all sugared up and smelling of cake. A slippery hug and a chase to the vinyl backseat of the hot car. Her bag in the boot and the kids all vying for a spot next to the window. Petra kissing her fingertips and waving it at me. The dust as the car turned on the drive. All the quiet after.

“What happened to the dress, Mrs Heather? If she didn’t take it with her,”
Detective Sergeant King asks.

“I washed it. Got the stains out.’ Mariama’s voice is guttural; deep and wet.
“I fixed the hem and I ironed it all neat for next time. I wiped the shoes down so
they were all white and shiny again. I hung the dress in her room, on the curtain rail,
so she would see it when she came back.”

In a few days. Thought she’d be back in a few days.

“And it stayed there?”

Mariama nods, and then shakes her head. “Til I went to hospital. When I got
back, it was gone. I thought her Mum had come and taken her stuff, with me being in
the hospital.”

She had come back with plasters on the inside of her arm and her chest
squeezed shut. With cardboard boxes of medicine on the counter and no hot water.
Cold rain running down the gutters. Twilight. Glory’s room tossed, cleared of
everything, drawers hanging open. Caught her in the heart, that . Jaks had ripped
everything out and left it like a robbery.

“And you didn’t ask anyone about it?” Detective Sergeant King asks.

Mariama looks down. “Didn’t see anyone for a long time. I was sick.”

“When did you get out of hospital, Mrs Heather?” he asks.

Thinking. Thinking.

“I didn’t go into hospital until November, so ... end of February? You can
check with them. The dates will be there.”

Glory didn’t die that day, Mariama thinks, looking at the flat dress. She didn’t
die on her birthday. Thank God. It means she died later, but she had got to be five.
The tears are coming again. Thank God.

“Well, thank you for coming in, Mrs Heather. We might need to speak to you again, if that’s alright...”

King stands and smiles. Mariama plucks at her handbag and stands up too.

She watches them wrapping it up, moving on. She wants out of the room too, away from those terrible photos. She didn’t tell him about Glory’s birthday presents. She didn’t tell him about the picture Jack drew. She didn’t tell them about the party. Maybe it doesn’t matter. Maybe the feeling of dirt filling her mouth, her throat, maybe it will go... and then, maybe, she can tell him everything she knows.