

**FRACTURE:**  
**THE RECEPTION OF THE 'OTHER' AUTHOR IN AOTEAROA**

BY

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## ABSTRACT

The fracturing of cultural identity is a common trope in postcolonial literatures. Traditional binaries of ‘self’ and ‘other’ are now complicated by cultural hybridities that reflect the intersectionality of migrant identities, indigeneity and the postcolonial national ‘self’. Where the binaries ‘self’ and ‘other’ do not hold, creative forms like the novel can go some way towards exploring hybrid and ‘other’ experiences, both as a reinscribing and reimagining of the centre, and as a complex ‘writing back’. This thesis investigates the complex positioning of the hybrid or double-cultured individual in Aotearoa in the last forty years. While postcolonial models have been used to expose the exoticisation of the ‘other’ in fictional texts, Part One of this thesis goes a step further by applying these models to real authors and interrogating their representations as static objects/products in the collective ‘text’ of media items written about them. Shifts in ‘our’ national literary identity can be traced in changes in responses to ‘other’ authors over time. Using an interdisciplinary approach, the first part of this thesis proves that there are differences in the media’s portrayal of six Māori and ‘other’ ethnic authors: Witi Ihimaera, Keri Hulme, Kapka Kassabova, Tusiata Avia, Karlo Mila and Cliff Fell, beginning with the 1972 publication of Ihimaera’s *Pounamu Pounamu* and ending in 2009 with Tusiata Avia’s *Bloodclot*. Part One of this thesis mixes media studies, postcolonial literary analysis, and cultural theory, and references the work of Ghassan Hage, Graham Huggan, Margery Fee, Patrick Evans, Mark Williams, and Simone Drichel. Part Two of this thesis is comprised of a novel, *Fracture*. While Part One constitutes an investigation of the positioning of the ‘other’ author, Part Two is a creative exploration of two double-cultured and dispossessed indigenous characters’ lived experience. The novel follows a Greek-New Zealand woman and a Māori man who go to a rural pā to protest fracking, or hydraulic fracturing. While the first part of the thesis explores the positioning of the ‘other’ outside of the white self, the novel aims to portray the effects of such ‘othering,’ on the individual and demonstrate how the historical/political event can be a real experiential locale for the ‘other’.



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## INTRODUCTION

‘Ko wai koe?’ Who are you? ‘Nā wai koe?’ From whom are you? And ‘Nō hea koe?’ From where do you come?

Patricia Grace, *Ned and Katina*

You never find yourself in a book unless you write it yourself.

Hanif Kureishi, *Something to Tell You*

This PhD thesis is both a creative and a critical exploration of ‘otherness’ in Aotearoa. What does it mean to write as an ethnic ‘other’ today? Who is ‘exotic’ and who is central in a white discourse of multicultural nationalism? Is it possible to write as ‘other’ without conforming to dominant culture’s prescriptions and expectations? The question at the centre of this thesis has two parts. Firstly, the critical thesis asks if the Māori or ethnically ‘other’ author has been exoticised by their media receptions in the last forty years, and if so, how has this ‘othering’ changed over time? What does this mean in relation to an evolving myth of national identity? Secondly, the creative part of the thesis seeks to represent the experiences of characters of ‘other’ ethnicities. This part goes beyond academic objectivity to answer the more complex question: what does it feel like on the other side of the gaze? The central concern of both parts is the fracturing of cultural identity. But while Part One examines how Māori and ‘other’ are positioned in discourses of national identity, Part Two explores, through fiction, the lived experience of the positioned other, for whom culture and ethnicity are not abstract concepts, but a lived reality.

This thesis conforms to the increasingly common practice in universities of offering doctorates that involve both critical and creative writing. The International Institute of Modern Letters defines the expectations for the fulfilment of a PhD thesis in Creative Writing as a creative component that is a full-length work for the page, or the text of a full-length work for stage or screen. The critical component should be an academic/scholarly study

contextualising this component (Letters 2013). The IIML website also states that ‘The primary value of the PhD is for those who wish to write creatively, and at the same time to think in focussed and original ways about the contexts of their writing’ (ibid.). My thesis constitutes a novel and, in Part One, an accompanying academic investigation of the cultural literary moment it is writing into.

Part One of this thesis is an analysis of the media receptions of six authors of varied ethnic identities. These authors are Witi Ihimaera, Keri Hulme, Kapka Kassabova, Tusiata Avia, Karlo Mila, and Cliff Fell. Fell functions as the ‘control’ part of this study. He is an English migrant, from the original colonial “home”. By collecting and reviewing all available media items about these authors’ first two works, we may compare how each author’s ethnic identity is constructed by the media. By beginning with the publication of Ihimaera’s first book, *Pounamu, Pounamu*, in 1972 and ending with recent New Zealand Pacific Island authors Karlo Mila and Tusiata Avia in 2009, we may trace changes in dominant culture’s response to Māori and ‘other’ ethnic voices. The cultural interest that marked Ihimaera’s first work, the euphoria and controversy that surrounded Hulme’s Booker Award winning *the bone people*, and the complex receptions of ‘other’ ethnic voices today are explored. What emerges from the results of this study is a map of a continuum of awarded ‘otherness’, where Māori and other ‘other’ are positioned variously in relation to a white national ‘self’. When viewed through the lens of the media, it appears this ‘self’ might be less multiculturally diverse and less inclusive than it wishes to appear.

The creative part of this thesis is a novel, *Fracture*. The Māori and ethnically ‘other’ authors I study here are all variously fractured<sup>1</sup> in their identities: Ihimaera, while Māori, in the 1970s wrote into a Pākehā world; Hulme is both Māori and Pākehā; Kassabova is Bulgarian, but was situated here; Mila is half-Tongan, half-Palagi; Avia is Samoan, but born and raised in Aotearoa. While the first part of this thesis constitutes an exploration of how they have been portrayed, the novel explores the actual, lived experience of the hybrid and indigenous ‘other’, turning to fiction in an attempt to better illustrate what may be occluded in an academic text. Fiction allowed me to complicate issues of morality, accountability, and historical responsibility. Some of the characters in the novel are Māori, and some Pākehā. One of the main characters belongs to that group of Māori who have effectively been

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<sup>1</sup> By this I do not mean that Ihimaera’s identity, for example, is fractured, but that he was raised Māori in a Pākehā dominant world. Schooled in the language of the coloniser and writing in English, he has at least a complex identity.

dispossessed. He journeys ‘home’, to his own marae, knowing no one, and having little knowledge of tikanga and te reo. He exists in a liminal space: in a group of Pākehā, he is ethnically Māori, but in a group of Māori who have been brought up on a marae, is he ‘really’ Māori?<sup>2</sup> The other main character is a Greek-New Zealander. This character ‘passes for white’ but is the carrier of a secret ethnicity: she has been brought up with a different language and culture. On the one hand is a Māori character who has been ‘brought up Pākehā,’ and on the other, a Pākehā character who has been brought up speaking another language, expected to exist both in the Pākehā world and in the Greek<sup>3</sup>.

Part One is an interdisciplinary study, mixing literary theory, media studies, and statistical analysis, and using both qualitative and quantitative techniques. I counted the number of identifications of an author by an ethnic identifier in a set collection of media items, and translated these results into a percentage. But my mode of interpretation falls within the disciplines of postcolonial literary theory and media studies. Using Ghassan Hage’s work on white nationalism as a framework for examining these results, I will interpret the case studies as snapshots of the evolution of Aotearoa’s ‘national self’. I will also reference the work of Sneja Gunew, Graeme Huggan, Margery Fee and Patrick Evans, adapting and localising their ideas (where necessary). In Aotearoa, it could be said that Māori are the original ‘self’ and all other ethnicities tau iwi or ‘other’ by definition. This is not, however, the picture reflected in this study, which reveals a dominant myth of national identity that in its very ‘inclusiveness’ echoes the assimilationist paradigms of the past. In using postcolonial models to interpret popular and literary media this study will interrogate the concept of the author as static object or product, seeking to unpack the nature of the ‘we’ that is ‘writing’ these authors, and how it is ‘writing’ them. By using articles written about authors as a collective ‘text’ and analysing depictions of authors within that text, this study hopes to turn the lens on whiteness as a shaper and reinscriber of ‘other’ identities.

While postcolonial analytic models have traced the exoticisation of the ethnic ‘other’ in fictional texts, this critical study proposes the application of such models to real world

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<sup>2</sup> Notions of authenticity also emerge as an important part of the exoticisation of the ethnically ‘other’ authors in this study.

<sup>3</sup> Placing these characters side by side gives rise to an interesting question: in the bi- or arguably multicultural Aotearoa of today, *who is more ‘other’*? Is the Greek character, with her cultural responsibilities, differing family structure and language, more of an outsider? Or, in the postcolonial, officially bicultural moment, is the Māori character more ‘other’, despite sharing his acculturation with Pākehā, because he fits into a colonised, recognised group? Is being ‘othered’ then equal to being oppressed? Or is it equal to being exotic? The critical part of this study suggests that gradations of ‘otherness’ exist in the white gaze.

figures. There is no local or international precedent for such a study, based as it is in close comparative reading of media articles about authors. While the methodology of the study is therefore unique, the analysis of the data will fit into contemporary literary, postcolonial and post-structural discourses. The past forty years have marked a period of accelerated change in the national myth of identity<sup>4</sup>. By analysing how some authors are labelled by their ethnicity, and how often other authors are not, we may investigate this change, illustrating the ‘self’s’ uncomfortable shifting from mono- to biculturalism, and onwards to a white discourse of multicultural nationalism.

The critical part of my thesis supplies new data about ethnically ‘other’ authors in Aotearoa. It contributes to local and international discourses about indigeneity, othering and exoticisation in a new way. Māori authors and Māori material are often foregrounded in literary courses at universities and in New Zealand school curricula, but not much thinking has been done about the implications of this for Māori writers or students<sup>5</sup>. Similarly unexamined is the active inclusion of other ‘others,’ like Avia and Mila. The idea that we *must* celebrate and elevate Māori or other’ authors is an understandable reaction to years of postcolonial invisibility and oppression, but this study moves beyond simplistic state-sanctioned inclusions into new territories to ask whether such a reaction risks damaging Māori or other ‘other’ in its re-inscription of simplistic, reductive models.

No literary study has attempted to map the complex differences between the reception of Māori authors and other ‘others’. Part One of this study asks who is awarding status, and how that status differs in regards to various ‘othernesses’. What emerges is a hierarchy of awarded otherness, where some ‘others’ are more sanctioned, or more important, than others. Where Māori are awarded a special (and necessary) place in educational curricula and in the national myth of identity, how do other ‘others’ fare? What might these different modes of inclusion or recognition indicate about the dominant culture receiving them? The animating concerns of this thesis tie into wider global discourses that interrogate the impact of capitalist

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<sup>4</sup> In *Leaving the Highway* in 1984, Mark Williams suggests that the previous forty years had marked a period of accelerated change – going back to the 1940s. This study similarly supposes that the years 1970-2010 have demonstrated on-going recalibrations of the national identity in literature. This supposition owes a debt to Williams’ work.

<sup>5</sup> The (now cancelled) Certificate of University Preparation available at Victoria University of Wellington included in its Academic Writing curricula, for example, media material about ‘poorly achieving’ Maori and Pacific Island students. Though many students of this course belonged to those groups, this information was not presented alongside any contextualising information. Instead, students seeking entry to university were working with texts that described them as not achieving well academically. The underlying thinking was that such students would respond well to relevant texts, but such unqualified inclusions might also be counter-productive.

driven globalisation that has led to the commodification of what Graham Huggan refers to as ‘the Postcolonial Exotic’ (2001).

The uses of the critical part of this study for other researchers could be various. Media studies academics might wish to use similarly qualitative/quantitative models to undertake analyses of media figures’ representations in relation to gender, class, or ethnicity<sup>6</sup>.

Technology anthropologists might choose to investigate changes in the media in recent history in a similar way<sup>7</sup>. But the new knowledge contained in this thesis will be of most use to cultural and literary theorists. This study investigates the evolution of the myth of national identity, within set geographical and historical boundaries, and using set research limitations. The results are telling, and could be applied in an academic framework to any study investigating representations of Ihimaera, Hulme, Mila, Avia, Kassabova, or Fell. In generating concrete results, this study provides academics with a platform for informed discussion of the positioning of these authors within Aotearoa today. Potential audiences then, of this part of the study, are academics and cultural theorists, both locally and worldwide, while the novel will (hopefully) be read by the wider reading public.

The creative part of my thesis also generates new knowledge in a different way. Greek writers are a minority in Aotearoa<sup>8</sup>. The experience of the Mediterranean migrant writer, however, is so common in overseas markets as to be considered part of a genre<sup>9</sup>. When I interviewed Christos Tsiolkas about his book *The Slap*, he said that:

Not only Greek Australians but Italians, Middle Eastern Australians, people from many different cultures have told me that for them, the book reflects a reality that has not been found in popular books...for so long our national literatures have looked to London or to New York, but I think there are those of us writing now who are saying look, our centres are not the old centres (2009).

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<sup>6</sup> Parts 4. And 5. of this critical thesis particularly emphasise that the exoticisation of Mila, Avia, and Kassabova especially has aspects of classism, and sexism.

<sup>7</sup> As outlined in Part 1.6, ‘Considerations in Research’, the media itself has changed dramatically over the past forty years, giving rise to a press more concerned with byte-sized snippets of information that can be easily accessed and replicated.

<sup>8</sup> With the notable exceptions of Vana Manasiadis, Miranda Manasiadis, Christodoulos Moisa, Spiro Zavos and Michael Harlow.

<sup>9</sup> Writing within this genre internationally are Greek-American writer Jeffrey Eugenides, New Zealand-based Italian author Nicky Pellegrino and Greek-Australian Christos Tsiolkas, who won the 2009 Commonwealth Prize.

By writing from a Greek perspective in Aotearoa, I will not only be contributing to an international body of writing that fictionalises migrant experiences, but also, on a local level, contributing to the decentralisation of ‘our’ national literatures.

Both parts of this thesis are complimentary and integral to each other. Also, the order in which I undertook them is important. In the process of discovering the real prescriptiveness of the white gaze, and in unpicking the current extent of the exoticisation of the ‘other’ author, I turned away from creative practice. It was only after a break wherein I closed the door on my academic thesis that I stepped away from the unhealthy self-consciousness that is the particular experience of the double-cultured author. It was this necessary turning away, the absolute nature of the separation between my critical and creative parts, that enabled me to wilfully ‘forget’ both the accepted tropes and limits of ‘ethnic’ fiction, and the responsibility I held as an ‘other’ author. I was no longer concerned with whether or not that would play the ‘Postcolonial Exotic card’; instead I concerned myself with how I could best represent the cultural fragmenting I inhabit. Underlying my deliberate ‘forgetting’<sup>10</sup>, though, was something that was possibly, as Fee puts it, a ‘conflicted desire for justice’ (Fee 2007, 189), or possibly a need to be creatively free of outside constraints. This feeling, arising directly from my academic findings, forms a strong undercurrent in my creative work.

In postcolonial literary discourses it is conventional to state one’s subject position. Such self-identification serves three purposes. Firstly, it explains the relationship of the writer to the hegemonies they are writing about. The identity of the cultural critic has an impact on the reader’s reaction: are they writing from within a dominant culture, or are they writing as a representative of a minority group? Secondly, this stated position can pre-empt disclaimers, for example: ‘As a white female scholar belonging to the middle class, I only claim to speak from my own experience.’ Such ‘as a’ statements can be seen as anticipating assumptions that theorists may be speaking for certain groups, or making recommendations too strongly. However, they are valuable in that the convention of speaking ‘as a/an’ leads writers to own their personal subjectivity. Thirdly, stating one’s subject position effectively addresses power imbalances within the conventions of academic writing itself. Owning their

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<sup>10</sup> Much like the ‘settlement forgetting’ of the coloniser, my deliberate ‘forgetting’ required that I imagine myself alone in the imaginary world of the novel, able then to claim new ground. The term ‘settlement forgetting’ has been used variously by Patrick Evans, Mark Williams and Jane Stafford, and Stephen Turner, to refer to the idea that Aotearoa’s settler population must ‘forget’ the recent colonial past in order to evade the guilt of the settler and situate themselves here. See, for example, Turner’s “Settlement as Forgetting” in *Quicksands: Foundational Histories in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand*.

subjectivity is crucial to postcolonial writers; emphasising this subjectivity is the key to creating a discourse where a multiplicity of perspectives is acknowledged and available. It is partly in this tradition that I will disclose my ethnicity. However, this disclosure also draws on migrant conventions that require self-identification within a group as the basis of knowing.

I am a third generation Greek, raised in a Greek family in Aotearoa. When meeting other local Greeks their first question is always: ‘What is your name?’ If I provide my first name, this is met with impatience. ‘No,’ the older person will say. ‘I mean, what is your *name*?’ It is my family name that will allow them to place me within a wider context. If they cannot place the name, the next question will be: ‘Where are you from?’ Māori culture in Aotearoa places a similar emphasis on naming and whakapapā. Patricia Grace discusses interactions between Māori on first meetings: ‘Though not spoken, the questions in the minds of the people [...] are the age old ones: ‘Ko wai koe?’ Who are you? ‘Na wai koe?’ From whom are you? And ‘No hea koe?’ From where do you come? (17-18)’ (*Ned and Katina*). By introducing myself in this way I align both with my own culture’s traditions, and with those of the tangata whenua. My name is Arathimos, and my family are from the village of Thafnona on the island of Chios in Greece. They came here in 1953. I am half Greek, but I was raised by my Greek family, learning Greek alongside English. At school I was aware of my difference because I possessed two languages, practised a different religion (Greek Orthodoxy) and ate different food. However, in stark contrast to my mother’s generation, I was only aware of my difference as a privilege, not as a disadvantage.

From the 1950s to 1980s, Greek immigrants in Aotearoa were subject to cultural oppression. My uncle told me that my grandfather taught him how to ‘pass’ as white. ‘Passing’ was easier for Greeks than for more visible minorities, but still discrimination was common. My mother’s generation were beaten at school alongside Māori because they could not speak English. Their names, food and religion were ridiculed, and new immigrants found it hard to get work with Pākehā employers. In their contact with the authorities Greeks often experienced minor racism<sup>11</sup>. The effects of these discriminations were subtle but present.

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<sup>11</sup> When my mother was in labour in the 1980s the doctor told her: ‘The Mediterranean ladies usually scream and carry on.’ My grandmother was advised by a doctor for her health she should not cook in olive oil, but in butter – butter being considered healthier. Pākehā doctors had no awareness of different cultural practices around death for Greeks in hospitals until an education program by Athena Gavriel targeted this in the 1990s. When a relatives’ shop burnt down in the 1980s an investigation was launched by the New Zealand Police, who assumed the crime had been committed by ‘a Greek mafia ring’.

Greeks practised a strict adherence to their own culture privately, appearing to assimilate well from the outside while maintaining their identities as separate and distinct at home. ‘Work hard, keep your head down, and learn their language,’ my grandfather told my uncle. ‘But remember, at home, you’re Greek’.

Partly as a result of the ostracism they had experienced, the Greeks I grew up with often expressed their negative opinions of dominant Pākehā culture<sup>12</sup>. In contrast to dominant Pākehā culture, Greeks described themselves as civilised, emotionally expressive, cultured, generous and loyal to family relationships. But my sister and I were also Anglase; our father was a Kiwi. We wondered if they realised that when they spoke of Anglase, they were speaking of us as well. Greeks also expressed racist views about other minority groups in Aotearoa – other ‘others’. I was aware of a sense of resentment toward Māori, who had the ‘privilege’ of being recognised Tiriti partners. Why should Māori be awarded scholarships, have their te reo schools funded, and be recognised as an important group when Greeks and other ‘others’ were not? My family saw Māori as a similarly oppressed minority, who, in their view, had not adequately empowered themselves through education or financial gain. But though my family resented the special status of Māori in relation to the Crown, they admitted to finding more in common culturally with Māori<sup>13</sup>.

It must be noted here that I do not speak for all Greek migrants or descendants of migrants, their families, or even my own. I am aware that I could be perceived by Greeks to be speaking against my own community. In repeating my grandfather’s words to my uncle I know that he would not feel comfortable knowing that a Pākehā audience was reading them. Older Greek migrants, if questioned, will say that Pākehā have always been accommodating and generous, that New Zealand has allowed them freedoms their home cultures would not have, and that there is nothing to complain about. But as I grew up the contradictions between insider narratives and my culture’s outward politeness and tact became more apparent. Why did my family ‘love’ New Zealand, if the food was boring, the sport savage,

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<sup>12</sup> Some examples: They said that if you went to an Pākehā/Anglase’s house they wouldn’t feed you enough, that they kicked their children out as soon as they were eighteen, that they lived in stunted family units, that they were emotionally repressed, that they weren’t materially generous, that they didn’t flavour their food, and that they were uncultured and savage in their love of rugby.

<sup>13</sup> In particular, Greeks emphasise the extended family structures of Māori, and their focus on language maintenance, hosting and food, as being similar to Greek traditions. I have had many conversations with Māori who recognise the same similarities.



and the people emotionally cold? My family ‘loved’ New Zealand because they had to; because they had no other choice, and because, as a model minority, they had mastered the art of keeping their heads down, working hard, and ‘passing’ as white. A grateful migrant culture that quietly maintains its values in the home is not a threat. By relating the real views of this minority group I risk exposing the Greek community to criticism. What I say here constitutes the violation of a code. As a Greek daughter and grand-daughter, this betrayal of confidence goes against all of my conditioning, but I believe it is an important part of unpacking the complex inter-relationships of cultures in Aotearoa.

Central to this thesis is the idea of internal and external cultural fracturing. Fee places herself within what she calls the ‘long and problematic tradition’ of an academia that claims itself as both civil and civilising (Fee, Russell 189). Like Fee, I’m aware of the constraints of writing from within the dominant paradigm. But I can also see the limitations of a guilty mode of biculturalism that can function to shut down constructive discourse. As a young activist I attended a decolonisation workshop for Pākehā, the focus of which was the need to honour the Treaty and honour Māori. When I asked where other minorities fit into this framework, everyone became uncomfortable, as if my question was politically incorrect. And it was: the other activists were working within a model that posited Māori as oppressed ‘other,’ and ‘the rest of us’ as a colonial ‘self’, unified in our need to make reparations. But my experience had been that within the colonising ‘self’ there are strong delineations and gradations in whiteness. A generation ago my family was different and excluded, *not white enough*, but today we are *white enough*; entirely assimilated. I realised this was why my family reacted to the ‘privileged’ position of Māori: not because they didn’t think Māori had been oppressed, but because their own oppression had not been acknowledged. Restricted by a simplistic, if necessary, bicultural national myth, minorities sit in opposition to one another. This maintains white dominance by normalising Kiwi culture as the uncontested centre, the norm to which all other minorities must conform.

In writing both from an academic Pākehā perspective and from alongside it, from the ‘other’s’ fictionalised point of view, I hope to achieve a more complete exploration of the issue of cultural fragmentation. Thematically, my double positioning as white/not white is reflected in the novel that forms the creative component of this thesis. Structurally, my dual identities as both an academic and creative writer are reflected in the composition of this thesis, which first turns to the media archives to decode the image of the ‘other’ in the world,

and then turns to fiction, to illustrate a possible ‘other’ ethnic experience. While the first part of the thesis, then, is academically conventional in its approach, Part Two is an attempt to answer questions about the fracturing of identity in Aotearoa in a radically different way: through fiction. I am writing again both from within academic discourses, and from outside of them. While my critical thesis answers questions about who the collective national ‘we’ perceive ourselves to be, when viewed through the window of the media, the novel is a more complex writing back: not only in attempts to overturn the dominant gaze, but as a challenge to the idea that the answers to such questions can fully answered within an academic text<sup>14</sup>.

Tina Makereti, a writer of Māori and Moriori descent, explains why she turned away from the social sciences in favour of fiction:

But I found that those disciplines alone could not address the full complexity of my reality. Fiction gave me permission to explore issues in a way that was non-didactic. That is, fiction does not come up with theories or definitions, it simply allows you to explore what is – to go deep into the paradox that is all of us – to suggest that a being can be more than one thing, that an idea or action can be both bad and good (Makereti, “Stories are the Centre”).

For Makereti, fiction allows her to express the fact that a being, action, or thing can be more than just good or bad. *Fracture*, the novel that comprises the creative part of this thesis, is about a group of activists trying to halt hydraulic fracturing on the land next to a pā. Using the novel form allowed me to complicate the too-simplistic boundaries of moral soundness that might emerge in simplistic bicultural narratives of national identity. Though the ‘frackers’ are seen in the book to be polluting the land, it is not a simple case of Māori tangata whenua vs. Pākehā developers. I also wanted to acknowledge and include Māori spirituality in the text without giving way to a Baxterian romanticism<sup>15</sup>. Mentions of Māori

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<sup>14</sup> Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin’s *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literatures*, is an academic survey of various postcolonial works and their implications for postcolonial culture. The texts are taken as a critique of colonial notions of culture. In the same way that these texts are analysed as an overturning of Eurocentric notions of literary and cultural value, the novel that forms the creative part of this thesis is a ‘writing back’ to the assumptions encoded within the critical thesis itself. The structure of this thesis therefore internally addresses the implications of writing within Fee’s ‘long and problematic tradition.’ Where the effects of (post)colonisation may be lived out in the body of the culturally hybrid or colonised individual, fiction may be more adept representing conflicts of identity and culture.

<sup>15</sup> James K. Baxter was a celebrated Pākehā New Zealand poet. In the 1970s he moved to the remote Māori community of Jerusalem, on the Whanganui river, where he adopted aspects of Māori spiritualism and tikanga Māori. See John Newton’s excellent book, *The Double Rainbow: James K Baxter, Ngāti Hau and the*

spirituality are complicated here by what is a reality in our cultural moment: Māori are not an amorphous group who all believe one thing.

My experiences as a Greek-New Zealander, as academic and creative writer, and as white/not white are the motivation for this thesis as a whole. Up until seven years ago, the relative invisibility of my ethnicity had always allowed me to slide under the radar of discrimination. I had always been ‘white enough’ to function in two worlds, until I began to be critiqued on my creative writing. When I brought my stories to a group, I got responses based on the cultural value of my work, instead of on the work itself. People waxed lyrical about the food. ‘Could you put in more baklava?’ one reader asked. One of my peers told me she felt privileged to read my work, as it gave her a window into a Greek world. Someone else told me how brave I was to share these stories, and how important it was for these stories to be told. The word ‘authentic’ was used. Some critics told me that they thought I should focus solely on my Greek material, and some told me I should look into the classics and reference Greek mythology, of which I have little knowledge. These readers, who were all Pākehā, urged me to further investigate my ‘Greekness’. Their well-meaning, always flattering comments sought to guide me towards writing about my culture *as an interesting point of difference*, one that would enable me to market myself as a new multicultural voice. I realised that if I published a book with Greek characters in it, I would be quickly labelled ‘a Greek-New Zealand writer.’ But if I wrote about Pākehā characters and included no Greek names, I might be received as just another new author. If I chose ‘Greekness,’ my colleagues implied, I would be guaranteed an audience<sup>16</sup>.

But what are the possible effects on the ‘other’ author, stepping as they might do on the publication of their first book into a pre-ordained niche, defined not by style or genre, but by ethnicity? Makereti told me she had concerns about being seen as the ‘new Māori author,’ and therefore being seen to represent Māori experience. She related a visit to a (Pākehā) book group where a woman told her: ‘When I first saw your book I thought, this isn’t the

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*Jerusalem Community*, for a detailed account of the history of Ngāti Hau: the people behind Baxter’s poetic representations, and of Baxter’s self-styled and sometimes problematic journey into Māoridom.

<sup>16</sup> When I published a story in *Best New Zealand Fiction Volume Four*, the editor, Fiona Farrell, wrote a kind introduction to my story in which she evokes ‘that dusty crossroads near Thebes and that story that has taken on the mantle of myth.’ The story itself has no Greek characters or references, but she knew that I was Greek, and was implying that my story made mythological references. This is a clear example of a reader seeing what they perhaps wanted to see: a new Greek voice who would present urban realities whilst eloquently referencing ancient Greek mythology. It didn’t matter that I had to revisit the Oedipal myth on Wikipedia; it seemed that a specific space was prepared for me, should I wish to inhabit it.

usual sort of thing that I would read. But then I thought, no, *it will be good for us* [the book group][*Italics added*].’ (Personal Communication 2013). Such emphasis on ‘ethnic’ writing as a cultural artefact, where its value is judged in accordance with its culturally educational content, creates a dynamic where the author is the quintessential cultural guide. While such reductionism is inherently problematic, it also places an impossible weight on the author’s shoulders: both to represent their culture for dominant consumption, and to be responsible for being ‘the voice’ of a minority group<sup>17</sup>.

*Fracture* maps how under the pressure of political events and circumstances, individual and collective fracturing can occur. Characters can either freeze or break apart under such pressure. In my novel cultural differences and the effects of colonisation are enacted violently upon the characters, who must choose how to respond. Guilt and the inheritance of generational ‘othering’ are themes that emerge in the novel: both as a sense of misguided responsibility and as anger held in the body. The pressure felt by the minority ‘other’ to serve, support, rebuild and preserve their culture can be experienced as an honour or as a restriction. *Fracture* also seeks to tackle cultural awkwardness, placing well-intentioned Pākehā characters on a rural marae where they attempt to help the local iwi.

This novel also came out of my own experience. My partner is Māori, and was arrested in the ‘Terror raids’ in 2007. Though the raids affected individuals all around the country, their focus was the small Tūhoe community of Ruātoki. In the media furore that followed, my partner was twice denied bail. I was advised by lawyers that the maximum sentence he might receive under the new Terrorism Suppression Act was twenty years in prison. He was bailed on the third appeal, but remained on trial for four and a half years. Lynette Russell, a descendant of the Wotjabaluk people of Australia, bases her understanding of her own identity on Homi Bhabha’s idea of a ‘third space’, which exposes the limits of any claim to difference, be it class, gender or race. For Russell, as for myself, ‘Bhaba’s third space is...much more than a theoretical posturing, it is a lived in experiential locale...’ (Fee, Russell, 189). *Fracture* the novel has been informed by my experience of the on-going iterations of colonisation, not in the abstract, but as such a lived locale. If whiteness can be

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<sup>17</sup> For me, being ‘a Greek author’ brought up all sorts of considerations. Is a Greek author required to write about the migrant experience all the time? If my ‘Greekness’ is the most interesting thing about me, what does this say about my writing? I’m only half Greek. If I don’t speak Greek fluently, and am received as a new ‘Greek voice,’ what will the community think? Conversely, if I resist writing Greek characters, am I suffering from internalised racism? My reaction was to avoid writing Greek material for two years.

described as a place, then we spent four and a half years positioned outside of it. *Fracture* is an attempt at writing back.



## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### TO THE CRITICAL COMPONENT

From the early 1950s cultural theorists began to address power imbalances between the colonial ‘self’ and the indigenous ‘other’. Aotearoa’s history includes land theft, war between colonial and indigenous populations, indigenous language and culture loss, and a legacy of oppressive euro-centric governmental policies. In recent years, both government policy and the values of popular culture have significantly shifted. In 1975 the Waitangi Tribunal was established to hear Treaty claims, and from the early 1980s ‘biculturalism’ was introduced. Now Aotearoa is an arguably postcolonial nation, whose indigenous and hybrid literatures fit into international discourses that complicate notions of empire, indigeneity, and culture.

Accordingly, Aotearoa’s myth of the national ‘self’ has evolved dramatically over time, reflecting changes in ‘our’ cultural identity. From John Mulgan’s *Man Alone* (1939), to the re-drawing of the national identity in the early eighties in response to Māori resistance (Harding, 4), to a more recent move towards inclusive multicultural hybridity, literary history mirrors changes in who ‘we’ are considered to be. The enthusiastic inclusion of ‘our’ emerging Māori writers in the 1970s and 1980s marked the beginning of a self-conscious need within white culture to decolonise the national self. This formed the precedent for what could now be seen as Aotearoa’s ‘multicultural’ literary scene, which encompasses a variety of Māori and ‘other’ voices. But is this new ‘multiculturalism’ really representative of a new-found equality? In what ways are ‘other’ voices commodified, packaged, and displayed, in service to a national self?

The arrival of Māori authors Witi Ihimaera, Patricia Grace and Keri Hulme was heralded by the literary community as a welcome addition to ‘our’ national literature, one that would aid the process of cultural decolonisation by promoting understanding of ‘the Māori world.’ Witi

Ihimaera's collection of short stories, *Pounamu Pounamu* (1972) is often taken as a starting point for the 'Māori renaissance' (Evans 2006, 12). Then in 1984, Keri Hulme's *the bone people* came to international attention as Booker Prize winner, effectively putting New Zealand and 'Māori writing' on a world stage. Her success was quickly followed by C.K. Stead's article contesting her right to write as Māori. Stead pointed out that Hulme was 'only' one eighth Māori (Stead 103). Margery Fee used Stead's article as a starting point for investigating who is entitled to write as 'other' (Fee 11). Such dialogues fit into international exchanges about indigeneity and whiteness, and also illustrate the extraordinary responsibility placed on 'other' authors.

A part of this study is a series of case studies, which I interpret as snapshots of the evolution of Aotearoa's 'national self'. I use Hage's work on white nationalism as a framework for contextualising changes in the way our post-settler culture positions itself in relation to the 'other' and to the world. Graham Huggan, author of *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins* (2001), sees the positive exoticisation of the ethnically 'other' author as a form of market-driven commodification in which cultural otherness is itself a product (Huggan 111). Huggan's position also strongly informs this work. Locally, the writing of Simon During, Patrick Evans, C.K. Stead and Simone Drichel has contributed to a greater understanding of the status of Māori in the literatures of Aotearoa. In Canada Sneja Gunew (who is also Australian) and Margery Fee have written about the reception of various 'other' ethnic authors, as well as Mireille Rosello, in the Netherlands. My research provides new information for anyone writing about the authors in my case studies, as well as contributing to international discussions within the fields of postcolonial literary and cultural theory.

Postcolonial critic Edward Said described the relationship between colonial 'self' and colonised 'other' as a binary opposition. The 'self' signified the good, moral, and civilised, while the 'other' was characterised as weak, feminised, inferior, and primitive (*Orientalism* 1978). Abdul R. JanMohamed calls this imposition of value by the coloniser 'the Manichean allegory'. This describes the conversion of the racial difference of the 'Other' into a 'moral and even metaphysical difference' (JanMohamed 80). The allegory constitutes colonist as civilised versus the savagery of the 'Other', as good as opposed to evil, as rational versus irrational – whatever the opposition, the terms always assert the colonising culture's superiority. But JanMohamed's Manichean allegory is based on 'racial' difference.



Postcolonial discourses have since turned away from using the word ‘race’ and turned towards the terms ‘ethnicity’ and ‘culture’. Simone Drichel emphasises the need to avoid ‘essentialist rhetoric’ when describing relationships between cultures in Aotearoa (591). She points out that ‘the difference between Māori and Pākehā was originally framed as a racial difference, later to be reconsidered as a difference in ethnicity, and, more recently, culture’ (592). Her concern is finding a terminology that challenges essentialisation in order to avoid applying the ‘same old stereotypes’ to ‘(formerly) othered peoples’ (590). For similar reasons, in this study I use the words ‘ethnic’ and ‘cultural’ to describe the identities of the authors studied.

In Aotearoa though, the word ‘culture’ often functions as a more politically correct, broader description of race, thus serving as just another ‘label suitable for producing the colonised as a marked category’ (Drichel 593)<sup>18</sup>. In applying the Manichean allegory to relationships between dominant and ‘other’ cultures in Aotearoa, the concept of the racially identified ‘other’ must then be broadened also to encompass ethnic and cultural identifications. Thus JanMohamed’s conception of colonial ‘Self’ vs. racially identified ‘Other’ can be applied now as (post)colonial ‘self’ vs. racially, ethnically or culturally identified ‘other’. It is possible to trace a Manichean allegory of value based on (post)colonial ‘self’ vs. ethnically or culturally identified ‘other’ in many of the articles examined in this research.

However, using this model in Aotearoa engenders further complications. The first of these is the need, cited by Drichel, to recognise Māori as the original ‘self’, and all other migrants as tau iwi or ‘other’. By acknowledging Māori as Tiriti partners we both resist the assimilation of Māori by dominant culture and ensure the legal rights of Māori as a group (Drichel 590). The biculturalism introduced to Aotearoa in the 1980s allowed for necessary legislation that

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<sup>18</sup> Drichel suggests that ‘cultural’ and ‘ethnic’ in Aotearoa act as euphemisms for ‘race’. Where Tusiata Avia is labelled Samoan, for example, with no further descriptor, the label is race-based. It is interesting to see that in such instances her other, Kiwi half is trumped by her Samoan-ness, and drops out of the picture. Conversely, when Avia is referred to as being ‘of Samoan descent’ and born and raised in Christchurch, as on the New Zealand Book Council website, (“About the Author –Tusiata Avia”) the description refers to both her ethnic and cultural heritage. So representations of Avia in public venues fluctuate between simple race-based descriptions (that reduce her to the more notably ‘other’ part of her identity) and more complex ones that take into account her acculturation as a New Zealander.

addressed colonial injustices towards Māori. Where I call dominant culture the (post)colonial ‘self’, and Māori and other cultures within Aotearoa ‘other,’ I am decoding the way dominant culture posits these cultures in relation to itself. I do not intend to re-inscribe Māori as ‘other’: they are, of course, the original ‘self’.

By arranging the authors studied here into a hierarchy of the ‘othered’, I do not intend to re-enforce mainstream narratives of multicultural diversity that exist in opposition to indigenous rights in Aotearoa. In ‘An Uneasy Conversation: The Multicultural and the Indigenous’, Ann Curthoys describes postcolonial discourses in Australia as containing two debates: one about indigeneity and one about multiculturalism. She says that these discourses are neither wholly separate nor wholly distinct from one another (21), and describes an anti-racist discourse and activism in which equality for the Aboriginal population and for immigrants was argued by different groups of people. Though the two groups both aimed to challenge assumptions of white superiority, Curthoys says it was not until the 1980s that these two strands were drawn together in the public arena under the banners of cultural diversity and multiculturalism (27-29).

In contrast, in Aotearoa New Zealand in 1981, the Springbok Tour acted as a unifying catalyst for the coming together of both indigenous Māori and anti-apartheid (anti-racism) activists. Anti-racist discourses could be said to be more closely linked with the rights of Māori in Aotearoa from this point on, occluding the development of a multicultural discourse and giving voice to only those formed by the colonial moment. However, it would also be accurate to say that campaigns for Māori rights and a more general left-wing activist scene have developed as separate but parallel (though indistinct) groups in Aotearoa since then, overlapping on certain issues but not necessarily working together. Curthoys describes the new multiculturalism promoted in Australia in the 1980s as a concept that ‘now *included* the indigenous’, which become seen as ‘one element in a mosaic of diverse cultures sharing the Australian continent’ (italics added, 29). Though Aotearoa remains ‘bicultural’ on a governmental level, similar discourses have arisen here, asserting that New Zealand is a multicultural nation. A multiculturalism that places ‘us’ all side by side, all equally immigrants, is a multiculturalism that all too easily subsumes Māori and reduces them to one more minority group, as opposed being the tangata whenua<sup>19</sup>. Drichel notes that assimilation (or ‘the one people myth’) ‘proves a remarkably persistent touchstone in New Zealand

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<sup>19</sup> Of course, a biculturalism that elevates Māori and Pākehā groups risks disappearing other ‘others’.

politics' (590). She describes biculturalism as a 'much needed safeguard against a return to the country's default policy setting of assimilation' (590).

Firstly, I am working with an inverted binary opposition, where self is described as 'white dominant culture' and other is described as 'Māori.' Secondly, suggesting we may tease out a hierarchy of the 'othered' risks simplistically including Māori in a mosaic of other 'others'. Thirdly, the application of such a continuum could imply a kind of homogenisation of the writing of the 'other', slotting 'indigenous writing' into a system of white-imposed value beside 'migrant writing' and falsely conflating the two, even if it was possible to easily define what constituted such writing. Curthoys questions Sneja Gunew and Kateryna Longley's description of Aborigines in Australia and migrants who have come from places other than England or Ireland as 'the marginalised'. To see both groups writing together 'as part of *post-colonial* literary endeavour' she says is 'extremely awkward', an oversimplification that does not take into account the experiences of the Indigenous people and their unique relationship to the land (Italics hers 30).

John Docker also opposes Gunew's application of Said's theory of 'Self' and 'Other' to European and Asian migrants to Australia, arguing that 'When 'the native' becomes 'the migrant' and 'Europe' or 'the West' becomes 'Australian society', something goes askew and awry' (2000, 131). It is important to acknowledge similar concerns in the cultural environment of Aotearoa. The 'otherness' of Māori is *not* identical to the 'otherness' of other minority groups: while both groups may be demonstrably exoticised by the exclusionary narratives of dominant culture, Māori occupy a particular space in relation to Pākehā culture and the Crown. Native is not equal to hybrid, and migrant is not equal to indigenous. But this study investigates how the positioning of these groups by the white gaze does homogenise them, by grouping them together as variously shaded 'others'.

In using the word 'othering' I am drawing on postcolonial theory that has its roots in a clear binary opposition, but the authors in this study have been 'othered' both positively and negatively. There are traceable differences in the calibration of their comparative statuses within the whiteness of the dominant 'self'. These differences reveal the identities of the othered authors as being constructed as *both inferior to, and superior to*, the 'self', sometimes within the same article. Both Ihimaera's and Hulme's work is often described as having a 'spiritual' element. This particular Māori brand of spirituality is characterised as naive, primitive, linked to the land and to pre-colonial Māori tradition. Clearly, the 'other' here

takes on the characteristics of Said's 'Other'. But often this stereotypical representation of a generic Māori spirituality is suggested as an antidote to the perceived emptiness and dislocation of Pākehā culture. The Manichean allegory is then complicated: the 'other' is exoticised as spiritual, but in Aotearoa this spirituality becomes a sought after commodity, one that reviewers might like to appropriate into a new national 'self'. William's and Jane Stafford's *Maoriland: New Zealand Literature* points out in that early romanticisations of Māori there were positive aspects (Stafford and Williams 11). They say the 'central feature of Maoriland was the use of Maori sources to provide the descendants of the settlers with a history peculiar to themselves' (ibid.). Māori are posited in early reviews of Ihimaera and Hulme as both *inferior to* but also as *superior to* dominant culture in their idealised closeness to the land – inherently inferior, but superior in their function of providing a distinct history.

In claiming that the authors examined in this study are positioned in relation to whiteness, it is necessary to ask what whiteness is. Writing from Canada, Fee proposes that

...while it is impossible to completely disentangle the author or self from the colonial process that produced whiteness as a category, it *is* possible to situate individuals and groups with respect to it (italics hers, "Whiteness' and 'Aboriginality' in Canada and Australia: Conversations and Identities" 188).

This study is based on the assumption that whiteness as a category has emerged as a product of Aotearoa's colonial past. This whiteness, though elusive, permeates and informs the governing institutions of this country. Accordingly, this study deems some authorising bodies, popular, and literary forms of print media to exist *within whiteness*. The academy, for example, has its roots in European practice, and though academics might critique the system they write from within, it is still a system influenced by the workings of Empire<sup>20</sup>. This study investigates the reception of 'other' ethnic authors in the mainstream press. Practically speaking, this means that articles about the authors were not included in the samples if they were published in non-mainstream publications<sup>21</sup>. However, some of these articles informed my wider interpretation of these results, and so have been included. Drawing such lines

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<sup>20</sup> While this may be a contentious and contestable view, what I mean is that the political, legal and to some extent educational systems of this country are derived from the systems of the original coloniser. In New Zealand defendants in a courtroom still must defend themselves against 'the Crown.'

<sup>21</sup> Examples being *Mai Review*, *Spasifik*, *Tu Mai*, and *Te Ao Hou*.

between the ethnic margin and literary mainstream was problematic<sup>22</sup>. I made the decision to include articles in the sample count that were published in mainstream publications<sup>23</sup>. Similarly, lines are blurred between the literary and popular media in this study<sup>24</sup>. For the purposes of this study, media items are included indiscriminately in the sample count. Implications of differing representations in literary and popular media are, however, included in the general discussion.

## Introduction to Subjects<sup>25</sup>

### Witi Ihimaera<sup>26</sup>

Witi Ihimaera has been described as the ‘first Māori writer to publish both a book of short stories and a novel’ (Robinson and Wattie 254), a description currently used on the New Zealand Book Council website in 2013 (“About the author – Witi Ihimaera”). He published a book of short stories, *Pounamu, Pounamu* in 1972 and a novel, *Tangi*, in 1973. In texts about him and his work, he is commonly referred to as ‘the first Māori writer’<sup>27</sup>. Ihimaera is of Te Aitanga-a-Mahaki descent, with affiliations to Tūhoe, Te Whanau-a-Apanui, Ngati Kahungunu, and Ngai Tamanuhiri, and links to Rongowhakaata, Ngati Porou, and Te Whakatohea (“About the author – Witi Ihimaera”). He was born in Gisborne.

Given Ihimaera’s status as Aotearoa’s first officially recognised Māori writer, it is obvious that the reception of his work set the stage for other Māori writers that followed. Williams calls him ‘one of the most forceful writers to have emerged’ in this cultural movement (*Leaving the Highway* 111). The response to Ihimaera’s work can be read as an indicator of how Māori were positioned within an increasingly self-conscious discourse of national identity.

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<sup>22</sup> For example David Eggleton reviewed *Avia* in the *Listener* (“Identity Parade”). Eggleton is of Rotuman descent. But as the review appeared in a mainstream publication, the article was included in the sample count.

<sup>23</sup> An attempt to chase up the complex ethnic heritages of each reviewer or journalist writing about the six authors would be excessive.

<sup>24</sup> In coverage of Kassabova, for example, the popular media exoticise her quite freely, but discourses in literary journals take issue with this. (See ‘Are some ‘others’ superior to other ‘others’).

<sup>25</sup> For a reference chart noting all of the authors’ first two works, period surveyed, and biographical information, see *Figure 8* in the Appendix.

<sup>26</sup> See *Figure 1* in the Appendix for a summary of his early key career events.

<sup>27</sup> He is listed this way in the 1973 New Zealand Index of Periodicals (24). Earlier publications by Māori writers including Hone Tuwhare and J.C. Sturm must be noted here.

## **Keri Hulme<sup>28</sup>**

Hulme published a book of poetry, *The Silences Between: Moeraki Conversations* in 1982 and an internationally acclaimed novel *the bone people* in 1983. Though Patricia Grace was heralded as the first Māori woman writer on the publication of *Mutuwhenua: The Moon Sleeps* in 1978, Hulme's Booker Prize win makes her a key figure in the rise of 'Māori writing' in Aotearoa. She was awarded the Pegasus Award for Māori writing ("About the author – Keri Hulme") in 1984, and the international Man Booker Prize in 1985, drawing varied responses from journalists and academics and making 'Māori writing' a focus for postcolonial and literary critics worldwide. Hulme is Kai Tahu, of the Ngaterangiamoa and Ngaiteruahikihiki hapu (Long 20). She is also of Kati Mamoe, Orkney Scots and English descent ("About the author – Keri Hulme"). She was born in Christchurch.

Harding has argued that Hulme's writing irrupted into a historical period that had an impact on her reception (7). Williams notes that in 1984 New Zealand 'entered a period of massive social change, adding that New Zealand was 'to be remade after the long oppressive years of Muldoon in an image of self-reliance, racial justice, and inventiveness' (*Leaving the Highway* 84). When Hulme published *the bone people* in 1984 there was a sense that she was something Aotearoa had been waiting for (ibid.). If Ihimaera was crucial to New Zealand's bicultural national identity as a Māori writer, Hulme, as Māori *and* Pākehā, feminist, radical, androgynous and asexual, was crucial to New Zealand's subsequent radical re-visioning of itself.

## **Kapka Kassabova<sup>29</sup>**

Kapka Kassabova is a writer who moved from Bulgaria to Aotearoa when she was seventeen. Her first book of poetry, *All Roads Lead to the Sea* in 1997, and her second, *Dismemberment* in 1998, were very well received by the popular media and by literary critics ("About the author – Kapka Kassabova"). She won the New Zealand Society of Authors Best First Book Award in 1998 and was a finalist in the poetry section of the Montana Book Awards the same year. She won a Buddle Finlay Sargeson Fellowship in 1999 and was also awarded the international Commonwealth Writer's Prize for Best First Book for *Reconnaissance*. She was

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<sup>28</sup> See *Figure 2* in the Appendix for a summary of her early key career events.

<sup>29</sup> See *Figure 3* in the Appendix for a summary of her early key career events.

born in Sofia, Bulgaria, and now lives in the United Kingdom. Kassabova has a Bulgarian accent and looks European (or ‘other’ Pākehā).

The reason for Kassabova’s inclusion here is to compare her reception to other ‘others,’ in an attempt to discover whether she is exoticised as an ‘immigrant writer,’ or accepted as one of ‘our’ Kiwi writers. Publishing her first collection of poetry in 1997, Kassabova is writing a few years before Karlo Mila and Tusiata Avia. She writes into a cultural moment whose dominant narratives of identity have shifted from the biculturalism of the 1980s to a focus on multicultural inclusiveness. Importantly, Kassabova is ‘other,’ but she is also white. In reviewing her work we trace important differences in the positioning of the ‘other’ author.

### **Tusiata Avia<sup>30</sup>**

Avia was born in Aotearoa and is of Samoan-Palagi descent. Her first book, *Wild Dogs Under My Skirt*, was published in 2004, and her second, *Bloodclot*, was published in 2009. She also works as an actor and performer. Avia was shortlisted for the 2006 Prize in Modern Letters, and held the Fulbright-Creative New Zealand Pacific Writer’s Residency in Hawai’i in 2005 (“About the author – Tusiata Avia”). Her work plays self-consciously with Pacific themes, often deliberately undermining stereotypes of the Pacific Island woman as ‘dusky maiden’. She was born in Christchurch.

Avia’s career was authorised and validated by both Pacific-based and mainstream bodies. Her early association with Victoria University Press and the International Institute of Modern Letters gave her an easy entry into the New Zealand literary mainstream, but throughout her career she has increasingly been authorised by bodies promoting the Pacific Arts<sup>31</sup>. While Ihimaera and Hulme were writing in the early years of the ‘Māori renaissance,’ and Kassabova came to the media’s notice as an immigrant writer, Avia is born here, non-Māori, but non-Pākehā. An examination of the reception of Avia and her work is critical in attempting to understand our present literary moment.

### **Karlo Mila<sup>32</sup>**

Mila is of Tongan, Palagi and Samoan descent. She won the NZSA Jessie Mackay Award for Best First Book of Poetry at the 2006 Montana New Zealand Book Awards with her first

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<sup>30</sup> See *Figure 2* in the Appendix for a summary of her early key career events.

<sup>31</sup> See *Figure 5* in the Appendix for a summary of her early key career events.

<sup>32</sup> See *Figure 4* in the Appendix for a summary of her early key career events.

collection of poetry, *Dream Fish Floating* (2005). In 2008 she published a second collection, *A Well Written Body*. Her work is described on the New Zealand Book Council website as ‘reflecting issues of the Pacific diaspora and navigating the tensions between traditional cultures and urban Aotearoa-Pacific realities.’ She was born in Rotorua but was brought up in Palmerston North.

By including Mila in this study we can examine the importance of an author’s path to mainstream recognition. While Avia was published by a dominant culture publishing house, Mila was published by Huia, who specialise in publishing Māori and Pacific writing. Though Mila is a relative newcomer to Aotearoa’s literary scene, her work has been included in both the New Zealand school curriculum and university curricula. By tracing differences in the reception of these two Pacific Island authors, and comparing those receptions to others in this review, we can better understand the role of publishers and book awards in the authorising of the ‘other.’

### **Cliff Fell**<sup>33</sup>

Cliff Fell was born in London and moved to Aotearoa when he was forty three. His heritage is complex: his grandfather was a New Zealander who moved to England. When Fell’s grandfather separated from his grandmother he returned to New Zealand, and Fell has said that for him this is an important part of his identity (Sperber 7). Fell’s first book of poetry, *The Adulterer’s Bible* (2003) won the Best First Book of Poetry Award in the 2004 Montana New Zealand Book Awards. In 2004 he was awarded a Creative New Zealand New Project Grant, and he published his second collection, *Beauty of the Badlands*, in 2008 (“About the author – Cliff Fell”). Fell is a migrant to Aotearoa, but, crucially, he is a Pākehā English migrant.

Fell functions as the ‘control’ part of this study. By examining how often he is named as a migrant and how much he is asked questions about his ethnic background, we can trace how ‘othering’ is enacted in Aotearoa’s media. Similarly to Kassabova, he is a migrant to Aotearoa; however his name, accent and appearance are mainstream Pākehā in origin<sup>34</sup>. Unlike Avia, Mila, Ihimaera or Hulme, he was not born here; however my research demonstrates that he is not as exoticised by the media as they are. Fell hails from not just any

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<sup>33</sup> See *Figure 6* in the Appendix for a summary of his early key career events.

<sup>34</sup> Cliff Fell is not his real name, but a pen name he has adopted.



other country but from “home”: the home of the primary colonising culture. By examining the media’s response to Fell and his work, we may make distinctions between who is regarded as ‘us’ and who is regarded as ‘other’. The welcoming of Fell as one of ‘our’ writers and the odd invisibility of his migrant history in the texts collected has clear implications for who is still included in a national ‘us,’ and who is not.

## **Research Methodology**

This critical thesis is comprised of six comparative case studies about the authors above. The analysis of media material generated around these authors’ first two works will be informed by the following questions:

- How has the reception of ethnically ‘other’ authors in Aotearoa changed from 1972 to the present moment?
- Is it possible to measure changes in how these authors have been described and therefore positioned within dominant white discourses?
- Is it possible to determine how often these authors are identified by their ethnic backgrounds in order to ascertain whether they are being 'othered'?
- If the ethnically ‘other’ authors are depicted differently, can we say they have been exoticised, positively or negatively?
- If so, does the mode of exoticisation vary from author to author? Does the 'othering' fit authors into (different) recognisable stereotypes of the ‘other’?

Using these central questions as a starting point, the following questions will be used in a close analysis of the texts:

- How often is the author’s ethnicity mentioned as an identifier?

- How early in the text is the ethnicity of the author mentioned, if it is mentioned?
- Is ethnic identity developed as a point of interest within the text?
- Is the author's work attributed to their personal experience? Is their work automatically assumed to be autobiographical?

While the questions above are set and quantifiable, their answers must be read in context for the results of this study to be meaningful. Sometimes the placement of an ethnic label within a text can be amplified by the positioning of an author photograph, by what is in that photograph, or by a clearly exoticising headline<sup>35</sup>. In addition to reading responses to the authors in-text, this study also examines what language is used to describe their work, noting recurrences in terminology. For example, in his early career Witi Ihimaera's work is described as 'lyrical,' 'emotional,' 'rhythmic,' and 'important.' Writing thirty years later, Karlo Mila's work is very often described as 'lyrical,' 'rhythmic,' and 'passionate,' and she is said to be an 'important' Pacific voice. Analysing the language used to describe these authors' work reveals an important commonality in their positioning: both are culturally important, and both quite neatly represented as the earthy, unaffected stereotype of the 'other.' Where relevant, I also discuss who originally published the author's work, who has authorised the author's visibility, and whether this has changed over time. By establishing the key events in an author's career trajectory, that is, publications, grants, appearances and prizes, we gain a clearer view of both the authorised and the authoriser<sup>36</sup>. By taking into account both the quantifiable number of times the author is labelled, and reading for exoticisation within the collective texts, I explore whether these texts could be said to explicitly or implicitly posit the author as outside of white dominant culture.

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<sup>35</sup> Kapka Kassabova, for example, is labelled by her ethnicity 90% of the time in all items included. But this labelling becomes more meaningful in a close reading of a *North and South* article from 1999, which features a large author photograph, describes her as a 'beautiful, brash Bulgarian immigrant' in the first paragraph, and whose title is 'Exotic Bird' (Quaintance 86). The intersection of label, image, and headline makes it clear that Kassabova is being emphatically 'othered'; also that she is being objectified in a gender and age-specific way.

<sup>36</sup> The results around contemporary Pasifika poets Tusiata Avia and Karlo Mila, for example, are different. In order to interpret these results I considered their differing paths to mainstream recognition.

## Research Strategy

My collection of data followed the process outlined below. It differed slightly for earlier authors, as Witi Ihimaera and Keri Hulme's first books were published before the digitisation of the Index New Zealand. This means a search for items about them took a slightly different form.

1. I searched for all articles where the author was mentioned in the timeframe included using Newztext Plus, a database available through the Victoria University Library. Keywords used were the author's names, and the titles of both their first books. This database pulls out all references to the subject in all Aotearoa's newspapers, literary journals and magazines.
2. I searched for all articles where the author is mentioned using the National Library of New Zealand's online index, and cross-referenced these results with results from Newztext Plus.
3. Then I cross-referenced these results with those from Knowledge Basket, an online resource at Auckland Public Library.
4. In the case of pre-digital authors (Ihimaera, Hulme, and Kassabova, whose career began when there is an overlap in pre- and post-digitisation), I checked each relevant year in the New Zealand Index of Periodicals.
5. I sourced articles not provided by the databases in full text. This search covered magazine, journal and newspaper articles, and utilised material from Victoria University Library, Auckland Public Libraries, Auckland University Library, Wellington Public Library, and the National Library of New Zealand.
6. In order to ascertain how the author had originally been marketed, I contacted the authors' publishers to ask if I could access any press kits or review material kept by the publisher<sup>37</sup>.

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<sup>37</sup> Ihimaera and Hulme's original publishers had not kept records of the material, however Marian Evans of the Spiral Collective, Hulme's publisher, had kept a file of media responses to Hulme that proved invaluable in contextualising the results. The other later authors' publishers were co-operative, and evidence from their press releases are included here.

7. I checked the New Zealand Book Council website for references to the author.
8. I checked the New Zealand Electronic Text Centre for references to the author.
9. I checked for publisher's profiles of authors online.

The last four steps contributed to building up a better picture of the author's career arc, providing information on prizes and changes of publisher. These mentions were not included in the statistical results.

## **Limitations**

Because media items gathered about the authors were many in number, it is necessary to impose search limitations. Items analysed using the central research questions are limited to:

- Print articles: paper articles published in newspapers, magazines, literary journals and press releases not including press releases from the author's publisher
- Items published about the author's first two book-length publications *or* articles written until two years after the publication of the second work<sup>38</sup>.
- Articles published within Aotearoa-New Zealand
- Articles longer than three lines (thus excluding play / event listings etc.<sup>39</sup>)

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<sup>38</sup> This limitation addresses differences in the speed of author output. Kassabova, for example, published her first two books in 1997 and 1998 respectively, while Fell took five years between his first two books. (For a reference chart detailing authors' publications and time surveyed, see figure 8 in the Appendix.) Extending the survey to two years after the publication of the authors' second work evens out potential imbalances. Five years' worth of media items about Fell might not be comparable with the Kassabova results if I only collected material for her in the years 1997-8.

<sup>39</sup> Both Avia and Mila are listed in many items as performance poets. In these cases the mention is often no longer than a few lines. It therefore proves difficult to apply such questions as 'is the author's ethnicity developed as a point of interest within the text.' Items longer than three lines often contain a description of the author's work, and have been included in the labelling count.

However, media items not conforming to these criteria are included in the general analysis and discussion, which calls for a contextualising gaze<sup>40</sup>.

### **Considerations in Interpretation**

The dual qualitative and quantitative approach that forms the methodology of this thesis gives rise to specific considerations in the interpretation of the results. While the statistics generated here successfully demonstrate that certain authors are ‘othered’ more often in accordance with their ethnicity, my interpretation of the implications of these results utilises postcolonial literary modes of analysis. There are no precedents for this study, where terminology applied to figures in the media is broken down in a statistical way<sup>41</sup>. While this speaks for the originality and interdisciplinary innovation of this study, it is important to note the complications inherent in applying a statistical model of analysis to such amorphous things as words, and concepts such as ethnicity and culture. To say an author is labelled is a relatively straightforward, countable thing, but variables in the execution of other aspects of the study have been taken into account. The research was carefully conducted and the results double checked, yet a purely scientific “objectivity” was not my purpose here; nor was it achievable. My intention was to use my statistics as a platform for discussion: if we can prove that, for example, a Māori author is always ‘othered,’ while an English migrant is hardly ever labelled by their ethnicity, this gives us a valuable insight and starting point into the real appearance of the national literary self. While it is possible to make definitive statements about author labelling, a number of considerations emerged throughout the execution of the study which must be taken into account.

The first consideration in a comparative study like this is the difference in sample sizes for each author<sup>42</sup>. This has a number of causes. Because Ihimaera began writing (for the purposes of this study) in 1972 and Hulme (likewise) in 1982, sourcing all articles written about these authors was a different process to that used with later authors. The first phase of investigation was searching online databases, using Newztext Plus, a database powered by

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<sup>40</sup> As all of the material collected and analysed in this study has previously been published in the popular or literary media, it is not necessary to apply for ethics approval.

<sup>41</sup> This is certainly true on a local level. Internationally I also found no precedents for a study structured like this, but it is possible someone has done something similar.

<sup>42</sup> For a comparison chart that shows exact sample sizes for each author, that is, how many media items were included in the count, see *Figure 9* in the Appendix.

Victoria University. Newztext Plus turns up mentions of search terms or key words that occur in articles published in Aotearoa-New Zealand prior to the present moment and after 1989. The results gleaned from Newztext Plus at the beginning of the period where articles began to be digitised are variable<sup>43</sup>. As both Ihimaera and Hulme were writing before the date of digitisation, this led to a difference in search strategy for these authors. Information about these authors could not be cross-checked against the National Library of New Zealand's online index, or the Auckland Library's Knowledge Basket, as these databases also cover a later period. Instead I relied on physical records in the form of the New Zealand Index of Periodicals. There was a greater occurrence of these earlier physical records being inexact or difficult to interpret, leading to difficulties in sourcing the articles. Media items relating to Hulme and Ihimaera were also more often unavailable, as the publications they were in were sometimes discontinued and not stored. These complications in sourcing material about Ihimaera and Hulme are reflected in the smaller sample sizes: only fifteen items for each author in total.

So the smaller sample sizes for the earliest authors might be the result of a difference in search technique, physical versus digital record keeping, the fallibility of such records, and the much greater unavailability of articles due to the inaccessibility of original sources. It could also be true that both Ihimaera and Hulme, as early 'leaders' of Māori or other writing, received less attention at the beginning of their careers than the authors writing later in this time frame. The great wealth of material accessible after this timeframe about both authors once their roles had been more firmly established in New Zealand writing would bear this out. However, it is more likely that the difference in sample sizes is the result of practical issues.

In an attempt to address the variability of Newztext Plus I cross-referenced records for later authors with other databases, wrote to publishers to request any material on the author that they kept on file, and checked smaller journals / periodicals around the dates of the authors' first and second published works. Some publishers keep extensive media files on their

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<sup>43</sup> Results for Kapka Kassabova, writing in the 1990s, showed some gaps, where material I found later through other means had been missed.

authors<sup>44</sup>, while others don't. The publishers of Hulme and Ihimaera understandably do not have complete records of print mentions for these authors dating to the 1970s and 1980s<sup>45</sup>.

Aside from necessary differences in search techniques for different authors, the difference in sample sizes is also a result of much broader changes in the nature of the media itself. The time period 1972 – 2009, from the time of Ihimaera's first publication to Avia, Fell and Mila's last, is not only a time of dramatic political and cultural change encompassing the reinvention of New Zealand into today's Aotearoa but also the reinvention of the media. The nature of articles and reviews about the earliest authors was very different to that of the latest. The proliferation of online media (though articles published solely online are not included in this study) and the tendency of reviews today to be both more entertainment focussed and more driven by marketing have led to a change in the way authors are written about. Most of the articles about Mila and Avia, for example, were very brief. The brevity of such articles is dictated by a media more geared towards serving up byte-sized pieces of information to a public accustomed to a higher volume of easily accessible information. Thus it is much more common for a book to be reviewed now in a paragraph about new literature, or a new author mentioned in a 'what's on' column, than it was in the 1970s and 1980s. So while Ihimaera and Hulme are reviewed less often, when they are, the length of the text is longer and the attention and analysis accorded the book more sustained in nature.

With later authors, the sample sizes are much larger. It appears that they are far more popular, or at least far more often written about. But while it would be tempting to infer that the recent mainstream media embraces new authors more willingly than their predecessors, the truth is more complex. Items about later authors are often more shallow, providing only surface information rather than engaging with the work<sup>46</sup>. Avia is the author with the greatest number of sample sizes, at 46 articles. Fell is the next, at 45, then Kassabova at 40 and Mila at 29. In an attempt to address the possible effects of this change on my ability to compare results between earlier and later authors, samples were required to be longer than three lines in length. This had the effect of excluding many play and reading listings for performance-

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<sup>44</sup> Auckland University Press is an example. Victoria University Press also hold records of press releases for their authors. Both publishers proved very co-operative and allowed me to review material in house.

<sup>45</sup> Though someone associated with Hulme's publisher of *the bone people*, the Spiral Collective, had compiled a file of mainly overseas reviews. Marian Evans kindly made this available to me. Also Penguin Books had some material on file for Ihimaera, but the collection was not comprehensive. After I had completed the initial research for this thesis, I found that Melissa Kennedy had written a book on Ihimaera, listed in the Critical Sources, in which she draws on source material on Ihimaera from the Beaglehole room at Victoria University Library. Some of this material may be missing from the samples I collected within my research limitations.

<sup>46</sup> This is particularly noticeable in the Avia and Mila material.

oriented poets Mila and Avia. But however I limited the results, it appeared that the media as a whole, driven perhaps by more overt market imperatives than those existent in the 1970s and 1980s, is producing more copy at a greater speed, but of lesser quality<sup>47</sup>. These comments cannot, of course, be applied to literary journals, who continue to uphold the practice of in-depth review and analysis of new works. However, it has been interesting to note which authors have been covered extensively by literary journals, and which have not<sup>48</sup>.

However different the sample sizes, it is possible to use the data collected to make statistically correct comparisons. The consideration here is whether the sample sizes are similar enough to be able to make a meaningful comparison between, for example, authors Ihimaera, using 15 media items, and Mila, using 29 items. In order to ascertain this, I conducted a statistical analysis to see if the percentages in each of the categories were different by author<sup>49</sup>. The results of the test mean that it is legitimate and meaningful to compare results between authors. Comparative statements like ‘Karlo Mila is identified by her ethnicity 97% of the time, versus her contemporary Cliff Fell being identified by ethnicity 24% of the time,’ are both possible and valid.

Another consideration is the notion of the author as active, not passive, object. Authors like Fell, who are part of the mainstream, can pick and choose to some extent how reviewers and journalists perceive them and his work. Fell may write about cultural difference, but on entering the interview room, cultural difference is not perceived by the dominant mainstream journalist to be contained in his body. In an early presentation of this research to my colleagues and supervisors, Ken Duncum asked a question about marketing and its power to define and tokenise an author. Wellington writer James Brown is known for being a cyclist, and cycling often finds its way into his subject matter. If Brown is written about in every article as a cyclist, Duncum asked, why is that any different to Mila being written about in every article as a Pacific Island author (Personal Communication 2010)? He made the point

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<sup>47</sup> If quality here can be defined as length of text, depth of analysis and focussed attention.

<sup>48</sup> Kassabova and Fell both had a high proportion of articles about them/their work in literary publications: Avia and Mila, in remarkable contrast, had hardly any. Kassabova published her first work in 1997, Fell, Avia and Mila published their last in 2009; the difference here can hardly be accounted for in variations over time, especially as Fell was Mila and Avia’s actual contemporary.

<sup>49</sup> To compare proportions while taking account of the differing numbers of articles, I used the chi-square statistical test. For this test, a large value for the statistic gives a low p-value, or probability that the data support the conclusion of no difference between authors. If the p-value is less than 0.05, I would conclude that the proportions are different by authors. But this is not the case; a comparison is possible. For a table depicting the results of the chi-square statistical test, see *Figure 11* in the Appendix. All statistics have been checked by a Victoria University Statistician, Dalice Sim.



that every author will be reduced in texts about them to a few key biographical bullet points. I answered that Brown chooses to cycle. Brown, being part of the white dominant ethnic majority, is capable of shedding this association as quickly as he is capable of changing subjects. If he meets a new journalist or reviewer, his preference for cycling is not embodied in his appearance<sup>50</sup>. Authors Ihimaera, Hulme, Mila and Avia, on the contrary, are perceived to embody difference. They cannot choose to 'shed' their ethnicity and take on a new one: in coming face to face with a reviewer or being written about by a journalist who has access to their image, they are already being positioned as a certain kind of writer: the 'ethnic' writer.

How much is the author complicit in the creation of themselves in the media as a figure? There is much cross over between subject matter and identity. Kassabova writes of exile, and is written of as an exile. Mila writes of cultural conflict and becomes labelled as a writer who writes of cultural conflict. Avia's writing plays on stereotypes about the Pacific Islands and Islanders, often cleverly overturning the assumptions of dominant white culture, but is stereotyped as a Pacific Islander. The establishment of ethnic identity in the marketing of 'postcolonial' authors like Mila and Avia is a way of demonstrating the author's right to speak about their culture. For 'us' to willingly consume Avia's writing, for example, 'we' need to be informed that she is, legitimately, Samoan; that she is speaking to 'us' from the inside. But the fact remains: these authors cannot lay down their ethnicity and pick up another subject. Currently, they have no choice but to be perceived as 'other.'

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<sup>50</sup> Unless he is wearing bike shorts, as he is wont to do.



## CHAPTER TWO

### THE REAL BI/MULTICULTURAL 'SELF'

The central concern of this study can be summarised as a two-part question: can we prove definitively that the mainstream media is prejudiced in its reception and positioning of authors of 'other' ethnicities? And, if so, how does this prejudice manifest, and what are its implications, both for the mapping of the white 'self,' and the 'other' author? By counting how many times 'other' authors are labelled by their ethnicities, how early that label is presented in the text, whether their ethnicity is developed as a point of interest, and whether their work is assumed to be autobiographical, and comparing those results to the statistics relating to a Pākehā migrant, I hoped to discover how exactly prejudice may be enacted. These are the results:

**Comparison Chart<sup>51</sup>**

|   | <b>Karlo Mila</b>     | <b>Tusiata Avia</b>   | <b>Kapka Kassabova</b> | <b>Cliff Fell</b>     | <b>Keri Hulme</b>      | <b>Witi Ihimaera</b>   |
|---|-----------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|------------------------|
| How often the author identified by their ethnicity? | 97%<br>28/29 Articles | 74%<br>34/46 Articles | 90%<br>36/40 Articles  | 24%<br>11/45 Articles | 100%<br>15/15 Articles | 100%<br>15/15 Articles |
| In the first paragraph.                             | 82%<br>23/28 Articles | 76%<br>26/34 Articles | 81%<br>29/36 Articles  | 18%<br>2/11 Articles  | 47%<br>7/15 Articles   | 60%<br>9/15 Articles   |
| In the rest of the article.                         | 18%<br>5/28 Articles  | 24%<br>7/34 Articles  | 19%<br>7/36 Articles   | 81%<br>9/11 Articles  | 53%<br>8/15 Articles   | 40%<br>6/15 Articles   |
| Is ethnicity developed as a point of interest?      | 67%<br>20/29 Articles | 39%<br>14/46 Articles | 88%<br>35/40 Articles  | 11%<br>5/45 Articles  | 100%<br>15/15 Articles | 100%<br>15/15 Articles |

<sup>51</sup> For a list of other recurring identifiers that appeared many times in the texts (for example, Kassabova is very often described as a speaker of four languages, and Cliff Fell is described as a local poet 60% of the time) see *Figure 10* in the Appendix.

## General Interpretation

We can say definitively that these authors are very often labelled by the media in all items analysed, with the exception of Cliff Fell. Both Māori authors here are labelled Māori in 100% of items, and their ethnicity is developed as a point of interest in 100% of articles. While allowances have been made in interpretation for changes that might have occurred over the study's thirty seven year span, the labelling of Kassabova, writing just over ten years after Hulme, is similarly frequent, at 90%. Writing around ten years after Kassabova, Mila is labelled by her ethnicity 97% of the time, though her contemporary Avia is 'othered' in 74% of media items. For most of these authors, excluding Hulme, their ethnicity is mentioned in the first paragraph of the texts<sup>52</sup>, making it not only an identifier, but clearly their primary identifier.

While the answers to this part of the research questions are conclusive, counting how many times an author is labelled is not the same as proving that they are 'othered.' It is necessary to contextualise these results within close readings of these texts, in order to explore how they are positioned once they are ethnically identified. Taken together with the close readings, the statistics help to create a map of 'otherness' in Aotearoa, as positioned by underlying myths of the white national self.

## Answers to Research Questions

At the outset of this project I assumed the statistics would reflect some reduction in the frequency of labelling of Māori and 'other' authors over time. I believed this would be reflected in the lessening of the importance of ethnicity as an identifier in media texts: after all, it is easy to assume that we currently exist in a comparatively more inclusive cultural environment than the one Ihimaera was writing into in 1972. However, this proved not to be the case. With the notable exception of Fell, the more recent authors in this study were sometimes labelled almost as much as Ihimaera and Hulme; one of the most recent authors, Mila, being labelled in 97% of articles. Clearly, though the bi/multi-cultural 'we' has evolved, ethnicity remains the primary identifier for all of these authors. Where Ihimaera was

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<sup>52</sup> By the time Hulme won the Man Booker Prize with *the bone people* in 1985, it might be assumed that readers already knew that she was Māori. Certainly, her ethnicity is developed as a point of interest in all (100% of) media items analysed.

welcomed as a new Māori voice, Mila was equally qualified and welcomed as a new Pacific voice. Chapters Three to Five of this thesis explore the progression from a new biculturalism through to the highly self-conscious ‘embracing’ of diversity that typifies whiteness today<sup>53</sup>.

It is possible to measure changes in how these authors have been described, as the statistics demonstrate. Their positioning within dominant white discourses varies. Ihimaera and Hulme are fervently adopted as Māori authors, but, as Chapter Three will explore, their function is quite different within the bicultural national myth of identity. Chapter Four will illustrate how Mila and Avia are subject to similar missionary impulses that aim to uphold and elevate ‘Pacific writing’ with a benevolent white gaze. Kassabova is granted a different kind of exoticisation altogether: an exoticisation not tempered by white guilt or a sense of obligation, like that accorded Māori and Pacific minorities. Chapter Five explores narratives about Kassabova that echo an insecure kind of cultural cringe that posits Europe as the real literary motherland. Fell was identified as a migrant 24% of the time in all media items surveyed, and his ethnicity was only developed as a point of interest in 11% of the time. What we can infer from this most generally is that Fell’s ethnicity and cultural background is invisible to the white national self. Chapter Five, Six and Seven explore the implications of this.

Aside from the statistics, the main part of this thesis relies on the teasing out of narratives about national identity in the analysed texts. Now that we can say that ethnically ‘other’ authors are depicted differently, can we claim they have been exoticised, positively or negatively? The answer to this is yes, with the exception of Cliff Fell, though media responses to these authors are often complicated by intersections of gender objectification<sup>54</sup> or class<sup>55</sup>. Also, this thesis proposes in Chapters Six and Seven that when authors are positively exoticised, such positivity is misleading if their identities are merely re-inscribed stereotypically and reductively. Modes of exoticisation vary greatly from author to author, with some subjects fitting very neatly the stereotyped image of the ‘other’<sup>56</sup>.

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<sup>53</sup> ‘Embracing’ here is in quotation marks. In chapters Four and Six I put forward the idea that by actively celebrating some ‘others’ and assimilating them into an ‘inclusive,’ diverse national myth, the white ‘self’ both controls threatening ‘othernesses,’ and uses them as adornment. Such ‘embracing,’ and ‘including,’ is in effect a complex policing of national boundaries that places white culture again at the centre. ‘Embracing’ a culture can be exactly the adverse: an attempt to keep ‘otherness’ in its place.

<sup>54</sup> Most clearly, in Avia, Mila and Kassabova’s cases.

<sup>55</sup> Most clearly, in Mila and Avia’s case.

<sup>56</sup> Mila and Avia as dusky maidens, responses to Ihimaera’s work that describe him as naive, unaffected, and sincere; the image of the earthy, natural native.

The answer to the research questions: ‘Is the author’s work attributed to their personal experience?’ and ‘Is their work automatically assumed to be autobiographical?’ is complicated by the fact that often these authors often play with ‘ethnic’ subject matter. As both Worthington and Stafford point out when ethnic dislocation is a theme in an author’s work, it may be important to divulge an author’s ethnic background (Worthington 16, Stafford “Making a Difference” 5). Statistics on this question remain inconclusive also because the nature of media items varied greatly, from very short theatre listings to longer, sustained reviews.

### **Emergent Themes**

The implications of these findings are various. Current modes of reception are simplistic and clearly re-enact earlier forms of marginalisation. In the specific white multiculturalism of Aotearoa, ethnic minorities’ identities are subsumed or appropriated into the white whole, with varying motivations. The Māori ‘other’, the other ‘other’ – all serve to either enrich the ‘self,’ to address historical wrong-doing, to augment the ‘self’ with exotic decoration, or to re-enforce the validity of the insecure postcolonial ‘self’. The narratives I unpack here serve to debunk the myth of Aotearoa as a welcoming and culturally diverse nation and show instead a national myth in which the ‘self’ is emphatically Pākehā/European in origin, and ethnic ‘others’ are still stereotyped as they are simultaneously ushered in. The remarkable adoption of English migrant Fell as ‘one of us’ serves to illustrate the prevalence of the ‘Man Alone’ myth even today<sup>57</sup>. Fell quickly loses his migrant label, and is in many articles connected to the land, linked to fence posts and rivers and the natural world, and described *as a Kiwi local* in 60% of articles. That this occurs within seven years of his reception is telling. His positioning, in direct alignment with the white ‘self,’ contrasts dramatically with how Ihimaera, Hulme, Kassabova, Avia and Mila are placed, though four of them are born here. I propose that these ‘othernesses’ can be mapped on a continuum of ‘otherness,’ where it is possible to illustrate the various placing of ‘others’ in relation to the ‘self’.

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<sup>57</sup> The New Zealand Book Council calls *Man Alone* ‘the classic New Zealand novel’. It goes on to say that [Mulgan’s] ‘direct narrative and spare diction cut through a prevalent sentimentality about both this country and Britain, and his style anticipated the tenor of much subsequent New Zealand fiction’. (‘Mulgan, John – In Brief’. *New Zealand Book Council*). *Man Alone* (1939) depicts a man’s journey through New Zealand and into Europe, reflecting a new take on New Zealand identity as distinct and separate from that of the ‘Mother country’. The ‘Man Alone’ tradition has been described as masculine.





## CHAPTER THREE

### **‘OTHERING’ THE CENTRE: HOW MAORI AUTHORS FIT INTO A WHITE DISCOURSE OF BICULTURAL NATIONALISM**

Until the 1970s, the dominant New Zealand myth of national identity in literature was Eurocentric. Attempts to define a distinctive Kiwi identity were based on a re-active re-imagining of a New Zealand ‘self’ against earlier colonial narratives that positioned England as ‘home.’ These narratives existed in a realist tradition that Williams associates with Frank Sargeson (*Leaving the Highway* 16), and with John Mulgan’s *Man Alone* (1939). In 1969 Bill Pearson predicted that a distinctive and distinguished body of work by Māori writers would soon emerge (“The Maori in Literature 1938-1965”). Williams states that ‘by the close of the eighties Pearson’s prediction had been amply fulfilled’ (*Leaving the Highway* 17). Throughout the 1970s and 1980s New Zealand myths of narrative identity began to undergo a radical revisioning as white dominant culture struggled to reposition oppressed Māori culture as an integral part of itself, with various motivations.

Williams argued that ‘former colonials transpose the desire for “home” from the lost European origin to the world immediately to hand and seek to identify with Māori religious beliefs and with the indigenous features of the country’ (*Leaving the Highway* 13). He also touched on settler anxiety, noting the Pākehā desire to throw off the ‘colonial taint’ of European heritage (ibid.). Fee wrote in a 2007 article about whiteness and aboriginality in Australia that ‘the notion of reconciliation (has) at its core a desire to develop a national identity that acknowledges and celebrates indigenous histories. Yet it also represents a desire to forget (“Whiteness’ and ‘Aboriginality’ in Canada and Australia: Conversations and Identities” 17). Though relationships between dominant white and indigenous cultures in Aotearoa and Australia are different, the colonial desire to ‘forget’ could be said to be an

underlying motive of white dominant revisions of New Zealand's national identity. Patrick Evans pointed out in 2006 the usefulness of such 'forgetting' in assuaging colonial guilt:

'One of the products of our settlement forgetting is the efficiency with which our dominant culture has naturalized the ideology that enabled it most comfortably to live with itself' ('Pākehā style biculturalism and the Māori writer' 12).

Ihimaera and Hulme emerged in a historical period marked by the mainstream culture's growing awareness of the impacts of colonisation and the need for redress. Underlying the enthusiastic reception of both authors was a sense of centrelessness in white dominant culture itself, a need to re-define Aotearoa as distinctive and original on a world stage, and an eagerness to acknowledge Māori in order to 'forget' past crimes. Williams has suggested that at issue in New Zealand's struggle to revise its 'self' in the 1970s was '*how to employ otherness in the project of reconfiguring the national identity*' (2009, 739 – emphasis added). Hage writes about the implications of a white dominant culture's collection and display of the 'other' in *White Nation: Fantasies of White Supremacy in a Multicultural Society* (157-60). He explains that colonising cultures throughout history have exerted power over the 'other' through a process of collection and classification, whereby the 'other' becomes an object exhibited by the collector in a demonstration of power (160). It is possible to trace such impulses at work in the receptions of both Ihimaera and Hulme.

### **Witi Ihimaera: Welcoming the Host**

The reception of Ihimaera's early work can be characterised by its positivity<sup>58</sup>. The extent to which it was employed in the re-formulation of New Zealand's national myth of identity can be measured by examining media items written about him in his early career. Ihimaera is identified as Māori in 100% of these, and in 60% he is identified as Māori in the first

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<sup>58</sup> In the 1970s Ihimaera began to publish short stories in the *Listener*, *Te Ao Hou*, *Landfall*, and *Islands* (Williams *Leaving the Highway: Six Contemporary New Zealand Novelists* 111). His first book of short stories, *Pounamu Pounamu*, published by Heinemann in 1972, met with generally positive reviews, and won third prize in the Sir James Wattie Awards. In 1973, he published *Tangi*, his first novel, which won the James Wattie Book of the Year Award the same year ("\$1000 Book of Year Prizewinner" Maurice Shadbolt). He held the Burns Fellowship at the University of Otago in 1975. Within five years he was firmly established in literary culture. For a summary in table form see *Figure 1* in the Appendix.

paragraph of the text. This positioning of his ethnic identity indicates that Ihimaera is not only identified as Māori all of the time, but that in the majority of articles his ethnicity is considered his most interesting or important quality. Ethnicity is developed as a point of interest in 100% of articles, often constituting the main part of the discussion. His work is also attributed to his personal experience 60% of the time. While other authors included in this study have many labels attached to them, Ihimaera is identified primarily as a ‘Māori writer,’ a description that has remained attached to him throughout his forty-year career. In 1971 a young Ihimaera said in an interview: ‘At present I’m dealing with Māori themes, but eventually I want to be known as a writer – not just as a Māori writer<sup>59</sup>’ (Ihimaera in Beavis 53).

The main features of Ihimaera’s reception in the media were excited praise and a lack of negative criticism. In most cases, reviewers and interviewers emphasise the importance of Ihimaera’s work and its value for both Māori and Pākehā readers. The ‘absence’ of other Māori writing is mentioned<sup>60</sup>, and the reader is urged to read his work. This foreshadows similar responses to Hulme, Avia and Mila’s writing, where reviewers recommend the work as a culturally broadening resource. Such notes of emphasis are absent from responses to Kassabova and Fell.

Responses to *Pounamu Pounamu* and *Tangi* emphasise the importance of Ihimaera’s work as a bridging tool, both as a window into ‘the Māori world,’ and a way that the Pākehā reader can ‘understand’ Māori as form of historical redress. *Tangi* was dubbed the ‘long awaited novel by a Māori’ (Katene 60)<sup>61</sup>. In another review of *Tangi* in 1974, the reviewer writes:

For the Pākehā reader this is a work of fiction which gives some insight, through feelings expressed, into what it is to be Māori [...] *Tangi* is an *important* communication between Māori and Pākehā coming at a time when the two races are striving more than ever before towards an understanding of each other. (*Tangi* English in New Zealand – emphasis added)

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<sup>59</sup> Such a statement neatly illustrates the conflicts of writing ‘as a/an (insert ethnicity). As a Greek author, I might be happy to represent Greek migrants, or not; or I might view positive responses, as Ihimaera seems to do here, with suspicion, wishing to prove myself a good writer, not ‘just’ a good Greek writer.

<sup>60</sup> Despite the other Māori writers mentioned earlier.

<sup>61</sup> Though this review appeared in *Te Ao Hou*, and therefore was not included in the sample, it illustrates what most other reviews from this period imply; that Ihimaera was writing into a prepared space.

In a review of *Tangi in English in New Zealand* in 1974 half of the text is concerned with the importance of Ihimaera's work (the word 'important' is used twice in a one-column review). The reviewer writes that 'The Māori reader is able to identify with this story' (56). But a quarter of the text is given over to the importance of *Tangi* for the Pākehā reader, pointing out the value of the book in a national literature where 'there is little written from a Māori viewpoint'. Through reading the book, the writer says, Pākehā readers can understand what it is to be Māori (56).

Ihimaera is seen in most texts to be providing an entry point into Māori culture and experience. In an article about Ihimaera by Judy Zavos in 1975 the following exchange appears: 'His mother, he says flatly, was "a servant." A servant in New Zealand? I asked with horror. Yes, he meant what he said: she was a servant' (23). In emphasising her horror here, Zavos illustrates a kind of post-colonial re-visionary impulse. The idea is that by 'understanding' Māori experience, by being sympathetic to it, the Pākehā reader makes a crucial differentiation between themselves and their colonial forebears. And making such a differentiation is an attempt to address colonially inherited settler guilt. Other reviews discuss Ihimaera's sensitive treatment of 'the problems of the Māori,' again portraying the revised bicultural gaze of the white 'self' as sympathetic and benevolent.

Again and again the idea that the Pākehā reader should seek to understand Māori is put forward. '[*Tangi*] provides a valuable experience to the Pakeha, for through identification with Tama he sees himself as an "outsider" through Māori eyes', writes Kathleen Fraundorfer. This will 'reward the Pakeha' reader (46). Another reviewer writes that *Pounamu Pounamu* so 'simply and skilfully' expresses an authentic Māori outlook that 'understanding is no effort at all' (Joan Stevens 50)<sup>62</sup>. While the new benevolent white 'self' seeks to understand Māori, it seems to be quite an effort. Stevens seems to suggest that, taken as a kind of educational pill, Ihimaera's work can administer understanding of 'the Māori world' quickly and painlessly to a newly bicultural national 'self'.

Along with emphasising the importance of his work, reviewers often display intense self-consciousness about writing about Ihimaera, often including in the first or second paragraphs of their texts a kind of disclaimer. H. Winston Rhodes' review of *Tangi* in *Landfall* is one such response. He writes that it is 'far from easy to discriminate and evaluate without a firm basis for comparison, and dishonest to praise or blame without turning a critical eye on one's

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own emotional and literary heritage' (348)<sup>63</sup>. A *Listener* reviewer foregrounds similar concerns, beginning 'Is a Pākehā competent to review "the first novel written by a Māori to be published?"' ("Prose Elegy" 42). Such Pākehā anxiety reflects concerns about how to adequately receive the 'other,' who in this case, is the original centre, thus making the transaction even more fraught.

Williams writes that 'reviewers and critics have failed to direct close scrutiny at Ihimaera's style since the heady days of his early success' (*Leaving the Highway* 122). While this is certainly generally true, a couple of reviewers did dare to violate issues of cultural safety and offer negative criticism. One such reviewer was Michael King. In his review of *Whanau* in *New Zealand Bookworld*, he criticises Ihimaera's work, citing an intrusive author, a 'disappointing' shifting narrative viewpoint that demonstrates a 'lack of control,' and a 'lazy' overuse of adjectives (43)<sup>64</sup>. In King's case, it is interesting that he does Ihimaera the honour of subjecting his book to stylistic criticism, while most reviewers steer well clear of this. His criticisms centre on what may be a broader issue of taste: not every reader likes to feel the author's presence in the text<sup>65</sup>.

Barry Mitcalfe also implies his scepticism in a 1973 review of *Tangi*, writing 'Everyone has one novel in them [...] Having written this largely autobiographical novel, Witi Ihimaera may find the next sets a greater challenge' (16).

Timothy Brennan has suggested that Salman Rushdie constitutes a 'Third World interpreter' for the West (*Salman Rushdie and the Third World* 1989). Rushdie was selected for the function of Third World interpreter because he was both English-educated but also knew about the 'East'. Rushdie's role in the west was that of culture-bringer and translator for the western reader. Similarly, Ihimaera's role is transmitter of important cultural capital. Like Rushdie, Ihimaera is a chosen interpreter, who will guide the Pākehā reader through the

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<sup>63</sup> Such bluster is a complex way of saying: 'Well, one can't seek to comment, not being Māori oneself...' This response points up issues of cultural safety. The subtext is that Rhodes does not wish to offer any negative criticism, as it might be taken the wrong way, i.e. as prejudice. As a Pākehā critic aware of the *importance* of Ihimaera's work, it is unsafe for him to do anything but celebrate the publication of the novel.

<sup>64</sup> It must be noted that since Ihimaera's reception, a shifting narrative viewpoint has become almost a hallmark of indigenous/postcolonial writing worldwide, and much more popular also in mainstream novels.

<sup>65</sup> This points up an issue at the heart of this thesis. If we ask that the authors' work be evaluated 'purely' as text, judged on its aesthetic merits and not its cultural value, do we open the floodgates of 'othering' of the 'other' in the name of taste? The postcolonial critic might argue that all taste is culturally determined, and that any issues the white reader might have with the 'other's' work can be put down to acculturation. My preferences in literature could be said to be culturally determined. King's dislike of Ihimaera's adjectives can be explained in this way. But if we don't allow such expressions of taste, we close down discourses about culture and literature.

warm-hearted, traditional ‘Māori world,’ teaching the odd Māori word here and there and gently introducing ‘us’ to some of the old traditions. But the role of interpreter is not conferred unconditionally.

In a 1975 review of *Whanau*<sup>66</sup>, King wrote that while in *Pounamu Pounamu* and *Tangi Ihimaera*’s political point of view on Māori-Pākehā relations was not blatantly expressed, in *Whanau* ‘the author is uncomfortably intrusive’. He goes on: ‘He stands at the shoulder of the reader and tells him how to react, how to think and feel about the characters and the village’ (24). King explains that he sees the role of the author as providing ‘raw material’ for the reader and allowing them to supply the emotion – ‘There is no need for Mr Ihimaera to violate this principle,’ he says (24). What is being violated here is the Pākehā tourist’s cultural safety. In assigning Ihimaera the role of guide to the ‘Māori world,’ a contract is agreed upon. Ihimaera will present Māori material; it is the Pākehā reader’s job to interpret that material as they please. When Ihimaera offers more than a straight presentation of Māori existence he is criticised as being in violation of contract.

What is being written about in most texts examined here is not really Ihimaera’s work but Ihimaera’s function within a changing national discourse of biculturalism. A reviewer in *English in New Zealand* emphasises the importance of understanding Māori: the ‘sensitive Pākehā reader’ should be able to understand the ‘distinctive Māori lifestyle’ after reading Ihimaera’s first book (“Rev. of *Pounamu, Pounamu*, by Witi Ihimaera” 52). Such recommendations underline the real concern of a newly revised white ‘self’: its moral position with regards to Māori. For a ‘sensitive’ reader: that is, an ethically sound reader aware of colonial wrongdoing, understanding is offered as a balm for settler anxiety. Ihimaera’s role here is provider of the ‘other’s’ perspective *for Pākehā*. In receiving ‘the first Māori author’ sensitively, sympathetically, and benevolently, and by seeking to understand Māori through his work, Ihimaera is made to perform a function in the service of narratives of national identity: whereby the national ‘self’ demonstrates its postcolonial goodness. The emphasis is on Ihimaera’s work as a necessary part of the political re-education and decolonisation of Pākehā: it is valuable as cultural rather than aesthetic product.

In the years since 1975 Ihimaera has been increasingly politicised. In the late 1970s he became aware of the fact that his books were being read as the ‘definitive portrayal’ of the

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<sup>66</sup> This review was not included in the sample count, as it is about Ihimaera’s third book. It is included here because of its contextual importance.

‘world of the Māori’. He decided to take a break from writing for this reason in 1977 ("Witi Ihimaera" - International Festival of Literature Berlin). In 2005 he began to rewrite his first five books, inserting passages that contextualise the original material within a more contemporary postcolonial view. Whatever his motivations, it is clear that from the moment he was published, Ihimaera was exclusively and repeatedly ‘othered’ by the press in the country where he was born.

### **Keri Hulme: Becoming ‘us’**

Keri Hulme is identified as Māori in 100% of media items in her early career. Her ethnicity is developed in these texts as a point of interest 100% of the time. This occurs in the first paragraph 47% of the time, and in the rest of the text 53% of the time. 40% of items assume that Hulme is writing from personal experience. Hulme is also very often identified as ‘Booker Prize winner,’ ‘winner of the Pegasus Prize for Māori Writing,’ and as a woman. The story of *the bone people*’s triple rejection by publishers and eventual publication by a feminist collective is also very often mentioned, making Hulme’s name synonymous with feminism<sup>67</sup>. Writing roughly ten years after Ihimaera’s entry into Aotearoa’s literary scene, the statistics on how often Hulme is labelled are identical. But her reception was not identical to Ihimaera’s, nor was she ‘othered’ and exoticised in precisely the same ways. Reviews of *the bone people* illustrate the split in the media’s opinion: the book was too long, badly edited, a mess, or it was a masterpiece, described as remarkable and astonishing<sup>68</sup>. Feminist by association, androgynous/asexual/neuter, and of both Māori and Pākehā descent<sup>69</sup>, Hulme has been fiercely championed and roundly criticised. Hulme has functioned as a polarising force in literature in Aotearoa ever since.

Into a politically charged environment that included the 1981 Springbok tour, Māori land marches and the establishment of the Waitangi Tribunal Land Court in 1975, the growing Women’s Movement and the reconfiguration of New Zealand as a bicultural nation, came Hulme. Similarly to Ihimaera, she is important because of her cultural value. Shona Smith

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<sup>67</sup> Ironically, Hulme told Shona Smith in an interview in 1985 that she did not identify as a feminist (31).

<sup>68</sup> Reviews often also mentioned violence, and the radical and disturbing nature of the subject matter. In 1984 the novel broke taboos in its depiction of domestic violence.

<sup>69</sup> In contrast to Ihimaera, who is identified in the samples only as Māori. Hulme’s identification *as both* allows Pākehā reviewers more breathing room as far as criticism is concerned: they may engage with the work with less concern for the rules of cultural safety.

wrote in 1984 that *the bone people* had been ‘greeted ecstatically as the work of a Māori writer’ (44). But where Ihimaera was ushered into the literary moment of the 1970s as a guide to Māori culture, Hulme was posited differently. The key to this difference lies not only in the cultural forces that both Bruce Harding and Williams say informed the reception of her work (Harding 7) (Williams *Leaving the Highway* 84), but in her mixed heritage. Hulme is of both Māori and Pākehā descent. Where Ihimaera is posited as a guide to Māori culture, Hulme is much more clearly appropriated into white dominant culture as a part of itself, or, more specifically, as a part of who ‘we’ wish to be.

Several articles from this period suggest *the bone people* is the long-awaited ‘Great New Zealand Novel.’ Michael King uses this phrase in the first paragraph of his review (though he is not uncritical) (*The Original Mouthful* 20). A *Metro* reviewer in 1985 violently refutes this, claiming that ‘*the bone people* will only appeal to readers of ‘certain minority persuasions’ (*Bone to Pick* 102). Joy Cowley wrote an ecstatic piece in the *Listener* claiming that “We are all the bone people” (60). Above her review, an image of Hulme has the caption: ‘Keri Hulme – a foot planted in each culture’ (60). Common to all of these articles is a certain sense of charged urgency, a heightened need to discuss not just Hulme and her novel but to examine what her work means for ‘us’, and to claim her dual identity as ‘our’ own. King, writing in *New Outlook* in 1984, emphasises the importance of *the bone people* in re-imagining the nation. He draws attention to Hulme’s depiction of New Zealand: ‘Then there is the country that is and is not quite New Zealand – or rather, Aotearoa [...] the most commanding features in Kerewin, Joe, and in the land itself are Polynesian, are Māori’ (“The Original Mouthful” 41). It is these ‘features’, this ‘Māoriness’ that was received so eagerly by a white dominant culture ripe for re-imagining itself.

Hulme’s work is value for its ability to radically re-inscribe who ‘us’ is. In her *Listener* review of *the bone people*, Cowley writes:

‘Years ago, an enthusiastic Australian critic tried to tell me how he felt on first reading Patrick White’s *The Tree of Man*. “He gave us ourselves!” he exclaimed.

I now understand what he meant.

Keri Hulme has given us – us (60).



Similarly to Ihimaera's, Hulme's work becomes appropriated as cultural product, but, unlike Ihimaera's, Hulme's is adopted (by some) as the explicator of a new bicultural 'self.' Where Ihimaera acts as guide, Hulme is herself a bridge. The 'us' that Hulme has given 'us' is specifically culturally Māori<sup>70</sup>. Here, Hulme is not, like Ihimaera, a friendly guide to a minority culture. She is a crucial gift-bringer, an embodiment of biculturalism, through which, if received correctly, Pākehā guilt about colonisation can be assuaged. The dominant myth of national identity had moved on from a morally sound appreciation of and 'understanding' of 'the Māori world.' It seized on Hulme as an explicator of an elusive biculturalism. The narrative has shifted from 'we sympathise with Māori,' to 'we *are* Māori.' The 'we' here, though ethnically Pākehā, channels Hulme, adopting her Māori spiritualism, her placement here, and the binary-confounding figure of the author herself as a symbol of qualities they wished to assimilate into the whole.

But the response to Hulme's work in the 1980s is not always ecstatic. In a *Metro* review of *the bone people* in 1985 the reviewer wrote: 'Let's get it over with: it's been overrated' ("Bone to Pick" 102). The reviewer goes on: 'It is unlikely that many readers will find *The Bone People* [sic] helpful in their understanding of what it means to be a New Zealander' (italics added, 102). Here any value to be found in Hulme's work stems directly from its role as a cultural artefact, and the verdict is clear: this artefact is not 'useful'. *the bone people* is being evaluated not on its merits as literature but on its ability to explain 'ourselves' to 'ourselves'.

C.K Stead's article 'Keri Hulme's "The Bone People" [sic] and the Pegasus Award for Māori Literature' was prompted by Hulme's winning the award<sup>71</sup>. Stead questions what a 'Māori writer' is and challenges the validity of Hulme's self-identification as Māori (she is one-eighth)<sup>72</sup>. In 1989 Fee wrote an article in answer to Stead, arguing that his notions of authenticity were restrictive ("Why C.K. Stead Didn't Like Keri Hulme's *the bone people*: Who Can Write as Other?"). Fee disagrees with Stead's position on ethnic identity, and labels his article 'polemic'. Stead's views on Hulme are obviously influenced by his negative personal response to her work. He refuses to use Hulme's uncapitalised title and describes the book as 'badly edited' (101-102). He equates Hulme's main character, Kerewin, with

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<sup>70</sup> As it must be assumed that 'we' are already in possession of whiteness.

<sup>71</sup> And perhaps her subsequent book tour through the United States as 'cultural ambassador' for New Zealand.

<sup>72</sup> Such ideas hark back to dated notions of blood quantum, negating the importance of individual acculturation

Hulme herself, and suggests that Kerewin is ‘more Irish than Māori’. He describes sections of the novel as ‘unconvincing’ and ‘spurious’ (106-107).

Interestingly, while Fee argues against Stead in her article, she agrees that Hulme’s ‘acceptance as a Māori writer gives her considerable political and cultural power’ (Fee 12). But any wielding of power here is complicated by the exoticisation of Hulme as a figure, and the positioning of her work by dominant culture. Hulme wrote a novel that was quickly subsumed into the white whole, used as a band-aid for colonial fallout, and as decoration for a newly radicalised nation<sup>73</sup>. Having written her book, she gets no say in how it is positioned or received. While on the surface positive, reactions to *the bone people* centre on its value as cultural artefact, and on Hulme’s value as an addition to or illustration of the bicultural ‘self.’ In this context, Hulme only wields power because of her function in the white ‘self’: and such ‘power’ is granted conditionally. The ‘adoption’ of Hulme therefore becomes a further iteration of the dominance of the ‘self’ that by definition, is not Hulme. Fee is right in a way: Hulme may use fiction to represent her place in the world. But once *the bone people* is put to use in the service of a bicultural national identity, Hulme has no power at all.

Ironically, and though his challenging of Hulme’s heritage is crude in today’s environment, Stead highlights the issue of positive exoticisation discussed here. He says of *the bone people* that ‘So far, nothing I have seen written [about the book] could be described as critical’ (101). He was wrong – there are numerous articles from this period in which reviewers take issue with various aspects of Hulme’s work. But Stead raises valid concerns about tokenistic responses to Hulme as a Māori writer. ‘*The Bone People* [sic] touches a number of currently, or fashionably, sensitive nerves’ (102), he writes.

In his 1992 book, *Becoming Bicultural*, James E. Ritchie writes: ‘My world is divided not just into Māori and Pākehā but into those who think biculturally and those who do not’. Though he writes in the early 1990s, we see here evidence of what Hulme and her novel come to signify in the new national myth. For those ‘morally good’ white nationalists that recognise and seek to understand Māori, and who welcome biculturalism with open arms as a necessary shift, Hulme and her work are emblematic of a new and promising ‘self’. Hulme’s story can be appropriated into ‘our’ nationhood, a nationhood that ‘thinks

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<sup>73</sup> The ‘Māori renaissance’ and indigenous activism were in this period aligned directly with the Anti-Apartheid movement, which was aligned with the Women’s Movement, which was aligned with the Environmental movement. An appreciation of *the bone people* was an apt decoration for any leftist of the time.

biculturally': that is, that does not invisibilise the oppressed indigenous peoples. For Cowley, Hulme's value lies in her illustration of 'us' as being both Māori and Pākehā. And by displaying Hulme as one of 'us', the white 'we' may demonstrate our tolerance and understanding, and the extent to which 'we' 'think biculturally'.

In *The Program Era: Postwar fiction and the rise of creative writing*, Mark McGurl touches on the process of essentialisation, by which the ethnically 'other' author becomes representative of their culture. 'Indigenous or local cultural value is translated and distributed to a world readership – as for instance when Kerri Hulme's [sic] *the bone people* (1984) is taken up and appreciated around the world as the quintessence of Māori [...] culture' (329). Hulme's importance to the national myth of New Zealand identity lies in this relationship: not only does she explain 'ourselves' to 'ourselves,' she also transmits a distinctive, indigenous version of 'ourselves' to the world.

Graham Huggan describes the Booker Prize as a 'popular retailer of the postcolonial exotic' (*The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins* 412). He describes marginality as a commodity in postcolonial writing, a signifier available for commercial exploitation (413). After Hulme won the Booker Prize, her 'otherness' was an internationally recognised commodity and, at home, she was increasingly written about as 'our' award winning author. Post-Booker Prize win, she becomes more clearly exoticised. In his 1998 book on hybrid identities Chris Bongie says that the descriptions of Keri Hulme on successive paperback editions of *the bone people* betray a "revealing shift in which her European origins get erased," and she becomes "simply a 'Māori writer'" (417).

Huggan discusses the role of the Booker Prize in the 'fetishisation of cultural otherness'. He says that fetishising the 'other' through positive exoticisation 'risks merely reduplicating the authority of the assimilationist paradigms' (*The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins* 111). The positive exoticisation of Hulme by the white dominant mainstream media in New Zealand in the 1980s does just that. By welcoming Hulme as 'us' and simultaneously essentialising her as Māori in every article, the media appears to usher in the 'other' while reinforcing its own ability to define who 'we' are. By celebrating Hulme's Booker Prize win and claiming it as 'our' own, we are able to re-imagine New Zealand as a bicultural nation, a harmonious mix of indigenous peoples and the settlers who honour them. By appropriating *the bone people* as a cultural artefact and revelling in its display as a cultural achievement we reinforce restrictive binaries of 'self' and 'other'.

In his book on multiculturalism in Australia, Hage says that ‘cultural enrichment’ is one of the key themes of Australian multiculturalism (117). Though Aotearoa at the time was being re-defined as bi- and not multi-cultural, this idea is applicable to Hulme’s treatment in the media. Narratives about *the bone people* in the media demonstrate either an extraordinary eagerness to display Hulme as ‘one of us,’ and to claim her view of ‘our’ culture, mixed in its mythological and genetic origins, as what ‘we’ are, or a violent rejection of her work. Hage argues that a primary motivation in appropriating and displaying the culture of the ‘other’ is always control. Whether the exoticisation is positive or negative, dominant white discourses that display aspects of ‘other’ cultures both enrich themselves and re-enact their capacity to ‘manage’ cultural diversity. In praising Hulme for her Māori perspective and claiming her ‘Māoriness’ as who ‘we’ are, white dominant culture reinforces itself as the manager of the national space. Conversely, in rejecting claims that Hulme’s novel is “The Great New Zealand Novel,” and in disputing its validity *as a cultural artefact*, discourses about Hulme’s work again reduce *the bone people* to a commodity, significant only for its effectiveness in articulating the white national ‘self’.

Moving beyond the moral aspects of such a debate, where the ‘good’ postcolonial settler ‘loves’ *the bone people* and the ‘bad’ postcolonial settler rejects it, it is clear that Hulme’s novel is merely currency in an internal debate about what constitutes ‘us’. But readings of Stead’s take on Hulme are further complicated: he disputes *the bone people*’s usefulness and validity as cultural artefact, but also, he engages with the text, daring to debate its aesthetic and literary merits. In this way, Stead’s reaction is both reductive, and honest. Where Cowley’s positive welcome of Hulme is in essence a cultural reaction, Stead’s could almost be seen to be doing Hulme the favour of granting her his sustained attention. At least, he engages with *the bone people* as an aesthetic product.

Like Ihimaera, Hulme is exoticised and ‘othered’ by texts written about her in her early career. She is not normalised: she is always labelled. Her function within white discourses of bicultural nationalism though more complex than that of Ihimaera, is equally reductive. Where Ihimaera is othered as a guide to, Hulme is honoured as a mediator between, a figure capable of confusing existing binaries between Māori and Pākehā, and between gender roles and sexualities as well.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### COURTING THE EXOTIC: THE VALORISATION OF 'OTHERNESS' IN WHITE NARRATIVES OF MULTICULTURAL NATIONALISM

While Ihimaera and Hulme emerged into a context of white biculturalism, Pacific authors Karlo Mila and Tusiata Avia arrived into a cultural moment defined by a dominant narrative of white multiculturalism. In the 1980s recognition of Māori as tangata whenua and co-partners in the signing of the Tiriti o Waitangi facilitated the re-visioning of New Zealand as a bicultural nation. This act of re-visioning simultaneously assuaged white guilt about land theft and the historical oppression of Māori, while assimilating Māori culture into an idealised view of the national myth of identity. But from the 1990s onwards, this myth underwent further dramatic shifts: biculturalism, though still a dominant narrative in both policy and popular culture, was subsumed in favour of a 'more inclusive' multicultural pluralism.

Prior to the 1970s, governmental immigration policies relating to Pacific peoples were deliberately lax. Stephen Hoadley has noted that 'by generous immigration policies the metropolitan states granted easy access to their job markets'. The implicit purpose of such policies was to aid areas of the New Zealand workforce that required cheap labour, which could be provided by unskilled migrants at a low cost to employers. However, these policies underwent a series of changes in the 1970s. Anne Beaglehole writes that 'by the mid-1970s, demand for Pacific Island labour had diminished. The tolerance towards migrant workers on temporary permits from Western Samoa, Tonga and Fiji came to an end' (Beaglehole). The effects of such policy changes were immediate, and came in the form of 'dawn raids' on Pacific Island communities. The status of Pacific Island peoples in Aotearoa New Zealand shifted accordingly: where previously they were portrayed as labourers, they were now portrayed as illegal over-stayers.

In contrast, the 1990s saw what could be described as the reactionary celebration of Pacific culture by the white dominant mainstream. Despite awareness-raising activism by groups like the Polynesian Panthers in the 1970s and the presence of Samoan author Albert Wendt, it is only over the past twenty years that Pacific culture has become apparent in Aotearoa's literary scene. In 1997 Samoan author Sia Figiel won the Best First Book award in the South East Asia/South Pacific region of the Commonwealth Writers Prize. Figiel was subsequently included in university curricula focussing on Pacific literatures. This inclusion could be said to mark the start of a Pacific literary 'renaissance' in Aotearoa. It is important to qualify the use of this term. In Aotearoa, the use of the term 'renaissance' when applied to Māori or Pacific cultures describes a growing recognition of these cultures by mainstream white culture, rather than a genuine renaissance. Pacific Island groups in Aotearoa maintained strong cultural traditions prior to the 1970s: the label 'renaissance' marks the period when Pacific culture came to the attention of white dominant culture. Such a period is typified by the active promotion of that culture and the construction of 'Pasifika' as a commodity available for white appropriation and consumption.

Avia and Mila published their first books in 2004 and 2005 respectively. Similarly to Ihimaera and Hulme, their ethnic 'otherness' is almost always the main focus of articles about them and their work. As 'Pacific authors,' they are neatly slotted into a 'cultural' segment of the literary world in an act that augments and favourably modifies the Aotearoa New Zealand's national 'self'. Hage reads such demonstrations of 'good' white tolerance as a nationalist practice, similar to violent racist attempts to reclaim national space (77). Tolerance essentialises the ethnic 'other' and fits them into a hierarchy where the white nationalist remains the 'manager' of threatening ethnicities. Hage explains multicultural tolerance as a way of reproducing and disguising relationships of power in society – a form of 'symbolic violence in which a mode of domination is presented as a form of egalitarianism' (87). To understand the positioning of Mila and Avia, it is necessary to see it as a progression from the positioning of Ihimaera and Hulme. From a national myth that sought first to appreciate, and then to appropriate, Māori, came an opening out of national identity into something that on the surface, seems welcoming and egalitarian: a white discourse of multicultural nationalism.

In the articles about Mila and Avia, both authors are classified as 'other' very early on in the text. Such acts of classification both essentialise the authors and echo the colonial need to

collect and display indigenous artefacts. While Ihimaera is read as a guide to a crucial part of ‘our’ culture, and Hulme subsequently comes to symbolise an imaginary harmonious fusing of Māori and Pākehā within an important bicultural national myth, Mila and Avia are positioned as guides to culture that can be used to decorate and enrich the national ‘self’ – not a part of ‘us’, but as a part of ‘our’ display of multiculturalism.

When Mila and Avia began publishing work, their biographical notes in press releases from publishers state their ethnic heritages’ first. Mila and Avia are labelled by their ethnicity in the first paragraph of the text<sup>74</sup> 82% and 76% of the time respectively. Compared to Ihimaera and Hulme, who are labelled in the first paragraph 60% and 47% of the time respectively, the later authors appear to be labelled earlier in the text *more frequently*. Such early pointing out of ethnicity indicates publishers’ and journalists’ response to a shift in the literary market that occurred in the late 1990s and early 2000s, both locally and internationally. Ethnic ‘otherness’ had become a recognisable and marketable commodity.

The underlying narratives present in the media around both authors are those of celebration and inclusion, echoing narratives in early reviews of Ihimaera and Hulme’s work. However, where reception to both Māori authors is marked by emphasis on the importance of their work in term of what it means for ‘us’, response to Mila and Avia is notably more simplistic. Mila and Avia, we are told, should be celebrated because they are Pacific authors. Similarly to the media surrounding Ihimaera’s early work, however, there is a reluctance to volunteer negative responses. Also notably, Mila and Avia are the members of this study under-represented in literary journals. While Ihimaera’s early work is met with positive reviews and Hulme is the focus of much analysis, Mila and Avia are defined as separate, worthy of celebration, but not generally of sustained investigation<sup>75</sup>. Instead, both authors are enthusiastically welcomed into the mainstream by a media whose almost unreservedly positive depictions of their ‘Pacifness’ comes across as patronising and paternalistic. They exist in a Pasifika niche, serving a fantasy wherein the tolerant white national ‘self’ is ‘generous’ enough to display ‘othernesses’.

Though there are differences in the reception of Mila and Avia, several similarities in their receptions by the media can be noted. Both authors write about identities and the

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<sup>74</sup> While for the purposes of this study I counted mentions within the first paragraph, in most cases the ethnic label for both authors occurs in the first or second line.

<sup>75</sup> Again, this is true within the samples collected and analysed, gathered at the beginning of each authors’ career, within the stated limits.

intersections of Pacific and dominant culture, and both play on overturning stereotypes of the Pacific woman. Despite consciously addressing stereotypes in their work, both authors are often exoticised by the media as stereotypical ‘dusky maidens,’ portrayed as fertile, emotional, attractive, and sexual. If they themselves are not exoticised directly, the terms used to describe their work achieve this indirectly – the work is lush, alluring, rhythmic, sensual, provocative, Pacific flavoured. Though the impulses behind the stereotyping of Mila and Avia are positive, or, as Hage would say, ‘morally good’ (20) they re-inscribe traditional binaries that posit Pacific Island peoples as inferior to the white ‘self’ or centre.

Given the intersectionality of gender, class, and ethnicity, it is not surprising that ‘otherness’ of ethnicity translates here to ‘otherness’ of gender and class as well. Both authors are frequently labelled women writers, and both are in one or more articles identified as coming from their home city’s poorest suburbs. While Hulme to some extent escapes gender stereotypes and Kassabova is exoticised as foreign and European, it is Avia and Mila who are reduced to the ‘other’ in a most obvious display of traditional binarism. They are described as poor in opposition to the white middle class reader, darkly sexual in contrast to an assumedly reserved, sexually puritanical white ‘self’, and very often as female in a literary world that would like to consider itself gender-blind<sup>76</sup>. In this way representations of Mila and Avia in the media in Aotearoa fit the blueprint of an almost archetypal ‘other,’ one whom the white mainstream may actively uplift as a demonstration of tolerance and generosity. Of course, encoded in such generosity is the power to include or exclude, an act Hage calls the managing of the national space (49).

### **Karlo Mila: A ‘Pearl in the Rough’**

Writing around thirty years after the publication of Ihimaera’s first book, and twenty years after Hulme’s, it could be expected that as an ethnically ‘other’ writer Mila might be essentialised and exoticised less than these authors. However, she is identified by her ethnicity in 97% of media items about her and her work: only a 3% difference. 82% of the time, this occurs in the first paragraph of the item, and 18% in the rest of the text, making this clearly her primary identifier. Ethnicity is developed as a point of interest in the texts 67% of

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<sup>76</sup> Most articles about both authors are accompanied by a photograph, making the statement of gender extraneous, even if it was not clear from their names (which in Mila’s case it might not be). But the texts around Mila and Avia often go further, describing their work as exploring women’s themes or as ‘Women’s Writing.’ The same descriptions do not often occur in articles about Kassabova.



the time, and in 62% of articles her work is considered autobiographical. Mila is most often identified as a Tongan or Pacific writer, while other items describe her as Tongan-Palagi or Tongan-Palagi-Samoan. We learn first that she is a Pacific Islander, then that she writes about identity, belonging and migration. The media around Mila is overwhelmingly positive, parroting simple descriptions of her subject matter taken directly from her publisher's advertising material.

Mila's work is described in many items as lyrical, surging, incantory, emotive, lush, and 'Pacific flavoured'<sup>77</sup>. She herself is often described as a wife and mother, and 'Woman Writer', and her subject matter is often said to be about relationships, sex, love, and babies. Her work is promoted as being accessible. Like Kassabova and Avia, Mila herself is the focus of most of the media surveyed. Like Avia, throughout the course of her career Mila becomes more often referred to as a 'Pacific voice'. By 2008, three years after she published her first book, she is described as 'a powerful force in Pacific poetry,' (William Dart). It is interesting to unpack the possible subtext of a comment like Dart's: 'a powerful force in Pacific poetry,' is essentially empty praise, which neatly avoids endorsing the quality of her writing. Her power lies in her ability to represent a previously under-represented group, reducing her to a culturally significant addition to a multicultural literary self.

There are interesting parallels with Avia's treatment in the media coverage of both authors. Richard Mays names Mila's home suburb of Highbury in Palmerston North, pointing out its low socio-economic status. He espouses the need to celebrate Mila's achievements in the context of what he portrays as an unlikely setting for literary achievement. This echoes one journalist's description of Avia's home suburb as 'one of the poorest in Christchurch' (Siobhan Harvey 38). There is clearly a kind of missionary impulse at work behind comments like these. Where Māori authors Ihimaera and Hulme are celebrated for their ability to both transmit and embody important indigenous cultural capital, the valorisation of Mila is a more straightforward 'othering': a celebration of whiteness' civilising influence on the 'other'.

Mila is clearly essentialised in the articles studied, and descriptions of her and her work are often gendered. Apart from being identified by her ethnicity, Mila's next most common

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<sup>77</sup> As is noted in 'Considerations in Interpretation', the present day press seems to cherry-pick phrases from press releases and other articles.

identifier is that she is a wife and mother<sup>78</sup>. We are told by various reviewers that she contributes to ‘Women’s Writing’. Her work is described as personal, feisty, passionate, and strong on rhythm<sup>79</sup>. Images of Mila depict her against palm-tree like backdrops<sup>80</sup> (for example: Hannah Sperber 69). Aspects of her representation in the media echo the ‘dusky maiden’ stereotype very clearly. She is said to use lush Pacific images, Pan-Polynesian words, and surf the new wave of Pacific poets<sup>81</sup>. What we are presented with is an author who is first Tongan, secondly fertile and womanly, and thirdly, direct, accessible and emotional. Such qualities are easy to contextualise at the extreme end of the classic spectrum of ‘otherness’: where the ‘other’ is earthy, natural, identified with the land, and sexually uninhibited in contrast with the white ‘self’.

In her profile of Mila, ‘The Fine Art of Writing Poetry’, Wendy Shailer-Knight describes Mila’s work as ‘artistic, Pacific flavoured and alluring, crossing over art forms and cultures’ (19). Here Mila’s work functions, similarly to that of Ihimaera’s as a bridge between cultures over which, implicitly, the Pākehā reader can cross. The word ‘alluring,’ evokes the exotic unknown, which beckons to the Pākehā voyeur. Like Hulme, Mila is a transmitter and interpreter of culture. But unlike Ihimaera or Hulme, Mila is not in this article or any others described as ‘important’ – she is rather more simply othered as the ‘dusky maiden’ whose culture may pleasantly enrich ‘our’ own, but will not seriously inform it.

Along with this straightforward exoticisation in the material around Mila are subtexts recommending that ‘we’, the implicitly white, middle class reader, should celebrate her. Such narratives confirm white dominant culture’s position not only as centre but also as superior to Pacific culture. White-centric discourses that explicitly call for the celebration of the other imply that such ‘others’ are inferior by default, and in need of the validation of the white gaze. In ‘The Poet From Palmy,’ Richard Mays writes that ‘*Dream Fish Floating* is probably the only book of verse that contains a poem about Palmerston North’s ugly duckling suburb, Highbury.’ Highbury is then described as ‘hitting the headlines for all the wrong reasons’ (2).

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<sup>78</sup> She is currently, in 2013, Postdoctoral research Fellow at the University of Otago. In the sample period, she worked at a high level in Pacific health.

<sup>79</sup> The ‘strong on rhythm’ description finds its way into a surprising number of texts. It evokes the oral traditions reviewers might suppose she is influenced by.

<sup>80</sup> Interestingly, Mila herself is conscious of this. In an interview with Selina Tusitala Marsh she said of the book cover for *Dream Fish Floating*: ‘...when the time came for the cover design they just banged a whole lot of frangipani in there, as you would expect.’

<sup>81</sup> While of course both Mila and Avia’s poetry itself involves a sophisticated ‘claiming back’ of the ‘dusky maiden’ stereotype, images of Avia and Mila are not often accompanied by a similar sophistication in the text. They may be parodying mainstream depictions of their cultures as sexual or exotic, but the *Listener* or *The Herald* presents them straightforwardly as just that: sexual and exotic.

Highbury has a Māori population more than double that found in New Zealand generally, at 30.4 %, as well as a high percentage of Pacific Islanders, who represent 11.0 % ('Ethnic Groups in Highbury, 2006 Census'). At the time of writing, Highbury had been mentioned in several news articles relating to gang-related crime. That Mila's home suburb is so important to Mays demonstrates the enactment of intersectional stereotyping here: not only is Mila notable as a Pacific Islander, but she is from a poor, gang-riddled suburb as well.

Mays goes on: 'It's stunning the way [Mila's] verse is able to transform, elevate and create a new appraisal of the ordinary and everyday. That Highbury can stimulate, and be the subject of poetry, is cause for celebration' (2). Mays asserts that we should be interested in Mila's work because of its rare, gritty, urban subject matter. He assumes that people in Highbury are not the sort to write poetry, and, if they do, it certainly never ends up in a book of verse. Mila is the quintessential 'pearl in the rough' – and the rough here is unquestionably ethnic. That Mila's verse is described here as 'elevating' implies that her subject matter – an ethnically diverse suburb – must presumably be 'low'<sup>82</sup>. Mays sees poetry as belonging quite firmly in the domain of a more educated, middle to upper-class white elite. Mila's poetry, to Mays, takes the rough experience of her ethnic and socio-economic background and makes it palatable to white audiences.

It is important to decode what we are being asked to celebrate here. We are not being asked to read Mila because of the quality of her poetry, but because of her ethnic and socio-economic background. This narrative is reminiscent of earlier responses to Ihimaera which recommend his work be read as an educational tool. But as a Pacific Island author, Mila's function within dominant narratives of national identity is less complicated by colonial guilt. In Mays' article she has two clear functions: firstly, she exists as a translator of ethnic, working class experience for a white middle class elite. Secondly, by presenting her story as one of upward mobility, of a Cinderella-like class shift into an enlightened, tolerant literary world, Mays affirms binaries that position the white 'self' as civilized, educated, and literate. Mila is portrayed as someone from a disadvantaged background who has unexpectedly achieved in the literary field. In unpacking the nature of Mays' admiration, and stripping away the moral soundness of his impulse, we reveal an interesting narrative underlying much of the text around Mila: 'we' should celebrate her achievement against such odds, and welcome her to 'our' obviously superior, more civilised world.

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<sup>82</sup> It must be acknowledged here that it is common to speak of poetry generally as being transformative.

Mireille Rosello writes of the function of such rags-to-riches stories in white dominant culture. She describes reactions to the work of Elissa Rhais, a contestedly Algerian Muslim woman writing in 1919-1940:

By consuming not only the work but the myth of continuity between the work and the author's tale of exceptional achievement, the public appropriates her work as the result of their collective political enterprise: we read and self-promote by seeing in this book a reflection of our own collective success even if of course, as individuals, we have nothing to do with the colonial enterprise (Rosello 10).

By describing Mila as a poor Pacific Island writer who has unexpectedly emerged as a literary achiever, Mays re-inscribes old narratives that posit the 'native' as uneducated and the coloniser as the bringer of enlightenment in the form of education. The idea that Mila's poetry transforms and elevates the ethnically specific subject matter of her upbringing reinforces both the position and value of the colonial, civilising, 'uplifting' enterprise.

Another common aspect of Mila's representation in the media is an emphasis on her poetry as simple and accessible, and as being 'for people who don't usually read poetry'. Readings of this aspect are complicated by the poet herself describing her work in this way. Phillip Matthews relates her response to winning her Montana award for *Dream Fish Floating*: 'She didn't think that her poetry was the kind that Montana judges like – it's not clever, literary poetry, she says.' He adds: 'but it has a strong social sense, it's lyrical and accessible' (Matthews 4). Mays writes that Mila's readable, accessible report writing for her work is mirrored in her creative writing (2)<sup>83</sup>. Often Mila is asked to speak about her own work's positive reception – and she plays it down, like many young poets. Sperber of *North and*

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<sup>83</sup> This point illustrates what was a constant point of tension in this research. Mila promotes herself as a Pacific poet, and so is read as a Pacific poet, by a reading public wanting Pacific poets. Here, Mila drops a phrase reflecting what she thinks about her own work. Reading into her description of the writing she thinks the Montana judges like (clever, literary poetry) we see both a set of assumptions about the literary scene in Aotearoa and also very clearly the fact that Mila believes herself to reside outside of that scene. But whatever is behind Mila's description of her own work, this idea is picked up on by many of the texts studied here. I would argue that it suits the white dominant narrative to characterise her work as direct and unsophisticated.

*South* asserts that Mila's modesty is ethnically determined: '[Mila's] Tongan heritage has made itself felt, too, in her peculiar modesty towards her work' (67)<sup>84</sup>.

Like Avia, Mila was born in Aotearoa, and like Avia, Mila is half Palagi. But her track to literary success has been quite different. Writing roughly at the same time, Avia's path to publication was through comparatively mainstream routes: she completed a Master of Arts in Creative Writing at Victoria University and went on to publish with Victoria University Press. In contrast, Mila completed a poetry course with Albert Wendt at Auckland University in 2000 (Shailer-Knight 19). Her breakthrough poem was 'Eating Dark Chocolate and Watching Paul Holmes' Apology,' published in the *Listener* in 2003, which she wrote in reaction to news presenter Paul Holmes' comments about United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan. The poem was spread through viral means, sent by Albert Wendt through email networks, eventually being requested by the *Listener*. Wendt recommended her to Huia Publishers, publishers of Māori writing, who were planning to expand their scope by including Pacific Island authors (Sperber *In From the Cold* 67). In an article on Mila in 2005, Sperber wrote that Mila 'almost never submits poems for publication. Instead, she displays an uncanny knack for attracting discovery' (ibid.). In 2004, Huia Publishers received Creative New Zealand funding to help publish *Dream Fish Floating*, Mila's first book. Mila has said that Auckland University Press rejected her first collection (Matthews 4). Where Mila was initially rejected by the mainstream, she was actively sought out by a publisher who was specifically seeking a new Pacific Island author. The space prepared for the Pacific Island writer, then, resembles that prepared for the Māori writers in this study. Mila's earliest reviewers were indigenous and Pacific Island focused magazines like *Spasifik* and *Mana Magazine*. It wasn't until her Montana win in 2006 that she was authorised by the mainstream.

Early publishers and champions of Mila's work were functioning in the 'ethnic' margins of the white dominant literary scene. Despite her entry from the borders, once Mila won the Montana Best First Book of Poetry Award for *Dream Fish Floating* in 2006, a deluge of mainstream white dominant media reviews followed. Mila became visible to mainstream literary culture. But the validation and welcoming was qualified by her ethnic label. She was ushered in not as a writer but specifically as a Tongan-Samoan-Palagi writer, a new 'multicultural voice.' To quote the judges: 'With her roots in Pākehā New Zealand, Samoa

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<sup>84</sup> This is clearly essentialising, implying that all Tongan people as a whole are modest!

and Tonga, Karlo Mila writes with flair, energy and passion’ (Montana judges quoted in Phillip Matthews 4).

Also of note is the speed with which Mila is included in university and school curricula. In 2005 Mila’s work began to be taught at Victoria University of Wellington (Sperber 66). In an article in *Mai Review*, Selina Tusitala Marsh offers reasons why such a new author might be included in university curricula: ‘A complaint I often hear from teachers of Pacific literature concerns the lack of suitable teaching resources available...most of the materials that are readily available are now considerably dated; most materials on new works are too new to be well disseminated’ (Marsh 1). She goes on: ‘For newer material on more recent authors, the internet provides a number of engaging websites for students interested in specific authors or books. For example, Karlo Mila, award-winning Tongan poet, has a regular blog on the New Zealand Book Month site...’ (2). Recommendations that Mila’s work be included in the school curriculum also appear in a draft curriculum presented at the New Zealand Association for the Teaching of English conference in July 2009. Under the set theme ‘Alienation and Belonging’ Karlo Mila’s work is suggested as a course material (NZATE Conference Paper 2009). Mila, as a Pacific poet, ticks a box in educational curricula that aim to address disparities in representations of ethnic minorities in school and university texts. The effects of such inclusions are various<sup>85</sup>. Mark McGurl notes in *The Program Era* that ‘when a literary text gets canonized as a teaching text – its sales can increase dramatically’ (338).

Though Mila’s inclusion as a Pacific author has been positive, the impulses behind such reductive identifications when imposed by white-centric institutions are problematic. Drichel notes that ‘an emphasis on *collective* identity in the name of race, ethnicity or culture...all too readily leaves the other re-othered, battling anew with essentialising descriptions of their identities’ (594). In an interview with Tusitala Marsh, Mila herself speaks of her discomfort with possibly being seen to represent Tongans as a group:

*Tusitala Marsh:* Do you see this collection as ...being the speaking voice for a particular generation of Pacific Islanders in New Zealand?

*Mila:* ‘Probably one of many voices I suppose. And I’m always a bit nervous about being considered in any way a kind of “authentic Pacific

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<sup>85</sup> Pacific Island students get to study work they can relate to culturally, for example, and such inclusion target imbalances inherent in traditional English curriculum.

voice,”<sup>86</sup> or “Tongan woman experience” or “young woman experience”, because I’m really clear that my identity is quite complicated. And I’ve had quite an unorthodox, perhaps, upbringing, and I’m half, and just not that straightforward, and I would think that probably it would be doing a disservice to the Tongan community should some Palagi person read this and think ‘Oh, this is the Tongan experience,’ because it’s far from it: it’s my experience, and although it’s one voice, it’s certainly not *the* voice’ (Selina Tusitala Marsh and Karlo Mila, “Interview by Selina Tusitala Marsh”).

But the media items about Mila are consistent in their tendency to make her representative. She is often held up as an example of Pacific achievement: illustrating her importance not as an artist but as a representative of a minority group. In 2006 the Minister of Pacific Island Affairs, Luamanuvao Winnie Laban, issued a press release congratulating Mila on her win at the Montana awards. She ends her statement: ‘This award reminds us that we are all of the Pacific, and that our art and culture contribute to a strong assertion of New Zealand identity as a unique and creative Pacific nation’ (Laban, 2006). Mila’s importance here is twofold: one, in achieving mainstream success she has become visible to Pākehā culture, and therefore can be used as a role model for Pacific Islanders, and two, the award demonstrates the value of Pacific art and culture to the national myth of identity. It could not be clearer: Mila’s value resides in her ability to modify this myth with her presence.

Mila’s poetry is usually enthusiastically celebrated, but journalists do take issue with openly political aspects of her work. In the *Listener*, in one of the mere 3% of articles about Mila that are critical, David Eggleton<sup>87</sup>, writes that Mila’s book *Dream Fish Floating*, ‘reads like an exercise in comparative anthropology at times’ (1). He says that for Mila ‘life is a kind of identity parade’ (1) expressing perhaps a certain jadedness with being made to think about cultural identity. Another exception to the norm is Peter Dornauf’s scathing review of *A Well Written Body*. He describes this collection as ‘descending into literary banality and preachy cliché’ (E8). He goes on: ‘Some of these works, however, come across a little too didactic

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<sup>86</sup> Quotation marks here indicate that in the video recording of this interview, Mila indicates quotation marks with her fingers.

<sup>87</sup> Who is himself of New Zealand Pacific Island origins, but writing in a mainstream publication.

and message driven. Mila is best when she leaves the soapbox behind and relies on her clever images and turn of phrase' (E8). This reaction is reminiscent of Michael King's response to Ihimaera's *Whanau*. King castigates Ihimaera for what he reads as an overly didactic quality in his work (Rev. of *Whanau* by Witi Ihimaera 24). Similarly to Ihimaera, Mila is allowed by white dominant culture to act as an interpreter and guide, as long as she does not venture to express political viewpoints too strongly. Dornauf says that Mila is 'at her best when describing the direct impact of [...] experience on herself personally' (E8). This criticism also speaks also to gender stereotypes: better not meddle in politics, he implies, best just stick to the minutiae and detail of your personal emotional life. The message is clear: white dominant culture celebrates depictions of the experience of the ethnically 'other' author, as long as they are presented without political pressure.

These texts use Mila not only as a guide to culture but as a route to the ethnic diversification of the national myth. By adopting Mila and 'elevating' her from her position at the margins, 'we' are able to augment 'our' view of who 'we' are, as a unique Pacific nation. By displaying Mila's ethnicity 'we' demonstrate our tolerance of the 'other' while affirming the position of white centrality. But as soon as Mila, like Ihimaera before her, does more than provide the Pākehā reader with straight descriptions of the author's personal experience, she risks breaking the unspoken contract between Pākehā reader and 'other' writer. She may interpret, but only if she does not too strongly venture an opinion. Such trends in how Mila is represented reveal the extremely prescriptive, restrictive and essentialising nature of Aotearoa's media when writing the 'other'.

### **Tusiata Avia: From the Centre, Into the Margins**

Tusiata Avia published her first book of poetry in 2004. Like Mila, she was writing around thirty years after Ihimaera, and twenty years after Hulme. She is identified by her ethnicity in 74% of all articles about her and her work. Where she is identified as 'other,' this occurs 76% of the time in the first paragraph, and 24% in the rest of the article. Her 'otherness' is her primary identifier. In 39% of articles, ethnicity is developed as a point of interest, and in 24% of articles her work is considered to be autobiographical. Representations of Avia in the media items about her bear marked similarities to that around Mila. Like Mila, Avia is stereotyped as the 'dusky maiden' despite consciously addressing such stereotypes in her work. She is also sexualised, and often described in gender-specific language as a 'Woman



Writer'. Similarly to Mila, she does not escape class stereotyping. However, there is a marked difference in the statistics around both poets.

Like that about Mila, much of the media about Avia focuses on the author herself, rather than on the text she has produced. Also similarly to items about Mila, many of the items about Avia analysed repeats either publisher's material or phrases from other articles about the author. Her work is very often referred to as confrontational, political, sexy, marginal, and aggressive. The texts often emphasises the political, emotional and sexual themes in Avia's writing. While journalists and reviewers writing about Hulme and Ihimaera were essentially writing into uncharted territory, when Avia published her first book in 2002 Aotearoa's literary scene had been re-defined. A press release from Victoria University Press demonstrates an awareness of what would prove to be considered the most important details about her work: 'Tusiata Avia's first collection of poetry *Wild Dogs Under My Skirt* draws on two different cultures [...] These poems are both confrontational and entertaining, raw and lyrical [...] reshaping our language and our understanding of New Zealand culture' ('A Review Copy from Victoria University Press: *Wild Dogs under My Skirt*'). Like Ihimaera and Hulme, Avia is writing into a prepared space. Unlike Ihimaera and Hulme's publishers, publishers now are aware of the power of the ethnic label as a selling point.

There are other parallels between the positioning of Avia's work and the positioning of that surrounding Ihimaera and Hulme. In *Landfall* James McNaughton<sup>88</sup> wrote of Avia's first book that it was vital, 'probably life-changing for some young NZ/Samoan [sic] women and a gift of insight for many New Zealanders' (156). Here the importance of the work as culturally significant is emphasised. In a *Listener* article about Avia in 2004, Eggleton, fully cogniscent of postcolonial discourses, writes that that 'Samoa is the Other, [...] and Avia, moving between two cultures while only half belonging to each of them, is our guide' (44). We can infer from such articles that Avia is designated a kind of guide to culture, a necessary part of white liberal education.

That Avia is positioned as a guide to a culture portrayed as less civilised, less morally sound, and indisputably 'other' is obvious in many articles. In a press release from the *Couch*, the reviewer describes Avia's characters as a 'bizarre menagerie [...] drawn from the shadowy margins of Pacific Island society' ('NZ Theatre Company to Flood the Sydney Opera House'). But Avia's characters are not 'shadowy' – though they may be eccentric and

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<sup>88</sup> In a rare review about Avia that appears in a literary journal.

outspoken. What is implicitly described as shadowy here is Pacific Island society, marginal in itself.

Avia is often indirectly sexualised through descriptions of her work. In a 2006 review the title of her book, *Wild Dogs Under my Skirt*, is described as ‘violently sexual’ (‘Wild Dogs Under my Skirt – New One Woman Show’). In the *Listener* in 2009 Avia was dubbed ‘Goddess of Poetry,’ and writer Siobhan Harvey writes that Avia ‘breaks down taboos’ (38). She also takes care to mention that Avia was raised in ‘one of Christchurch’s poorest suburbs’ (38). Her description of Avia’s origins echoes Mays’ preoccupation with Mila’s Highbury origins (2). The narrative here is identical: a poor Pacific Island girl from a disadvantaged background achieves the outlandish accomplishment of writing a book. We are similarly advised to admire Avia: ‘Now this woman christened Donna and raised in Aranui, one of Christchurch’s poorest suburbs, is about to launch her second book of verse, *Bloodclot*.’ (38). As with Mays’ subtext, what is ‘remarkable’ is the transformation of Avia, a transformation effected by her unlikely passage from that world into this: the comparatively affluent world of literary visibility.

Though Avia’s ethnicity is still her primary identifier, the contrast to the Mila results is interesting. Both are young female Pacific poets writing in similar time frames and in similar subject areas – why the 23% difference in the frequency of labelling? The answer may be found in their differing paths to the mainstream. As previously mentioned, Avia came to the attention of the mainstream via the International Institute of Modern Letters at Victoria University. Her first book was subsequently published by Victoria University Press. Mila, in contrast, is published by Huia Publishers, a specifically Māori and Pacific Island publisher. The mainstream ‘discovers’ Mila at the Montana Book Awards in 2006, as a ‘multicultural, lyrical voice,’ a ‘Pacific poet’ – and this is how she will be represented from then on. But the ‘discovery,’ it must be pointed out, is not original – journals *Spasifik* and *Tu Mai* had already profiled Mila and reviewed her book. Victoria University Press, though small, is positioned firmly inside white literary culture. The differing positioning of the authors’ authorising bodies colours the writer’s reception in the mainstream media.

The two poets’ journeys to recognition could be described as the inverse of each other. Coming from the margins into the centre, Mila ends her journey occupying a space reserved for the other who is not ‘us’ but who we wish to display as a symbol of ‘our’ inclusiveness. Avia’s journey runs in opposition to Mila’s. At the publication of her first book, Avia was

quickly included as ‘us’. But as her career unfolds, media items about her demonstrate a more qualified inclusiveness. Avia becomes more often labelled by her ethnicity, from her earlier beginning as ‘a New Zealand poet’. Early in her career, Avia read at a high-profile poetry event associated with the IIML, where New Zealand poets performed with *Lord of the Rings* star Viggo Mortenson. In the (considerable) media surrounding this event, Avia’s name is listed alongside other New Zealand poets. No language is used to identify her as a Samoan poet here. Avia appears subsequently at many literary events and festivals that lump her in with other ‘local’ poets, so she is again implicitly defined as a New Zealand poet. Because of her involvement in mainstream literary events at the beginning of her career, she is more quickly included as one of ‘our’ poets in the media. In fact, she is identified as being associated with the IIML or with Bill Manhire 11% of the time in all the articles written about her.

Another factor that might influence the statistics is that Avia is a performance poet. Her first collection *Wild Dogs Under My Skirt* was produced as a play for an extended period of time. Where her name occurs in event listings, she is often described as a ‘performance poet’, with no exact reference to her ethnicity. While play listings have been excluded where shorter than three lines long, the high frequency of this kind of listing in the Avia material may skew statistics. Mila also comes from a performance poetry background, but she began her literary career reading with a very different group of poets. She appeared at many Pasifika-themed events, and, though clearly as active as Avia, is not subject to immediate inclusion in literary events that are considered of nationwide importance (for example: those including Hollywood stars). She is not described as a Kiwi poet or New Zealand poet or as a local – not until the mainstream’s ‘discovery’ of her work at the Montana Book Awards. It is at this point that Mila becomes one of ‘our’ most exciting emerging young writers.

While Mila’s is a journey from the margins to centre, we could read Avia’s trajectory as a journey from the centre out to the margins. Despite her open self-identification as Samoan from the beginning, she was not so frequently labelled as ‘other’ until a later stage of her career. As she gained more recognition she began to appear more often at Pasifika-themed events. By 2008, she appears, with Mila, at West Auckland literary festival *Going West Books and Writers Festival* as a Pasifika poet as part of ‘Polynation,’ a Pasifika performance group. Either Avia begins to gravitate strongly towards Pasifika-themed festivals – or it may be the case that, having gained visibility as a notable Pacific figure, Pacific-themed festival

organisers begin to gravitate towards her. Avia herself has described the publication of her first book as coinciding with the birth of a Pacific Arts ‘scene’ (Avia in Harvey, 40).

Hage writes that the focus of narratives of white multiculturalism in Australia is on what ‘multiculturalism can offer’ (117). Similarly, Aotearoa’s media may appropriate the ‘otherness’ of Pasifika festivals and artists to achieve what Hage terms ‘cultural enrichment’ through the commodification of the ‘other’ (117). An article about the Iva Pacific Arts Festival that Avia appeared in reads: ‘The festival is an excellent showcase of Pasifika music, entertainment, arts, crafts and food. Make sure you support it’ (‘The Bug is infectious’ E3)<sup>89</sup>. Echoes of the narrative underlying Ihimaera’s reception are evident here: the ‘morally sound’ white reader<sup>90</sup> should be sure to support the festival, just as the ‘sensitive’ Pākehā readers should read Ihimaera’s work to gain an understanding of ‘the Māori world.’ But in a newly diverse white multiculturalism, supporting such a ‘showcase’ of otherness, achieves other aims; also demonstrating tolerance and ‘enriching’ the ‘self’ with a consumable exotic ethnicity.

Just as the mainstream picks up on Mila’s description of her work as ‘direct’ and ‘for people who don’t like poetry’, one aspect of Avia’s work appears again and again in media items about her work. Parts of Avia’s subject material appeal to the mainstream’s beliefs about what constitutes Samoan culture. Several reviews of her work focus on her depiction of domestic violence. By celebrating ‘other’ narratives that confirm Samoan culture as barbaric, essentially violent, and oppressive, the liberal white reader affirms their own position as more civilised. Though Avia’s poems about abuse might be an important attempt not to simplify or idealise Pacific culture, and moreover, renditions of a real, valid experience, what is notable here is how often this subject matter is appropriated to serve to re-stereotype the ‘other’. In a review in 2006, the reviewer writes:

...not only does Avia direct shafts of caustic satire at the history of Palagi-Samoan contact, she’s also unsparing in her exposure of domestic abuse within Polynesian communities’ [...] ‘this collection reads like a Samoan *Once Were Warriors*’ ((‘Wild Dogs Under my Skirt – New One Woman Show’).

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<sup>89</sup> As this article is from a mainstream newspaper, it may be assumed the audience being urged to support the festival are predominantly white.

<sup>90</sup> Like Hage’s morally sound white nationalist (20)

John Smythe writes that *Wild Dogs Under My Skirt* (the play) ‘forcefully articulates the repression experienced by young Samoan women who must deal with an ever-expanding catalogue of prohibitions enforced with beatings’ (‘Poetry Emotion’ 2007). Such reductive statements about inherently oppressed Samoan women allow the white reader to strengthen their identification as generous sympathisers with the disadvantaged minorities. Just as Mays’ article about Mila cherry-picked her upbringing for evidence of poverty, media items about Avia’s work are all too quick to seize on her depiction of domestic violence.

Both Mila and Avia are posited as ‘third world interpreters,’ and this description is particularly appropriate when applied to Avia. Avia emerged from the authorising bodies of the IIML and VUP, to function as the translator of Pacific culture *for* a dominant mainstream. Just as Hulme becomes the conveyer of a special ‘Māoriness’ to the world (McGurl 329) Avia is a guide responsible for conveying a special Pacific culture to dominant culture. A *Dominion Post* article which mentions Avia’s appearance at a Pacific awards event in 2006: ‘Their work celebrates their heritage and last night six artists received recognition for taking their work to the world’ (‘Artists bring culture to the world’ (E2 5). In describing all the work of the six artists featured here as ‘celebrating their heritage,’ the media reduces these artists to one thing: guides to who exist *for* white audiences. Eggleton echoes this sentiment in his article ‘Five go Adventuring’. He says in Avia’s work, ‘a culture hitherto sidelined steps to centrestage’. He goes on to describe Avia as ‘our guide’ (44)<sup>91</sup>.

Similarly to Mila, Avia is presented as a guide to culture and similarly, this role comes with conditions attached. She is allowed, of course, to make jokes: in fact she is lauded for what we may dub a kind of ‘Billy T James’ quality<sup>92</sup>. She may make jokes at the expense of her own culture that no Pākehā would be safe making, and to some extent, she may make jokes also at the expense of dominant Pākehā culture. But often, she crosses the unseen line. In a 2006 review, a critic reacts negatively to the political content of Avia’s poetry, describing the poems as angry, disturbing, and bitter, in tone (‘Wild Dogs Under my Skirt – New One Woman Show’). Another takes issue with her trademark confrontational style of performance. The reviewer writes that ‘a good poet on the page has been known to murder

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<sup>91</sup> Though he has Pacific Island heritage, Eggleton’s work is included here as ‘mainstream’ because of its publication in *The New Zealand Listener*.

<sup>92</sup> Billy T James was the performance name of William Taitoko, a Māori television and radio comedian who was popular in New Zealand in the 1980s. Much of his humour violated what would now be termed political correctness. He used his status as Māori to poke fun at both Māori and Pākehā alike. Probably his most famous catchphrase parodied a bag advertisement of the time. In Billy’s version he says ‘Where did I get my bag? I pinched it.’ The humour lies in his ability to poke fun at ethnic stereotypes.

his or her own work on stage [...] If you heard Christchurch-born Tusiata Avia read her work at the Elma Turner Library a few years back, you'll know what I mean here' (*Rev. of Wild Dogs Under My Skirt* at the Maidment Theatre). Avia treads close to the line of what is acceptable to white audiences. But the white media's reactions to both Mila and Avia are double-edged: the white audience has a voyeuristic need to hear the 'other' talk back to the 'self', to raise issues of identity and cultural conflict. But, at the same time, when the 'other' is *too* political, the 'self' may grow offended. Peter Wells explains the fine line Avia walks on a poetry tour of the South Island:

Tusiata recites the subtle poison of a poem about Helen Clark's apology to the Samoan nation. She presages this with two comments. New Zealand police shooting into peaceful protesters during the Mau rebellion. And the decision to allow in a boat carrying the influenza epidemic, which led to a quarter of the population dying. Her challenge to "Helen" hangs in the air. There's a sense this could be offensive. Certainly it's dangerous. But the audience go with it. Glow with it. The evening is a success (Wells, 103).

Avia is valuable as a guide who will tell 'us' the truth about New Zealand's treatment of Pacific Islanders both within and outside of Aotearoa. The tension lies in how much guilt the Pākehā audience is willing to shoulder. In most cases in the texts analysed, white audiences have appropriated Avia's work into dominant white narratives of national identity easily and fluidly. Avia's work acts primary as a window to a culture clearly positioned as more savage, more shadowy and marginal, more sexual, and less civilised, than the culture of the 'self'. Her work is then regarded by the critics as a fitting adornment for the newly multi-cultural 'self' to display. But she sometimes walks dangerously close to the line for white audiences. In this way, she has a similar contract to that Ihimaera and Mila have with dominant culture – she is useful as long as she fulfils the purposes of that culture, and must not push too hard against it.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### ARE SOME 'OTHERS' SUPERIOR TO OTHER 'OTHERS'?

Four of the authors included in this survey are born in Aotearoa. But two, Kassabova and Fell, are not. Avia and Mila are both half Palagi, born here, and demonstrably exoticised by the New Zealand press. Similarly, Hulme and Ihimaera are also born here, and exoticised as Māori. Kassabova and Fell, however, are both recent migrants to Aotearoa. Kassabova arrived in 1992, and Fell in 1998. The nature of any exoticisation they experience at the hands of the media is influenced by radically different relationships between 'postcolonial' white dominant culture and the ethnic groups they belong to. Kassabova and Fell are both Pākehā, though it will be seen that Kassabova qualifies as an exotic, European 'other', while Fell does not.

Though Kassabova identifies herself as a happy cultural hybrid or mongrel ("Kapka Kassabova: bio"), she is most often identified in Aotearoa as a Bulgarian migrant. Fell is an English migrant with some Kiwi heritage – his grandfather was from Aotearoa (Sperber 7). In order to understand the positioning of these migrants within the white dominant media, it is important to note the differing immigration policies that influenced the present ethnic demographic of Aotearoa. Fell, as an English citizen, is part of the original colonial culture. When the Tiriti o Waitangi was signed by Māori tribes and the Queen of England in 1840 New Zealand was established as a British colony. Accordingly, from the early days of colonisation to 1974, British migrants were the subjects of New Zealand's most lenient immigration policies, with policy prior to this date aimed at encouraging British migration. Te Ara, the New Zealand Encyclopaedia, explains the effects of Norman Kirk's policy change in 1974: 'After the immigration policy review [...] British migrants, like all others, were required to obtain a permit before they left their homelands. The British and Irish were now on the same footing as the nationals of other countries (Ann Beaglehole 'Immigration Regulation: 1946–1985: Gradual Change')'. However, Beaglehole notes that despite this

policy change there was a difference between law and practice, and that British subjects continued to be favoured for many years to come (ibid.)<sup>93</sup>.

In contrast to the encouragement given British nationals, other groups were the focus of active discouragement. From 1881 the following ethnic groups were discouraged from emigrating: Chinese, Indian, Asian, Non-English speaking Europeans (such as Dalmatians, Italians and Greeks) Germans, and Austro-Hungarians (Beaglehole 'Immigration Regulation - 1914–1945: Restrictions on Non-British Immigration', 'Immigration Regulation: 1946–1985: Gradual Change'). In the 1970s and 1980s these restrictions began to be revised and replaced by merit-based policies that allowed migrants from previously discouraged groups in on the basis of education and assets. The legacy of such restrictive policies is reflected in Aotearoa's ethnic demographic today. In contrast to Australia's large Italian and Greek populations, for example, Italian and Greek communities in Aotearoa are proportionally smaller as a result of policies which allowed only refugees to emigrate. Bulgarian migrants fall into the same category. Fell, as an English migrant, fits into a pattern of easy immigration to Aotearoa marked by colonial domination by the British. Kassabova, in contrast, belongs to a relatively small minority of Pākehā migrants whose passage to Aotearoa was deliberately restricted, until very recently.

A comparative discussion of the extent to which Fell and Kassabova have been exoticised by the media must also extend to gender. Descriptions of Kassabova, who published her first book at twenty-two years-old, often point out her youth and beauty. In a media geared towards the superficial, an author's physical appearance plays an important role in the marketing and promotion of books. Media items about Kassabova are very often accompanied by an author portrait; similar material associated with Fell is not. Numerous feminists have argued that in the western media, youthful female beauty functions as a currency: images of women's bodies are exploited in the media. As a young woman, Kassabova is exoticised as 'other' more than Fell not only because of her ethnicity, but because of her age and gender, as Mila and Avia are similarly exoticised.

Unlike Mila and Avia, however, the migrant group that Kassabova belongs to has a different relationship to white culture in Aotearoa. Though relatively invisible, and with a history of

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<sup>93</sup> My own Greek family's migration was affected by such policies. In the 1950s Greeks were allowed in only as refugees. Australia had much more lenient rules for Greeks. The Greek population of Melbourne sits at around 152,000 now. The Greek population for the whole of New Zealand was estimated to be around 3000 in the 2006 census.



discrimination against them evidenced by past immigration policies, Bulgarians are not a historically oppressed minority within Aotearoa like Pacific Islanders or Māori. While the relationships between Māori and the Crown have historically been fraught and typified by violent injustice at the hands of the state, and those between Pacific Islanders and dominant culture have been marked by oppression, Aotearoa has no collective memory of oppressing Bulgarians as a group. The celebration of Māori and Pacific culture can often be read as an attempt to make reparations, with particular emphasis on obligations towards Māori as *tangata whenua*. It can also translate to generally uncritical, valorising reviews that steer clear of real engagement with the authors' work due to issues of cultural safety. In media items about Ihimaera, Hulme, Mila and Avia, their work is promoted as cultural product, useful in its ability to articulate and augment myths of national identity. While it will be seen that Kassabova's 'otherness' is similarly appropriated into the white 'self', what is missing is the narratives of elevation and self-conscious inclusion in the receptions of formerly (and currently) oppressed 'others'.

The reception of Kassabova, then, is different to that given Ihimaera, Mila, Avia and Hulme, in that subtexts in the material lack the same missionary impulses. She is clearly exoticised, but positioned as an exotic 'other' worthy of 'our' admiration. Similarly to these authors, though, her ethnic heritage is commodified and packaged for the consumption of the mainstream as a certain brand of postcolonial fiction. Hage argues that the discourse of white multiculturalism 'assigns to migrant cultures a different mode of existence to Anglo-Celtic culture. While the dominant White culture merely and unquestionably exists, migrant cultures exist *for* the latter. Their value [...] is their function as enriching cultures' (his emphasis 121). Narratives around Kassabova are free of the taint of obligatory white guilt, filled instead with portrayals of her specifically European literary sophistication. Where Māori authors are promoted as a necessary addition to 'our' literary scene, and Pacific Island authors are recommended as an exotic, but lesser adornment, Kassabova is considered not 'us', but *more than* 'us'.

Similarly to Kassabova, Fell is not the focus of narratives of celebration or elevation. Instead, he is the only writer featured in this study who is the focus of narratives of unmoderated inclusion and assimilation. Fell, as an English migrant, is very quickly adopted into 'our' literature, not as an 'other' or migrant, but as *a part of* the white dominant 'self'. Though he himself discusses his immigration to Aotearoa in interviews, and his status as an outsider,

interviewers frequently steer him away from such subjects, choosing instead to engage him on the themes or other literary or stylistic aspects of his work. This is because Fell's is the invisible ethnicity – the ethnicity of the white 'self'.

### **Kapka Kassabova: The 'Exotic Bird'**

Kassabova is described as Bulgarian, an immigrant, migrant, or émigré to Aotearoa 90% of the time in all articles about her work surveyed. 81% of the time, this occurs in the first paragraph, which means the introductory article includes the terms Bulgarian, immigrant, migrant, or a variation of this. 19% of the time she is identified as 'other' in the following paragraphs. This means her status as an immigrant to Aotearoa is clearly her primary identifier. Ethnicity is developed as a point of interest in 88% of all articles about Kassabova, and her writing is considered autobiographical in 88% of these as well. Her ethnicity according to the mainstream media would seem to be the most interesting and important trait she possesses as a writer.

Other identifiers attached to Kassabova are her gender, her youth, her beauty, and her association with the Master of Arts programme in Creative Writing at the IIML. She is described variously as bold, exciting, critically acclaimed, and very often, as a speaker of four languages. Interestingly, though she is very often called labelled Bulgarian in the texts studied here, Kassabova does not define herself simply as a Bulgarian. In a panel discussion on Migrant Literature at the London School of Economics and Political Science, Kassabova explained her own views on being identified as a migrant. 'Things were complicated for me by immigrating to New Zealand,' she said. 'I was known there as 'Bulgarian-born writer Kapka Kassabova'. [...] They are still too hung up on slightly passé notions like migrant this or migrant that' ("Roundtable on Migrant Literature").

Her early success was accompanied by the overwhelmingly positive response of the media, who seemed fascinated by Kassabova. In the *Sunday Star Times* in 1999 Guy Allen wrote 'There is something "poetic" just in the idea of Kapka Kassabova – the young woman from highly exotic Bulgaria' (F3). Tom Weston enthused: 'her husky and exotic accent sounds luxurious'<sup>94</sup> (15). *North and South* called her 'an exotic bird' in 1999 (Lauren Quaintance

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<sup>94</sup> When the author's country and accent are actually described as 'exotic', it seems a clear case of exoticisation.

86), and Matt Johnson said she looked and talked like the next Bond girl (A2). The media throughout this period is almost embarrassingly enamoured with Kassabova; more specifically, with her 'exotic-ness'. Though Kassabova qualifies as white or Pākehā, or perhaps because of this, she is the focus of extreme exoticisation. Bill Direen writes that Kassabova is 'a handsome woman of sophisticated European appearance' in an article titled 'Dignity of Desire'.

Another factor contributing to the Kassabova phenomenon is a general fascination with her skill in writing in English, her fourth language. Kim Worthington points out that:

As many commentators note, the fact that Kassabova writes so well in English is remarkable. [...] For a largely monolingual New Zealand audience, this is perhaps even more astounding than it might be for a European readership for whom fluency in several languages is the norm rather than the exception (Worthington 16).

Worthington pinpoints sentiments expressed in many articles. In an article in 1999 Ken Arvidson wrote that Kassabova is 'one of the most interesting writers to have appeared in this country in recent years' (5). He then attributes her 'legendary' presence in the literary scene to English being her fourth language. 'That she writes so well in a new language has about it something of the marvellous', he writes (ibid.).

When she published her first two books in quick succession, *All Roads Lead to the Sea* and *Dismemberment*, Kassabova was 22 and 23 respectively. Many critics not unreasonably seize on Kassabova as a literary prodigy. Worthington draws attention to this, saying that almost all the material she has read about Kassabova notes that she is 'beautiful, she is young, and she is a Bulgarian immigrant to New Zealand' (15). Worthington sees this focus on Kassabova's youth and beauty, rightly, as sexist. 'Can you imagine the work of a male poet being introduced by a description of his appearance?' (16). It is clear that, like Mila and Avia after her, Kassabova is gendered and sexualised in addition to being ethnically othered.

One last factor contributing to Kassabova being read as exotic is her exile from a war-torn country. While Mila and Avia are exoticised as symbolic of the lush Pacific with its islands, mangos, foliage and 'dusky maidens', Kassabova symbolises something else: the deeply fraught history of Europe. Some journalists seem to find this aspect of Kassabova almost unbearably exciting. She is described variously as an exile, sometimes as a refugee, often as

an émigré. Luke Strongman in *Poetry NZ* compares her to Salman Rushdie and Michael Ondaatje, in her displacement (73). He also describes her as having a ‘romantic immigrant perspective’ (72). Weston describes the effects of what had become the Kassabova phenomenon: ‘Indeed, she is hard to miss. The Press has done a feature. So has *North and South*. Established poets like Kevin Ireland gush. Awards committees go weak at the knees’ (11).

In response to the exoticisation of Kassabova, parts of the media became self-conscious about how Kassabova was being written about. In the *Pander*, Richard Taylor notes the eagerness with which Kassabova had been hailed by the literary establishment, and co-author Hamish Dewe adds that this reception says a lot about ‘the way we construct our own national identity in relation to our conception of the Other’ (Taylor and Dewe 42). But there is, as with the other authors, a major complicating issue here. Kassabova is labelled an exile, placeless, dislocated, not only because of where she is from but also because her work discusses exile, placelessness, and dislocation. How could journalists fail to write about what Kassabova writes about? Kassabova is labelled an exile but is also self-described as one, and the predominant themes in her work are those of cultural conflict. Similarly, Avia and Mila are continuously described as writing about the intersections of culture – because they both write about these topics. How then can critics write about any of these authors without mentioning their ethnic background, without stating explicitly where they are from?

Worthington, writing further on the mainstream’s obsession with Kassabova as a second language speaker, asks:

Why is this relevant to the writing? It could be argued that in the free-verse Kassabova favours it is the music of the language and the resonances of imagery that are paramount: slippages in dissonances in phrases... (16).

She concedes that in an analysis of Kassabova’s work, mention of her other linguistic origins are important (ibid.). In *New Zealand Books*, Jane Stafford wrestles with a similar issue. Raising issues of authenticity and ethnicity, Stafford writes:

What about ethnicity? Is the ethnic origin of the author a pertinent factor in a critic’s evaluation? If so, doesn’t this mean that it’s proper to make a link between author and work? [...] On the back of *All Roads Lead to the Sea*, Kassabova is described as a “young Bulgarian immigrant poet” and, despite

strictures to the contrary, all three of the biographical adjectives seem a necessary way into her work. [...] That she is Bulgarian and an immigrant provides the subject matter and tone of much of the collection (5).

Both Stafford and Worthington investigate the difficulty of separating the author from their subject, the 'exotic' material from the exoticised. Mark Pirie also takes up the subject of Kassabova's exoticisation in *JAAM: Just Another Art Movement*, suggesting that 'these blatant acts of labelling are probably very offensive to the poet' (83). He writes:

Although the poetry in this young poet's book is admirable, the publisher's bio note on the back cover is somewhat irritating. It states: 'This is a first collection of poems by a young Bulgarian immigrant poet whose work has already attracted attention and admiration.' This remark which labels the poet as an 'immigrant poet' seems to me to be irrelevant. I mean, does it matter? (83)

None of the media articles surrounding Mila and Avia asks these questions about exoticisation and authenticity<sup>95</sup>. Eggleton drops familiar postcolonial terms into his reading of Avia's work in the *Listener*, but aside from this demonstration, the texts about them and their work are remarkably free of such analysis. But the media items surrounding Kassabova does ask these questions, repeatedly. Aotearoa's media is content to take Avia and Mila at face value as Samoan and Tongan New Zealand authors. Language surrounding them and their work is consistently reductive and simplistic. But no one queries the frequent labelling or the exoticisation they are subject to.

Aside from positive reviews from most sources, Kassabova's work has also been harshly critiqued. Alongside descriptions of her work as real, thought-provoking, and compelling, are less flattering terms: clumsy, melodramatic, self-absorbed. Similarly to Hulme, Kassabova seems to inspire either great admiration or equally great dislike. Though reviewers rarely take issue with Ihimaera, Mila, and Avia's work, when they do, criticisms often target a detected note of political didacticism not favoured by the white 'self'. But when Kassabova is critiqued, she is given the full treatment: her work is criticised across the board on its stylistic, literary, and aesthetic merits, without the anxiety that tempers the responses to the other authors.

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<sup>95</sup> In the sample texts studied here. There is some analysis about Mila in non-mainstream texts.

Most literary reviews are characterised by a sustained attention to a work's language, construction, and themes. Journalists and critics writing about Mila and Avia quote their work, describe their performance and highlight the importance of their subject matter – but very few engage with their texts in the tradition of literary criticism. Here is another crucial difference in the receptions of Kassabova, Mila and Avia: Kassabova received, on the publication of her first two collections, an astounding amount of and depth of literary attention. This includes some negative and mostly positive reviews. But apart from two writers who take issue with small aspects of Mila's work, and two who describe Avia's reading style as aggressive, no one criticises their work at all. Reviews are overwhelmingly positive in regards to both collections from both authors. They are also predominantly from the popular mainstream, and not the literary media.

The key to understanding the differences in the reception of Kassabova's lies in her status as a *European* 'other'. Kassabova is exotic, but also Pākehā. It is safe to critique her. White dominant journalists writing about Kassabova stand on a platform of cultural safety that they do not feel they stand on with Mila, Avia, Hulme, and Ihimaera. Consequently, Kassabova receives genuine attention and sustained, attentive reviews, while reviews of Mila and Avia's work are shorter, more simplistic, and hardly ever published in literary journals.

Critics who enquire into the way that Kassabova's work has been written about are taking part in the creation of a larger discourse about how Kassabova's, or any ethnically 'other' author's work is being read. These voices are certainly in the minority even amidst reviews of Kassabova's work, which tend to be more literary in nature, but they are there. Critics and reviewers have described Avia and Mila's subject matter as being concerned with representation, ethnicity, identity and culture, but not one of them<sup>96</sup> has critically engaged with these issues themselves in their writing apart from brief, token acknowledgements of theme. No one submits the 'othering' in the media around Mila and Avia to the same scrutiny<sup>97</sup>. No one thinks it offensive, or reductive, or simplistic that they are so straightforwardly labelled 'other'.

Literary discourses about Kassabova also engage critically with what her presence means in relation to 'our' national myth of identity. Reviews of Kassabova's work are often tempered

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<sup>96</sup> In the samples studied.

<sup>97</sup> Though the same observation may be made of the texts around Hulme and Ihimaera, the dates of their receptions must be accounted for here: postcolonial discourses had not yet developed to the extent they have now.

by a kind of awed admiration of her European origins, and an evocation of European literatures as a wider context for her work. Direen describes Kassabova as ‘the well-educated daughter of successful academics’. He goes on to describe her ‘approach to poetry (as) European, not at all Anglo-Celt’. He ends ‘Dare I say it?... a welcome offshore breeze!’ (45). In this way the media regard her as not ‘us’ but *more than* ‘us’. Strongman writes that she ‘brings to her adopted homeland a refreshingly European voice’ (72). Hage’s ideas about cultural enrichment apply here. Arvidson writes emotively that ‘we are indeed lucky that her family chose to come to this country from Bulgaria. New Zealand literature is the *richer* for her presence (emphasis added 5).

Strongman has a similar view of Kassabova as enricher and gifter of culture in his *Poetry NZ* review. He emphasises the relevance of her work in redefining ‘our’ national myth of identity as a multiculturally diverse melting pot. He says explicitly that Kassabova, as an ethnically ‘other’ writer, should be included in a central literature that will benefit from celebrating diversity:

At a point in time in which New Zealand literature can increasingly celebrate the diversity of influences at work among its writers, Kassabova seemingly occupies the privileged position of reflecting that diversity [...] While invoking not so much a tradition as a ‘vein’ of writers giving voice to themes of exile [...] Kassabova seems convincingly committed to a cosmopolitan Pacific vision unique among young New Zealand writers [...] her exploration of a hybrid Pacific mythology is a resolutely contemporary one’ (72).

Kassabova is important then because firstly, she enriches national literature with her foreignness, and secondly, she provides contemporarily important reflections of national identity myth that is concerned with updating its image. Her value as an ethnically ‘other’ writer is lies in her ability to enrich current narratives of identity. Unlike Ihimaera and Hulme, we do not *need* to subsume her narratives into our own to right some historic wrong; ‘we’ may consume her exotic worldliness at ‘our’ leisure, absorbing what it has to say about our special, Pacific bi/multicultural ‘selves’. However, she is also in possession of an ‘otherness’ ‘we’ would like to display, in the hopes of adding a certain sophistication to ‘our’ identity.

Discourses in the literary media pick up on this quality of admiration in the praise for Kassabova. In *The Pander*, three writers attempt to decode reactions to Kassabova and within Aotearoa's myth of national identity. Dewe argues that Kassabova 'has become shorthand for a contemporary exotic [...] and for a history which we (and she) clearly feel the lack of' (42). He continues:

These sentiments play straight into a revival of the Nationalist literature of the 1940s and plainly state what our reviews only imply: that we are cut off from the main stream of literature, a backwater, isolated, lacking in history, exiles. This may seem an odd position at a time when references to 'Home' are thinning fast. But national myths rely on sentiment, not fact, and the exile's position is clearly present in statements which play on Kassabova's role as culture-bringer in the form of 'a welcome offshore breeze,' the bearer of an entire 'seam of European/Slavonic poetry, tragic, comic, metaphysical' (as if such writing has not existed here until her arrival), filling 'lacunae in our sensibility' (42).

Dewe asserts that underlying narratives in texts about Kassabova reveal a sense of needy centrelessness or alienation that the national 'we' would like to think it left behind. But trading a preoccupation with England as "home" for a more localised 'self', a 'self' theoretically more indigenous, more multicultural, has not resulted in a 'self' that is more secure. Aotearoa's journalists and reviewers are impressed by Kassabova, her education, her multi-lingual prowess, her *European-ness*. She is not just exotic; she is more cultured, more literary, more accomplished. Aotearoa's white dominant media culture looks *up* to Kassabova as a sort of ambassador descended from the romantic, intellectual, existential schools of poetry to impart knowledge and culture to 'us'. The missionary impulses evident in reviews of Mila and Avia's work are wholly absent here, as are narratives promoting the work of Māori authors as important and necessary.

The remarkable exoticisation of Kassabova is characterised by an admiration that has its roots in an insecure national myth of identity. The admiration in the present day media's reaction to Kassabova stems from the same sense of centrelessness and lack that underpinned the national myth in the 1940s. A New Zealand literature that struggled to assert its independence from England then was vulnerable to the idea that the centre was ever elsewhere. In the 1980s, white dominant culture attempted to fill this gap in a cohesive New



Zealand identity with Māori culture, and, as Aotearoa redefined itself as multicultural, with other cultures as well. Within the current myth of multicultural diversity lies the still present urge to appropriate the ‘other’ as an enriching, culture-bringing force, an anxiety Dewe suggests has its beginnings in ‘our’ settler past.

### **Cliff Fell: The Invisible Migrant**

Like Kassabova, Fell is a relatively recent migrant to Aotearoa, moving here in 1998 at the age of forty three. Unlike Ihimaera, Hulme, Mila, Avia and Kassabova, he is not primarily identified by his ethnicity in media items about him or his work. He is identified as a migrant to New Zealand, or English-born, only 24% of the time. Compared to the other authors, who are identified by their ethnicity between 74% and 100% of the time, Fell is an anomaly. In articles where he is identified by his ethnicity, this occurs 81% of the time later in the article as opposed to in the first paragraph. Most of the other authors are mostly identified as ‘other’ in paragraph one of all items written about them and their work, with the exception of Hulme. This later placement of the ethnic identifier is part of a trend wherein Fell’s ethnicity, when mentioned, is regarded as being of secondary importance, whereas the ethnicity of the other authors is regarded as being of primary importance.

Even more remarkable than the statistics that indicate he is labelled according to his identity less often than the other authors is the fact that Fell’s English identity undergoes a swift and dramatic re-visioning within five years of publishing his first book. In this period Fell begins to be described not only as a poet or writer with no ethnic label attached but *as a New Zealand writer*. That is, he becomes described as a New Zealand writer in what amounts to 62% of all media items about him and his work within the period studied. Fell is, furthermore, not sexualised, not the subject of gender-specific language, and not exoticised as ‘other’ in any of the material surrounding him. He is not the focus of narratives of active celebration, or the focus of class-based descriptions of his childhood, like Avia and Mila. He is not the recipient of a loaded admiration that has its roots in cultural cringe, like that accorded Kassabova. He is not discernibly ‘othered’ at all. Rather, he is assimilated into white dominant literary culture, starting out occasionally labelled English but ending up the quintessential ‘Man Alone’ figure, identified with the New Zealand landscape, wholly naturalised. This is because Fell comes from “home”, from the original colonising culture.

Writing in a supposedly ‘multicultural’ present moment, Fell’s ethnicity is invisible because it is that not only of the past, but of the *current* ‘self.’

The closest parallel to Fell in the authors surveyed is Kassabova. Fell came to Aotearoa when he was forty three, Kassabova when she was seventeen. But despite arriving later in life than Kassabova, at a time when it might be assumed his identity was more fixed, Fell quickly loses his migrant label. Unlike Ihimaera, Hulme, Avia and Mila, Fell was not born here, but it seems very few reviewers want to discuss his heritage at length: in only 11% of total articles is his ethnicity developed as a point of interest. Fell often offers up his migrant background to interviewers, and repeatedly states that his work is autobiographical, but only 18% of journalists and critics make this point in all media items from this period. Most remarkably, Fell is named in 60% of articles as a local poet.

Fell is hardly ever identified as an English migrant, Englishman or foreigner, compared to Kassabova’s identification as Bulgarian or ‘other’ in 90% of articles. But the press release for Fell’s first book, *The Adulterer’s Bible*, by Victoria University Press’ in 2003, describes Fell as: ‘An English-born New Zealander who farms in the Moutere with his family and teaches in Nelson’ (“New Title Information from Victoria University Press: The Adulterer’s Bible, Cliff Fell”). Very few reviews subsequently pick up on Fell’s self-identification here as an ‘English-born New Zealander.’ By 2008, when his second collection, *Beauty of the Badlands*, was launched, the ethnic description had dropped off the author biography. His English heritage and recent migration are mentioned nowhere on the page-long press release.

Instead, *Beauty of the Badlands* is said to *confirm* ‘Cliff Fell’s place as a compelling and distinctive voice in New Zealand poetry’ (“New Title from Victoria University Press: *Beauty of the Badlands*, Cliff Fell”). Fell’s ethnicity, ten years from his migration, has become invisible. In contrast, Kassabova, eight years after her arrival, is still labelled a migrant, Bulgarian or ‘other’ 90% of the time. But beyond merely having his ethnicity ‘disappeared,’ Fell is actively adopted, assimilated and localised as ‘us’. Detectable even in the short snippet above from Victoria University Press is the subtle narrative of Fell’s naturalisation: Fell is not confirmed as a good poet; he is *confirmed to have a place* in New Zealand poetry. Here the confirmation of Fell’s place is a symbolic iteration of the colonial claiming of land: for if Fell has a place here, and Fell is ‘us’, then so do we.

A complicating factor in tracing the transformation of Fell from English migrant writing in New Zealand to New Zealand poet is Fell's proud self-identification as Kiwi. Fell's grandfather was a New Zealander who immigrated to England and then moved back later in life, and his father, though raised in England, was born here. Though himself born in England, Fell has said that coming to New Zealand has made him feel like 'a whole person,' and that it has been a rediscovery of his grandfather's culture (Sperber 7). When he came to Aotearoa, Fell invented a writer alter-ego for himself, changing his name. His personal transformation from Englishman into New Zealander paralleled his own re-identification. Sperber writes that 'The last decade has seen Fell reinventing himself as he has discovered and embraced New Zealand' (7). She goes on to say that when he came here, Fell 'began to work on his New Zealand incarnation' (8). What is interesting is that Fell is allowed his reinvention as a Kiwi by a dominant myth of national identity whose boundaries are permeable for English migrants. If Kassabova had similarly decided to reinvent herself as a Kiwi local, it would not have worked: the media would have persisted in 'othering' her. So Fell's ability to shift from English to Kiwi is a privilege, granted him because of the relative invisibility of his ethnicity. Sperber ends the article with a quote from Fell: 'I'm just really happy to be a New Zealand poet' (8).

Williams and Stafford make the point in *Maoriland: New Zealand Literature* that 'Empire building and learning to love the new place are coterminous' (115). Learning to love the new land implies, they say, no severance with Empire (ibid.). Just as earlier colonials could be both English *and* Kiwi, enabled by the Empire that made them the determinant of their identities, so Fell may choose Kiwidom. In a wilful act of forgetting, Fell throws off the English mantle in favour of a self 'more rooted' in the new land. But Fell is here because of Empire and enabled by narratives that still normalise the English migrant and exoticise the original inhabitants. He is *allowed* both to transform into Kiwi and to claim a place, allowed by dominant culture. Angela Moriarty writes that Fell's second collection, *Beauty of the Badlands*, 'will begin where the previous collection ended, at the Orinoco farm he shares with Pamela Coleman, the place he now calls home' ('The Rise of Fell'). She quotes him:

I think having done the book here has really located me here in New Zealand. It's really made me see myself as a New Zealand writer, maybe not in other people's terms, but in my own terms. That's something I feel very happy with (ibid.).

Interestingly, it seems that ‘other people’, that is, the writers of the media items surveyed here, see Fell as a New Zealand writer too. Fell’s feelings and personal beliefs about his change in identity are, of course, valid. How Fell feels about his identity influences his decision to describe himself in a certain way to interviewers. But however Fell chooses to portray himself or not, he is not solely in control of how he is received. The favourable reception of Fell *as one of ‘us’* confirms to what extent his ‘otherness’ is invisibilised. Fell’s transformation into a New Zealander is made possible by dominant narratives that count English culture as ‘our’ culture. His easy assimilation is enabled by white dominant narratives that continue to place England at the ‘centre’.

There is a great deal of material that supports the idea that Fell, as an English migrant, is swiftly localised and assimilated. Fell is described as a Ngatimoti/Nelson/Motueka or Orinico poet in all the articles about him and his work 48% of the time. He is described as a Kiwi or New Zealand poet 6% of the time, and as a local 8% of the time in all articles. This means that in 62% of articles, Fell is clearly localised, often linked to a specific place<sup>98</sup>. Fell himself describes this process as a ‘shedding’ his Englishness (Moriarty “The Rise of Fell.”).

Narratives around Fell often focus on his transplantation to New Zealand soil, claiming emphatically that he is now ‘us’. Such emphases are achieved through the use of adjective and adverbs. In 2006 in the *Nelson Mail* we read that ‘English-born Cliff Fell is now *firmly* established in Nelson (‘A Convergence of Poets’ 14). Later in the same article, we are told that Fell is ‘working on a collection of poetry *very much* based in New Zealand and specifically in Nelson in terms of culture, history, and imaginative landscape’ (14). Fell’s work is not only based in New Zealand but *very much* based here. Another journalist, Geoff Collett, also uses an adjective to convey the validity of Fell’s naturalisation: ‘[Fell] is a transplanted Englishman, now *firmly* of this place, living with his partner on a farmlet in the Moutere hills’ (17). Fell is not just ‘us’; he is *very much* ‘us’, he is *firmly* ‘us.’ Detectable here is a kind of subtextual defensiveness. For by permitting Fell to enter so smoothly into ‘our’ concept of ‘our’ national ‘self’, ‘we’ re-assert the notion that British migrants are still

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<sup>98</sup> One possible reason for such skewing of statistics is regional competitiveness. The *Nelson Mail* has generated a lot of press on Fell. This regional newspaper likes to claim Fell as one of ‘our’ successful, award-winning poets in its arts pages. But even though this may be a factor in the frequency with which Fell becomes labelled a ‘Nelson’ poet, other newspapers, such as the *Dominion Post*, take up this description as well.

closest to the real national ‘self’. And in asserting that the culture of the coloniser is still the centre, and that migrants from this culture are so similar to ‘us’ that they may quickly, *firmly, very much* belong here, ‘we’ attempt to mask any anxiety in white dominant culture about ‘our’ right to be here. Of course Fell belongs here! So, implicitly, do ‘we’.

Narratives of identity that easily include Fell are often evident in what is *not said* as opposed to what is. Often Fell is included in ‘our’ literary scene without the description of ethnic ‘otherness’ that would usually accompany the other authors included in this review. Sperber, in an interview in *North and South*, says that Fell has ‘very quickly been identified as one of New Zealand’s most exciting emerging poets’ (70). Here what is notable is the lack of identification that would have qualified the other authors in this study. The other authors, four of whom were born here, would be labelled by their ethnicity, usually in the first paragraph of the text. In an article entitled ‘Exchanging Views Across Cultures’ in 2007, a project by Fell and another artist is described. But any culture crossing is about Fell and co-artists Kate Walker’s view of the culture of the United States, from a Kiwi viewpoint. There is no mention of Fell as an immigrant here; instead, we are invited to look with him through newly Kiwi eyes as he sees the United States as ‘other.’

In ‘Theme and Variation,’ a review by Claire Hero in *Landfall*, Hero engages deeply with Fell’s work on a thematic and semantic level, without ever mentioning his ethnicity. This review is of *The Adulterer’s Bible*, Fell’s first book, which was written six years after Fell emigrated. The gaps are telling. Also, Hero is critical of Fell’s work: she described the collection as compelling, yet uneven (201, 202). Similarly, David Beach’s review of the same book in *Poetry NZ* also declines to mention Fell’s heritage. Instead, the book is similarly praised, and the reviewer engages with the themes of the work, before embarking on some criticism: ‘But while there is flair at the level of individual lines and images, and the integrity of the book as a whole, if the unit taken is the poem, there isn’t quite the level of accomplishment’ (106). Here, two things are evident: one, Fell is included implicitly in ‘New Zealand literature,’ by virtue of not being labelled a migrant in any way, and two, he is the recipient of literary criticism unmoderated by the strictures of cultural tension and safety. For a critic to say similar things about the work of Mila and Avia is unheard of: there are simply no similar examples in the literature. Kassabova, however, receives some negative reviews, as she is both exoticised and admired. However, Kassabova ethnicity is discussed in 90% of articles, and Fell’s in only 24%.

Where Fell's recent migration is mentioned, it is very often mentioned *later in the article*. This distinction in placement of ethnic identifier is of crucial importance. Where Fell is 'othered', his ethnicity is relatively unimportant. When compared to Mila and Kassabova, who are othered *in the first paragraph* of all texts about them and their work 82% and 81% respectively, the contrast is clear. Fell's ethnicity is only mentioned in the first paragraph 18% of the time, when he is 'othered' at all. Examples of this can be found in the material that does mention his English heritage: in 'A Convergence of Poets' we are told that Fell is 'English-born' half way through the article (14). Anne-Marie Johnson writes in the *Nelson Mail* that Fell has received the Adam Prize, and that he lives on a farm and works in Nelson. She goes on to add at the *end* of the article that 'Mr Fell arrived in New Zealand only five years ago' ('First poet to win big Vic prize'). Again, his London background is essentially an afterthought.

A large part of Fell's localisation and naturalisation is strangely literal: he is identified with the land. In a review of *The Adulterer's Bible* in *New Zealand Books*, John Horrocks writes the following:

Though born and raised in England, Fell demonstrates in 'Alive' that this does not disqualify him from writing about New Zealand. Anyone who has been a hill country farmer will recognise the solitary exhilaration of following a fenceline and turning to see the valley below...' (16).

Though from elsewhere, Horrocks asserts that Fell has the right to write about 'our' landscape. Again, defensive subtexts are evident here. One might ask, if Fell were to be disqualified from writing about New Zealand, who is it who would be doing the disqualifying? The tangata whenua? Would he be disqualified because he is an Englishman? Horrocks addresses a half-formed anxiety in the collective Pākehā readership; an unacknowledged insecurity that brings to mind the alienation and dislocation that Williams has described as a feature of the national 'self' (13). As farmer, local, and man of the land, he is more specifically welcomed into a tradition in New Zealand letters: that of the 'Man Alone'. It seems the localisation of Fell is complete.

Fell is, unlike the other authors in this study, the bearer of the invisible ethnicity: that of the colonial 'self'. Fell is *allowed* to 'shed' his former culture and ethnic identity easily, quickly, and irreparably, unlike other 'others', because of the rules that dominate the culture he is

entering into. Those rules, or boundaries, include Englishmen such as Fell as 'us', or if not 'us,' then an extension of 'us': an 'us' that can very quickly fit in, understand the landscape, and start writing odes to it. In the five years between Fell's two books, he very suddenly becomes local, becomes 'us.' 'Us', therefore, is never ethnically Pacific, even if born here. 'Us' is not Māori, even if we would like it to be. 'Us' is not even simply white, as there are certain shades of white, and some more foreign, more exotic, than others. 'We', then, are still specifically English – as Cliff Fell's easy entry into our written culture illustrates.





## CHAPTER SIX

### WHAT DOES THE WHITE 'SELF' LOOK LIKE?

Myths of national identity are formed not only in literary texts but in popular, political, and economic discourses. Narratives about who 'we' are emerge frequently in newspapers and political speeches. In a 2007 speech at Auckland University, John Key said that:

We are, however, developing a unique New Zealand identity. *We have to be careful* just what this means. It is not the same as having a more ethnically diverse population [...] It is more like having a shared understanding of a common culture, a unifying sense of what New Zealand is, and a pride in it, that we can all identify with, *regardless of our individual backgrounds* (Key, 2007, emphasis added).

Key is describing a kind of egalitarian multiculturalism here, a multiculturalism that comes with strict conditions. In his book *White Nation* (1998), Hage describes Australian multiculturalism as a violent function of white culture's policing of Australia's national space. Through positive exoticisation, 'other' voices which may constitute a threat to the central culture are subsumed into a narrative of inclusiveness (Hage, 42). In Key's assertion that 'we' are developing a unique identity are the implicit assumptions about who 'we' are. In his caution that 'we' must 'be careful' about the formation of a national identity and that 'our' New Zealand-ness must take precedence over individual cultural backgrounds, we may read white dominant culture's exercising of what Hage has described as its capacity for managing and therefore *containing* diverse ethnicities (Hage 119). Key recommends that we understand New Zealand-ness as a 'common culture', a culture in which our diverse individual backgrounds are unimportant, subsumed into the whole. The *too individual* ethnic minority does not fit into Key's vision. A strong Indian community, or Pacific Island

community, or Asian community within Aotearoa that maintains<sup>99</sup> their individual culture is not welcome here: it is not in the service of the ‘common culture’ of the whole. Of course, Māori, as a group who place strong emphases on language and culture maintenance, are included here in the list of potential threatening ‘othernesses’. Such narratives of ‘inclusive’ multicultural pluralism achieve two things: one, they displace Māori as being in possession of an already unique indigenous identity, and two, they suggest that other ‘others’ come to heel, sacrificing any real individuality for the sake of the unity and homogenisation of the national space.

### **Discriminations Within Whiteness<sup>100</sup>: A Continuum of ‘Otherness’**

While taking into account the status of Māori as original ‘self’ and the inversion and confusion of simple positive / negative binaries<sup>101</sup>, it is possible to say that the literature around Ihimaera and Hulme reflects a clear relationship of ‘self’ and ‘other’ where ‘self’ is the white dominant Pākehā centre. But decoding the narratives around other ‘others’, and the interrelationships between them and Māori, is more complex. By creating a visual representation of the hierarchical relationships illustrated in the narratives of these media texts, we gain a better understanding of the positioning of these groups<sup>102</sup>. While placing Māori authors beside Pacific Island and European migrant authors risks oversimplification and false conflation<sup>103</sup>, the following diagram is an attempt to portray their relative positional relationships to the ‘self’.

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<sup>99</sup> As my Greek family maintain.

<sup>100</sup> For an article on the reconfiguration of Australia and New Zealand’s national selves, see the article “On the Discriminations of Postcolonialism in Australia and New Zealand,” by Williams, whose title has influenced this chapter heading.

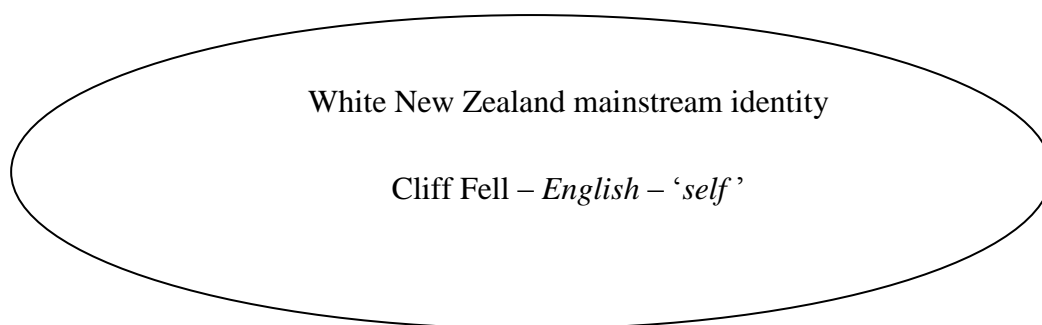
<sup>101</sup> As discussed, the traditionally ‘negative’ attributes’ imposed on the Other includes qualities like earthiness, naivety, and identification with the land. In Aotearoa New Zealand’s evolving myth of biculturalism, these qualities were highlighted in Ihimaera’s work, and to a certain extent, in Hulme’s. But they were appropriated as a positive addition to the national myth: providing the insecure settler ‘self’ with a sense of tūrangawaewae in this place.

<sup>102</sup> Of course, the purpose of this image is not to essentialise or re-other the ‘othered’; as mentioned, models that seek to compare the extents of differing oppression (i.e. Aboriginal vs. Māori oppression) are flawed. This image describes the very specific positioning of these authors *as seen within the texts around their reception into a national myth of identity in the time period surveyed, and within the samples studied*. It is not intended to enforce essentialising generalisations.

<sup>103</sup> As mentioned in 1. Background and Theoretical Contexts, it is problematic to imply, for example, that we can directly compare the experiences of the Aboriginal peoples in Australia and the Māori in Aotearoa.

Kapka Kassabova – *Bulgarian – European literary ‘other’*

Insecure admiration



Anxious appreciation / appropriation



Appreciation / elevation

Witi Ihimaera / Keri Hulme

– *Māori – primary ‘other’*

Tusiata Avia / Karlo Mila

– *Pacific Island – other ‘other’*

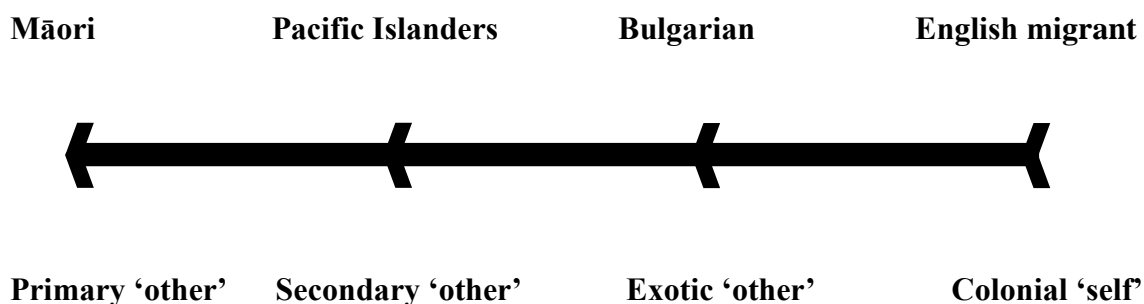
In the diagram above, white dominant culture is represented as ‘self’ or ‘centre’. Every author in this review, aside from Fell, has been ‘othered’ and positioned outside of the mainstream by the white gaze. Fell’s ethnic identity, in contrast, is so parallel to that of the original ‘self’ as to be almost invisible in this study<sup>104</sup>. In the years following the publication of *The Adulterer’s Bible*, Fell is drawn into the ‘self’, actively assimilated and naturalised, until he ends up being known as a local farmer: strongly identified with the land, and ‘qualified’ to write about it. He is not positioned outside the myth of national identity as a newcomer; nor does he exist in parallel. Instead, as an English migrant, he is strenuously

<sup>104</sup> Being labelled only 24% of the time in all media items about him. Again, this is remarkable because the press release about his first book names him as a migrant, and Fell discloses his background in many articles.

portrayed as being central: to be ‘of this place,’ to be ‘firmly’ rooted here, to be ‘very much’ us.

Like the other ‘others’ in this study Kassabova is exoticised, but the predominant impulse of this exoticisation is a clear admiration for a European ‘other’ that is more than ‘us’. She is placed above the ‘self’ in this diagram to represent the unmistakable element of cultural cringe in collective texts about her and her work. Also, media items about Kassabova are notably free from narratives of elevation or the anxiety-ridden valorisation accorded the Māori and Pacific authors reviewed.

Though some argument could be made that in the narratives evident here, Ihimaera and Hulme trump Mila and Avia in terms of ‘importance’ to the national ‘self’<sup>105</sup>, it could also be argued that that Pacific island authors are just as ‘important’ in the striving for diversity that the national myth was attempting at the time they began writing<sup>106</sup>. However, Ihimaera and Hulme are clearly ‘othered’ in a traditional way by the dominant media, and clearly positioned outside of the ‘self’. They are also received more deferentially by the ‘self’ than Avia and Mila are. This both emphasises their importance to the national myth of identity, and suggests that dominant culture positions them as the ‘original other’<sup>107</sup>. While Mila and Avia are comparably exoticised, Māori are positioned directly in opposition to the Pākehā ‘self’. While the hierarchies in the ‘self’s’ positioning of ‘others’ is explained by the diagram above, the positioning of these authors might also be understood as a continuum.



<sup>105</sup> Of all the authors Ihimaera and Hulme, the Māori authors in this study, are both othered the most often, being labelled by their ethnic identifier 100% of the time in both cases.

<sup>106</sup> That is, where Ihimaera and Hulme are appropriated into a pre-bicultural and bicultural myth, Avia and Mila appear at the right moment to augment a national ‘self’ concerned with diversification.

<sup>107</sup> This distinction is not reflected in the image. This is because it is impossible to represent: seen in this way, Māori are both more important to the national myth, and therefore should be positioned above Avia and Mila in this diagram. Or their positioning represents a more complete ‘othering’ in the text, in which case they should be positioned below Avia and Mila, farther away relationally to the national white ‘self’.

At one end of this continuum, Māori represent the most ‘othered’ ‘other.’ The other groups examined here fall in different places on the continuum in relationship to the white ‘self’. In the narratives unpacked in these texts, Māori and Pākehā, unsurprisingly, can most easily be fitted into the traditional binaries of ‘self’ and ‘other.’ What this study has revealed is the ordering and relative awarded whiteness/ ‘otherness’ of the other ‘others’. At one end are Ihimaera and Hulme: labelled 100% of the time by their ethnicity. At the other, Fell, whose ethnicity is progressively ‘disappeared’. The next most ‘white’ ‘other’ appears to be Kassabova, who, though labelled in 90% of articles, is closest to the white ‘self’ in that she represents a European literary tradition the ‘self’ identifies with and looks up to. Less white, and more ‘other’, are the Pacific Island authors studied here. They are more clearly posited as further from the white ‘self’ than Kassabova. Their ‘lyrical,’ ‘rhythmic’ poetry might be celebrated as a tokenistic nod to oral traditions, but when it comes to being reviewed in literary journals, the genuine interest in these authors<sup>108</sup> is simply not there. Behind the narratives of celebration and inclusion we find the key to their outsider positioning. None of the material around Kassabova stresses that we ‘should’ read her work, that we should ‘make sure to’ support her, or that she is a Bulgarian leader. When placed in relation to Ihimaera and Hulme, however, a clear delineation in the groups’ differing treatment is apparent: Avia and Mila may be a diversion for the white ‘self,’ a further adornment, but Māori are both ‘more important’, and more completely ‘other.’

Hage writes that white discourses of multiculturalism, rather than redistributing power amongst various ethnic groups, instead reinforce the binary relationships that maintain white power:

It is in the opposition between valuing diversity and *being* diverse that the White nation fantasy operates to reproduce itself. The ‘we appreciate’ diversity, ‘we value’ ethnic contributions, etc. attitudes [...] create a gulf between the ‘we’ and that which is appreciated and valued’ (139).

In Aotearoa’s myth of national identity, the work of Ihimaera, Hulme, Mila, Avia and Kassabova is equivalent to ‘that which is appreciated and valued’. They are, in turn, described as existing outside of dominant culture, ushered into it by a generous white ‘self’.

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<sup>108</sup> Again, strictly within this timeframe and apparent in the sample texts studied.

In the case of authors Ihimaera and Hulme, attempts are made to claim Māori identity as a new, crucial part of whom ‘we’ wish to be: firstly, ‘we’ becomes capable of understanding and sympathising with the ‘other’, and then, in a neat re-visioning of the self in the 1980s, *becomes* bicultural itself. Ironically, if the white ‘self’ were actually bicultural, the need to both make reparations, and subsequently to embody the indigenous ‘other,’ would not be necessary. In the case of Pacific authors Mila and Avia, the underlying narratives are those of generous inclusion and celebration by an implicitly white ‘we’. In these cases, appreciation and elevation of the ‘other’ can be translated as a re-enactment of the colonising enterprise. By celebrating Mila and Avia for achieving in the world of white literary nationalism, the ‘we’ subtly re-enforces its role as civiliser and up-lifter, while appropriating Pacific ‘othernesses’ into a white discourse of multicultural diversity. The gap between what is being actively appreciated and what really constitutes ‘New Zealandness’ is clear. In Kassabova’s case, ‘we’ are enriched by her presence: both through the absorption of her exotic ‘otherness’ into the whole, and by seeking our own, dispossessed, insecure reflection in the mirror of her writing.

All these authors are stereotyped and essentialised as ‘other’. In Fell’s case however, he is not valued or appreciated because of his ethnic identity, because his ethnic identity is invisible. Though Fell is from England, he very quickly becomes assimilated into the ‘we’ who does the valuing and appreciating. In white discourses of multicultural nationalism, in the current myth of national identity, who ‘we’ are is emphatically still *firmly, confirmed to be* English at the centre.

### **Employment of Māori Spirituality**

In 1989 Ruth Brown wrote that Pākehā readers seized on the spirituality in *the bone people* as some kind of ‘metaphysical palliative’ (253). She suggested that this was symptomatic of a need within whiteness to locate spirituality *somewhere*, in a capitalist world (ibid.). This seizing on a specifically indigenous spiritualism is a common experience or theme within the white identity of the 1980s. John Newton investigates James K Baxter’s time at Jerusalem in his book, *The Double Rainbow: James K Baxter, Ngāti Hau and the Jerusalem Community*.

He traces the journey of the people of the land alongside Hemi's<sup>109</sup> spiritual journey, which might be summarised as a process by which Baxter attempted to become self-indigenised. Jeffrey Paparoa Holman writes in 'Ka Mate Ka Ora: a New Zealand Journal of Poetry and Poetics', of Newton's intentions:

The other task he sets himself is to free Ngāti Hau not just from their literary transfiguration in the Baxter narrative of events, but also from their construction as victims of a faceless Pākehā colonialism, or players in Heemi's<sup>110</sup> spiritual journey. Freeze-framed there, they may be read as mere extras in the literary remains of his late-life estate: the Jerusalem writings, deeply influential at that moment in the perceptions of Māori by disaffected young Pākehā (a group in which during the early 1970s, I include myself). Baxter did a revolutionary thing: he brought hidden Māori figures into the forefront of a Pākehā literary discourse, and for this I am forever grateful.

This passage articulates two important points. Firstly, Hemi's self-naturalisation enterprise relied heavily on his appropriation of Māori spiritualism. In the Baxterian narrative, Māori are more natural, more genuine, and more spiritual than Pākehā. They also have the added advantage in Baxter's eyes of having more right to be here. But Baxter's appropriation of Māori 'otherness'<sup>111</sup>, his essentialisation of 'the Māori way,' reduces the Māori he lives with to 'players' in his personal journey: mere extras in the remains of Baxter's literary estate. Secondly, this passage articulates a tension at the heart of this study: is the foregrounding of Māori characters, and 'the Māori way of life,' not a good thing? The gratitude that Paparoa Holman says he feels is key here. Baxterian essentialism may be reductive, but at least, Paparoa Holman suggests, Māori figures and subject matter became the subject of literary discourse as a result of Baxter's attention. But the word 'gratitude' also implies that 'we' should be happy for Māori to collect scraps of white dominant attention. Similarly, the ethnically 'other' authors studied here *should be grateful*. After all, a generation ago Pacific writers, for example, were so not visible; their material not so widely read as is the case today. This argument assumes that any attention is good attention. But my argument is not against ethnically 'other' writers being visible or recognised. Instead, I suggest that where

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<sup>109</sup> Baxter's adopted Māori name.

<sup>110</sup> Paparoa Holman's rendition of Baxter's Māori name, 'Hemi'.

<sup>111</sup> Or centrality.

ethnic ‘others’ are represented in popular / literary or political discourses, their representations must be sufficiently problematised and shaded in order to avoid simplistic re-otherings.

The narratives apparent in the reception of Ihimaera and Hulme similarly essentialise and exoticise the spirituality of the Māori ‘other’. Ihimaera’s work is referred to as natural, unaffected, naive, sincere: he is the epitome of the ‘native,’ spiritually tied to the land. Hulme’s *the bone people* fulfils the same function. By identifying themselves with a specifically Māori spirituality, the Pākehā reader strengthens their uncertain colonial grip on the land, and targets a spiritual gap in a post-Christian, increasingly secular, culture<sup>112</sup>. The appropriation of Māori spirituality that underlies texts from this period simply reduces the ‘other’ to a function, whereby the white ‘self’ can become closer to the land.

### **Differentiations in Prepared Space**

When authors are writing into a gap, pressure is automatically put on their work. The stories of the ‘other’ must serve a function within the dominant myth of identity. In the current national identity myth of actively inclusive plurality, that sits uneasily with biculturalism, they enable the white ‘self’ both to appear welcoming, and to absorb some interesting ‘otherness’ into itself. The Māori and Pacific Island authors in this study are variously employed in the national myth, clearly used in the service of a white ‘self’ whose impulse to display both re-essentialises and ‘re-others’ them. Ihimaera, Hulme, Avia and Mila are also strongly indicated here as guides to or translators of culture. Such positioning of course is also reductive: they exist for the white reader.

The space Kassabova writes into is, by contrast, less pre-emptively expected and less defined. She is exotic, but she is Pākehā-exotic, therefore capable of being both freely critiqued and capable of critiquing us. The space she writes into was not necessarily expected to open in New Zealand letters. By noticing her work, the dominant ‘self’ is not fulfilling quotas or responding to educational curricula that target cultural gaps in representation. Therefore, it is

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<sup>112</sup> For an enlightening book on New Zealand spiritual writing, see Harry Ricketts’, Michael Grimshaw and Paul Morris’ *Spirit in a Strange Land: A selection of New Zealand Spiritual verse*. Their introduction makes the point that though secular, spiritualism has always thrived in Aotearoa. The selection is also fascinating in its tracing of a peculiarly diverse spirituality: from early Christian verses, to a ‘secularism’ that ends up encompassing expressions of Māori spirituality and anti-Christian sentiment.



free to notice, and be surprised, as she essentially makes a space for herself as the European émigré. But such a space is also restrictive, with prescribed limitations. What is emergent in these studies is that while the other 'others' are exoticised, and Mila and Avia are subject to gendered responses, it is Kassabova who is most clearly objectified by a press enamoured of her youth, her multilingual prowess, her 'luxurious' accent and 'exotic' refugee status, and by her physical beauty. What is apparent is that in white narratives of bi- or multiculturalism, the space prepared for the 'other' author is clearly defined, stringent and specific in its requirements for what the 'other' must be.



## CHAPTER SEVEN

### AUTHENTICITY AND THE PERFORMANCE OF INDIGENEITY

In the years since the publication of Ihimaera's *Pounamu, Pounamu*, white dominant culture has struggled to reconceptualise the 'other.' Whether this reinscription is positive or negative, the relationship of 'self' to 'other' remains restrictive. Eager to make reparations for past crimes, a post-settler media might seize joyfully on a new Māori author, or seek to celebrate multiculturalism as part of a larger white assimilationist narrative. But a white dominant culture seeking to celebrate 'other' writing, while morally 'sound,' makes essentialist claims as to how this kind of writer is defined. In 1989 Fee wrote that:

The demand for "authenticity" denies Fourth World writers a living, changing culture. Their culture is deemed to be Other and must avoid crossing those fictional but ideologically essential boundaries between Them and Us, the Exotic and the Familiar, the Past and the Future, the "Dying" and the living. (Fee 17).

Placing requests for authenticity under a critical eye is particularly pertinent today. Aotearoa's indigenous population blurs the traditional realms of the Other by definition. The urbanisation of Māori meant a great change in demographics that led Māori to lead less culturally traditional lives in cities; and it is harder and harder to separate Māori and Pākehā on purely ethnic lines. Gunew points out that 'Ethnic minority writers continue to be judged in terms of their 'authentic' depiction of the migrant<sup>113</sup> experience...' (Gunew 72). Drichel asks 'How can we conceptualize an indigenous identity without trading on the same old stereotypes we have become so used to in discussions surrounding (formerly) othered peoples?' (Drichel 590). Even calling 'Māori writing' 'Māori writing' places Māori in some mythical amorphous cultural group, fulfilling a need within the 'self' for the real, authentic story.

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<sup>113</sup> Here, 'migrant' can be compared to indigenous / migrant or other 'other'.

Stead's interrogation of the positive reception of Hulme's *the bone people* (103) asserts that Hulme's work is celebrated mainly because of her ethnicity, and not because her writing is good. While otherwise his reaction to Hulme could be seen to demonstrate what Karen Lamb has described as 'the pervasiveness of anglo-celtic superior attitudes towards writers from postcolonial cultures', he points out an interesting complexity (Lamb 37). Evans' ideas about 'the Māori writer,' are considerably more culturally nuanced, but he risks perpetuating a dangerously similar superiority. In his article, *Pākehā-Style Biculturalism and the Māori writer*, he examines Ihimaera's revising of his earlier fiction. Ihimaera's *Whanau II*, Evans says, constitutes 'the replacement of a facile biculturalism with something far darker and more resistant' (13). In doing so, Evans says, Ihimaera puts behind him forever his **earliest** role as the Guide Rangi of New Zealand literature (ibid.). Evans attempts to define an early 'Pākehā-style biculturalism,' pointing first to the classical pairing of the treaty and the Crown, and asserting that its other aspect is 'the reification of Māori culture that followed the Māori land wars', by both Māori and Pākehā, by which the idea of a unified Māoritaonga was made real (14-15). The third movement in the evolution of this biculturalism was Ihimaera's *Pounamu, Pounamu*. Evans goes on to describe the kind of Māori literature that Ihimaera was contributing to in his early career<sup>114</sup>:

...a nostalgic literature centered on a knot of common themes – recollections of grandparents as nurturing and connecting to a traditional past; the elderly as emblems of a lost, wholesome lifestyle in nature; the ruined buildings as an emblem of the lost rural community, the tangi as demonstration of family unity and capacity to grieve, the past as a looming, unforgettable determinant of the present, mediated by internalised ancestors, traditional mythology and nature as living spiritual presences. (14-15.)

Here is the central problem in Evans' critique: in describing what he sees as the passé elements of the Māori writing of the period, he sums up the features and concerns of not just some of the Māori writing of today, but of a lot of writing that fits into a postcolonial, indigenous, migrant or hybrid framework. Ihimaera's later reactive revisionings of his work make it more radical than this brand of, in Evans' eyes, anaesthetised, performed indigeneity (19).

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<sup>114</sup> As found in short stories and shorter texts.

This style of writing, Evans says, is ‘almost entirely constructed by the tropes it is worked in,’ a kind of ‘performance of indigeneity’ (Evans 2). While lamenting the prescriptive nature of dominant culture that, in Evans’ view, creates such writing, he does not avoid a (scathing) denunciation of the work itself: ‘Much kai moana is eaten and many nostalgic tears are shed in the Huia series by writers who often apply Māoriness like makeup...’ (ibid.)

There is something of a double-bind here for the Māori, indigenous, or ‘other’ writer. Of course, Evans’ tropes are entirely recognisable features today of a post-colonial exotic. But it is possible to read into his descriptions a kind of anglo-celtic snobbery like Stead’s with regards to Hulme: it is the sentimentality, the nostalgia, the *emotion* of such writing that Evans finds aesthetically unpalatable, predictable, and over-done. While he is right about the occurrence of these recognisable tropes in ethnic literatures, perhaps he should critique the marketing industries that push the commodification of such tropes, instead of implicitly criticising the writer<sup>115</sup>. For Māori writers, writing into the prepared space of indigenous ‘other’ to Pākehā, such passé themes might still be crucial to their work. Evans is jaded about what he sees as a repetitive performance, but for some Māori or other ‘others’ such themes, language and symbols might not be a clever playing of a card, but a lived experience. Because it remains true that some Māori do eat kai moana, do go to tangi and cry, do have grandparents that connect them to a more traditional past, do have different beliefs about ancestors, and, as a colonised people, do experience the past as a determinant of the present.

Evans believes themes like these to fit into an outdated mode of Pākehā biculturalism. But they might also represent themes Māori, or other ‘others’ still wish to write about. If so, where is the ‘other’ author to go? If they write into the space prepared, Evans implies, they are merely repeating, applying their ethnicity ‘like make-up’. Where ‘authentic’ Māori writing was once expected to be the Pākehā-style biculturalism described, where Ihimaera was celebrated for his depictions of whanau, tangi, and the natural world, now, Evans implies, this *is not authentic enough*. Is it required then, of the Māori writer, to exercise the kind of intense self-criticism that led Ihimaera to re-write his work, updating it to match current postcolonial thinking, and bringing it into alignment with present discourses about tino

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<sup>115</sup> He is certainly adept at critiquing authorising bodies such as the International Institute of Modern Letters about what he sees as the commodification and homogenisation of New Zealand writing. For an example of this see his 2003 article in the *New Zealand Listener*, ‘Baby Factory’.

rangitiritanga? Does that mean the Māori, or ‘other’ writer, should be so well-versed in the accepted tropes of their niche that they avoid all of them in favour of depicting some more politicised, gritty urban ‘truth?’ What if such a Māori writer accidentally has their characters use a Māori word, or go to a tangi? The irony of this is that in 2006 we have Evans, like Stead, critiquing Māori writers not only for being ‘victims’ of a prescriptive dominant culture, but also for being *inauthentically* Māori.

In a review of Evans’ *The Long Forgetting: Post-colonial literary culture in New Zealand*, Stafford claims that:

Culture is a problem for Evans. He doesn’t really believe in it and yet he can’t quite give it up. He disapproves of settler writers who invent it and young Pakeha who ignore it, and yet he recognises the triteness of contemporary Maori authors who fall into its stereotypes. He warns against the lure of the “post-colonial exotic” and yet his discussion of Pacific literature and culture [...] seems an example of it (2008).

Evans’ contradictory stance is nicely explicated here. He applauds Ihimaera for progressing from a toothless Pakeha-style biculturalism, and so avoiding ‘the lure’ of the postcolonial exotic, and rounds on Māori writers who might too easily reiterate tired themes. He disapproves of settlers who overwrite the indigenous, yet he allows the indigenous no space to move. Underlying his prescriptiveness is a strange hypocrisy while he, the Pakeha critic, defines this settler writer as too postcolonially clueless; that Māori writer as too traditionally Māori. Perhaps his issue is a matter of aesthetics rather than culture: he wants to applaud the post ‘Māori renaissance’ writer, but his taste bristles at being presented with the same ‘tired’ material.

Demands for authenticity can also reduce the ‘other’ from creative writer to autobiographer. Assumptions are made in dominant narratives that suppose the author *is* their main character, if that character’s ethnicity is ‘other’ to the norm. While many articles take it for granted that the ‘other’ ethnic authors writing here are purely regurgitating their experiences for the page, in 1999 Matt Johnson asked Kassabova if her novel *Reconnaissance*, is entirely fictional. She answered:

...the book is not meant to be autobiographical. I realise that assumption will be made because of the coincidences. Like Nadejda [her main character], I did travel around New Zealand, but I'm not fond of shoplifting or casual sex. Sorry to disappoint you (Johnson 2).

Here Kassabova jokingly overturns the assumption that her character, a young woman from Bulgaria, is equal to Kassabova, the writer. In addressing also the interviewer's/reader's implicit *disappointment*, she uncovers both the pressure put on the 'other' author to give 'us' the real, gritty, authentic version of the 'other's' reality, and her own uncomfortable knowledge that the journalist/reader might wish her to resemble her character. Such reductions are reminiscent of Stead's conflation of Keri Hulme with her character, Kerewin Holmes, in "Keri Hulme's *the Bone People* and the Pegasus Award for Maori Literature". While Hulme may have engaged in autobiographical play in *the bone people*, Stead, wishing to question the authenticity of the author and her right to write as indigenous, suggests that Kerewin Holmes is not really Māori. Both Johnson and Stead's articles point up the white dominant concern with getting the 'real' ethnic view.

### **Marketing the 'Other'**

The continual labelling, stereotyping and reduction of the ethnically 'other' authors in this study is almost the direct inverse of traditional relationships between 'self' and Other: where the Other once was hidden, inarticulated, invisibilised by the 'self', Aotearoa's (arguably) postcolonial 'self' wishes to uplift, promote, and display the 'other'. Such a white 'self' is not just inclusive of 'others' and 'sensitive' towards Māori, it is vehemently inclusive. But the constant labelling and display amounts to a fetishisation of difference. Huggan points out that fetishising otherness risks 'reduplicating the authority of the assimilationist paradigms...that such multicultural writing seeks to replace.' (111). In the fetishising of the 'othernesses' we have found here is a direct re-iteration of the colonial model: the 'self' might be newly inclusive, but it persists in both containing and commodifying 'othernesses', and demanding they conform to its own ideas about authenticity.

In New Zealand/Aotearoa biculturalism has become official government policy embraced by many Pakeha. Yet here too the postcolonial interest in

positioning the other more prominently in the national imagery for tourism and marketing purposes comes at a time when global integration means that indigeneity has become a marketable sign of local distinctiveness (Williams 2004, 744).

Positioning the Māori ‘other’ author prominently in a myth of literary national identity achieves dual goal for the white ‘self’. Firstly, as Williams points out, indigeneity may enhance the ‘self,’ making it more distinctive. Secondly, it achieves a broader aim of making Aotearoa’s history exotic and therefore more marketable on a world stage. In *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins*, Huggan says that the process by which colonial histories are transformed into historical fantasies might be seen ‘as an instance of a neo-colonial ‘othering’ process’ by which history itself become a packageable commodity for consumption (115). ‘Māori writing’ becomes attractive to a world market as part of the ongoing spectacle of colonisation. Such appropriations are not only damaging and reductive; they actively re-other the Māori writer. Huggan argues that the Man Booker Prize merely acts as a purveyor of the postcolonial exotic, specifically, as a legitimiser of ‘‘multicultural and/or exotically foreign goods’ (111). The problem according to Huggan is that in promoting ‘otherness’ in this way, cultural critique is effectively contained within the slick commodification of cultural difference (110). In the same way, the white ‘self’ in Aotearoa has been shown in this thesis to violently contain the other, especially the Pacific Island and Māori ‘other’, as a special and distinct part of the white ‘self’: a part that is not really a part, but useful for display purposes.

### **How to Write as ‘Other’: Implications for ‘Other’ authors**

Despite ‘our’ commonly accepted myth of an inclusive, celebratory brand of multicultural nationalism, the violent positioning of the ‘other’ author in relation to the white self is still very much in evidence. But should ethnically ‘other’ writers not be proud of their heritages? Should they not be proud, for example, to be labelled a Pacific Island writer? After all, they are representing an under-represented group. Mila or Ihimaera or Hulme may not write for white audiences at all, but for their own communities. They are, however, inevitably pigeonholed and stereotyped by white dominant culture on their publication.



The Māori or 'other' author in Aotearoa today enters a complex space in popular and literary discourses, bounded on all sides by assumptions, expectations, and prescriptiveness. If, as an 'other' author, you are celebrated and well-received by the white mainstream, you may be unsure whether it is because of the cultural value of your work, or because of the quality of the text itself. Avia proudly identifies as Samoan, but is aware of the restrictions of being labelled. 'I started performing at a time when the Pacific Island Arts scene took off,' she said in the *Listener*. 'But that's also meant that I'm seen as having a particular image [...] the thing with images is that they're constraining; they never let you be seen as a person' (Avia in Harvey 40).

Aside from the constraints experienced by the re-othered, a range of responsibilities come with being seen as the representative of an ethnic group. Mila feels this tension: as she told Tusitala Marsh, she shies away from the idea that a Palagi would take her experience generally, as the definitive Tongan experience (2003). As the member of an oppressed, misrepresented minority group, authors might feel the pressure not to share the secrets of the minority group. This extends to depicting, say, domestic violence by ethnically 'other' characters. Though there are countless instances of this in the literature of the 'othered', such fictions walk a fine line: they may depict gritty realities<sup>116</sup>, but they may, like the violence in Avia's work, be simplistically appropriated into dominant narratives that posit the 'other' as primitive and uncivilised. The 'other' author may also understandably not wish to re-stereotype the already stereotyped in their work<sup>117</sup>.

Māori and Pacific Island authors are often included in courses at universities and in NCEA curricula, as 'important'. Not much writing has been done around the implications of this for Māori, or other 'other' writers or students. The idea that we must celebrate and elevate Māori or other' authors is an understandable reaction to years of postcolonial invisibility and

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<sup>116</sup> When Alan Duff wrote *Once Were Warriors*, a starkly realist account of a family dealing with extreme poverty, sexual abuse, and alcoholism, he reinforced some unflattering racial stereotypes of Māori. In his novel Māori are oppressed and dispossessed, and portrayed as an inherently violent race: 'Once Were Warriors'. In Duff's simplistic version of Māori 'reality', salvation is available to his characters in the form of language retrieval, cultural rehabilitation, and financial empowerment. In this Duff risks didacticism, and also, he subjects Māori as a group to more reductive stereotyping. Māori are seen as a failed race. Such a message would not be so permissible in a white author's work, but in Duff, was celebrated by the white reading public, perhaps as his work acted as a counter to the comparative romanticism of early 'Māori renaissance' writing.

<sup>117</sup> In my case, this has caused internal conflict. Some Pākehā reading the Greek characters in my writing have considered them to be stereotypical. But in my experience Greeks really do throw their hands around, eat Greek food, speak Greek, and respect family above all else...what is the 'ethnic writer' to do?

oppression. This study asks whether such sanctioned inclusions could be similarly damaging to Māori or other 'others' in their re-inscription of simplistic, reductive models.

These issues are the inheritance of the 'othered' individual, the double-privileged hybrid, who still must assimilate or change their identity in response to different environments. The pressure felt by the minority 'other' to serve, support, rebuild and preserve can be felt as an honour, or conversely, as a restriction: especially if dominant culture is seemingly blind to anything but the ethnicity of the individual, and has a set of assumptions readily arranged in the prepared 'other' space.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### CONCLUSION:

#### THE EVOLUTION OF A WHITE ASSIMILATIONIST NATIONAL ‘SELF’

Given the varying receptions of the authors studied, it is possible to say that five out of six of these authors are identified most often by their ethnic backgrounds in the media in the samples analysed. These authors are Ihimaera, Hulme, Mila, Avia, and Kassabova, who are identified in all media items as ‘other’ between 74% and 100% of the time. In 47% to 82% of these articles, the authors are described by their ethnicity in the first paragraph, emphasising the importance of the ethnic description as a primary identifier. Fell is the only author whose results contrast with this trend. Even as a recent migrant to Aotearoa, his English roots slip under the radar in all but 24% of articles. Despite his candid discussion of his background in some interviews, more than three quarters of all the early press generated around Fell ignores his ethnic identity, instead assimilating him neatly into the invisible ethnicity of the dominant self. This is reflected in statistics that demonstrate that he is labelled a local or Kiwi in 60% of all media items surveyed here. Though it is problematic to draw the conclusion that simply labelling authors as ethnically ‘other’ automatically indicates ‘othering’, evidence that Ihimaera, Hulme, Mila, Avia, and Kassabova, are ‘othered’ is very strong. In most articles these authors are not simply identified by their ethnicity but they are actively exoticised in connection with it.

Beginning with Mulgan’s *Man Alone*, it is possible to trace a changing myth of national identity in the literature(s) of New Zealand. This begins with a myth that is predominantly masculine and Pākehā in the 1930s and 1940s, built around an uneasy relationship with the newly inhabited landscape. But the landscape is not blank; and in response to pressure from Māori and internationally shifting paradigms, Ihimaera’s work emerges into the pre-bicultural ‘self’ myth of the 1970s, a myth of a national ‘self’ that, though primarily Pākehā, concerns

itself with ‘understanding’ ‘the Māori world.’ The impulses behind such seeking to understand Māori are various.

In her 2011 book on Ihimaera, Melissa Kennedy says that:

Since the emergence of a revitalized Māori writing in English in the 1970s, the New Zealand literary community, understood predominantly as Pakeha, has embraced Māori writing in an inclusive gesture which nonetheless carefully maintains and honours its creative difference (2011 xi).

The image put forward here is of a gentle, careful, generously inclusive community, the morally sound postcolonial ‘self’. But if we look deeper into the narratives and terms used even here, we find a masking of what Hage considers the violent act of simplistically including ‘othernesses’. Firstly, the impulse to include reflects the insecurity of a newly formed nation and the settlers’ longing for “home”: a longing that manifests in an eagerness to claim and assimilate a specific, special ‘Māoriness’ into the white ‘self’. Secondly, there is the issue of colonial guilt. Williams refers to the ‘colonial taint’ of European heritage (*Leaving the Highway* 18): by understanding the indigenous culture, the ‘self’ of the 1970s wishes to both ‘forget’ recent colonial injustices to Māori and define themselves against the mother country, emerging as new, innocent, and culturally distinct. Thirdly, underlying narratives in the reception of Ihimaera’s texts is the clear desire for reconciliation.

Repeatedly, the texts urge the reader to seek to understand, to try to see the world from ‘the Māori perspective,’ to be ‘sensitive’ enough to delve into the ‘problems of the Māori,’ and in doing so, to attain absolution. Such a reader is only ‘sensitive,’ of course, within a self-congratulatory ideology that implies an opposition between the morally ‘good’ white reader and the morally ‘bad’, who might not seek to understand. But whether such impulses are ‘good’ or not, here they merely re-enforce the Pākehā reader as the undisputed manager of the national space.

Narratives around the Māori authors in this period also serve to re-enforce the power of the ‘self’ when encountering threatening ‘othernesses’. Elevation is also a form of classification<sup>118</sup>, and classification has behind it the motivation to control. While uplifting Ihimaera and Hulme then, with their attention, the white reader maintains and underlines the

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<sup>118</sup> As by uplifting Māori authors as *Māori authors*, ‘we’ automatically place them in one homogenous group outside of the ‘self’.

centre's power to display Māori culture. By receiving Ihimaera into a pre-designated space, the Pākehā reader goes some way towards throwing off their settler past. By making reparations through the accumulation of knowledge of the 'other', by attempting to learn what it is to be Māori, the Pākehā 'self' becomes both 'morally sound' and more firmly posited here.

King broke the taboo on criticising the work of a Māori author: crucially, he took Ihimaera to task for what he perceived as Ihimaera's didacticism (in *Whanau*). He implied that in daring to express political, anti-colonial sentiment, the work itself has failed<sup>119</sup>. What it has failed in though, is in fulfilling the contract between the Māori writer and Pākehā reader. The 'Māori experience' is to be presented, preferably charmingly, with no political accompaniment, no actual Māori author leaning over our shoulder. The anxiety here is clear: Ihimaera's work exists as cultural product, but it may be enjoyed only in so far as it does not intrude too strongly on the Pākehā reader's sensibilities. Obviously such a reader is anxious; becoming increasingly aware of the need to make reparations to Māori. Ihimaera's work was valuable to the white 'self' as a previously unvoiced narrative; one which could be readily positioned in relation to a changing national 'self': not as a part of it, but as a primary 'other,' which should be celebrated.

Where Ihimaera is valorised clearly as primary 'other,' Hulme occupies a radically different space. The reception of Hulme in white myths of national identity illustrates a new development in the ushering in of a new 'self'. This 'self' is no longer clearly English, no longer an 'us' trying to throw off the idea that England is "home" and inject some local colour into itself. This 'us' is not just growing comfortable with the shift to a bicultural identity, but in contrast, is violently adopting it. Splits within the 'self' become evident, as Stead and Fee's debate demonstrates. Who is 'really' Māori, and who is not? If we do not define race by blood quantum, how do we define it? Such discourses fed into international discourses that put indigeneity and empire under a critical lens. Ironically, the asexual, androgynous, Māori-Pākehā Hulme, ends up in the literature simplified after her Booker Prize win, to being a 'Māori' author. While Ihimaera's work is seen as educational and important, Hulme actually *is* not what the 'we' of the time was, but what it wished to be. In the 1980s then, New Zealand's national myth used Hulme's *the bone people* and Hulme herself as an expression and embodiment of biculturalism.

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<sup>119</sup> Though stylistically, he may have a point, what is important here is the emphasis on the function of Ihimaera's work.

Similarly to Ihimaera and Hulme, Mila and Avia are swiftly appropriated into narratives that seek to celebrate, elevate, and include them, though again, the inclusion is conditional. The texts about Mila and Avia are characterised by a similar motivation in the white ‘self’: the need to understand, to uplift, and to display. Here the white ‘self’ maintains the guise of friendly inclusion whilst re-inscribing a familiar hierarchy: the ‘self’ is affluent, cultured and civilised, where the ‘other’ is not. Such qualified inclusions re-enforce Pākehā culture as a civilising influence on a Pacific culture that is here portrayed as particularly feminine, earthy, sexual, violent, poor, and uneducated. Where gradations of class are a factor in the reading of Ihimaera and Hulme, they are, interestingly, more subtle. In textual representations of Pacific Island authors, the intersectionality of class, gender and ethnicity come to the fore, apparent in the rags-to-riches stories of Mila and Avia<sup>120</sup>.

Mays’ portrayal of Mila depicts her as a ‘diamond in the rough,’ achieving well educationally *in spite of* her Highbury upbringing. But Mila’s upbringing was one of active educational encouragement. She says in an interview that: ‘My Mother spent a lot of time taking me to the library and working with me, reading and writing and learning at home, so that I could excel. From a fairly early age, I was celebrated for being a high achieving “brown girl” from the wrong side of town, who was going to go “somewhere” one day.’ (Mila, Maryanne Pale 2012). Mays over-writes Mila’s actual experience with the Cinderella myth of unlikely and miraculous achievement, thus subsuming her individual reality into a larger narrative about the transformative nature of education for the ‘other.’

Encoded in any impulse to elevate is the implication that the uplifted ‘other’ resides in a lower position to that of the ‘self’. Though impulses behind reactions to Mila and Avia may be morally ‘good,’ they reinforce the position of Pākehā as creators, modifiers, and managers of the national myth. In the celebration of Avia and Mila their subsequent display as exotic parts of ‘our’ national literary diversity is a re-enactment of colonial control. Such reductivism reduces the author to a symbol: and it must be noted that should such symbols cross the line of political acceptability, support will be withdrawn. Evidence of this is seen in what constitute the only negative responses found to both Avia and Mila anywhere in these samples: the criticism that focuses on both authors being too strongly political. Like King, or

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<sup>120</sup> The ‘riches’ in these stories are of course, not money: it is unlikely that Avia or Mila made/make a great deal of money from their poetry. But in these narratives, poetry is clearly posited within the realms of an educated, White elite. Mila and Avia’s progression from obscurity to White mainstream visibility is portrayed as an upward journey of social, if not necessarily monetary, mobility.

the audience described in Wells' article<sup>121</sup>, reviewers become uncomfortable when faced with what they suspect might be a too-firm indictment of the white 'self.' Everyone wants to consume an exciting new exotic product, willingly going along with the 'dusky maiden' jokes, but no one wants to be made to feel too guilty. The welcoming of the Pacific Island author is specific and conditional: the 'other' is welcomed in as sexual, earthy, identified with the land: as a figure evocative of Joseph Conrad's female Other<sup>122</sup>, but only as long as they keep to the rules. Their strength, according to the white dominant press, lies in their mysteriously 'alluring' poetry, its rhythm, its very exotic-ness, and even in its ability to speak back to the white 'self', as Avia does in her poetry. But the line of acceptability is there, and it is the white audience who decide what is tasteful and what is not.

As I found through the process of writing this thesis, there is little comfort to be found in the results of this research for the 'other' ethnic writer. Whether the 'other' writer is proud of their ethnicity or not, when looking at the reception of these authors in the press (apart from Fell) one commonality presents itself: the illusory nature of the author's agency. Avia and Mila may deliberately target ethnic stereotypes in their work; but they cannot control how they themselves are stereotyped. Kassabova might view herself as a cultural hybrid; but she could not dictate to a New Zealand media who wanted to describe her as a Bulgarian refugee. Ultimately what is revealed in these texts is that in spite of authors' attempts to position themselves, and to reconsider race and culture in their work, they are unfailingly re-positioned by a dominant culture intent on its own agenda. For the ethnically 'other' author also, there must always be a tension in being recognised by the white mainstream. Consciousness that writing 'ethnic' material is like playing 'the race card' can choke and restrict creativity, or cause self-doubt in the instance of success.

Years of white dominance in the popular media cannot be simply erased by the appropriation of Māori or 'other' ethnic writing into 'our' national myth. A critical reader might ask: If we are not able to celebrate and champion Māori and 'other' ethnic writing, then how are we to react? The way to react is to interrogate the 'we' that continues to authorise the entry of Māori or other 'others' into white dominant discourses. Close reading and a dedication to responding to literary works *as texts* might be one corrective to the tendency within whiteness

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<sup>121</sup> When Avia takes Helen Clark to task, the audience are at first tense (Wells105).

<sup>122</sup> In Conrad's *The Heart of Darkness*, the unnamed African woman who is Kurtz's temptation is, in stark contrast to the virginal fiancée at home, characterised as passionate, natural, identified with the land, violently sexual, and primitive. She constitutes the classically articulated Other. Avia and Mila's depictions in the texts around them resemble her surprisingly closely.

for re-othering and stereotyping the 'other'. By opening discussions about who 'we' are and by problematising myths of national identity that 're-other' the 'other' in a quest to adorn who 'we' wish to be, we take a step towards working through the ongoing effects of colonisation. By challenging the essentialisation of authors of Māori or 'other' ethnicities in the media we demand more honest representations of who 'we' insist that we are, but who 'we' still, by definition, are not.



## APPENDIX

### Key Early Career Events – Witi Ihimaera

| Date | Event   | Authorising Body                    |
|------|---|-------------------------------------|
| 1972 | Publication of <i>Pounamu, Pounamu</i> , a collection of short stories (Ihimaera)                 | Heinemann                           |
| 1973 | Won third prize in the Sir James Wattie Awards for <i>Pounamu, Pounamu</i> (Shadbolt)             | Sir James Wattie Award<br>Heinemann |
|      | Publication of <i>Tangi</i> , a novel   | Heinemann                           |
|      | Publication of <i>Whanau</i> , a novel  | Sir James Wattie Award              |
| 1974 | Won Sir James Wattie Book of the year Award for <i>Tangi</i> (“About the author – Witi Ihimaera”) |                                     |
|      | Awarded the Burns Fellowship at the University of Otago (“About the author – Witi Ihimaera”)      | University of Otago                 |

Fig. 1.

### Key Early Career Events – Keri Hulme

| Date   | Event  | Authorising Body  |
|--------|--|---|
| 1970's | Wins Māori Purposes Trust Fund (Romanos 33)  | Māori Purposes Trust Fund   |
| 1975   | Wins Burns Fellowship at Otago University (ibid)   | Otago University  |
|        | Wins Katherine Mansfield Memorial Award for <i>Hooks and Feelers</i> (“About the Author – Keri Hulme”) | Katherine Mansfield Memorial Award                                    |
| 1982   | Wins New Zealand Writer's Bursary (ibid)   | New Zealand Writer's Bursary  |
|        | Publishes <i>The Silences Between: Moeraki conversations</i> , a collection of poetry                  | Auckland University Press<br>ICI Writer's Bursary                     |
| 1983   | Wins ICI Writer's Bursary for <i>The Silences Between: Moeraki Conversations</i> (Romanos 33)          | Mobil Pegasus Prize<br>Mobil Pegasus Prize<br>New Zealand Book Awards |

|      |   |                    |
|------|---|--------------------|
| 1984 | Mobil Pegasus Prize for Māori Writing for <i>the bone people</i> (Romanos 33)<br>Appointed ‘Cultural Ambassador for New Zealand’ and tours the United States (Wichtel 22) | Booker Prize Award |
| 1985 | Wins New Zealand Book Award for Fiction (“About the Author – Keri Hulme”)<br>Wins the international Booker Prize (ibid.)  |                    |

Fig. 2.

### Key Early Career Events – Kapka Kassabova

| Date | Event   | Authorising Body  |
|------|---|---|
| 1997 | Published <i>All Roads Lead to the Sea</i> , a collection of poetry   | Auckland University Press   |
| 1998 | Completed MA in Creative Writing at the International Institute of Modern Letters (Ross <i>Kapka Kassabova</i> )<br>Published <i>Dismemberment</i> , a collection of poetry<br>Won New Zealand Society of Authors Jessie MacKay Best First Book of Poetry Award for <i>All Roads Lead to the Sea</i> (Chambers)<br>Finalist in poetry section of Montana Book Awards for <i>All Roads Lead to the Sea</i> (NZEPC <i>Kapka Kassabova</i> ) | International Institute of Modern Letters<br>Auckland University Press<br>New Zealand Society of Authors<br>Montana Book Awards |
| 1999 | Published <i>Reconnaissance</i> , a novel<br>Won Buddle Finlay Sargeson Fellowship (Aldridge 4)   | Penguin Books<br>Buddle Finlay Sargeson Fellowship Trust<br>Commonwealth Writer’s Trust   |
| 2000 | Won Commonwealth Writers Prize in the South-East Asia and South Pacific region for <i>Reconnaissance</i> , Best First Book category (NZEPC <i>Kapka Kassabova</i> )<br>Published <i>Love in the Land of Midas</i> , a novel   | Penguin Books   |

Fig. 3.

### Key Career Events – Karlo Mila

| Date | Event   | Authorising Body   |
|------|---|--|
| 2003 | <i>Best New Zealand Poems</i> poetry publication  | International Institute of Modern Letters                |
| 2003 | Spoken word events, under various titles with various groups, including 'Passionate Tongues,' 'Femme Fatales,' and 'Shades of Pasifika' | Temple Bar, Auckland                                     |
| 2003 | Poems published in <i>Whetu Moana: Contemporary Polynesian Poems in English</i>   | Auckland University Press                                |
| 2004 | Albert Wendt recommends Mila to Huia Publishers (Sperber 67)  | Albert Wendt   |
|      | Huia Publishers receive a Creative New Zealand Grant to help publish  | Creative New Zealand                                     |
| 2005 | <i>Dream Fish Floating</i> , a collection of poetry   | Huia Publishers  |
|      | <i>Dream Fish Floating</i> published  | Victoria University of Wellington                        |
| 2006 | <i>Dream Fish Floating</i> becomes a taught text at university (Sperber 66)   | Montana Book Awards                                      |
|      | <i>Dream Fish Floating</i> wins NZSA Jessie Mackay Award for Best First Book of Poetry ("About the author – Karlo Mila")                | Huia Publishers, Auckland Reader's and Writer's Festival |
| 208  | <i>A Well Written Body</i> , a collection of poetry, published and launched at Auckland Reader's and Writer's Festival                  |  |

Fig. 4.

### Key Career Events – Tusiata Avia

| Date | Event  | Authorising Body                          |
|------|--|---|
| 2002 | Completed the MA Creative Writing Programme at the International Institute of Modern Letters ("About the Author – Tusiata Avia") | International Institute of Modern Letters |
| 2002 | Awarded grant to write <i>Wild Dogs Under My Skirt</i> , a one-woman show ("Pacific Performance and Design on Prague Stage")     | Creative New Zealand                      |
|      | Published <i>Wild Dogs Under My Skirt</i> , a collection of poetry   |   |

|      |  |   |
|------|--|---|
| 2004 | Artist-in-residence at the Macmillan Brown Centre for Pacific Studies ("A Word Painter")   | Victoria University Press<br>Macmillan Brown Centre for Pacific Studies |
| 2005 | Granted Fullbright Creative New Zealand Pacific Writer's Residency at the University of Hawaii ("What I'm Reading." 27 Aug. 2005)      | Creative New Zealand<br>Arts Pasifika Awards                            |
| 2006 | Wins Emerging Pacific Artist Award (Moore 14)  | International Institute of Modern Letters                               |
| 2009 | Shortlisted for the Prize in Modern Letters ("About the Author – Tusiata Avia")<br>Published <i>Bloodclot</i> , a collection of poetry | Victoria University Press   |

Fig. 5.

#### Key Career Events – Cliff Fell

| Date | Event  | Authorising Body   |
|------|--|--|
| 2003 | Won the Adam Prize in Modern Letters for his unpublished manuscript, <i>The Adulterer's Bible</i> ("About the Author – Cliff Fell")<br><br>Published <i>The Adulterer's Bible</i> , a collection of poetry | International Institute of Modern Letters<br><br>Victoria University Press |
| 2004 | Won Best First Book of Poetry in Montana Book Awards for <i>The Adulterer's Bible</i><br><br>Won a Creative New Zealand grant to write another collection of poetry (Moriarty <i>The Rise of Fell</i> )    | Montana Book Awards<br><br>Creative New Zealand                            |
| 2008 | Published <i>Beauty of the Badlands</i> , a collection of poetry   | Victoria University Press  |

Fig. 6.

## Reference Chart

| Author name     | First two complete published books   | Publisher(s) of first two works     | Period included in survey | Ethnicity   | When they arrived in Aotearoa  |
|-----------------|--|-------------------------------------|---------------------------|---|--------------------------------|
| Witi Ihimaera   | <i>Pounamu, Pounamu</i> (1972)<br><i>Tangi</i> (1973)                                      | Heinemann                           | 1972-1975                 | Māori: identifies as Māori  | Born here                      |
| Keri Hulme      | <i>The Silences Between: Moeraki Conversations</i> (1982)<br><i>the bone people</i> (1984) | Auckland University Press<br>Spiral | 1982-1986                 | Māori – Pakeha: identifies as Māori                                       | Born here                      |
| Kapka Kassabova | <i>All Roads Lead to the Sea</i> (1997)<br><i>Dismemberment</i> (1998)                     | Auckland University Press           | 1997-2000                 | Bulgarian immigrant to Aotearoa: identifies as a ‘happy cultural mongrel’ | 1972: At seventeen years old   |
| Tusiata Avia    | <i>Wild Dogs Under my Skirt</i> (2004)<br><i>Bloodclot</i> (2009)                          | Victoria University Press           | 2004-2009                 | Samoan, Aotearoa born   | Born here                      |
| Karlo Mila      | <i>Dream Fish Floating</i> (2005)<br><i>A Well-written Body</i> (2008)                     | Huia Publishers                     | 2005-2009                 | Tongan - Palagi - Samoan, Aotearoa born                                   | Born here                      |
| Cliff Fell      | <i>The Adulterer’s Bible</i> (2003)<br><i>Beauty of the Badlands</i> (2008)                | Victoria University Press           | 2003-2009                 | English immigrant to Aotearoa: identifies as New Zealander                | 1998: At forty three years old |

Fig. 8.

## Comparison Chart with Sample Sizes

|   | <b>Karlo Mila</b>     | <b>Tusiata Avia</b>   | <b>Kapka Kassabova</b> | <b>Cliff Fell</b>     | <b>Keri Hulme</b>      | <b>Witi Ihimaera</b>   |
|---|-----------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|------------------------|
| How often the author identified by their ethnicity? | 97%<br>28/29 Articles | 74%<br>34/46 Articles | 90%<br>36/40 Articles  | 24%<br>11/45 Articles | 100%<br>15/15 Articles | 100%<br>15/15 Articles |

|   |                                  |                       |                       |                       |                      |                        |                        |
|---|----------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|------------------------|------------------------|
|   | In the 1 <sup>st</sup> Paragraph | 82%<br>23/28 Articles | 76%<br>26/34 Articles | 81%<br>29/36 Articles | 18%<br>2/11 Articles | 47%<br>7/15 Articles   | 60%<br>9/15 Articles   |
|   | In the rest of the article       | 18%<br>5/28 Articles  | 24%<br>7/34 Articles  | 19%<br>7/36 Articles  | 81%<br>9/11 Articles | 53%<br>8/15 Articles   | 40%<br>6/15 Articles   |
| Is ethnicity developed as a point of interest?<br>In all articles |                                  | 67%<br>20/29 Articles | 39%<br>14/46 Articles | 88%<br>35/40 Articles | 11%<br>5/45 Articles | 100%<br>15/15 Articles | 100%<br>15/15 Articles |

Fig. 9.

### Other Identifiers

|                              | <b>Karlo Mila</b>  | Tusiata Avia   | Kapka Kassabova   | Cliff fell   | Keri Hulme   | Witi Ihmaera                         |
|------------------------------|--|--|---|--|--|--------------------------------------|
| Any other major identifiers? | Woman<br>Mother<br>Wife<br>Pacific voice / leader<br>PhD student<br>From Palmerston North<br>Born in New Zealand | Associated with Manhire course<br>11%<br>Performance poet<br>Born in Christchurch<br>Born in New Zealand<br>Woman<br>Mother<br>Children's book | Young Woman<br>Beautiful<br>Wellingtonian<br>Speaker of four languages<br>New speaker of English<br>Award-winning<br>Associated with Manhire course<br>New talent / new | Described as Kiwi / local / Nelson poet 60%<br>Orinoco poet<br>Motueka poet<br>Associated with Manhire course<br>Golden Bay poet<br>Ngatimoti poet | Booker prize winner<br>Winner of the Mobil Pegasus Award for Māori Writing<br>Feminist<br>Asexual / Androgynous<br>The writer of the 'Great New Zealand novel' | First Māori novelist<br>Young writer |

|  |  |        |        |  |       |  |
|--|--|--------|--------|--|-------|--|
|  |  | author | writer |  | Woman |  |
|--|--|--------|--------|--|-------|--|

*Fig. 10*

### Chi-Square Statistical Test Results

| Question                    | Chi-square value | p-value |
|-----------------------------|------------------|---------|
| How often mentioned?        | 79.260           | <0.0005 |
| Mentioned in paragraph one? | 22.768           | <0.0005 |
| Mentioned in rest?          | 23.878           | <0.0005 |
| Ethnicity developed?        | 90.041           | <0.0005 |

*Fig. 11*

Clearly we have strong statistical evidence for all questions, that the proportions of labelling are different for the different authors. What this means is that although there is what appears to be a large variation in the sample sizes of between 15 and 46 items for different authors, it is still legitimate and meaningful to compare them. As the p-value in the statistical results above is less than 0.05 in value, comparative statements like ‘Karlo Mila is identified by her ethnicity 97% of the time versus contemporary Cliff Fell being identified 24% of the time’ are both possible and valid.

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**Part Two: *Fracture, a novel***

# Fracture

Michalia Arathimos



Shall I at least set my lands in order?

T.S.Eliot, *The Waste Land*

This one thinks she is the centre but she is only a part. The other thinks everything is the centre but himself. This one has long hair down her back, hair she can hide inside. When his hair gets long he razors it off, the fine points biting his palm. She has always been adored. She carries it like a weight. Her shoulders hunch and she is shamefully aware of it. Don't let yourself sag like that. Stand up. Be proud of who you are. You are the first of us to go to university. You are our hopes and our dreams. He has only ever been needed, which is different to being adored.

Where she is filled with voices he is empty. He and his mother sit alone, together. Blow out your candles! Blow them out! Big breath! He gasps and gasps for air in the quiet room. In this one are old songs. Forty years. Forty days. To make a better life. He has emptied himself of words. They were mere repetitions, after all. Did I tell you that story about your father?

Oranges make him feel austere. He peels off the pith carefully. He pops the cells of the skin with his thumbnail to release their scent, each small pore like a section of honeycomb. The smell is a sweet forgiving. She likes baklava, but there's a limit to how much of it you can eat. She moves smoothly through the university halls. He occupies the

buildings in his first year, bombards the office of the Vice Chancellor with rotten fruit, is passed up bread in buckets by girls waiting outside. He studies hard and fails all the tests on purpose. She would prefer not to be touched. In bed she wants the snatch and grab, frisson, the hot collision. For it to be felt, and over. He likes tenderness and curation, the body a deftly mapped terrain.

She is filled with work. Of course there is her voice, the one she keeps quiet because. And you'll never earn any. And we don't want you to live on. And why do you think they came here, so you could grow up to live in poverty? He knows the right people and talks about photography. It's a living, of sorts. It makes no difference. It makes no difference. He photographs trees and snails. It's a talent he has for seeing the light. It's not much. He's always loved the bush, though of course he knows its hunger, its fickle generosity. It deals out dappled leaves and alpine views, then turns. Rain. Floods. Cliffs. She moves through the work and out the other side. There she finds she has used her lover as a flotation device. The family is far away. She cuts free the device, and goes under.

He finds nothing makes a difference. The answer maybe is the bush, but people cut it down. It is not a question of the bush's innocence. He fights casually, mainly through the documentation of small moments. Still, this proves unpopular. His girlfriend says: Just because you're not paranoid doesn't mean they're not out to get you. He makes the best of it. That's what I thought when your father. You're going to have to make the best of it. You just have to carry on. He pushes it all outward.

All she wants to do is sing. She goes on the road. This is where other people find things. This is what you are meant to do. She's not sure what sorts of things she is looking for: evidence, collectables, things that will make her throat open. Will her throat open? He gets in the car and drives. He knows it's naive, but someone has to try and save the world. And supposedly, he's going home.

## ONE

London Bridge is falling down,  
Falling down, falling down,  
London Bridge is falling down,  
My fair lady.

Isaiah woke the morning of the pōwhiri with a dry mouth and a feeling like sand was in his eyes. It was early but the sun had hit their tent, leaving him no choice but to exit his sleeping bag and crawl out. He and Sam had driven well into the night, arguing, and then finally, not speaking. Such focus had been necessary to keep the car on the road, to keep the thin white strip on one side and the car on the other. More than once he'd come to himself, the car moving gently sideways. It took so much energy not to cross the line.

Inside the tent Sam slept on. They were camped outside the main clearing, away from the other cars. Isaiah pissed into the ditch next to the tent in a long, satisfying stream, and looked to the mountain. In the morning light it was only that, a mountain. He surveyed the place: the dense bush, the wharenuī up on the hill with others flanking it, the hills rising bare beyond. It was smaller than he'd expected, dwarfed by the mountain and by the surrounding land. His mother had told him many times that he had shares here by birth-right, that if he wanted to live here, they would welcome him back. Who would welcome him back?

The protestors had arrived gradually in the night. They had made a decision to wait outside until enough people were here to be welcomed onto the marae together. Aidan and Hannah were already here, Sam had said. They'd be useful for fundraising gigs. A few of the others he'd worked with, but he'd never met Bryce before, always, somehow, missing him, though finding threads of his influence everywhere. He wasn't sure, from what he'd heard, that they'd get along. He'd never heard anything negative about him: it was quite the reverse. Bryce was, by all accounts, charismatic and motivated, and not afraid to act. He was

in an open relationship, and had *had* something with Sam, once upon a time, something Isaiah had not inquired into. Sam's friends would be here this morning, Melissa and Kat, both thin women with a lot of energy for the cause, and a number of other acquaintances would be arriving too. Quickly he counted the cars and tents. He estimated forty-five, fifty people. A bird sang wildly in the bush next to him, making him jump. He could see nothing of the fracking, which was supposedly happening right next to the pā. Perhaps it had not yet started? Or maybe it wasn't as bad as they'd been led to believe? The locals had been told there would be an exploratory well, nothing more, but then the company had found a gas source that necessitated further drilling. Now there were plans for a large scale operation near the pā, and the locals were opposing it.

To Isaiah it all looked fresh and untouched. The mountain was perfect, cone-like, almost too regular in shape, like a child's idea of a mountain. His maunga, he reminded himself. It was a perfect day for walking. Though the tip of the mountain was shadowed he could tell the cloud would burn off by lunchtime. By then he'd be cooped up, in the press of the marae welcome, listening to speeches in a language he didn't understand.

‘Mōrena, cousin. He roa te wā kua kitea.’

The man stepped out from behind a tree. He must have seen Isaiah pissing, and chosen his moment.

‘I'm sorry,’ Isaiah said. He did up his pants. ‘I don't speak –’

‘Ahh,’ the man said. He scratched his chin. ‘Aie. Well, long time no see, bro.’

Isaiah was afraid the man was moving in for a hongī, but instead he dealt Isaiah a great clap on the shoulder. ‘Last time I saw you, you were probably three years old.’ He looked significantly at Isaiah, who knew this would have been at his father's tangi. ‘So go on,’ the man said, straight-faced. ‘Tell me I don't look a day older than twenty one!’

He looked more like fifty, but held himself like someone younger. Tattoos covered most of his face and forearms, which, Isaiah could see, were strong and well-muscled. Those on his arms were clumsy and blurred; prison tats, Isaiah guessed. But the one on his face was chiselled and sharp; imposing so you noticed it before you saw his wide, open face. He wore impeccable camouflage gear from head to toe. There was nothing in his dress to distinguish him from a common army soldier but a small tino rangatiratanga flag stitched to the sleeve of his green shirt.

‘I'm Rangi,’ the man went on. ‘I'll be your guide.’ He laughed, a huge, compelling laugh. ‘Nah, jokes man. You're not a tourist.’ He looked at Isaiah consideringly now, and Isaiah was aware he was being assessed. ‘I'm you father's third cousin, once removed,’ he

said. Isaiah wondered how Sam was sleeping through the man's booming voice. 'You're like him,' Rangi went on. 'Taller, skinnier though, eh. Got to put some meat on those bones.' He looked thoughtful, and his hand went again to his chin, which over the moko was bearded slightly. 'Bet you never cut up a cow.'

Isaiah, who had made it through vegetarianism and out again, but who had never killed anything as large as a fish, shook his head mutely. The man straightened up, one eye on the mountain, as if it might suddenly have something to say.

'Well,' he said. 'Reo or not, you've got to come in for the pōwhiri. Your kaumātua want you.' Isaiah must have looked densely at him, because the man sighed. He gestured to the bush behind him, where a faint path led around the main entrance, presumably onto the pā. 'Polly sent me,' Rangi went on. 'She's your father's aunty by the whangaied sister, on your father's mother's side.' He laughed widely again, then, to Isaiah's surprise, grabbed at him bodily, shifting him towards the path in the bush ahead of Rangi himself.

'But what about...?' Isaiah said.

'That chick you were with last night?' Rangi looked at him boldly. It was disquieting: he wasn't sure if he was meant to feel intimidated or not. 'She'll figure it out. She was the one told Bryce who called and told Matiu who told Polly you were all up for getting your language back, your lost culture. Said you wanted to find out all about your dad.' Isaiah stepped quickly through the bush. He could hear the faint sounds of people talking behind him, the other protestors waking up. The bush closed in behind, and they were alone, puffing in the dense green. Should he trust this Rangi? He could be anyone; some madman perhaps, who lived at the pā because he had nowhere else to go.

'How did you even know I was... myself?' Isaiah asked, in a last ditch effort to regain control. Behind him Rangi laughed his loud, slightly insane laugh.

'Easy as, bro,' he said. They came suddenly out of the bush into the bright light. The wharenuī was before Isaiah, rearing up, much larger than it had seemed from a distance. 'Your own whare whakairo!' Rangi said, pride in his voice. He seized Isaiah and, pulling him close, gave him a long hongī. 'Nau mai! Haere mai!' His smile enveloped Isaiah like a warm blanket. 'Easy as to tell you apart from the others. One, you look like your dad, and two, didn't you notice?' He laughed uproariously. 'You're the only dude out there who's not white!' He walked away towards the house, leaving Isaiah no other option but to follow.

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Aidan was playing guitar. The mood in the camp was tense, like the time before heavy rain. Alexia sat with Hannah, who was singing. Alexia was silent, of course. She wouldn't play or sing in front of all these people. For the last five years she hadn't played or sung, even in front of herself. They sat in a clearing near the outskirts of the pā. Aidan had explained that there were three or four marae attached to this place, and that the largest was the site of a very old dwelling. The structures of warfare were still evident around it: the crests and defensive bumps green and furzed over now, but still there.

The deep cut of a river wove through a scattering of small, modest houses, batch-like and close together, all in various states of repair. Some of them looked lived in, others were entirely boarded up. There were three wharenuī that Alexia could see from where she sat, each placed on a high piece of land. She had thought a pā was a base with only one meeting house, but apparently this place warranted a few. One big house certainly was grander than the others. The small houses and the patches of bush all formed a series of irregular hamlets. Alexia could imagine what this land must have looked like, pre-farming. Outside the boundaries of the pā was a sudden flattening out of bush and hill. Cattle-grazing land stretched out on either side of them, pleasant, easy grassed plains, all the way to the mountain. Her eyes caught again and again on the carving at the pinnacle of the large marae. She was too far away to see any details, but the sun lit fiercely on something there, maybe inlaid pāua in the eyes of the figurehead. It glinted intermittently, blinding her.

'Coffee!' one of the men in the clearing yelled. He came round to Alexia and offered a tin cup, which she accepted. He poured elaborately from a kettle, lifting it high so that she was afraid she would be burned. He grinned at her and she had time to notice his psychotic pale blue eyes before he moved on. The coffee in the cup was so strong it was almost tarry. A dreadlocked girl was doing poi, and another man played guitar out of a van, and a couple of people were doing what looked like yoga over by a patch of bush. She wasn't sure all this was appropriate behaviour for a crowd about to be called on for a pōwhiri, but no one appeared to be in charge. She felt, in her too-crisp jeans and lack of political patches and with her hair long and, now she thought of it, expensively shaped into a layered tumble down her back, altogether too clean, entirely out of place. She shouldn't have come.

'That's Bryce,' Hannah whispered, pointing at the coffee pourer. She was sipping coffee too. Alexia leaned towards her, happy to be somehow involved. 'You're going to want to watch out for him.'

'What do you mean?'

‘Well,’ Hannah said. She looked into her cup, long blonde hair brushing her lap. ‘I guess he’s a bit of a character, that’s all. That’s his wife over there,’ she said, flicking her eyes at a woman much younger than Bryce. ‘And that’s her girlfriend.’ Alexia must have looked surprised. ‘Oh, it’s nothing like that,’ Hannah said. ‘It’s all out in the open. Bryce has other partners too. Like, a lot of them,’ she said, grinning at Alexia. ‘He’s kind of a big name activist. He’s been doing it for a while.’

A woman was in front of Alexia, holding out an envelope.

‘Koha,’ she said. She smiled, revealing a set of even, healthy looking teeth, like a fine mare. She was stocky, short and wholesome looking.

‘Hi, Sam,’ Hannah said. Aidan stopped playing and came over, slinging his guitar across his back. Alexia had thought there would be lot more music than there had been so far. When Aidan talked up the trip in the bar a few nights ago she’d thought he and Hannah were headed off on a tour of the island, that they’d be playing gigs in their folk band of two and going to the occasional protest. It had seemed attractive to Alexia, an easy escape from the city. She would sleep in her tent and they in the back of the van. She’d thought their casual approach to music would rub off on her somehow. She’d thought she’d find herself playing alongside them. It seemed now a remote possibility. Instead they were here, answering some call from this marae whose land was threatened by hydraulic fracturing, a process Alexia didn’t even really understand. She wasn’t sure how long Aidan and Hannah wanted to stay, but Aidan said he’d already cancelled their next three tour dates. Hannah seemed unfazed by this in a way that Alexia, who needed things planned out within set parameters, could not relate to.

‘Sam,’ Aidan said. He drew a hundred dollars from his pocket and put it in the envelope. ‘That’s for me and Hannah, for starters.’ His Irish accent took on a certain gruffness. Alexia had not thought about koha. She had only twenty dollars in her pocket. Hurriedly she thrust it at Sam. Sam did a thing where she pretended not to look at the money, but actually did. Then she looked at Alexia’s sharply pleated jeans, her too-clean sneakers, the ruffled white shirt she had last worn at a law school presentation, and turned wordlessly away.

‘Aidan’s ex,’ Hannah whispered. ‘Makes him nervous.’ She betrayed no such nervousness herself, but started, nonchalantly, to roll a pair of cigarettes. Aidan was tuning his guitar pedantically, looking intent. Alexia, who had perfect pitch, knew the instrument was already absolutely in tune.



Then she heard the call. The long, drawn out karanga cut through the clean air and hit at something in her stomach. It was a bodily feeling, as though she were crying out herself, or weeping. It cut through the hubbub and the chatter and made the people go still. She saw the notes as lights, one long, peaked heartbeat of red and gold. As the next notes wrung the air, it began to pull them in. They began to straighten, to shuffle towards the entrance place. Alexia stood, feeling her body unfurl as though it wanted to run, feeling in her throat some kind of suppressed series of notes, like an answer.

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Isaiah wished he had brought his camera. Around the meeting house were several houses and a few buildings that must serve as storage places. All were modest, not at all built for show. But then the ground seemed to gather itself to a point, plateauing then rising to the place where it held the meeting house up to the sky. The panels on the house's side were intricate and ancient-looking; of a dark, carved wood. Isaiah wished for the camera, fervently wished for the camera. The morning light was perfect now, diffuse and soft, but clear. It would show all the whorls and ridges of carving without throwing them into too stark relief. But he could only take pictures with permission from someone, anyway, and maybe even then not at all. And his camera was back in the car, and Rangi was calling to him from up ahead; something he didn't quite catch. He felt the space the camera's absence made at his side.

'Hurry the bloody hell up, cuz!' Isaiah hurried on. He'd wanted to meet his father's people and enter his own marae on good terms, not like this, feeling rushed and bleary. He ran his hand through his hair and rubbed at his face under the glasses. Rangi's head appeared from the porch of an outlying building. Isaiah rounded the corner.

Lying on the table in front of him was the naked carcass of what must have been a steer. Rangi gave him an evil stare, and revved the chainsaw in his hands. Isaiah supposed the meat would be for the hangi, later. He'd never thought much about the mechanics of dissection, of making a steer into cuts of meat. Rangi kept up his mad grin. He was wearing white gloves which were already streaked with red. He jerked his head towards the porch. A woman sat there, smoking calmly. In one hand she had a potato peeler and in the other, her cigarette, which was held in a long, pearl-surfaced holder. She glanced at the carcass and at Isaiah and at Rangi and blew out smoke in a long, delicate stream, as though in front of her was not a bucket of half-peeled potatoes, but some tableau from an opera by which she was not entirely impressed.

This was Polly. Isaiah knew it in a rush of discomfort, even as he walked towards her. Polly lived in his mother's stories of the pā as the aunt closest to Isaiah's father. He'd heard the specifics again and again; Polly was the educated school teacher, the one who had taught his father piano, the one who'd paid for his schooling in the city, and who'd encouraged Isaiah's father to make the most of himself, who'd sent him away. Polly, who, and he'd always been astounded that his mother seemed not to mind, had cut his father off, cleanly and entirely, on the occasion of his marriage to his mother. Polly had had higher hopes for Isaiah's father than that, his mother said, and then she would laugh and laugh, calling Polly a proud old bird.

Polly looked at him with extreme composure and stubbed out her cigarette on the wooden arm of the chair. She must be eighty, at least. He did not remember her face, but knew her hands in the same moment. He wasn't prepared to recognise her smell: the dry rasp of smoke mixed with some gardenia-like perfume, and something else, lavender maybe. There was in his memory the fine weave of a long black skirt and his own self reaching up, a laugh high above his head, a gold ring on a long brown finger.

'Aie,' Polly said. 'Aie. Mokopuna. Haere mai.' She stood, and Isaiah saw that she was small and thin but still very upright. The potato peeler fell from her right hand into the bucket, but apart from this one concession she did not seem moved.

'Kia ora,' Isaiah said, moving forward to meet her. This time he was not taken by surprise by the long hongī. When they moved apart he felt her warm tears on his face. She did not acknowledge them. Instead she looked at him critically.

'Kōrero Māori?'

'No, Aunty.' She looked at him rather haughtily.

'Could have taken a class.' He was so stung by this he did not know what to say. 'Oh well, no matter. At least you look like your father's boy.' Tears continued to slide down her nose and out of the corners of her eyes. She looked past Isaiah to Rangī, who paused in his sawing as though afraid of the repercussions if he did not. 'You're right, he does look like his dad. Lucky he didn't take after his pōrangī mother, eh? Breastfed you till you were four, she did,' Polly said. 'And picked you up all the time, every little cry. Some kind of a hōhā city Pakeha! Wouldn't have time for that kind of thing out here. Just gave them bloody formula in my day.'

Well, Isaiah thought, it was true. His mother was a little crazy. He thought of her impersonations of Polly, which got more and more insulting after each glass of wine.

‘Aunty, Aunty,’ Rangi said. He spoke in hushed te reo for some time. ‘Don’t you know what they say these days?’ he ended, in English. ‘Breast is best!’ Isaiah couldn’t help laughing. He looked straight into Polly’s eyes, which were still leaking tears. She put her hand on his.

‘But you are like him, you are,’ she said wonderingly. Isaiah, still laughing, remembered this about his father: he was famously even-tempered. Well, he’d let Polly think he was the same.

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The manuhiri moved towards the marae. The approach of the visitors was magnetic: slow, inevitable, painful, almost delicious. It was as though they were being drawn in by the karanga but at the same time, curiously, repelled.

‘Closer together,’ the blue-eyed man Bryce said, up near the front. They passed through the carved entrance posts and onto the ground before the meeting house. The marae ātea, Alexia remembered, from her compulsory course at law school. She’d resented being made to learn a language other than her own; would have rather spent time studying Greek. She’d skipped as many classes as she could.

‘Get closer. That’s right. Now, the women first. It’s the women in these parts.’ Bryce’s voice was clear and had a power to it. The people moved as instructed till they were arranged in a wedge with the women at the front and the men at the back. The kuia standing ahead of them called out, her voice clear but her body bent and small. Aidan and Hannah were to Alexia’s left and Sam was to her right. Aidan turned towards her.

‘When am I meant to take off me boots?’ he whispered.

‘Shhhhh,’ Sam said sharply, turning and staring. ‘The time for kōrero is later.’ She turned and faced the front again, her vague smile recovering itself on her lips, as though nothing had been said. They were close enough now to see the kuia’s long, black skirts, her large pounamu, the feathers she wore in her hair, the way she vibrated her hands at each new rise of the song. Alexia took a breath and let it in again. It was a luxury, a celebration of bursting lights.

Alexia had only been onto marae three times. It had always been in educational situations, and always at city marae. The last time she’d gone on they’d slept over, her and her university classmates. Having gone to the bathroom in the middle of the night, she had forgotten to take off her shoes on re-entry. She’d been half asleep but a woman near the door

was awake, as if watching for errant Pākehā. It was the stupidest mistake a person could make, and the woman stopped her, thankfully, from making it. She hadn't said anything, only put one quiet hand on Alexia's leg. Alexia had been mortified.

This marae was huge. Its ribs rose up to meet the ancestor carved at its head, and the porch was large and already covered with shoes. Of course, the locals would already be inside. The house was traditional: red and black and brown, intricately decorated. The pāua in the eyes of the figure on the central post gleamed. A warrior came out from the porch into the grassed land. He performed a series of formal motions, and laid a feather at their feet. She felt, absurdly, tears behind her eyes. Bryce went forward and picked the feather up. Then they were filing slowly onto the porch, taking off their shoes and placing them in neat rows. Sam looked up from where she'd placed her practical boots and smiled at Alexia, seeming to have forgotten her sharp comment earlier. Perhaps she smiled at everyone, all the time.

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Isaiah followed Polly towards the back of the wharenuī. She walked in small quick steps and held her head very upright. She was starling-like, her skin very dark and all her various decorations gleaming in the sun. There was something familiar in the turn of her head.

As a boy Isaiah had loved to hear anything about his father. Later though, he had grown uncomfortable with his mother's stories. Eventually he'd stopped asking altogether. Now, when she spoke of his father he'd look away. It was in the end the finite nature of the stories, the unbearable repetition. She told and re-told and always he was expected to act amused and interested at the right times. There was no avoiding the fact that some time long ago, his mother had run out of amusing anecdotes and charming tales. She was not given to repeating herself on any other subject, so the omission of new material pointed only to his father's absence. When his mother told these stories her face emptied of all of its customary expressions and assumed the pale, bland innocence of a baby's. He'd look away and she'd speak faster, more eagerly, confused about why he didn't want to hear.

'Oh, and he loved you,' she'd always say, at the end. 'Oh, how he loved his little boy.'

By the time he was eight Isaiah had a habit of biting his nails.

'If you could see the way he'd look at you,' she'd say, 'before we lost him.' She would cry sometimes, messily, scattering apologies and tears. He would fetch tissues.

‘You were his firstborn,’ she would say. She would laugh, take another sip of wine. She would bite her nails too, but coyly, only the thumbnail, and only when she was drinking. In her it was an endearing habit, a quirk that went along with her flying hands and her many rings and her perfume and her scarves. ‘He always said he wanted sixteen children,’ she would say. ‘Before he disappeared.’

By the time he was a teenager Isaiah bit his nails until they bled.

He saw his fingers now against the earth. They were long, slender: grownup’s hands, the nails perfectly smooth and untouched. He saw the ground beneath his feet was an ochre brown. He saw Polly walking there so quickly in front of him, so oddly upright, a feather in her hair. He had started weaning himself off the nail-biting when he started taking photos. It had taken a long time: until he was twenty five, only a couple of years ago.

“The Little Prince,” Isaiah’s father had been called as a child. The name was part mocking, part affectionate. His father, trained by Polly, had been good at school work. He’d often been praised by the teacher in front of the other pā kids. The other kids were struggling of course, his mother would say, and her eyes would mist over with a kind of righteous rage. How could they be expected to read and write in English, when it wasn’t their first language? But his father was well-spoken in both languages, and possessed an outlandish self-confidence. The old people said he would be an orator or a lawyer, or a politician. Isaiah’s mother had told him he always carried himself with an odd uprightness, an almost jaunty angle of the head. It wasn’t seen as a good thing, to be liked by the Pākehā teachers with their straps and canes. But his father won everyone over anyway. Isaiah knew, even as a child, that his father was meant to go to the city and bring something back, though he could never understand what it was the people expected. He’d thought it was riches, because his mother had told him the pā was poor. Now he knew it had been something else: something elusive and unattainable, justice maybe, or mana motuhake; something that would restore them to what they had been.

Polly carried herself towards the marae, lightly, smoothly, like an aged but graceful dancer. All that Isaiah had seen of his father were trapped images in old photographs. He used to make himself dizzy looking at the same few snaps, glancing away and then back again, thinking he could somehow trick the images into moving. Perhaps his father had turned his head slightly, exposing more of his jaw or eyes? But there was never any change.

Watching Polly he felt embarrassed for himself. Did he look this arrogant when he walked? She seemed buoyed upwards by some invisible thread. He felt a space open in his chest like a dark hollow in the bole of a tree. Polly turned and grasped his arm. They entered

the kītini at the back of the marae, he tentatively, she with a flourish. The room held the confusing smells of blood and fish and some sharp astringent cleaner, and was lit by bright overhead lights and filled with a crowd of people he felt he should recognise. Somehow there ahead of them was Rangi, having teleported himself from the side of the dismembered beast. Polly clung hawkishly. Despite the drama of her entrance no one looked up. Rangi was muttering and it took Isaiah a moment to realise he wasn't speaking to the people around him but to the line of chickens he was gutting. He greeted each as he picked it up and flipped it over, wielding the knife with great efficiency, and seeming almost parentally proud as their innards splattered into the basin. His speech was threaded with English expletives.

Polly banged her staff on the floor. He had not even noticed it until now: it was carved and ancient-looking, of pāua and dark wood.

'Isaiah Tane Mahuta,' she said. 'Son of Tane Mahuta. My nephew.'

Rangi went on talking, unimpressed, till a thin youth beside him stood on his foot. All the movement in the room stopped; the carrot graters paused in mid-air, the half-assembled sandwiches resting, naked and open on their platters. They all looked at him quietly, until it was comical, until some of the other aunties (he assumed they were his aunties) started to laugh.

'Looks scared to death,' one of them said to Polly.

'What you doing busting him in here then?' one of the others said. 'Got work to do. No time to muck about.' But as casual as they all pretended to be he could sense in them a keen interest. He kept his gaze level and his shoulders back. The younger man next to Rangi stepped forward and cleared his throat.

'We knew that you were coming,' he said. His face was dark and thin and scarred with old acne. He was a little stooped. He stepped towards Isaiah and for a strange moment Isaiah thought he was going to bow and kiss his hand. 'I'm Matiu. I extend welcome for all the whānau –' Rangi let out a rude laugh that turned into a cough, cutting Matiu off. A large old woman bustled through the doors.

'Five minutes to the pōwhiri,' she called. 'Five minutes then you all get yourselves in there to greet. There's not enough of us. You,' she called to Matiu. 'Cat got your tongue? What you looking all po-faced about?' No one answered her. 'What's he looking all po-faced about?' she asked another of the women. Then she saw Isaiah. 'Ahh,' she said. 'Ahh. Well, it makes no different either way. We've still only got five minutes.' She stormed up to Isaiah and took him firmly in her arms, and squeezed him. He found himself entirely engulfed and disarmed, enfolded in her smell of sweat and powder. 'Little Tane,' she said in

his ear. 'I would have known who you were anywhere.' She turned and glared at everyone. 'Get to work, whānau,' she said. 'Last time the tea ran out and the sandwiches I ate were soggy. We're never going to shame ourselves like that again.' She pulled Isaiah towards the exit. Matiu looked bereft.

'Why'd she eat so many then if they were so bloody soggy?' he said. The door swung closed.

'They've waited all your life to see you, they can wait a few more minutes,' the woman said. 'I'm Mary, anyway. I'm your Aunty. We need you up front. Hardly any men to greet the manuhiri anymore.' She sighed and bowed away, calling to the men near the door, figures with carved staffs and canes who were obviously senior.

It was a big wharenuī, huge, he didn't know how old. It would have slept two hundred. It was decorated in traditional colours: red, white and black, and the tukutuku panels that told of his ancestry extended all the way up the walls towards the roof, speaking another language unintelligible to him. The rafters were the ribs of the house, of course, and the central post its backbone. It was dim. There was something wrong with his eyes. A woman called outside: a long, devastating cry. He'd expected to be out there, with Sam and the others, part of the crowd as they edged towards the door. Why had he not even anticipated this? He felt sweat start at the back of his neck.

One of the older men looked towards him. He couldn't linger here. He stood near the photographs, black and white, with the odd one in colour. He recognised no one. He wished to take a photograph of the space but it was not allowed. The wharenuī was shadowy and he thought he could feel, if he tried very hard, its sacredness. It was as if the building did have a sentience, a mana, of its own. He tried the word out in his mind. The older man gestured wildly, with great, welcoming arcs of his arm. If Isaiah felt anything it was a certain transparency, as though the marae and the people in it were real, and himself a permeable copy. He stood, Isaiah, Tane Mahuta's son. He saw himself at a distance, walking forwards.

The old man reached out a hand and pulled Isaiah in, to share his breath.

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Alexia moved in her stockinged feet. Three kuia were lined up near the door. There was a complex interchange of looks and smiles. Bryce strode forward confidently, and Sam went on ahead. Alexia felt a great, unwieldy tension. There was the hard-edged bush on either side, the barren hills, the great blue dome of the sky. It was possible to feel that even the air

was observing her. A kuia near the door shifted and smiled. She nodded deliberately at Alexia, as if in recognition.

The poles in the centre of the marae were earthed and held by the ancestors beneath. Their arms overlapped, one sometimes sitting atop another, pāua eyes shining. There were many people present, but not as many as the wharenuī could hold. The activists gathered in a clenched group near the middle. Bryce's head rose above the others. His face said he was enjoying all this immensely. Good stuff, he seemed to be thinking, with each smile and nod. Good stuff!

\*

After the calling from outside there was quiet. Isaiah had never seen a wero. It was an older practice. In his mind's eye he could see the male warrior issuing his challenge, the tentative steps forward, the laying down of a token. What would they lay at the manuhiri's feet? A shell it would be sometimes, or a dart, he remembered from school. A part of him wanted to be out front with the guests, to see. But he was tangata whenua. He would have to ask Sam later. He should know what the token was, this being his home marae. He should know without needing to ask.

‘Haere mai, haere mai.’

He came out of the hongī and looked into the old man's eyes. There was a sharpness to them. He held Isaiah's gaze for a long time, until Isaiah shifted. As if that was what he'd been waiting for, the man released him. Was he another relative? He imagined he could see a resemblance in the long line of the man's jaw. But the interlocking groups here were so complex, with many iwi and hapū overlapping. Some weren't related at all. The few relatives he'd met after his father's death had always been vague about their exact relationship to him, as though it was a matter of etiquette not to ask. They were always just Aunty, or Uncle. His whakapapa wasn't written down. It was not allowed to be. He was meant to have been taught to recite the names of his ancestors in a long rhythmic verse, but that was another thing he'd never had the opportunity to learn. The old man pulled Isaiah close beside him. The rise and fall of the karanga beat against his ears. He would resolve not to see ghosts everywhere. But already his mind was making links. His father was there, in Matiu's eyes, in this man's jaw, in Rangi's cheekbones, in Polly's upright stance.

The man held him firmly at the end of the line of men. But surely he was too junior, too inexperienced? What was he meant to do? Polly and Mary had said there were hardly



any men left to do the greeting. Matiu was perhaps younger than Isaiah himself, and Rangi would be the only other candidate he'd seen so far aside from the couple of men by the door. The local people started to file in. The nature of the space made them slow down and fall quiet. There were no windows and the light made the ancestor's eyes glow and the tukutuku patterns come to life. The people settled themselves with small adjustments of scarves and skirts. On entry they passed their tūpuna. The oldest photographs were cracked, sepia-toned: portraits of men with moko and women with feathers in their hair, all very serious. He would have loved to study the photography.

‘Haere mai, haere mai.’

Rangi arrived. He looked from the old man to Isaiah and back, and moved in between them. Isaiah stepped back hurriedly. The first visitors were coming in. Isaiah made his breathing slow and regular. He felt slightly dizzy. He seemed to see birds in the rafters, or the shadows of birds. It was hard not to look straight up. The feeling of lightness in his head was increasing. He tried to breathe down into his legs, into his toes, as a grounding measure. He was dimly aware of Rangi snorting softly, giving him a challenging look, but it was all he could do to keep upright. There. The tukutuku patterns were flickering, moving, as though the patterns of red, black and white were revolving upwards.

‘Haere mai, Haere mai.’

He turned to Rangi with his mouth open, about to ask, but the visitors were upon them, and the mihi had started.

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After the speeches and acknowledgements came a moment of silence. The waiata! Now they were all meant to sing. Alexia felt an elbow in her ribs and, looking left, saw one of the women activists nodding at her. She pushed Alexia forwards until she stood to the front of the group. The marae was filled with polite shuffles and throat clearings. There was a pat on her back. From behind she heard the Bryce whispering encouragement.

They thought she was Māori, and they expected her to sing. They were deferring to her. In her panic she scabbled in her mind for lyrics. Cross your legs. Cross your arms. Sit up straight. Here are the poi we have made out of plastic bags and plaited wool. Here are the harakeke windmills. Move in time, hands on your waists. But people were staring now and her face was getting hot and all that was running in her head was a nursery rhyme in Greek, which was the wrong language altogether.

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The welcoming speeches had been made. Isaiah stood awkwardly in his position near the door, trying not to catch Sam's eye. His girlfriend stood huddled in the group of Pākehā, close to the front, hands clasped in a respectful way. Bryce stepped forwards and spoke with absolute confidence, launching fluidly into his whaikōrero. He spoke fluently in te reo, explaining, Isaiah guessed, his own origins, outlining their shared kaupapa and reasons for coming. Isaiah understood only the English words: environment, pollution, solidarity, fracking.

Now the waiata would begin. The Pākehā stood quietly and Isaiah suddenly realised: they hadn't decided on a song. They had all arrived at different times and were from different groups, and somehow every one of them had assumed that another had sorted it out. Across the room Polly gave Isaiah a disappointed look. They were his people, after all. The silence lengthened. Mary, Rangi, and Matiu began to give each other, quick, doubtful looks. Then Melissa and Kate were pushing a woman to the front of the group.

The woman was darker skinned than the others, with long black hair worn loose down her back. He saw at once that the others had taken her for Māori. But she looked frozen, as lost as Isaiah felt. Perhaps she wasn't Māori at all but Middle Eastern, or Italian. She was certainly beautiful. She opened her mouth to sing, but no words came out. Someone gave her a little pat from behind.

‘Pōkarekare ana...’

The woman's voice was good but Isaiah could not suppress a slight physical flinch. Beside him he felt Rangi stirring slightly. Everyone was too polite to laugh. The other Pākehā joined in, lifting their voices with relief, fading out during some of the trickier bits. Isaiah watched in fascination as the woman's face turned a deep, somehow satisfying red.

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At last it was over and the lifting of tapu began. The hosts formed a long line and the guests began to file past for the hongī. Alexia always felt challenged by the intimacy and closeness of the hongī, and guilty for not mastering it. Greeks kissed on the cheek, one, two, three if they were being emphatic. But this sharing of breath was so direct, it was all she could do not to duck her head and shy away.

A man grasped her hand. The wrinkles on his face fell down in folds. He drew her strongly towards him. She leaned in, trying to still herself. She glimpsed his eyes: dark, teary, brimming with warmth, before they closed and his nose was on hers. But she missed! Her own nose brushed his and swept to the side, and everything was lost in awkwardness.

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Bryce passed, Melissa passed. Kate hugged him enthusiastically. He'd sat in meetings with them, eaten with them, schemed with them. But now they looked at him with a certain pride, he on one side of the line, they on the other. He wanted to object, say, look, it's just me, Isaiah, but he saw he was a kind of talisman. The flickering of the panels had, luckily, subsided. He greeted each new person nervously, hoping he was doing it right. Sam came and hugged him broadly, flashing a bright grin. Further down the line, the woman who had sung approached, blushing furiously.

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Alexia stood in front of another man. At the last minute, sensing her discomfort, he changed the hug to a kiss, and Alexia nosed his cheek. In a room full of people Alexia would somehow find the only loose thread in the floor, and trip and fall. She was handed to a stocky man in camo gear, who pulled her in quickly. Centimetres from her face he stopped and looked at her. Was he wondering, too, if she was a relative? His stocky build reminded her of something. All at once she wanted out, pure and simple; to run out into the air and breathe unencumbered, to walk towards the mountain. He leaned in and hugged quickly, and then, as if to say, there, all done, handed her on to the next person.

Her immediate thought was that she recognised this man. They stood eye to eye, gazes almost perfectly aligned, and she almost took a step back. He stood very upright, hand reached formally towards her. But she did not know him. He was slender and very nearly her age. He had black hair cut neatly short, and there was something about him that made him seem taller than he was. His clothes were generic: an earthy coloured T-shirt and functional khaki pants. He had dark-rimmed glasses frames that weren't quite thick enough to be fashionable. The hand he had extended was long-fingered and his wrist smooth-skinned. The skin on his face was stretched taut across the bones. There was no excess on this man, nothing wasted. He could have been an ad for an outdoor adventure company or

some expensive multifunctional watch, the kind that told you your physical co-ordinates. He didn't look all Māori. His skin was quite light, a tan colour, and his eyes were flecked with green, like her own. That was it: he looked Greek to her. He looked like Alexia herself.

They moved forwards at the same time. His hand was unpleasantly sweaty, but so was hers. She was aware that they were causing a small jam in the system, and leaned forward too quickly. She thought he'd go for a hongī but he moved his head jerkily towards her cheek. He seemed as nervous as she was. His lips hit her cheek and grazed the corner of her mouth. Both of them straightened up. His face creased as he studied her. He held her hand with disarming gentleness, his eyes moving quickly behind the glasses. The sturdy man beside them made a sound and Alexia let go, the man's hand sliding out of her grasp. The touch had been nothing, really: light, quick, entirely accidental.

Stephen had been firm and practical with his kisses, straightforward. Alexia had always preferred, unlike most of the women she knew, to skip the preliminaries and go straight for the full body contact; the strong-armed hold, the rough push and pull. It was what she liked. It was what she had thought she liked.



## TWO

Build it up with wood and clay,  
Wood and clay, wood and clay,  
Build it up with wood and clay,  
My fair lady.

It was early morning in the wharekai. Alexia sat near Isaiah. He wished he had something clever to say. Sam was on the other side of the table, talking to Kate and Melissa over their bowls of oats and soymilk. Rangi raised his eyebrows at him. Sam began to talk in hushed tones. Melissa seemed upset, but that didn't necessarily mean anything.

'Devastation,' Kate said.

'Annihilation,' Sam said.

'Like the earth is wounded,' Melissa said.

They must have gone onto the fracking site in the night. The small fact of Sam's betrayal opened out in him. It would have been for practical reasons though, that he had been excluded: relations with the pā were still fresh, and it paid to keep Isaiah innocent in the eyes of the iwi, who might not welcome the city people poking around. Sam was an excellent politician, but sometimes a less than tactful girlfriend.

Matiu and Rangi were deep in conversation about whether they should plant the gardens the old way, following the cycles of the moon, or whether it was all bollocks. Isaiah struggled to hear the women's whispers over the noise. He would dearly love to see the fracking site himself, but it was beyond the pā-owned land, behind a stand of bush, and patrolled by security guards. Matiu said they'd be stupid to turn their backs on the knowledge of the kaumātua. Rangi slurped his food.

'But who's got time to find out about all that now?' Rangi said. 'Spring's almost over. Got to get the kūmara in soon. Only one left who'd know is your Aunty, and she's back at her family place up the coast. Better we just plant up.' Sam, Kate and Melissa's whispering grew stagey. Isaiah fought the idea that this was partly for his benefit.

‘Such destruction,’ Melissa said. ‘Can’t believe it. The bulldozers. Toxic effluent. I mean –’

‘The old ones,’ Matiu said loudly. ‘They know the way. My koro, he knew everything, how to smoke the eels, cure the fish so it didn’t go off, everything. But especially he knew about the gardens.’

‘Well why didn’t you bloody write it down, then?’ Rangi said.

‘So poisoned, so ugly,’ Melissa whispered. And there, at the long wooden breakfast table, she began to cry. A look of concern passed over Alexia’s face.

‘Are you alright?’ she asked.

Melissa did not answer, but looked accusingly at Alexia’s breakfast bowl through her tears. She had a certain disdain for people who drank cow’s milk. She would have watched everyone at the table carefully to see who used the jug with soymilk and who used the one with cow, so as to organise them into her hierarchy of vegan vs. other. Isaiah himself sneaked into acceptability on a lower rung, as a freegan, which meant he would eat whatever he was given.

‘She’s fine,’ Kate said. She put an arm around Melissa’s shoulders. ‘She’s just crying for Papa-tū-ā-nuku.’

‘The earth mother?’ Alexia asked. She began, uncontrollably, to laugh. She picked up her bowl and left the table, blushing furiously, unable to contain herself. Rangi frowned at her fleeing back, but luckily, Matiu drew him back into conversation.

‘She wouldn’t understand,’ Kate said to the table as a whole.

‘You know they didn’t like things written down,’ Matiu said.

‘That rule’s only for whakapapā,’ Rangi said.

‘Well, you didn’t write it down either. Like I’m the only one around here with the responsibility.’

‘What did you see, Melissa?’ Isaiah asked. He would corner Sam later, get her to tell him everything. But Melissa looked at Kate, and Kate at Sam. The three women bent over their bowls without speaking. He watched a tear drip down Melissa’s long face and fall into the soymilk. He took his bowl through to the sink where Alexia was standing. She raised her eyebrows and took the dish.

‘They went onto the frack site?’ she asked. ‘I thought the elders didn’t want that.’

‘Seems like it.’ Isaiah shrugged.

‘But that’s so disrespectful,’ Alexia said, with a primness he did not like. But then suddenly she laughed. ‘And those three... “Tears of the bloody earth!”’ She bent slightly at

the waist, her large mouth widening, her laugh a cackle, irresistible. He found himself laughing too, uneasy that he would be heard. ‘I’m sorry, Isaiah. I know you’re Māori. I didn’t mean to be insensitive back there.’

‘Oh,’ he said. ‘The Papa-tū-ā-nuku thing? Don’t worry. I’m not –’ he began to say, but couldn’t think what it was that he wasn’t. Through the open doorway they could see Melissa crying more openly now as Sam whispered on. He didn’t know what Alexia had done to him, but he was laughing wildly now, holding it back with one hand over his mouth. He had to leave the room.

In the ablutions block he leaned into a stall and laughed and laughed, soundlessly, pressed against the cold metal door. It was disturbing. At the same time he had in him a desire to know what Sam knew, to take the first opportunity to grill her for details. What did the site look like? Was the pollution visible? Was there runoff apparent already? Could it be photographed? These were serious questions. But his body laughed.

When he went to wash his face off at the basin though his reflection was crying. His tear ducts, as if released from a long damming, had opened up. It felt like an entirely physical thing, as though his mind had nothing to do with it. He watched, astonished, as the fat drops darkened the concrete floor in great, ragged spots. There was a sick feeling in the pit of his stomach. He stayed there a long time, his body pressed against the cold wharepaku wall, face streaming water and tears.

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The kids were out in front of one of the smaller whare. Someone was strumming a guitar in a back paddock and singing in a low, sonorous voice, words Alexia couldn’t understand. Voices came from inside. The light was almost preternaturally bright, turning the grass a verdant green and the clouds a fluorescent white. Only the urupa was partially shaded by surrounding bush. Wherever she was on the land around the pā she felt its presence. She began to see the slight, firework-like lights that came with the chinks and twangs of the distant guitar. For a moment she slipped into it, the notes moving and dancing freely in front of her eyes, then she pulled herself out. It wasn’t the urupā itself. It was the music.

It was in her early teens that she started seeing the lights. They had been so confusing, the small flashes and latticed points that others could not see. She had avoided, for a while, telling her parents. But it was always there, at its strongest in music class and when, lying in her room after school, she would close the curtains and put on headphones and



lose herself in the emerging patterns. She waited till she was sure, so that when she did tell and was taken to a specialist she could say yes, the lights followed the beats in the music and yes, different colours corresponded to different notes and yes, she could see the bars unfolding in the air, not recognisable as a musical score but intelligible to her: each song a visible series of flares and bursts.

When it was decided that she had music synaesthesia she was both relieved she was not crazy and appalled at having her secret exposed. Her grandmother was impressed. The word, after all, had its roots in the Greek: ‘syn’ meaning ‘together’ and aisthēsis meaning ‘sensation.’ Somehow this conferred upon Alexia a special status, as someone in possession of a sense, in her grandmother’s mind, extra to those possessed by everyone else.

But Alexia did not always experience her synaesthesia positively. She had to learn how to manage the lights so that she would not be distracted by them. She had mastered, now, this art of suppression, but something about the music from the back paddock: mesmeric, atonal, oddly dirge-like, crept through her defences so she could see the flashes now, faint but sharp over the urupā. As always when she saw the lights she began to go there; into that place, where the knowledge that what she saw was not real, ‘only a trick of perception,’ as the specialist had put it, faded out, replaced by mesmerised belief. She felt cold all through her body, her feet chilled in her shoes.

A little boy came and sat on the step. He had introduced himself to her as Tama, and now he seemed to have taken her under his wing as his responsibility, his pet Pākehā. His bare shoulder brushed her knee, and that was all it took: she jolted out. No lights, no more lights. He followed her eyes to the graveyard.

‘One of my nannies is in there,’ he said. He liked his nanny, he told her. She noted the present tense. He told her they always visited, and that his mother always cried, but that he wasn’t sad. He said they were only dead, and Alexia shouldn’t be afraid. ‘Once though,’ he said, ‘she came in the night, and told me off.’ Alexia waited. ‘I took my brother’s kete,’ he said eventually. ‘Well, actually I stole it. His was better than mine.’ He looked defiantly at Alexia.

‘Right,’ she said. ‘So what did your Nanny say?’

‘She came in the night,’ Tama said. ‘Nanny Moko. That’s her name. She came, and I knew it was her because of her marks, here, see,’ he said, tracing a panel on either side of his nose. ‘And here. I told Mama after and she said, that’s your Nanny Moko. Nanny had this weird moko cos she was from down south, and that was what her father’s people wore. But I had never met her before she died so I didn’t know.’ Alexia nodded. ‘She’s not called

Nanny Moko either,' he said. 'That's just her nickname. That's not a real name.' He looked at her disparagingly, as though Alexia had claimed it was.

The heat shimmered off the grass, and in the distance the graves showed as dark specks on the green. Little light flags waved above the urupa. The guitar played on behind her, and again Alexia stepped back from the lights and ceased to see.

'My nanny, she said if I didn't tell Ma and give the kete back, she would lean on me.' 'What do you mean, lean on you?' she asked.

'She leaned on me,' he said. He turned to Alexia and lay his head against her chest. The pressure was overwhelming. 'Like this. I couldn't breathe.' He backed away and looked at her distrustfully, from beneath thick eyelashes. 'She better not hear me telling you,' he said. He looked towards the urupā. 'And she said I had to give back my sister's iPod, too, from where I hid it under the bed.'

'Are you scared of her?' she asked.

'No.' Tama said. Alexia could still feel the imprint of where he had pressed his head against her body. The pressure had been strangely constant. 'Nah. My nanny loves me,' he said. 'I take her flowers, and I don't take people's stuff anymore.' He looked vaguely guilty. 'Only sometimes apples, but they're from Taylor's farm and once that was all our land so it belongs to us anyway.' He looked loftily at Alexia along the bridge of his nose. 'That's not really stealing. But you wouldn't understand.'

Suddenly he cut his eyes at her and dashed off down the path into the bush near his house. He ran barefoot with no apparent pain on the river stones. She avoided looking back to the urupā, where she knew the lights would be dancing again, the colours too varied and the notes too weirdly random for her to read.

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Sam stood up. The meeting was being held in one of the informal halls attached to the wharekai, a casual space, almost a lounge. There were ten or twelve people in attendance: three elders including Polly, the city Pākehā, and Rangi and Matiu. The day before a group had gone to protest the lack of council action on their application to have the fracking banned. Alexia had stayed behind, happy to sift through documents. It was unclear what exactly had happened, but Matiu told her that Sam had almost been arrested. When a local councillor came out to address the protestors she'd thrown black paint on him in a simulation of oil, and had lain on the ground chanting until a security guard dragged her away. The

police were very nearly called. It was all very good, Matiu had said, to want to make a strong statement, except that until now the pā had avoided police involvement, aiming to keep the face of the opposition peaceful.

‘Kia ora,’ Sam said. ‘Thanks for your ideas in the meetings earlier this week, and thanks for your support around our little demo.’ She smiled in Kate and Melissa’s direction. ‘I thought we could use this session to do a little education around fracking, and maybe talk through some possible strategies for stopping it. Bryce?’ Alexia marvelled at her confidence, her ease. Now Bryce stood and opened his laptop, and set up his display.

‘Fracking,’ he began, ‘is a word for hydraulic fracturing, a method that companies use to discover natural gas or oil, and extract it from the rock.’ He pulled up a diagram showing a metal structure at the top of a deep cross-section of a well. Rangi cleared his throat. ‘In your area,’ Bryce went on, ‘the wells they are intending to bore would most certainly be in search of natural gas. We know they’ve got some more not far from here already, and those have passed the exploratory stage, so there’s a good chance they’ll put in quite a few here.’ Rangi cracked his knuckles. Bryce flicked over into another screen. ‘Once they bore a well, they pump fracking solution or frack fluid into it, mixed with sand and chemicals. The idea is that the fluid literally fractures the earth horizontally, releasing the gas that may be trapped in the fissures in coal seams so it can be channelled to the surface.’

Matiu shifted uncomfortably, and Rangi coughed. Polly let out a protracted sigh.

‘Of course, there are often problems,’ Bryce went on, unperturbed. ‘Earthquakes, air pollution, water pollution. The environmental impacts of this process are many and various. It’s outlawed in much of Europe, and they’re talking about banning it in Canada. They can’t ensure the wells don’t leak runoff, is one thing. There’s a lot of related pollution. They have to get the sand and water for the frack fluid from somewhere, so they’ll be mining the land and collecting millions of litres of water from rivers. And, when the fluid comes up again, they have to do something with the toxic waste. Landfarming is one way they try to deal with it. They scrape the grass and topsoil off a field, and lay the waste down. Then they just put the grass back on top of it.’ He flicked over to a shot of an immense pond. ‘Or they’ll store water in ponds like this, lined with plastic. Often the frack water leaches out into the earth. It can cause problems with cattle health, with farms, with local water sources...’

‘For God’s sake, man,’ Rangi was suddenly there, beside Bryce, huge and furious in his camo gear, closing the computer. ‘Stop wasting our time.’

‘Rangi!’ Matiu was up and trying to subdue his cousin. But Rangi went on.

‘Nah,’ he said. ‘Nah. I’m not putting up with it anymore.’ He turned to the group. ‘We been patient all week. Let them do it their way, we thought. But coming in and telling us everything we already know? Where do you get off?’ Alexia felt privately embarrassed. She’d not known anything Bryce had covered, and had been interested in the presentation.

‘We do have the internet here,’ Matiu said. He seemed almost apologetic. ‘I mean, all the info’s out there. There’s even documentaries on it.’

‘Of course we know the risks of the fracking,’ Polly said. ‘We wouldn’t have put out the panui for help if we didn’t know how dangerous it was. We don’t need any more information.’

‘Come in and educate the natives. What do you think you are, bloody missionaries?’ Rangi said. Bryce sat down with a thump, and was graceful enough to apologise. There was a small, awkward silence. At length Kate spoke, one of the tall, thin women that seemed always to accompany Sam.

‘Let’s try again to get this meeting going,’ she said, ‘if that’s Ok with everyone.’ Her hands twitched and clasped themselves together in her lap. ‘I’d like to start with a round. Because...’ The hands were small and claw-like, like the paws of some animal. ‘I feel that following the umm, action outside the council buildings, I thought we might need to debrief.’ Almost as though she was passing a talking stick, she turned to Sam. ‘Sam,’ she said. ‘We all admire your commitment to the cause, and I know you’ve had some trauma as a result of being attacked by the guards yesterday.’ Here she was silent for a moment, as if in deference. ‘I don’t want to speak for you but I thought we all might learn something by hearing about your experience, and how you’re processing it.’

Isaiah’s girlfriend bore no visible marks of violence. Her face was impassive, non-sense and candid under her short, blunt cut fringe and cropped hair. She seemed about to speak, but Melissa let out a sob.

‘I’m sorry,’ Melissa said. Isaiah remained straight-faced. Sam looked on with an official kind of compassion. There was a light in her face like that you’d see in the faces of churchgoers going to serve at a soup kitchen. There was a healthiness to her, like if you stuck with her she’d feed you up on ethical food and take you for bushwalks. Aidan was yawning and eating all the cookies. ‘It’s just, I so feel for Sam, who put herself on the line like that.’ Melissa sniffed, a sniff outrageous in length and magnitude. Alexia suppressed a laugh at the last possible moment. But Polly could control herself no longer.

Her waiata cut through Melissa’s sniff and somehow brought the world outside the room into focus. Alexia could hear birdsong outside, children talking, distant bulldozers at

work. Polly sang low and full, a welcome song, but there was a hardness to her voice that no one could mistake. The tune looked to Alexia like rough waves on the sea, all sharp points rising. She quelled it. Polly was wholly still, formed like a tight fist around her voice, and now even Melissa was quiet.

'That is how you open a hui,' Polly said. 'In these parts.' She sat back in her chair. She held her staff in one hand, long and carved. Rangi leaned forwards and put his hands on his knees.

'We are here by the grace of our ancestors, who guarded and protected this land,' he said. 'Who gave their lives for it. Now it is being dirtied, made barren. There will be nothing left here for our children, or our children's children. The time for cheap talk is over. All these facts and figures and sharing of feelings and all that, well, we don't have time for it. Or, all due respect,' he said, looking at Sam, 'for one-person acts of bravery.' Sam blushed. Rangi smiled, a charming, quite unbalanced smile of complete candour. 'So,' he said. 'What are we going to do to shut these dirty bastards down?'

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Alexia was singing quietly to herself as she did the dishes. The sparks danced over the knives, only for her. She sang often now, on her way to the wharenuī, or back to the camp she slept at with Hannah and Aidan. They'd decided to leave the sleeping rooms at the wharenuī for other visitors, hoping as many people as possible would be encouraged to stay. There was a lot of optimism around, a lot of mucking in and brainstorming and excited conversation. She felt her voice loosed in a way that it could not be in the city. Even now, in the crowded kitchen, she was unafraid.

She felt a hand on her back. It landed in the centre and then passed away, but the feeling was large and warm. She jumped, hands sliding in the suds-filled sink. Her fingers grazed a knife's edge. Pain.

'You!' she said. Isaiah grinned madly.

'Keep going,' he said. 'Your voice. It's unbelievable.' As suddenly as he'd said it he flinched away. Alexia's hand was bleeding a lot into the water. She would have to do the dishes all over again.

'You're bleeding!' Isaiah said. 'Oh, I'm sorry!' He seemed appalled at what he'd done. 'Wait, I'll get a...' he grabbed for a cloth and her hand at the same time. She couldn't stop laughing, at him, the situation, his ineptness.

‘Let me do it.’ She took the cloth from where he was fumbling at the cut and wrapped it round, once, twice. He reached out to put pressure on it. His eyes had fine lines at the corners. His eyebrows were black and strong with unfairly long lashes. He had the cheekbones of some kind of prophet but his mouth was a contradiction: lush and full. He looked older than he had in the dim marae.

‘I’m sorry,’ he said again, meeting her eyes.

‘Shut up,’ she said. ‘I really don’t care.’ They stood for a moment longer and she became aware that he was still holding onto her hand.

Sam came in through the doorway behind Isaiah and paused, taking this all in. By the time Isaiah saw her, she had her features in order. But Alexia had seen things twist across her face that weren’t intended for Isaiah. She pulled back till she felt her hip bump the cold sink, clutching her bleeding hand, reminding herself of what she’d heard about Isaiah and Sam’s relationship: that like Bryce’s and his wife’s, it was ‘open’. Maybe that was just a line he gave out? Maybe that wasn’t how Sam saw it at all? But now Sam’s face was bland again, as always, lit from within by a certain evangelical belief. Alexia was reminded of an old word: fetching.

‘Alexia’s cut herself,’ Isaiah said. Something flickered over Sam’s face again; possibly relief. And just as suddenly as Isaiah had moved away Sam was next to her, tutting, looking into the sink full of blood.

‘Let me see,’ she said, and Alexia found herself offering her finger up almost gladly. ‘No, this needs a bandage.’ She levelled her eyes at Isaiah. ‘You want to finish up these dishes? I’ll take Alexia to the first aid stuff.’ It wasn’t a question. Isaiah moved into the space by the sink. She found herself being led away.

Outside they walked side by side in silence. Blood dripped off Alexia’s fingers onto the soil. After the light of the kītini everything seemed too bright.

‘So where do you whakapapa back to?’ Sam asked. Alexia looked at the woman, her slightly upturned nose, her pug face. Their feet kicked up red dust.

‘The capital,’ Alexia said.

‘Oh,’ Sam said. ‘I meant, your iwi.’

‘I’m Greek,’ Alexia said. After they’d realised she wasn’t Māori people always wanted to know what part of Greece Alexia was from, and whether she’d been back, and say how lovely the islands were, and tell her how great it must be to be part of a culture with real ‘roots’. They never seemed to realise that they themselves were also part of the great tide and

wash of culture; passengers from somewhere headed somewhere else, even if they could not see it.

'Oh, sorry. I thought you were Māori,' Sam said. Then she shrugged, as if that was the end of her interest in the subject. Alexia looked into Sam's face, but her eyes were a wide, innocent blue. 'So you don't have an iwi then, or a hapū,' she went on. 'You're like me, just Pākehā.'

And that was Alexia's sore point. She didn't want to put be in the same basket as Sam, collected like flotsam into some amorphous cultureless group. Alexia was Pākehā but she was also Greek. Sometimes, she was mainly Greek: it depended on the context.

'I'm Greek,' she said again. Sam's smiled, an impenetrable smile.

'The Greeks aren't doing too well at the moment, are they?' she said mildly. 'But you are only a Pākehā, anyway,' she went on. 'You were born here, right? Your people were colonisers too. They just came later.' Alexia looked into the clear, guiltless eyes. 'I wondered why you didn't know the tikanga, why you forgot to have koha ready,' she went on. 'And, I mean, 'Pōkarekare āna!'

There was no question now. This was a powerful speech that Sam had been working up to for some time. 'If you were Māori you would have known that stuff. But you're just a whitey after all!' She gave Alexia's arm a hard, joking punch, and laughed, a single loud laugh that Alexia did not echo. They arrived at the ablutions block.

'I'm Greek,' Alexia said. She heard her voice come out louder than she had intended it to. 'My mother's generation were beaten alongside the Māori kids at their school. They weren't allowed to speak their language either. They lived six to a room for years, until they could buy a house. They're not, we're not, just white.' The fact of Isaiah's skin came into her mind, coffee-coloured, absurdly like her own, as similar as if they were related. 'Things were different, then. They were tolerated, not welcomed. And then, only barely.' She knew as she was speaking that it would not make a difference. She knew that she was getting at something Sam did not wish to understand, a niggling complexity, an ambiguity in her system of inherited blame.

Sam threw open the cabinet door and pointed to the bandages.

'I mean, of course I'm white too—' Alexia went on, a little desperately.

But, elaborately, Sam turned away. Halfway out the door she called back over her shoulder.

'Sorry!' Her face was filled with a kind of odd joy. 'Sorry, sister! Can't chat! Just remembered I've do some strategising before the meeting!' And she was gone, leaving

Alexia in the entrance to the wharepaku, with blood on her hands and a taste in her mouth like metal and dirt.

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In a gap between meetings Alexia found the guitar. Its surface was smooth and buffed and carried a subtle sheen, weathered by the hands that had played it. It was against a wall in a corner. There was the long slope and swoop of it, the dull patina. There was a scar where it must have been dropped. There was nothing special about it. It had a woven strap, black, red, white. She picked it up. On inquiry it appeared that no one minded if she used it.

She was playing it when she saw the vision come up over the field. She shaded her eyes, cutting out the music lights, and found that it was real. It was Ana, one of the children, who was maybe twelve. She had an eel over one arm and was coming up from the creek. She stroked it. It was almost as big as her, its mouth open in an uncanny grin. It had milky blue eyes that Alexia could discern even from this distance. Her brothers Tama and Maitai came galloping madly after her, a hysterical edge to their voices.

'You three up to something?' Alexia called. Ana patted the eel with a long, slow stroke, as if hypnotised. It was huge. She seemed crushed under the weight of it, but unafraid. It remained placid.

'What's it to ya?' Ana called. 'That's my wharenuui you're sitting by. And this is my eel, so there!'

The eel's tail swept around suddenly and hit Tama. The movement was slick and serpentine and Alexia felt the fright deep in her body. Tama began to run, and by the time he reached Alexia he was in tears.

'She's not supposed to!' he said. 'They said! They said to leave them in the river!' He rubbed his hand across his face. 'Old Mako loves her and always comes when she calls but she shouldn't take him out.'

Ana disappeared down the bank with Old Mako. When she came back he was gone. She approached sulkily.

'He's my eel,' she said, by way of explanation.

'He likes it better in the river though, doesn't he?' Alexia asked.

'He loves me,' Ana said, stubbornly. 'He comes because he loves me. He's mine.'

'She makes him come to her with kai!' Tama could not control himself.

'Do not!'



'Do so!' Tama looked to Maitai for support. 'She puts food in a sock and then his teeth get caught and then she gets him!'

'So?' Ana put her hands on her hips.

Alexia picked up the guitar and began to strum. 'Don't mind me,' she said, addressing herself to the air. 'I'm not really playing.'

'Then what are ya doing?' said Maitai. 'Far out, she's crazy!'

'She is not.'

'Is too.'

'You're good!' said Ana. She'd apparently forgotten her rage. Alexia started to sing: rhyming lyrics about an eel and his lover. Maitai and Tama began to laugh. Ana crossed her arms across her thin chest, and made her toughest face. But Alexia was relentless.

'Old Mako he loved Ana, loved her like fish and chips, and up out of the creek he came and kissed her on the lips!' she sang. The lights fired and fell. She kept them at one remove in the way she had learnt: with her breath.

'Old Mako he loved Ana, he loved her all his life, and one day she went and saw him and he asked her to be his wife...'

Ana screamed and hit Alexia on the arm, but now she was laughing too. Then suddenly Isaiah was there.

'Isaiah,' Ana yelled. 'She's mean! She's being stink, Isaiah!' She ran to where he stood at the bottom of the wooden porch. Alexia stopped playing.

'Why'd you stop?' Isaiah asked. The lights burned and faded. She hadn't played in front of anyone in years. And now there was the actuality of him here, his whole competent-looking, weirdly familiar self, standing in the open field. It was ridiculous. He was smiling slightly, but only at one corner of his mouth.

'She was hassling me!' Ana said. 'She said I would marry Old Mako!'

'She said he would come to her in the night...' Maitai said.

'She said they would kiss,' Tama said, 'on the lips!' They were falling over each other laughing. Ana was still attached to Isaiah's arm.

'Go on then, play,' Isaiah said.

Alexia strummed loudly, surprising herself. She would play as if he wasn't here, as if it was just the kids, or the no one that had filled the field before they arrived: the emptiness that was not emptiness, the gold notes on the grass and distilled silence like the memory of voices. None of this land was uninhabited, that was her sense of it. For a moment she gave herself over and entered in; the bursts pink and red. She played a Latin American ballad.

She sang no words but increased the tempo until the kids were looked at her sideways and Tama gaped. Isaiah folded his arms and watched.

'You're good,' he said, when she was done. She hated his casualness.

'I had some lessons,' she said. 'A long time ago.'

'You could help play at the concert!' he said, suddenly animated. 'We're going to have a fundraiser! We're running out of money fast. And it will spread awareness.'

'A concert!' Ana said. 'We'll all get to stay up late. Eh Maitai? Eh Tama? There hasn't been one in ages.'

'Wait,' Alexia said. 'Seriously, don't get too excited.' There was a miserly tightening in her stomach. 'I'm totally out of practice and I get stage fright and...'

'And you're good,' Isaiah said. 'I'm doing the flyers. Aidan and Hannah were going to do the main bit. I'll add your name.'

Alexia had taken advanced classes in music at school. She had been taught classical and flamenco and knew how to play twelve string guitar. When she'd got to law school she had given up. The demands on her time were too great. And her studying music had always been against the wishes of her family. 'It makes the synaesthesia worse,' her mother always said. 'It makes you lose touch.' Her father had been more practical. 'You want to live in poverty?' he'd say. Her music had become a secret thing, a shameful thing. She had not played in front of anyone, not even Stephen, her ex-partner, for years.

'No,' she said. 'I can't. I don't want to help out on the fundraiser.'

For a moment Isaiah looked truly shocked, standing there in the late afternoon light. Ana tugged at her.

'Then why are you here?' he asked. 'Why are you here, coming to meetings, camping on the land, scabbing off these people, if you don't want to help?' His face had closed like a mask, his eyes gone cool and remote. Alexia had moved out of home at seventeen, helping to fund her study and flat expenses by working in cafes. In spite of this she had a reputation in her family for being irresponsible: an idea perpetuated mainly by her father.

'Scabbing?' she said. 'I'm probably the only person here who's not on the dole. At least I'm using up my savings. You all come in and leech off these people's struggle. You don't have enough to protest about in your own privileged lives so you come here to 'save' the locals. I don't think I'm the worst interloper here.' Ana stared. Tama was kneeling on the grass. Maitai was looking from her, to Isaiah, and back again. Too late she remembered the pōwhiri: of course, Isaiah had been on the other side. He was so entrenched with the group of Pākehā from the city that she'd simply forgotten.

'Well, they told me you were studying to be a lawyer,' he said, as if it was an insult. 'I didn't believe it until now. But actually, I'm from here,' he went on. 'This is my land. I'm not just some Pākehā jumping in on the fight.' He stared at her for a long moment. There was something defensive in his silence, as though he expected to be challenged.

Rangi came out of the wharenuī. Tama ran to tell him about the eel and Alexia's song, and Ana went too, and then Maitai. They were left looking at each other. Finally he turned and left her on the porch without another word.

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Polly hated her. She was sure of it. She'd become aware of her scrutiny at the second or third meeting, perhaps after Isaiah had looked in her direction a little too long, or touched her hand when he passed her a cup of tea. Already Alexia was half-looking forward to such moments, whether Isaiah was aware of what he was doing or not. Polly's response had been swift but futile. In the few weeks they'd been here she had produced not one but three eligible female suitors for Isaiah, all of whom were connected to the pā in some way. Isaiah seemed absolutely oblivious, rebuffing the suitors with the same companionable friendliness he maintained towards everyone. Sam did not seem to figure in Polly's calculations as any real threat. But Alexia did. Polly seemed to have decided that she'd find a substitute, perhaps as some sort of pre-emptive strike.

Polly had revealed at last night's meeting that her water had gone bad. Isaiah was invited to come and test the water in her whare and see for himself. The meeting had been hushed and hurried, in the hall off the smallest wharenuī, and only a few of the activists were there. Sam had been out, no doubt on some reconnaissance mission. Hannah and Aidan were practising their set for the concert. So it fell to Alexia to accompany Isaiah and help him carry the camera gear, though she had a reluctance to go into Polly's house, under her watchful eyes. Alexia didn't think for a second that Polly's water had really gone bad.

On their way to Polly's house Isaiah watched the birds and Alexia watched Isaiah. He had a queer lucidity about him when he was looking at the land that wasn't there at other times, as though he was reading signs not visible to other people. He carried a larger camera than usual, and Alexia had the bag with the microphone and tripod. Polly had said that when she turned on the tap, she'd smelt gas come up off the water. Her water came out of the river that ran through the fracking land. She'd stopped using it for cooking or drinking, and started buying bottled water instead.

Alexia's clothes had all been dirty when she went to get dressed this morning, in the damp, stale tent. She'd pulled some clothes from the bottom of her pack: her work clothes. She struggled into them: a short, black pencil skirt with an expensive texture, a high-collared white ruffled shirt with pearl embellishments. Her long legs in their stockings proclaimed themselves inappropriately as she walked across the pā in borrowed gumboots, her loose hair at odds with the rest of her, a tragedy of stylistic displacement. Isaiah hadn't appeared to notice.

Polly's house was tiny, and daftly quiet. It was set in the trees away from the main marae, concealed in the woods. She clomped onto Polly's small, well-swept wooden porch and started to slip off the boots while Isaiah knocked. Polly opened it smartly, as though she'd been standing directly behind it. Alexia was caught bent over, arms akimbo, one gumboot in her hand and the other half off, almost falling on Isaiah for support. Polly gave her a calculated look.

'Mōrena,' she said to them both, then kissed Isaiah sweetly on the cheek, ignoring Alexia. She led them down a dark hallway. Photographs were everywhere, mounted along the walls and decorated with fronds of harakeke woven into flowers. Some, the important ones, Alexia guessed, were crowned with feathers. Even in the dim light the glass gleamed brightly, though the other things in the hall, the shoes near the door, the elaborate wooden coat stand, were dusty and untouched. Alexia understood Polly must polish the glass each morning, moving from each faded photograph to the next, touching the black and white faces behind the glass. Alexia's grandmother too moved through the house early each morning, carrying an incense burner and dowsing the icona with smoke, saying her morning prayers. When Alexia was a girl she'd helped, righting the frames, lighting candles, polishing the pictures of dead relatives under the glass. She stopped to look at a photo with a man in it who looked very much like Isaiah. Polly turned and gave her a baleful stare. Alexia didn't care: she was as affected by Polly's hall as she would be entering a great cathedral. When they came out into the lounge it was a shock to see the girl clad in bubble-gum pink jeans and loose T-shirt who was, unquestionably, beautiful.

'Te Kahurangi, Isaiah, Isaiah, Te Kahurangi. You two are cousins, but not by blood,' Polly said emphatically. Polly allowed her gaze to graze down over Alexia's body, all the way to her laddered stockinged feet. Isaiah hongied the girl. 'Te Kahurangi is in her first year of university,' Polly went on. 'She is studying politics. She will be staying here for a few days.' The girl was too lovely: almost as tall as Alexia herself, but darker, chocolate-skinned. She wasn't awkwardly thin, however, or gawky, or slump shouldered, as Alexia

knew herself to be. She looked about eighteen. 'Te Kahurangi is fluent in te reo,' Polly added. 'She has been raised on the marae.'

Te Kahurangi swept past Polly and kissed Alexia gently on the cheek. Alexia felt suddenly overwhelmed. She had done nothing to Polly, after all. She had not laid any claims. She felt, amazingly, the tears rising.

'You three sit here and I'll get you some tea,' Polly said. She went to a stack of bottled water by the door. It was not all talk, then: Polly really was concerned about her health.

'No, Auntie, no tea.' Isaiah said. 'I've got to go to town for some supplies later. Let's make this quick. Shall we have a look at this water?'

'Cuz,' Te Kahurangi said urgently, but Isaiah was already in the kitchen. Instead she turned to Alexia. 'Doesn't he know anything?' she said. 'Way to offend an old lady, rejecting her manaakitanga!' She raised outraged eyebrows. But in the kitchen Polly was putting the kettle on anyway, as though she hadn't heard. Te Kahurangi's eyes were too far apart, giving her a slightly doll-like look, but it made her more beautiful, not less. She looked directly at Alexia and then leaned in close and took her by the arm. Her breath smelled of peppermint.

'It's true then, you are all that,' she said.

'What?' Alexia said.

'They all said it: you're hot.' Alexia didn't know where to look. A tattoo snaked out of Te Kahurangi's sleeve. Wasn't she too young to be tattooed?

'But you're not Māori, eh?'

'...Greek,' Alexia said.

'Don't worry about Auntie,' Te Kahurangi said. 'She'll come round. She's just got some funny ideas. I keep telling her I've got a girlfriend, but it's like she thinks she can cure me with some fine young Māori stud. Not that he's so young,' she said. Then she paused. 'Oh, I just mean, he's more like, your age I guess?' She grinned. Alexia liked her, suddenly, very much. 'He's big news on the pā, you know,' Te Kahurangi went on. 'They think they need more men. Everyone's gone away to the city. There's no one here to do the work anymore. But see, you're big news now, too. And chicks are more useful than men anyway, don't you reckon?' She winked.

A loud bang came from the kitchen. Isaiah yelled.

Alexia and Te Kahurangi crowded into the doorway. Polly looked entirely unfazed and stood by the stovetop like a small, upright carving. Isaiah was flustered.

‘Singed my eyebrows!’ he said. There was a strong smell of burnt hair.

‘The water caught fire?’ Alexia asked. Then they were all speaking at once.

‘I told you it had gone bad,’ Polly said.

‘Here I’ll show you –’ said Isaiah.

‘Aunty wouldn’t say –’ Te Kahurangi said.

‘We have to film it –’ Alexia said. ‘This is insane.’

‘Calm down,’ Polly said. She turned on them. ‘What, you thought Polly was not telling the truth?’ She turned on the tap. The small kitchen filled with a sulphurous smell. ‘Stand back,’ she said, masterfully. In the small kitchen Alexia saw her moko lines were chiselled in. She must have had it done when she was very young, when they still did moko like that, with hammers and a thousand tiny blows. She had a vivid image of Polly being held down in some open space, holding her face carefully still. Polly let the water run for a moment, and then flourished a match: the large, fire-lighting kind. It would have taken days for them to complete a moko like hers. Polly held the match to the flow and the three of them jumped, but nothing happened. Polly took the flame away and touched it to the water again. Still, nothing. One more time Polly lit a match and held it to the water, held it in the water, where it should have gone out.

A flame exploded out of the tap. The air was sucked towards it. Fear went up and down Alexia’s body. She noticed Te Kahurangi had her by the hand.

‘Kai hamuti!’ she said.

The water ran and the flame danced around it. It was bright, a foot high, half a foot in width. There was something so wrong about it. In the dim kitchen it grew larger and brighter. It struck Alexia as somehow biblical, as though she were watching brimstone fall from the sky. She felt slightly faint. It was very much like her private lights, and this made her feel oddly guilty, as though she, Alexia, had personally put it there. They all continued to watch, hypnotised. The flame grew larger still, reaching the edge of the sink and passing beyond it, to where a tea towel hung on a hook. Still, they watched. Te Kahurangi’s hand was slick with sweat.

Suddenly, Polly twisted the tap off. The flame leapt away down the plughole like an animated ghost.

‘Shoo, shoo,’ Polly said. She hustled them out into the lounge and rushed about, opening windows, while they all began to gasp.

‘Bad,’ she said. ‘Bad water, bad air.’ She was muttering to herself. Alexia was definitely feeling ill. Next to her, Isaiah bent over, clutching his stomach.

‘Sick,’ he murmured.

‘What do they think I’m supposed to drink?’ Polly said. ‘How do they think I’m supposed to cook my kai? All my life, I drink from our stream. What am I supposed to do now?’ She looked at Alexia. ‘Complain to the council with more of your big words? Fat lot of use that’ll be. Bad air and the water all on fire. Fat lot of good your fancy words will do.’ In her light-headed state, Alexia was vulnerable. She looked down at her long, ill-concealed thighs and too-short skirt, her long legs, her clumsy arms. She felt ashamed in a way she hadn’t let herself feel for quite some time, as though it was her body that was culpable. There was a silence in which she could not speak. She had been raised to respect her elders, after all.

‘Oh come on, Aunty, she’s just trying to help,’ Te Kahurangi said. Isaiah was quiet. Alexia hated him for a moment, then saw he still looked very sick, and forgave him.

‘I am too old now to fight,’ Polly said. ‘You must do something, before we have no air left to breathe.’

There was footage to take, and water samples, and people to be notified. But for a long moment the three of them stood Polly’s lounge, until Isaiah reached for the camera, and stood up.

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Mitai found her where she was practicing her scales. Alexia’s fingers sped over the strings, her fingers making satisfying pat pats on the wood. She cradled the guitar. She wasn’t composing, only working on building strength after being so long away. It felt like the music was a place and she had gone away from it, as if it was the stable constant and she the uncertain element, coming and going like the weather. The music held still. It was a relief to be there, fingering out the notes, seeing the lights burst and fade, feeling callouses grow again on her too-soft hands.

‘You’re dumb,’ Mitai said. She stopped playing.

‘Am not.’

‘Are too.’

She gave him a look.

‘Don’t you want to know why?’

‘No.’

‘Cos I said so.’

Alexia started to play again. The notes flew up, down, up down, building to a crescendo.

‘You’re dumb cos you don’t even care about the concert,’ Maitai said, at length. ‘And cos you’re a girl. And ugly.’

Tama arrived, holding his special cat. She was curled into the small boy’s shirt, purring. Alexia wrinkled her nose at Maitai, thinking hard.

‘I know you are, you said you are, but what am I?’ she said. Tama laughed. Maitai looked expressly displeased.

‘Well?’ he said. ‘Why won’t you play?’

‘Because,’ Alexia said, ‘I’m not very good.’ Tama watched her fingers fly along the frets. It was easy to keep the lights in check, easy to compartmentalise them, in daylight.

‘You’re a liar,’ he said. She ignored him. ‘Nah, but it’s true!’ he said. His kitten gave a little snort. ‘You’re better than Rangi and Matiu and even Mama,’ he said.

‘Shut up!’ Maitai said.

‘Well, not Mama,’ Tama said. ‘But everyone else.’

‘He’s right,’ Maitai said, sagely. ‘You’re dumb.’ Alexia put the guitar down and prepared to go. A look of cunning crossed his face. ‘Isaiah told me he thinks you’re dumb.’

‘Shut up!’ Tama said. ‘You’re making it up!’

‘Am not!’

‘Are too!’ Alexia started walking towards the wharekai. She had a report to write in legalese that no one else could manage. Maitai grabbed her arm.

‘You don’t care about the tui Ana found, and the piwaiwakawaka by the gate, and all those bees!’ He said. The bees had been found most recently: a sad black rain peppering the clearing by the poisoned river. ‘Don’t you care about our eels getting sick?’ Alexia didn’t believe this last story. She’d only heard the rumour through Melissa and Kate, who exaggerated everything.

‘Well, what if the eels do get sick?’ he said, sensing her disbelief. ‘They been here for ages, our eels.’

‘Stupid,’ Tama said. ‘Not for ages. They been here forever.’

‘Well how do you know?’ Maitai said. ‘If you know so much?’

‘They been here since before the people came,’ Tama said. ‘Even us. It’s in the old stories. They say a eel showed us where to go, when we had to move from down the coast. They say it was a queen eel. She came and got the chief in the night and she took him up the



stream, and there were all the kai tuna under the moon, just waiting. And she showed him this place. And so we came here.'

'Far out, I never heard that!' said Maitai. He seemed genuinely impressed. 'You think Old Mako's a king eel? Who told you that anyway?'

'My nanny. Not your one, the one on the other side.'

'Man, how would she know?' Maitai said, scathing again. 'She's not even from here. And you don't know anything, anyway. You're only six. People don't know anything when they're six.' He still clung to Alexia, his small fingers digging into her arm.

'My nanny told me and so did Polly. So there.' To Alexia's surprise Maitai seemed to accept this.

'Far out,' he said. 'An some of our eels now, they're so old,' he said. 'They're ancient. They probly even remember when we moved. Maybe one of them's the queen.' He flung his arm out towards the bridge. 'They're special eels, too. Longfin tuna, Rangi said. They live in the land water and the sea water. That's why they're magic.'

'They're not magic,' Tama said.

'Shut up,' Maitai said, but mildly. 'They live on a Papa-tū-ā-nuku and in Tangaroa too, and those two aren't friends, so they gotta be magic. And also they live for more than a hundred years.' Alexia looked at him closely. 'It's true!' Maitai said. 'And when they want to have babies they go out to sea, all the way down the stream, and they swim to Kaldonia. It's an island. It's like, one thousand kilometres away, Rangi said. And then they come back.'

'Do not!' Tama said. His cat scratched him and he sucked his finger, looking at the ugly creature with no blame in his expression.

'Do too,' said Maitai. 'Old Mako, he's more than a hundred. Polly said she knew him from when she was a girl. She says he's got the same scratches as he had then, on his head.' Maitai slid his hand down Alexia's arm, gave it a squeeze. He was good, she had to give him that. 'And,' he said with a degree of finality, 'they're dangered.'

'What's dangered?' Tama said.

'He doesn't know anything,' Maitai said sadly. 'Dangered means there's only a few left. And that they're all gonna die, if we don't look after them.' He looked at Alexia again. 'He's only six,' he said. Alexia saw he was waiting for her to speak.

'I don't perform,' she said. Maitai suddenly lost his patience.

'You don't care about our eels!' he yelled. He grabbed Tama, whose cat complained and fled. He stormed away. 'You don't care about our river and our tui and our bees and our

land! You're just dumb!' He stomped his feet and looked at her one last time. 'Stupid dumb Pākehā!' he said. He ran away, pulling Tama after him.

\*

Coalesce, Alexia thought. Coalesce. She was dreaming something about a man tied to a train track in front of an oncoming train. There were rescue teams and various onlookers and herself, all trying to save him, but they were too far away. Alexia could see him, far off but with hideous clarity, as he watched the train approach. She half-knew she was dreaming but could not pull herself out. She was running but her feet would not touch the ground and instead spun in a wide circle just above the scraped earth, tracing wide, pointless revolutions. The plain was naked, all burnt reds and oranges. The only green was spread in a pool around the man, as though he'd gathered the grass to himself. She could see the police and, further off, a fire truck, but even the authorities seemed not to have it together. She was closer to the man than them, and the train was bearing down.

It hit, and she opened her eyes. Coalesce. She crawled out of the tent and saw the mountain, remarkable and unclouded, white-tipped now the snows were moving in, somehow super-real. Somewhere under its flank the cold bare fracking land started, with the soil scraped up and the waste laid down on top. But from here she could only see the ground dropping away to still-perfect farmland, the mountain taking on the gloss of the sun. She could see why tourists came here. She tried not to see the image left over from her dream: from the moment after the train had passed, and all the rescue attempts had failed.

Hannah touched her arm. She was slender and her eyes were pale blue. She wore a loose white blouse and a long skirt and many rings.

'She's so beautiful this morning,' Hannah said, of the mountain.

'Coffee? Ciggie?' Aidan was already up.

'Yes, and no,' Alexia said, watching Aidan try to roll the cigarette with one hand. Hannah came and rolled it for him.

'I don't get it,' Alexia said. 'How can you put that rubbish into your body?' The dream was like a bad taste left in her mouth. Pointless revolutions. Coalesce.

Aidan stopped his vigorous stirring and looked up as though he had perhaps misjudged her.

'I'm surprised at you, Alexia,' he said. As always, his Irish accent charmed her. 'Vegetarian, vegan, raw foodist, freegan, straightedge... I mean, isn't it all just the fucking

bollocks? I'm an anti-labellist, essentially,' he said. He leapt up and threw his arms out to the mountain, grabbed up his guitar strummed a tune. It was blue, red blue. She watched, interested, as he added in some orange sparks. 'Let me tell you a story,' he sang. But Hannah grabbed the guitar and pushed at him playfully.

'What he means to say is,' she said, 'we're not puritans.'

'What he means to say is,' Aidan said. 'I grew up a Catholic. And yes, I want to save the world. But am I going to replace one repressive fascist religion with another?'

'Everyone always expects so much of lefties, don't you think?' Hannah said. 'Like if you want to help the planet you have to be some kind of healthy saint.'

'I mean, look at me,' Aidan went on. 'I'm a raving anarchist. But every time I go to light up there's some other anarchist telling me I'm not a real anarchist because I smoke.'

Hannah tousled his hair gently. 'It's not all about you,' she said.

Alexia felt a small longing. It wasn't for Stephen exactly. It was more for just a someone whose body she had unlimited access to. Stephen had been her partner for five years, all through law school. But she had been surer that she needed to leave Stephen and their comfortable, *alright* life together in their nice apartment in the city than anything she'd ever been sure of. She'd finished university and made the decision in a moment, knowing that it would devastate him, but that it would be dishonest for her to stay. Aidan was looking at Hannah with a look that was half quizzical, half enraptured.

'Of course it's about me!' He danced a jig without leaving his place on the ground, pouring the coffee into tin mugs. 'But seriously,' he went on, looking in no way serious, 'people do expect mad things of the left. Unity, for one thing. No one expects all these right wingers to agree with each other, do they? But as soon as you're a lefty you're accused of being wishy washy, like it's a failing not to all think the same bloody thing.'

Alexia took her coffee. 'But the left *is* divided,' she said. 'And it *is* counter-productive. Look at our meetings. Matiu and Rangi want one thing and Polly another. And then there's us.'

'Everyone has their own reasons for being here.' Aidan said. 'Sam and that, now they're the true militants. I could see them being divisive. Polly, she just wants to protect her people, peacefully, as far as I can tell. No faulting that. You don't necessarily have to want to blow up parliament to save a few trees.' He stubbed out his cigarette and flicked it into the fire. 'The point is, who says you all should agree on what action to take? Maybe the most effective thing would be a bunch of people who don't all agree, but who just go off at night and take things into their own hands?' He gave Alexia a meaningful look down his

nose, which she absolutely couldn't decode. 'Now me and Hannah, our big thing is stopping climate change, he said. 'But the angle we come at it from is music.' He seized the guitar and strummed violently. Alexia watched the cigarette butt catch fire and burn itself out, releasing a denser, blacker smoke into the air.

'So, the smoking?' he said. 'I'm not going to worry about every little thing. It takes energy away from the fight. All these poor bastards thinking about everything they put in their mouths and everything that comes out their plugged up liberal arses, crafting their re-useable bags and baking their vegan cupcakes...it's just more distraction, in 'it? If people are focussed on all that they're not going to resist their masters. They're too busy cooking for the bake sale.' Hannah struck him lightly with her palm.

'Ignore him,' she said lightly. 'He's just a bitter old Marxist.'

'Socialist,' said Alexia.

'Anarchist,' said Aidan.

'He's just talking a load of bull to distract you from the smoking. The fact is, we're addicted.'

'The voice of truth,' Aidan said, sighing. 'But at least I don't pretend to be a lefty saint, not like some others around here.'

Bryce came into the clearing.

'Moreana,' he called. 'Something's happened. You have to come help.' He walked off without elaboration. Aidan looked put out and Alexia hadn't finished her coffee, and Hannah rolled her eyes as she went to get a warm scarf from her tent. But they followed him quickly down the path to the pā.

Bryce moved fast on his long, capable legs. The back of his denim shirt flitted through the bush. At the place where the path opened out Aidan took Hannah's hand, they began to run. Now Alexia too heard the waiata. She couldn't understand the words, but the notes rising and falling had one clear meaning. It was white, white, pale falling sparks. She knew it; there had been a death.

The voice called with such urgency that she started to run as well. She blocked out the lights that interfered with her sight. As she came into the field in front of the big marae she looked for the crowd that would be at the entrance to the pā, but no one was there. The call was coming from the other direction, past the main area, down by the river. She started toward the bridge and saw everyone was running, children and older people too. Matiu caught her up and she saw tears streaming down his face. Rangi was there too, running beside her. She could not see Isaiah. At the bridge people were looking down. Some were

weeping. Polly stood at the creek's bank, singing. Since the fracking had started the banks had been coated with an orange substance, and the water had darkened. Alexia was brought up short by the parapet.

There was no body, no dead person. Instead, there were the bodies of the eels, varying in size and age, varying too, in how much life they had left in them. Some were clearly dead but others writhed violently, moving away from the water in strange blunt movements. Some had burrowed their heads into the slimed banks. The largest were metres long and thicker than one of her thighs. Once she saw the first one it seemed like a mist was lifted from her eyes and then she saw them everywhere, some hunched dead along the bank she'd run past, others wrapped around the base of the bridge, so many, a litter of huge bodies. Isaiah arrived beside her. He glanced at her for a second before his hands went to his camera. Then he was clicking, clicking, moving among the fallen bodies. She stayed pinned to the bridge, stilled by Polly's waiata. It was white, the death song, white. She tried to block it.

A child's voice rose above the song. Under the bridge were Tama, Maitai and Ana.

'Mako,' Ana said. Alexia saw that she had the eel by the head and was pulling at him, as though if she got him out of the water he would live. His mouth opened in a rictus of pain. Ana offered him the sock filled with bait, but he didn't move. She took the food from the sock and threw it in front of him on the ground, but he did not shift towards it. Tama tried to pull Ana away but she cradled the eel's large head in her arms and began to cry. Then she hit him. Still, he didn't move. She hit him again, a small blow. Now Maitai pulled her away. 'But he was my eel!' she said. She looked frantically up at the bridge and the watching adults. 'Why don't you do something?' she screamed at them. 'I hate you!' She looked straight at Alexia. 'He was my eel, and now he's dead!'

It took them the rest of the day to collect and bury the bodies.

That night Alexia went to Isaiah and said she'd play in the fundraiser.

### THREE

Build it up with silver and gold,  
Silver and gold, silver and gold,  
Build it up with silver and gold,  
My fair lady.

'But do you like it?'

Alexia was due to sit her practising exam. Her degree was finished, but while most other graduates had gone off to celebrate, she had the last test hanging over her. She was meant to be using this time to prepare. She had the course book in her pack; a huge, technical volume with silk-thin pages, ready to be perused. It remained closed.

'I'm not enjoying it right now, no. Because I'm not doing it,' she said. 'It doesn't seem so real, here. It doesn't seem to mean anything.'

'In Ireland, we have the bar exam,' Aidan said. He pulled at one of his long blonde dreads. 'I understand it's meant to be hard out. What are you going to do then, if you're not studying? You going to just turn up and play them a song?'

'It's just that –' she said. But she couldn't think of anything to say.

'Isaiah thinks you're our great legal hope,' Aidan said. 'The one to save our arses when the shit goes down.'

'I haven't qualified,' Alexia said. 'I'm not even licensed to practise. All I want to do is play music.'

Rangi burst into the clearing. He was huffed and red, his eyebrows high up on his forehead.

'Want to see a cow being born?' he said.

'Yeah!' Aidan said. 'That'd blow our city slicker minds.'

'She's in the high field by the reservoir,' Rangi said. 'She's close. Matiu's there. Calving's early this year. Global warming.' He stared at Alexia as though he expected her to argue.

'I'd like to come,' she said.

They walked along the perimeters of the pā land on a path worn into the grass. The track followed the fence line between the main marae and Taylor's land. The bush rose up on one side. On the other the land fell flat and stretched out into a leisurely green plain. In the distance Taylor's house sat in a dip, a newish pre-fab bordered by pines. The mountain's top was barred by clouds. Rangi barrelled along in his camouflage gear, carrying a bucket and a long rubber glove. He shook them and turned his mad gaze on Alexia.

'Just in case,' he said.

Some of the kids had come to look: Ana and Maitai and Tama. Isaiah stood awkwardly at the back end of the cow, who heaved and bellowed. Her coat was amber and her eyes were wide and blank with pain. She shuddered and called. Up close she was huge, much larger than Alexia had imagined cows to be. The other cows had retreated to a respectful distance.

'Bout time you buggers got here.' Matiu was rubbing the side of the cow soothingly. He looked at Isaiah.

'Got your little audience, then, cuz,' he said. 'Going to show them something, or you going to keep the little miss waiting?' It was unclear whether he was referring to Alexia or the cow. The cow shifted and then did something Alexia didn't know cows did: it screamed. Matiu sidled up to her. He had a misshapen frame that bent slightly at the waist. He got about the place curved like a fish hook. It made every conversation with him seem intimate, like he was about to tell you a secret.

'This is her first,' Matiu said. 'Often get stuck on their first. Poor thing.' His voice held immeasurable compassion. 'She doesn't even know what's happening.' He looked at Isaiah. 'Is you iz or is you aint my baby?' he sang. Isaiah gave him a stern look, but he kept singing, rubbing the cow's side all the while.

'Here he is,' said Rangi. 'The man with the plan. The man with the glove today, bro, the man with the long, white glove.' He handed it over.

'But iz he man enough for the job?' Matiu said. 'Iz he, or iz he not the chosen one, like Polly thinks? Is he a mild-mannered photographer, or is he really a super hero in disguise, here to bring justice to the people?'

Isaiah turned away. Alexia saw how angry he was.

'Aww, leave him alone, cuz,' Rangi said. 'Man's got a big job ahead.' He patted the cow. 'Relationship problems, too,' he cast a wry eye at Alexia. 'Pressures you and I don't even understand, secret trips to make in the night...'

'Shut up, Rangi,' said Matiu, abruptly.

'And besides,' Rangi went on, reasonably. 'Of course he iz your baby.'

Isaiah turned towards them. His calm mask was still in place, but his eyes had narrowed. Rangi backed away, waving his arms dramatically.

'Cuz, what do you expect, coming back home with a dumb-arse name like that?' The cow moored loudly.

'Let's not forget the real issue here,' Alexia said quickly.

'The real issue,' said Matiu. 'Ha ha!' But he pointed seriously to the cow's tail, where the issue at hand was emerging. Isaiah put on the long white glove. It made a snapping noise and the kids laughed, jostling at each other.

'Quiet, you lot, or you go back to your aunties,' Matiu said. The kids obeyed him immediately, which was unusual. There was sweat running down the cow's sides. She seemed close to exhaustion. Rangi began to speak quietly in Isaiah's ear. Now he was dead serious, his words careful and emphatic. Isaiah seemed grey about the face. Matiu started to pray under his breath.

'...now, cuz. You have to.' Rangi said. Isaiah did as he was told.

Alexia had expected it to be quick, but instead there was an interval of speech and movement that lasted some time. The cow bucked and Isaiah struggled, his face plainly terrified. Maitai was squeezing her hand tightly.

'I can't feel...' Isaiah said.

'Further,' Rangi said. 'To the right.'

'Steady hands,' Matiu said.

The cow stamped. Isaiah shifted his stance and in that moment looked straight at Alexia, but did not see her. She was erased by this look, suddenly transparent. He was sick with the responsibility of it, the immense weight.

'I still can't...' he said. 'It's stuck.'

'Pull harder.' Rangi said.

She wasn't really here. Even with Maitai's hand in hers, she wasn't really a part of this. If she was absent it would be some other woman spurring Isaiah out of his relationship with Sam. It didn't matter who she was. She saw it all at once, as the cow moaned and lowered herself to rest on her knees. She should go home and study for her exam, without



which she would be throwing away her law degree. But her home was packed up and dissolved, the couches sold, Stephen gone, her things in boxes in her parents' basement. She'd left it all so suddenly, including the good parts: their discussions about music, their shared record collection, even the house plants. But she'd known Stephen was never really hers: Stephen, with his spectacular cooking and diplomacy, his supportiveness, his unflinching commitment to reason. Now here she was on this grassy hill, with a man she was horribly attracted to, pulling a calf out of a cow and ignoring her while he tried not to throw up.

'No,' Isaiah said. 'I can't.' He was suddenly livid. Matiu jolted towards him. It was Rangi's show, but Matiu was not about to endanger the calf's life. Everyone was embarrassed, Ana looking away toward the river and Tama at his feet. The calf's hooves were intertwined in Isaiah's gloved fingers, its blood on the white knuckles. Rangi and Matiu moved towards him, but Isaiah pulled again, concentration on his face. The exam was a chance to enter a life she'd etched out already in her mind: she would be an independent professional, a lawyer, a traveller, she would have a couple more relationships maybe, with men who made her laugh. No children. The cow was moaning almost beautifully.

'Enough,' Matiu said. 'She's in trouble, can't you see?' But Rangi said nothing. Isaiah's gaze was fixed stubbornly away from Alexia. He had to look a little too far to the right to avoid having her in his view. So he was aware of her. But why should he be embarrassed? Stephen would have gone in with joking confidence, and backed off gladly when he was not capable, unashamed. There was something broken in Isaiah. She could see it would be a lot of work to decode all the silences.

'There!' He pulled suddenly. Ana yelled. The men stepped back and the cow balked and stomped. She seemed to breathe in and then contract, and then Isaiah was pulling something from her, a mess of blood and membrane. The calf half-fell to the ground. It was wrapped in a thin white blanket. Alexia remembered an old word, somehow mysterious: the caul. The cow bellowed, a long, despairing moo.

'Is it dead?' Tama asked.

But Rangi and Matiu were working.

'Pierce through it...' Matiu was saying.

'Got a knife,' Rangi said.

The twisted rope of the umbilical cord was still attached to the mother. The cow was turning to look at her calf. She brought her face up to the slick bundle. The calf moved, just a little. Here was a thing that had not yet learned to breathe. Rangi slashed at the caul with his knife. He pulled it away, revealing its face. It was covered in blood and mucus and

surprisingly perfect. It opened its eyes. Rangi put the caul to one side. He cut the cord and tied it. Isaiah looked at her, finally, stopped panting, and closed his mouth. Alexia had defected from her own life, and, suddenly, she was purely glad.

'Gross!' Ana said.

'Nah, awesome,' Maitai said.

'It is so gross,' Ana said.

'What, you never saw one being born before?' Tama said.

Ana scratched in the dirt with her toe. It seemed she was being dramatic for the newcomers. 'But look at the mum,' she said. 'It's eating the whenua.' Alexia saw the cow was, indeed, eating the afterbirth.

'The whenua's not gross,' Rangi said. 'It's good for it. Makes it strong.'

They all watched the cow. Isaiah came to stand by Alexia.

'Well, I think it's disgusting,' Alexia said.

'It is,' Isaiah said. 'Completely disgusting.' And then he laughed. The kids went over to look closely at the calf. It shifted and breathed and, miraculously, got straight up on its spindly legs, and fell down again. Rangi gave Isaiah a clap on the back, and then surprised him by pulling him in for a hongī. Then all the kids hongied him too, as though this were an informal welcoming ceremony for Isaiah and not for the calf, who staggered towards its mother. Tama looked up at him very seriously.

'It's good it's not dead,' he said.

'Yes,' Isaiah said. He turned to Alexia, smiling. He'd embraced the rest of them; it would seem odd for them not to touch. Alexia looked at the ground and then at the cow, who had got onto its side on the ground and was eating ungracefully, and licking the calf's head. She looked back and now Isaiah was looking away. She patted his arm, awkwardly, around the dried blood. No one noticed the look he gave her: quizzical and perplexed all at once, as though she was a language he hoped to be able to translate. The caul lay off to the side, a sweaty remnant of the cow's last barrier into its life. Alexia supposed the cow would eat this as well.

\*

'We've never had any taniwha in the river,' Tama said. 'But we've got one now.'

Alexia was practicing. All she had were odd lyrics and scraps of tune. When she sat down with the guitar to write she thought of her grandfather more often than not, his fingers

flying across the strings of a bouzouki. For him there was only the one kind of music, not all these bewildering choices. Tama pulled her arm.

'A taniwha, I said,' he said. 'Are you deaf?'

She did have one song she was proud of, a sort of hybrid mix. She started fingering the chords, just for herself, the words running through her head. The song started purple and went green around the middle, ending in a crescendo of sparks. Tama sighed.

'Don't you want to know about the taniwha?' he asked. 'I seen it.'

'Oh, yes,' she said. It was dusk, the time when the pā settled into itself. There were no city lights polluting the sky and the stars were clearly visible. She was distracted. 'Do you know the names of the constellations?' she asked.

'Tautori,' said Tama. 'He's the belt. Whetū Matarau, those two point towards the big cross. And that's Mahutonga.' She knew the names of constellations that had come from the Greek: Orionis, Andromedae, Pegasi. Tama looked at her disgustedly. 'Jeez, what's up with you? You gone all weird and loopy like when Ana falled in love.'

'Who'd Ana fall in love with?'

'That eel, stupid!' Tama said. 'Old Mako.' He sat down next to her on the wooden step.

'My cat's gone,' he said. 'I haven't seen her for a whole day.' She could hear the tears in his voice. 'Aunty Mary says when you fall in love you get stupid because your blood goes to other parts of your body than your brain. You can't think properly.' He shook his head as if contemplating a great mystery.

'You know a lot for someone who's only six,' Alexia said. She would look for the cat around the campsite.

'What's up with you anyway?' Tama said. 'Are you nemic?' He lunged towards her and grabbed her cheeks with both hands, pulling at her lower eyelids.

'Tama!'

'I'm checking if you're nemic,' Tama said. 'Mama was nemic from not eating enough meat. The doctor said you can tell, if your hands are yellow and your eyelids is white.' She'd just managed to push him off when Maitai arrived.

'She's nemic,' Tama told Maitai. 'Or in lurve.' Maitai looked at her closely.

'Nah,' he said, dismissively. 'Her cheeks is too red.'

'So what's with this taniwha?' Alexia asked.

'What taniwha?' Maitai said.

'We got one,' said Tama. 'That's all. I seen it.' Maitai punched his arm.

'You have one of your dreams again?' he said.

'No,' Tama said. 'I was awake. I was looking for my cat. I thought maybe she went up the river to get some kai. But I looked and I couldn't find her.' Maitai gripped his brother's arm.

'You know they told us to stay outta there,' he said. 'You know there's pits. And they changed the river so it's not our river anymore. You can't go there. You're not allowed.' Tama looked at him quietly.

'But you went,' he said.

'You don't know anything about it,' Maitai said. 'And you're just making it up about the taniwha.' He took Alexia's hand. Surprised, she stopped making the small, twanging notes flash in the air, and held it.

'Am not,' said Tama.

'Did it talk to you?' Maitai asked. 'In English? Or in te reo?'

'In its own language,' Tama said. 'It sounded like leaves.' Alexia put the guitar down.

'You mustn't go up the river on your own,' Tama,' she said. 'Especially not at night.'

'It said people were going to pay,' Tama said. 'It said about the eels, and the water. It's only a water taniwha. It doesn't care about the land.'

'I don't think you should listen to it,' Maitai said, slowly. 'Promise you won't go up there. It's not safe anymore.'

'She came to me up near the bend in the river,' Tama said. 'She had gold eyes, big teef. Claws. She was silvery, like the outside of a fish. I wasn't scared.'

'Far out,' Maitai said. 'You been listening to too many stories. Sounds like one a Polly's kōrero. You know that's not real life.'

'But she spoke to me. Said she had to come back cos people are messing everything up. It was dark, and I saw this massive shape in the water. That's when I heard her whispering. Sounded like a snake,' he said.

'Sounds like you imagined it,' Maitai said.

'I magined nothink!' Tama was suddenly in tears. Alexia put out her hand, but he ripped himself away. 'She was real! Teef, and claws, and massive, and she lives in the water up there, and she's not happy!' he yelled at both of them. 'She's already done some things to stop them. So there.'

'Tama, promise you won't go to the river on your own,' Alexia said.

'I promise. I promise,' Tama said.

'He's lying,' Maitai said.

'Nah, I promise,' Tama said. He looked Alexia straight in the eye. 'Ok,' he said. 'I promise by my nanny. I won't go in anymore on my own.' He looked at Alexia as though she alone were responsible for all of it: the pollution, his cat's disappearance, the fracking itself.

\*

'Have you prepared for the fundraiser?' Sam made Alexia's task sound like a frivolous thing.

'Don't worry, I'll play.' She was staring. This was the stare she had to be careful of. Stephen had hated it. It was her Greek glare, he said. She joked with him about his casual racism but he was right, they all did it in her family: turned their eyes on one another like knives. Mama's stare was particularly good. Alexia turned it off. It was wasted on Sam anyway, who was on to the next item on the agenda.

'Aidan, Hannah, have you...'

'Put up the posters in town?' Aidan interrupted her. 'Yeah. Got some up last night.' The rules laid out for meetings in the beginning – no interruptions, consensus-made decisions only, designated minute-takers, rotating facilitation duties – had been eroded till they no longer held. It was partly Polly's obvious contempt for the process. Isaiah had told Alexia privately that he thought the meetings had turned chaotic and out of control. Alexia had admired his long brown arms, his intelligent eyes behind the dark-rimmed glasses, and refused to agree. She said this was not the way things were done here: there were long-established hierarchies and alliances to navigate that the townies weren't even aware of. His eyes had grown hard. She didn't say also that she'd found those first meetings arduous. She loved the meetings now: they were fast, furious, and someone always went off yelling. It was much like her family, in the good times.

'I didn't see any posters in town last night,' Rangi said.

'There's a company who own the ad space on the walls and lamposts,' Hannah said. 'Sometimes they tear rival posters down.'

'You can't own space on a bloody wall!' Rangi said. Bryce laughed.

'Oh, they can, brother, they can,' he said. Isaiah rushed in late.

'Apologies,' he said to the general meeting. 'I was detained.'

He'd made the same complaints about the meetings to Sam at lunch. Sam had enthusiastically agreed, and they'd gone off talking. Polly gestured grandly for him and he went over so she could pat him on the cheek.

'There's been some kind of accident at the fracking site,' he said. Around one wrist he wore a black strap. The camera was concealed in his sleeve. 'Something's gone wrong with one of their bulldozers. It's leaking oil. Ironic, isn't it?'

'What do you mean, an accident?' Polly said. She looked closely at Isaiah. He shrugged.

'I was just up there checking things out,' he said.

'I said no one was to go onto that site,' Polly said. She turned to the group. 'Do you hear me? It's not safe. We must be seen to respect their boundaries, if we want them to respect ours.'

'They don't. That's why we're here,' Isaiah said. Then he lowered his eyes. 'I'm sorry, Aunty.'

'What happened to the bulldozer?' Rangi said.

'Couldn't get close enough to see. But it was seriously messed up. Security was all over it. There were firefighters, police. I don't think anyone's been hurt. The bulldozer had been tipped to one side. It had a...' he seemed at a loss for words. 'A bite taken out of it. A chunk missing, from the engine side.'

'A bite?' Bryce asked.

'I haven't seen anything like it. It couldn't have been made by another vehicle. I'm telling you, there was a hole in the side of the bulldozer, and the tank was leaking oil into the river.'

'We can use this,' Aidan said. 'We can tell the press. It'll look bad. We'll say there's an oil leak straight into the water.' Sam turned to him.

'You think they'll care about a tank full of oil?' she said. 'They don't care about the fracking itself.' Aidan was quiet.

'I don't know how it was done,' Isaiah said. 'Explosives, maybe.'

'Could have been acid,' Rangi said.

'Tama said he saw a taniwha.' It was out before Alexia could stop it. They all stared at her. Polly shook her head in a pitying way.

'That Tama has read too many stories,' she said. 'There hasn't been a taniwha in these parts since 1869.'

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'The kai moana's good,' Rangi said. 'You should have some more. You could do with some fat on your bones.'

'It's not up to you to say whether my bones are fat enough or not,' Alexia said. Her whole life she had dealt with an older generation concerned with fattening her. Her grandmother had still not given up. She let her best legal gaze travel over the beginnings of his paunch. Under his army shirt was the gently rounded evidence of Rangi's appetite.

'Frosty,' he said, but not as if his heart was in it. He reached over an extra serving of mussels. She'd eaten the raw fish with no problem, the fish heads, and the kina too, but she saw how the other Pākehā were struggling. She had been brought up on calamari and whole fish that were eaten with the hands. She watched Hannah pick at the raw fish. Aidan stared at the mussels heaped on his plate with an uncharacteristic torpor. Still, they all ate, as though eating the food was some proof of their political commitment. Isaiah ate mussel after mussel. Matiu and Bryce had collected the kai themselves at the coast just down the road.

'I like them, anyway,' she said to Rangi, and took more of the large horse mussels.

'More than I could say for some a them,' Rangi said. Melissa, Sam and Kate, the vegans, were eating in the lounge. 'The way some people been eating salad the gardens won't be holding up much longer,' he went on.

'And whose fault is that?' Matiu said. 'Production's down on last year.' Alexia cleared their plates and delivered them to where Mary washed dishes at the sink. Isaiah finished up his plate of food. She took the proffered tea towel, which was damp already. Communal tea towels were always already damp.

'They'll come to blows, those two.' Mary said, shaking her head.

Everyone at Bryce's table laughed. He was entertaining them. He had come in wet, quite the hero, carrying the crate of seafood, his shirt half-stripped off.

'It's not their fault though, about the gardens. It's the fracking waste.'

'It's affecting the gardens already?' Alexia asked.

'Only near the river. But it's only a matter of time. The land's being poisoned from underneath.' She spun the cups along the surface of the bench, one two, three, as though her efficiency might stall the garden's demise. 'They'll be at each other's throats soon. They got no one else to take it out on, is all. Better play nice at that fundraiser, tomorrow,' she said brightly.

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Alexia woke with a sick stomach and a pounding head. She'd gone to sleep late, unable to settle, thinking through the chords and the songs she would play on stage. She didn't have the beautiful amp Stephen had bought her the year before. She didn't have her electric acoustic guitar. She had only the backwards-strung guitar that she'd found in the communal hall. She was left handed. She'd played to Isaiah and the kids with her off hand. Now she'd turned the guitar upside-down and strung it so she could play properly. She tried to climb through her tent flap to the clearing, but instead fell out onto the ground. Hannah was by the fire. She looked dull, crouched around and over herself. From the bush behind them came a heaving sound. Alexia got up and staggered. Her stomach pitched and fell, a craft in a violent storm.

'You too,' Hannah said.

Alexia crawled into the bush, in the opposite direction of Aidan's groans.

It seemed to go on and on. At last it was over and she looked up through the karaka leaves and then down, into the rich soil. It was all wrong. The lights were everywhere, but there was no music. They flashed in incomprehensible patterns. There was a buzz in her ears like static and the tips of her fingers were numb. She looked up again and saw the foliage as water. She blinked and looked elsewhere and saw the bark as sand. The lights came on, all colours, sickeningly random. She looked again at her feet. They were bare, and did not shift or change. She felt she could push her hand through the leaves, understanding them as the vibrations they were. The soil had an unmistakable sentience. The lights themselves had light aura. She tried to block it but it didn't work.

'Hannah!' she yelled. 'Aidan!' She lurched her way back to camp. Something was very wrong.

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Rangi was sick, and Matiu was in bed, and Te Kahurangi had not emerged from Polly's house. Polly was at the kitchen table peeling potatoes, seemingly fine, though she admitted to having had a little trouble with her stomach. She looked at Alexia and saw her weakness. Alexia straightened up under her eye. Aidan and Hannah had dragged themselves in to see what could be done. People would begin arriving soon for the fundraiser. The only activists not sick were Sam and Melissa and Kate, and Bryce's wife and her partner. Melissa was



counting tickets into numbered batches. Sam brushed past with an unmistakable air of triumph. Bryce came in with a lockbox and put it on the table.

'Aunty,' he said to Polly in greeting. Polly patted Bryce on the cheek. Bryce looked ill, but not as sick as the others. Isaiah burst in the door with a certain drama. He looked very, very sick. His eyes seemed to cross as he stood there, and he was sweating. He was paler than she'd ever seen him, his olive skin sallow.

'Alexia,' he asked. 'How do you feel?'

Everyone, including Sam, looked at her. Alexia blushed. Aidan stood up, then sat down again, then stood up and hovered near the other door. He'd thrown up three times on the walk over.

'I feel... like you do, I think,' Alexia said. He should be in bed. He grabbed the doorframe. In his other hand he held a piece of paper.

'No, I mean, how do you *feel*? How do you all *feel*?' Isaiah asked.

'Sick, man,' Aidan said. 'Sick as a dog's bollocks, if a dog's bollocks could get sick.'

'... Numbness and tingling around the mouth... dizziness, double vision...' Isaiah was reading from the paper. Alexia drew close to him. The sheet was titled: "Toxic Shellfish Poisoning: coastal safety warning." '... Potential respiratory issues... vomiting, diarrhoea... how do you feel, all of you?' he asked. 'Does any of this sound familiar?' His eyes were jerking strangely. He had eaten more kai moana than anyone. Alexia's fingertips felt blunt and dumb.

'I have numbness,' she said. Rangi came in.

'The kai moana,' he said. 'Something up with it. It wasn't just rotten.' Isaiah brandished the paper at him.

'It's the shellfish,' he said. 'It's toxic.'

'I've been bloody seeing aura, mate,' Aidan said. He laughed a little hysterically. 'I thought it was just some sorta flashback.'

'PSP.' Bryce said. 'Paralytic shellfish poisoning. We should have known.'

'You've heard of this?' Isaiah said.

'Don't worry, it will pass,' Bryce said, airily. 'It usually lessens within hours. It's happened at other sites, overseas. And it's happened here already, up the coast. It can come from farm runoff, chemicals from factories, all kinds of things. But of course, it's the fracking: it must be. Stands to reason the kai moana isn't safe anymore. I don't know what we were thinking.' To Alexia he was surrounded by a weird ring of lights, one slender hand

reaching out to console Polly. 'Your kai moana is not safe for the people,' he said, grandly. 'The levels of toxicity in the river are too high.'

'For how long?' Polly said. 'Will it go away?' No one answered her.

'This is the only time,' Aidan said, and doubled over suddenly. He raised a finger and his upper body with great effort of will. 'The only time, bar Bangkok, I'll grant you, when I've been that out of it that when I made it to the shitter, I didn't even know which end to point at it first.' He dashed to the door. 'But at least in Bangkok I'd had some fun beforehand,' he said. 'This is just the total fucking shites.'

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The decision had been made to go ahead with the fundraiser. People started to drift into the hall. Isaiah was nauseous. Aidan and Hannah had crept back to their tent. Even Polly had made a concession to illness, resting, feet up, on a couch. It was like seeing a piece of wood relax. She was so small, lying there and sipping at her water, that Isaiah had felt an inadvertent surge of affection. The only people left standing were Sam, Melissa, Kate, and Bryce's wife and partner. They were all extremely useful organisers, but none of them had any musical talent. The only one who could perform and who was still able to walk was Alexia. He went to find her in the little room behind the stage.

'How many of them are there?' she asked. She clutched Tama's ugly cat in her arms. Maitai was at her side, stroking her arm. Isaiah had a moment of extreme envy. In his state he was not sure he could adequately police the necessary lines. He had thrown up many times, but found that if he drank cold coffee and ate burnt toast, the aura lessened somewhat. He was meant to be the MC.

'I'd say a hundred,' Isaiah said. He was being deliberately conservative: the hall could hold two hundred, and was almost full. They had used up a large amount of funding on big prints of his photos, and Melissa had written blurbs. He'd been doing his own investigations into the effects of the fracking. Now the punters were circulating, unable to avoid the pictures.

'I can't do it.' She looked at him viciously. 'I don't know Hannah and Aidan's set: I can't play it by myself. I don't know what you're expecting me to do. I'm sick,' she said. Her hair was ruffled and huge around her face, and though she was wearing a pretty dress, something frothy in blue and green, he could smell her. It was an ill smell. He probably smelt the same. Maitai glared.

'You don't have to get up there,' he said.

'Actually, I do,' Isaiah said. 'You'll be fine, Alexia. I'll take up as much time as I can. Rangi said he'll play something after, and Matiu. But you're the headliner.'

'I think I have to throw up.'

'No,' he said. 'That's what I have to do.' He left her with Maitai. Afterwards, splashing water on his face, he wasn't sure quite where his confidence in her was coming from. Sam said he was blind when it came to Alexia. She hadn't said anything to him directly but he gathered as much from her pointed looks. Sam thought Alexia conservative, deeply traditional. She also thought she was possibly an undercover cop. Isaiah doubted that. Surely an undercover cop would know better than to turn up to a hui forgetting to bring adequate koha, in office clothes and inappropriate shoes, camping out in pencil skirts? A cop would have had a better disguise.

Sam was sorting money at the door.

'You look terrible!' she said.

'Sam, will you do the kōrero? I don't know if I can,' he said. Sam laid a cool hand on his forehead. He experienced a slight jolt. It was just Sam, of course, but he was all pent up and stressed out. The sickness had done odd things to his body.

'No,' she said. 'I think you should do it. You're the one that knows how the Power Point runs.' She smiled her no-nonsense smile. 'You'll get through it! I have complete faith in you. You know who I'm not so sure about though? Her over there. The only time I've heard her sing was at the pōwhiri. Sure, she has a nice voice, but she was lacking in inspiration, wouldn't you say?' She shrugged. 'It's nothing. It's just, we've promised these people entertainment. I guess it's a matter of taste.'

'The last thing I expected of you Sam,' he said, 'was for you to turn into an aesthetic snob.' He started to walk away, but Sam put a hand on his shoulder.

'Tama told me she hasn't performed in five years,' she said. 'I just don't want this to be a huge failure.'

They went towards the stage and made some adjustments to the lighting and the sound. Isaiah set up his Power Point display; the people would get their music, of course, but not without his spiel. There was a last minute glitch, as there always was, with a microphone, but Sam fixed it.

It was time. In the darkened hall people rustled and giggled and fell silent as Sam hit the lights. Isaiah stood with his mouth dry and his hands clasped together behind the lectern. He told himself he was giving a speech at school. He started the Power Point display. A shot

of the mountain. Here was the difference: it was not school, not another meeting, not a practise run. This was his mountain. He started his mihi, which, shamefully, he had only perfected the night before.

The shots kaleidoscoped through the damage he'd found at the frack site. His voice cracked but he was used to public speaking and spoke through it, knowing that soon he would be lost in the thread, able to tell the story. He described the effects of the fracking. He described the risk. He touched briefly on the recent reports, the science. But he knew what they were interested in were the sensational aspects: the dead birds, the poisoned soil, the flaming water. He showed a brief clip of it. The audience moved and murmured.

When it was over he felt a quick pride and then, coming down from the stage, a crushing exhaustion. But no one came on after him. He signalled wildly to Sam. Rangi and Matiu got up from where they were at the front of the hall uncertainly. Then Maitai emerged from a side door, dragging Alexia by the hand. She looked feverish, on the verge of collapse. The apples of her cheek bones were a high red, and her hair was a huge dark mess, moving and alive. Isaiah realised he was standing awkwardly, half on the stage, half off, staring at her. Everyone could see him. He must be sicker than he thought. He got down.

Maitai took the microphone. Rangi gestured at him to get off the stage, but Maitai only smiled. He placed Alexia in a chair put there for the purpose and she picked up the guitar. It was upside down, he saw, strung left-handed. Maitai launched into a small speech. He beamed out over the crowd and showed the gap in his teeth.

'And thank you all for coming to see our show,' he said, finally. 'And thank you for helping to save the pā from the frackers. And this is Alexia. She will play some of her songs.' He climbed down, very proud of himself.

Alexia looked out at the crowd. She did not speak. The audience rustled and squeaked. Still, she did not open her mouth; her long brown fingers lax on the guitar strings. Isaiah began to panic. More rustling. Someone called out something rude from the back.

'I'm going to,' Alexia said quietly. She looked as if she were about to pass out.

'Microphone!' someone called out. Sam turned it up.

'I'm going to play,' she said. Everyone waited to hear about what she would play, an introduction, or some pleasing anecdote. But she just started to strum. The song was bland and formulaic: a call to arms, a call to save the environment and end the fracking. Even in his strange, almost euphoric state of illness he could hear that her voice fell a little flat. It was Aidan's song, and without his accent and Hannah's backing vocals there was nothing to it. Alexia finished and didn't play on. The audience did not applaud. She seemed to be

looking at the microphone. She was not such a good musician after all, he thought, but very photographable. He had the bizarre urge to leap up and explain to everyone that she was sick, that she had not had time to practise. He wanted to pull out his camera and take photos but was aware of Sam's eyes on him. The silence grew.

Suddenly Alexia broke into an unfamiliar rhythm. The sound was traditional, Middle Eastern, maybe. It took him a few moments before he decided it must be Greek. Of course! But it wasn't the cheerful canned Greek music of kebab shops. It was inexplicably modern, the base tempo taking on extra, off-kilter beats, the guitar being hit somehow by the flat of her hand in a way he had not seen before, setting up a low hum that underlay the beat. Rangi looked across at him and raised his eyebrows. It was dancing music, for all its experimental undertones. Sick as Isaiah was, he felt like dancing.

She started to sing. It was strange music to hear at a fundraising concert in the middle of rural New Zealand. As she went on singing, something odd happened to her face. She stretched her mouth into awkward shapes to accommodate the words, which switched from Greek to English and back again. It was a song about a lion and a rabbit, some revised nursery rhyme. She increased the tempo and her fingers danced over the frets. Upsidedown guitar. Flying hands. She scrunched and twisted her face. The music was poppy and weird and slightly off key. It was not quite regular enough to be satisfying. It was a wonder. Her face was entirely mobile; relaxed one second, contorted the next. And she was not embarrassed. She was not faltering anymore. She increased the tempo again, adding more layers under the notes, here and there an oddly ringing slide: things he knew instinctively were not a part of the old music but her own elaborations upon it. She increased the speed again, playing double-time. He remembered some footage he'd seen somewhere of Greek dancers, hands linked with handkerchiefs, moving around the room in a circle. The music's speed would start slow, then double, treble, till the dancers were running and leaping and it became a contest to see who could keep dancing.

'Opa! Opa!' Alexia yelled into the gaps between the notes. Raised hands, white shirts, black pants, kicking legs, broken plates. Alexia played faster. She sang, face wrapped around the words: a marvel of effort. Her cheeks were very red. She looked out and up, not at them but at something near the ceiling. She played so fast now that Matiu looked at Isaiah in amazement and Rangi, who'd been stamping on the floor, stood up, and Maitai and the kids were dancing. Isaiah felt himself taken up and standing and some people had started, uncertainly, to clap. Alexia played until Isaiah could not see the individual movements of her fingers. She was wailing now, inhumanly, and doing something very complex that made the

guitar look like it had many strings. She was yelling out past the microphone into the crowd. The notes rose and rose, and suddenly, stopped. She looked out blindly, face blank and calm.

'Got any more like that, sis?' Rangi called up onto stage.

She smiled, and played another.

Afterwards, when Rangi and Matiu were safely installed on the stage, playing more familiar tunes, Isaiah passed Kate and Melissa whispering near the door.

'Amazing, right?' he said to them. Kate shrugged.

'If you're into that sort of thing,' she said. 'Don't know if the locals liked it.' Isaiah felt the grin slip off his face. He was foolish, foolish. He must not be thinking straight. Maybe he was the only one who could see how well Alexia played. He turned to Melissa.

'It was alright,' she said. 'I guess.' He walked away, chastened. Of course, he'd been in the front row, seeing only Maitai, Matiu and Rangi's response. Perhaps the rest of the hall had been unmoved. He was sick and his judgment was out.

Isaiah took a bottle of water to the side room. He found Alexia slumped there, as he'd expected, alone, staring at the guitar. He offered her the bottle. The effects of the illness were still strong. Now he looked at Alexia and saw the fuzziness around her head and hands, as if she were glowing slightly. He still had not come right. He sat down.

She turned to him, eyes wide and unhealthily bright.

'You were...' he said, but she leaned close suddenly and put her arms around his neck.

'Shut up,' she said fiercely. 'Shut up about it.'

'You...' he said.

'I was perfect,' she said, into his armpit. 'Apart from the start, of course.' She still smelled sick and her hair tickled his nose. 'It's been a long time, for me,' she said. She was talking about the performance, he thought. He shifted against her, hoping she would not move away. But she pushed her head into him roughly. 'Entirely unsuitable, I know,' she said, 'for an environmental fundraiser. But what else could I do? It's all I really know how to play.'

'I seriously doubt that,' Isaiah said.

'You don't need to flatter me.' Her voice was low now where on stage, it was elastic. Something was added to it now that he knew its range. She looked on the edge of sleep one moment and then wired the next. Her lips were lazy and full. She wore makeup around her eyes, and her lashes were so long they seemed fake.

'Are you still seeing aura?' he asked. 'On stage it looked to me like you had sparks coming off you.'

'Those were real,' she said. She pulled back, and laughed uproariously. She put her hand on his leg. 'I had a dream about you. We were riding in a car very fast. It had no steering wheel and we were in the backseat: it was like it was driving itself.' She stroked the guitar.

'I didn't know you were left-handed.'

'My great closely-guarded secret.'

'I didn't know a new interpretation of Greek folk music could bring a small town audience to its feet.'

'Only the front row,' she said.

'I didn't know you spoke Greek.'

'In the car in my dream I kissed you.' There were circles underneath her eyes. She seemed electric. This might be all be regrettable later, he thought, and put the thought out of his mind. 'Then it crashed,' she said, 'the car. It went up in flames. Can I put my arms around you again?'

'I don't see why not,' he said. He was trying for lightness but she took it personally and raised her eyes upwards, looking particularly Greek. Then she looked him straight in the eye, and anything he was trying to do or not do fell away. They sat on the scratchy couch, Rangi's voice rising to the chinka chinka chink from the main hall, the sound of people clapping outside. She placed one arm, very slowly, around his shoulders, not at all like the fluid movement of before, and brought her cheek in close to his. He brought his opposite hand round and placed it on her wrist. He wanted in a deep part of himself to run out of the room. They sat like that, awkwardly, for a minute or so.

'Oh well,' she said. 'It was a good thought, anyway.' She got up and went towards the door.

But this was too much. He got up and caught her against the wall. His lips met hers, but only just, like on the first day they met. His glasses crashed into her nose. She righted them.

'I didn't want to rush.'

'I'm a straight up kind of a person,' she said.

'It's just that I don't know what.'

'I'm an all or nothing type. I'm just saying it now. I'm just saying.'

There was an interlude of sorts. When it was over it was obvious that they would have to go somewhere immediately. She led him away down the corridor and out into the night. They were far away from their tents or any appropriate room. Isaiah kept reaching out

as he followed her into the bushes, touching her back, her shoulders, her hair. She did not speak. Someone smashed a bottle in the car park, and someone closed a door. Isaiah jumped, a jump all out of proportion the noise. He worried again that he was not at all well. They went behind some trees. The ground was damp, and he couldn't see the stars. But this person was Alexia.

'I can't believe you told me about that dream.'

'I can't believe you let me get up there, when I'm so sick. I should be in bed.'

'We should be,' Isaiah agreed. 'We may be too old for these sorts of encounters.'

Please don't judge me for this.'

'Promise that you'll love me in the morning,' Alexia said jokingly, but her eyes were full of tears.

There were some moments of urgency. Eventually Isaiah found his wallet; the bright packet. Soon he was with her. Soon she was over him, he underneath. There was a twig in her hair and it was dark so he imagined her face. He held her down on his hips. She was rough. He thought that he was meant to like it, but he didn't. He stroked her face. There was a moment of calm where he held her to him preciously, his desire curiously stalled. There were contours to be discovered and memorised. She leaned down and he held her there, she slightly unwilling, as he kissed her. But as soon as he moved again she started to butt against him: he couldn't match her. He tried to cup her in his hands but they were still too clothed. It was dark and impersonal. She moved and moved and made sounds. He put his hand where she wanted. He lay on his back, the stones driving into his shoulder blades. He found it all too hard to make real and, when she made the many noises and climbed up into them and out the other side, brushing her fingers down his still clothed chest, he found it even harder to believe.

She lay next to him. 'I'm sorry,' she said. 'Do you want me to...?'

'No,' he said. 'Don't worry.' He lay on his back, happy to be rid of her. He felt a sense of guilt, not because of Sam, but because he had built Alexia up in his mind and when it happened he had not fully been here. He had somehow, in the face of it, stayed closed. He'd have to explain that it couldn't happen again.

'That was terrible, wasn't it?' she said.

'Did you really...?'

'I don't know what's wrong with me. It's purely physical. Most women would hate me, of course.' She laughed coolly, and the comment opened out between them, taking on shades. He checked with his hand and found the bad thing.



'Alexia,' he said. He was surprised to feel her hand. The packet lay discarded off to one side.

'Well,' she said. 'It's not as if you...'

'No,' he said. 'It would be highly unlikely.' He wanted to kiss her again, but, thinking of her jolting movements quelled the urge. As they walked back together she turned to him and said something he didn't catch.

'What's that?'

'Music, I said. Music.'

'What about it?'

'I see it.'

She explained it then. He wasn't sure what it was she was offering; some tale about a different way of seeing. She gave it to him like a gift, one he wasn't sure how to take. At the hall they parted like casual acquaintances. He saw how tired she looked. How rough she'd been. She waved at him as she went away awkwardly, hunching over, into the crowded hall.

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He didn't see her again until the food had been cleared from the tables and the lights taken down. He was rolling his photographs into large unwieldy scrolls. She was by the drinks table. Someone was doing donuts in the car park. Rangi had gone outside to break up a fight and had not come back. Matiu was taking down harakeke decorations and stacking chairs. Isaiah had thrown up once more. He had been unable to hold back a feeling of dislike when he glimpsed himself in the bathroom mirror. His hair was short and tidy, as always, and his face was clean-shaven behind the glasses. He looked younger than he was, like some kind of promising graduate student in the midst of an internship, fresh faced despite the illness, much more hopeful-looking than he felt. He looked like someone who would buy flowers for the girl he loved.

For the last half hour Melissa and Kate had been whispering to each other. Sam had not looked at him since he had come back inside. His absence had been noted. He was sick of all of this: of being tracked, of having to account for every look and word and action, to keep within the rules. Of course he would speak to Sam tonight. He felt ill all over, but it couldn't wait. It was one of their very firm policies: complete honesty. They would not leave the other to wonder if something had happened with someone else: they would let each other

know, preferably before the fact. Now he knew nothing further could happen between Alexia and himself, it would be easy to make the disclosure. Rangi came in and closed the doors.

'It went quite well, don't you think?' Sam said. He was aware of Alexia across the hall like he was aware of his own hand on the wall. 'The concert,' she said, when he just looked at her.

'I need to talk to you,' he said. He came down from the ladder, feeling dizzy. Sam's face stilled. Rangi was approaching. This was always the hardest part. They had set it all out at the start, but it had not, in practice, always been simple. She had been guilty of loose interpretation, as had he. Included in their rules was the right of veto. If he had a personality conflict with one of Sam's partners, he could exercise it. Neither of them had exercised it yet. But now Rangi was beside them, and Matiu. Rangi seemed beyond ill. His eyes were red, and he swayed a little in place. Matiu laid a hand on his arm, but Rangi was focussed on Isaiah with the myopia of the very drunk.

'Beast with two backs, eh?' Rangi said. He swayed one way, then the other, then righted himself. 'Well?' He leered horribly. Alexia approached from the other end of the hall. Matiu struck his cousin on the arm, but Rangi did not notice. 'Bit of this and that in the bushes, eh?' he said. Melissa and Kate came over, aware of the commotion. Rangi staggered closer to Isaiah, laughing whiskey breath into his face. 'Long time coming, eh? Where is she? Where is that hot kūmara of a woman? Kūmara!' Now he was yelling. Alexia was close enough to hear. Isaiah wished to send her away. Bryce came over too. 'About time, eh, Isaiah?' Rangi made the lewdest gesture, one which involved fingers and a thrusting of hips.

Sam stared at Isaiah, Melissa and Kate at her side. Alexia halted in her approach, holding an accordion of empty plastic cups.

'Sam,' Isaiah said.

'Hands off me, bro,' Rangi said to Bryce, who was attempting to lead him away. 'Dirty white hands offa me.' He assumed an outraged air. 'I have it on good authority,' but here he broke into giggles, spoiling the effect, 'that your Isaiah Tane Mahuta has got himself a new lady.' He appeared to notice Sam for the first time. He squinted. 'Shee-it,' he said.

Sam was quiet, watching Isaiah with great attention.

'Sam,' he began again. She crossed her arms.

'Sorry,' Rangi said. 'Sorreee.' His words began to slur together. Isaiah wondered if he would remember this later. 'Was jus. Congratulating. Thassal. Congratulating my friend. Isaiah!' He yelled, and seemed again to forget everyone else. 'Been washin you two for

weeks giving each other the eye!' He slapped Isaiah on the chest. Now Melissa and Kate, always party to the workings of Isaiah's relationship, intervened.

'He didn't tell you, Sam?'

'Did he clear it with you?'

'He didn't say?'

'Did you know?' Sam shook her head. They turned on him.

'Bad communication is no excuse.'

'What you've done to her, Isaiah, it's humiliating. It's as bad as cheating.'

'It is cheating.'

'You didn't have to. You could have waited. You sell yourself as this sensitive guy but in fact.'

'You're just as bad as the rest of them. To think we thought you were ethical, that you were honest.'

'Alexia and I aren't together,' Isaiah said. 'We're not.'

'Well,' said Rangi, suddenly completely lucid. He had popped into the eye of the storm of inebriation where pure and universal truths are seemingly discovered. 'Did you fuck her?'

Matiu stepped physically back. Even free-loving Bryce seemed shocked. Isaiah stood in the middle of them all, Matiu, Bryce, Sam, Melissa, Kate, and Alexia. Sam's brown finger rose up and then down upon her bare upper arm, tap, tap tap. Isaiah felt an almost foreign calm descend over him. Everyone watched him expectantly. He could almost see the opposing wills of Alexia, and of Sam and of her friends. In his delirious state he imagined he almost saw lines stretching between them all, and he was the point of focus, the unwillingly apex. For a moment he looked to the grains of the wood floor, and staggered, and Rangi, of all people, held him up. The weight of it all, the unpredictability of others' needs. When he looked up again he saw they were still all waiting, and in that moment he felt it: pure, unlimited power, almost intoxicating.

'Alexia and I are not together,' Isaiah said. 'We are not planning to have a relationship. She is not my girlfriend. Sam, please,' he said. Four years was a long time. 'Please.'

'But my mates saw,' said Rangi. His eyes were bleared. He had departed the eye and again entered the storm's messiness.

'I don't care what they saw,' Isaiah said. He would talk to Sam privately. She must forgive him.

'Alexia?' Melissa and Kate had turned to her. She stood in her good dress with her thin legs and large hair, holding the crumpled cups in one hand

'Alexia?' Sam asked. He knew how much it cost her to say it. Alexia drew herself up.

'I'm not the one on trial here,' she said. He saw how good she would be in the courtroom, standing just like that, unearthly, intense, filled with absolute righteousness. 'I'm not the one whose honesty is in question.' She walked away.

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Alexia and Isaiah had been sent off together by Polly, and though both hated to go, they'd had no valid reason to oppose her. Isaiah wondered if Polly had heard something, and was punishing him. Their job was to retrieve the profits of the fundraiser from Bryce's house bus. Now they entered the clearing where Bryce had set up camp. Bryce's wife's girlfriend got up and came over, topless and tanned. She was a deep, even orange. A scarf was draped around her neck, partially concealing one nipple. It made her appear somehow more naked, not less. Alexia stared fixedly at Bryce's wife, the more clothed of the two.

'We're here for the lockbox,' Isaiah said.

'Giddy to you too,' Steph said. 'Oh come on. Seems like everyone's so tense these days.' Isaiah looked around their camp. Bryce and the others had hung prayer flags from the trees with tino rangitaritanga patches on them. In a way this typified Bryce's approach. Two bikes were in various states of repair by their campfire. Steph had been tinkering with them. There were screwdrivers and bolts everywhere.

'Well, crazy things have been happening,' Isaiah said. Alexia was studying the two girls.

'Did you not get sick?' she asked.

'I'm vegetarian,' Steph said.

'Vegan,' said her girlfriend.

'Bryce was only a little sick,' Steph said. 'I don't think he ate much of the kai moana.'

Isaiah, who could still see a faint trace of a disquieting aura around most objects, ignored this.

'Where would the lockbox be?' he asked. Steph led them to Bryce's van: a huge, blue, older style camper with a white pop-top awning. Inside it was dark and larger than Isaiah had expected. The walls were lined with reclaimed wood and someone had installed a four poster structure around the bed, a carved wooden thing made out of driftwood pieces.

The bed was unmade and the pillows were thrown about. He wondered if they all slept together here: Bryce, Steph and her girlfriend, and then pushed the thought away. It was too close to imagining Sam, her stocky body, and Bryce, and whatever they had done together.

The lockbox was on the small bedside table. Underneath it were Bryce's books: *The Art of War*, *The Complete Karma Sutra*, *Political Persuasion*, *Working in Groups*, *Primal Ecology*. If Bryce was a spy, his disguise was thorough. Alexia sat on the bed, bouncing and looking around. On the roof was a grand mandala, and dim light came from the stained glass window behind the bed.

'This is my family's worst nightmare,' she said.

'Would you live in something like this?' Isaiah asked. He wanted to sit next to her. He'd thought it all done with. He'd thought he never wanted to see her again. Alexia looked him over and smiled.

'Depends on who with,' she said.

He felt himself blushing, a band of terrible heat. He looked desperately away, to where there was a shelf on the wall. He didn't want to look back at her there, on the bed, her long tan legs arranged haphazardly, her skirt a little ruffled, her hair loose and wholly indecent in the muted light. He was ridiculous and he knew it. On the shelf was a pressed leaf, several packets of seeds, and a notebook. There was also the edge of a small red package. Alexia was watching his face with absolute concentration. It was the look she had when she was playing guitar.

'I'm sorry about yesterday,' he said, because he hadn't said it before. 'I think we were both just really sick.'

'We rushed into it,' she said. Her face had gone still and distant. 'But you're right, we were sick.'

'So sick.'

'Really sick.'

'I can't believe I even played.' She put her head into her hands.

'But you were great!' he said, in surprise. Artists and their complexes were a little beyond him.

'I'm meant to be a lawyer,' she said.

'Are they mutually exclusive things, being a musician and a lawyer?' The little packet was bothering him.

'It seems like it sometimes,' she said. 'I'm meant to be studying for my qualifying exam.' Her voice took on a confessional quality. 'And I'm not.'

‘Not what,’ he was distracted.

‘Not studying,’ she said. ‘At this rate, I’m not going to pass.’ He knew he should follow this last thing up but he could see the corner of a word which should not be there. Then she was beside him, staring at the thing he had in his hand.

“Not for human consumption,” Alexia read. For a moment they didn’t say anything.

‘I’ll have to research,’ Isaiah said.

‘Surely he wouldn’t,’ Alexia said. He pocketed the thing, small, innocuous, empty now of powder. ‘But why would he have it otherwise?’ Alexia said. ‘What would he be doing out here with possum poison?’

‘I’m pretty sure this is the stuff that kills dogs,’ Isaiah said.

‘You’re going to take it?’ Alexia asked. She reached her hand into his pocket then removed her hand. ‘Leave it. Or he’ll know we know.’ Isaiah shook his head.

‘Come on,’ he said. He grabbed the lockbox.

‘Find what you were looking for?’ Steph asked. She gave Alexia a loaded look. Isaiah nodded.

‘Got everything,’ he yelled brightly. ‘Cheers!’

\*

Isaiah took two great, measured steps towards the table. Te Kahurangi was there, and Matiu, and Polly, Sam and Melissa and Kate. Alexia stood behind him. He laid the empty red package down. He pulled out a chair with an elaborate screech and sat. It was only after waiting for one beat, two, that he raised his eyes and looked Bryce in the face.

“Warning, poison,” Sam read aloud. “Do not ingest.” She took a step towards the table and lifted the package in her hands. ‘Where did you get this?’ she asked. Melissa and Kate and Matiu crowded around to see. Rangi stayed where he was, his quick eyes moving from Isaiah to Bryce and back again. Te Kahurangi lounged faux-casually by the door.

“Warning,” Sam went on. “If ingested may cause numbness around mouth. Other effects include... hallucinations, shortness of breath, respiration difficulties, vomiting and diarrhoea.” She laid the package back on the table and looked at Isaiah more warmly than she had for weeks.

‘Where did you get it?’ she asked again. Her voice was almost soft. It sent a jolt of longing through him. More than anything it was her voice and the things she said with it, the clever, forceful, radical things, that got to him.

‘Where did I get it, Bryce?’ he asked.

Through all this Bryce’s face had stayed calm, unmoving. Now he moved casually towards the table, grasping the package dismissively between finger and thumb.

‘Well,’ he said, after a time. ‘I do carry this sometimes. My work as a ranger in the past, as you know, involved some pest control.’ He looked at Isaiah. ‘Did you go through my things?’

‘We went to get the lockbox,’ Alexia said. ‘It’s poison,’ she said, loudly to the others. ‘It causes vomiting, hallucinations – everything we had. I thought I was going crazy!’ she said. ‘We could have all ended up in hospital. The children ate that food!’

Bryce looked at her in an interested way, much as he would someone with a good idea. He nodded enthusiastically.

‘Right,’ he said. ‘Alright then. Yes.’ To Isaiah he seemed to change the way he was standing, become some other version of himself. ‘It is mine,’ he said. ‘Yes, it’s mine. And yes, I poisoned all of you, myself included.’ He nodded his head deferentially at Sam, Melissa and Kate. ‘Apart, of course, from the vegetarians.’

Polly banged her staff on the ground.

‘You poisoned the kai moana on purpose?’ She looked at the small red package in Bryce’s fingers. ‘That’s possum poison,’ she said. ‘You put that in our kai? Are you crazy, man? You think with all this fracking we don’t have enough poison on our land?’

Bryce fell to his knees. Alexia began to laugh.

‘This is no joke,’ he said. ‘Polly, I ask you, and you people’s forgiveness.’

‘You can’t be serious,’ Isaiah said.

‘Aunty,’ Bryce said. ‘I did it for us.’

‘Don’t listen to him Aunty,’ Rangī said. ‘He’s full of –’

‘Watch your mouth, Rangī,’ Polly said.

‘What do you mean?’ Sam was on him. ‘You endangered the people of this pā for what, Bryce? I thought it was you,’ she said. ‘I thought it might be you who was working against us. The informant.’

‘But surely that would be an illegal act?’ Matiu said.

‘Informants work in weird ways,’ Sam said.

‘I’m not an informant,’ Bryce said. He was standing now, tall as ever. Isaiah found himself convinced. It was illogical and unpleasant. ‘I’ve been upset, like all of you, at the way our attempts to fight this have been failing. And I know a lot of you have felt let down,

like me. We've acted optimistically, assuming, perhaps, that there weren't higher powers involved.'

'What higher powers?' Rangi asked.

'The local council and the papers,' Bryce said. 'And probably the government. They'll have investments in the fracking. Economic motivations.'

'What are you saying?' Isaiah said. 'That we shouldn't bother to resist?'

'No!' Bryce seemed genuinely appalled. 'No. Just that we shouldn't have bothered trying to do it honourably, with applications and protests. We aren't dealing with the forces that existed in the past. This fracking, this fracturing of the land,' he said. 'It has the potential for utter destruction, you all know that. It can ruin the air, the water. It can trigger earthquakes, tidal waves. This kind of insane piercing of the earth, it hasn't been seen before. We should meet force with force. What they're doing to your land, Aunty, should be illegal. It's a violation of natural law. I say we should meet that illegality head on, with some illegal acts of our own. Ones that would have a more direct effect. Whose law is the law anyway? The coloniser's law.'

Matiu stepped forward, right up to Bryce's face.

'Enlighten us as to why you poisoned our food,' he said, 'and our children's food.' There was a moment of quiet.

'Everything's falling apart,' Bryce said. 'I've seen it happen before with social movements. It all starts out well. Then one thing or another happens and the forces we're contending with seem too powerful. Humans were meant to fight in short bursts: we're not built for the long fight. Before you know it the energy wanes, and it's all over.'

'So you poisoned us,' Isaiah said, 'to give us some motivation? To make us angry enough to act?'

Bryce nodded. Melissa started crying.

'You expect us to buy that?' Sam said. 'What kind of insane, stupid activist poisons his own comrades the night before a fundraiser?'

'A desperate one,' Bryce said. 'I needed to make an impact.'

'You mad bastard,' Alexia said. She was unmoved. 'You poisoned children.'

'I've worked with possum poison before,' Bryce said, cautiously. 'I generally know how much to... administer.'

Isaiah remembered the blurring of his vision, the vomiting that had gone on for hours. Now Polly came close to Bryce, and looked up at his face. She reached out her hand and



stroked his chin. Then she slapped him very hard, one, two, across the face. For a bare moment Isaiah saw Bryce's mask falter, his face slipping into shock.

'I always thought you were a little strange,' she said. 'From the minute I saw you I thought, that man's a man of the people, but he don't have no friends. Now I know you're not strange,' she said. 'Now I know you're totally off the wall pōrangī insane. Mad as a hatter. Should be locked up.'

'I move that disciplinary action be taken by the members of this group against Bryce,' Sam said. 'For implementing actions without a mandate.' Bryce looked at her as if she were naive.

'Oh I think you'll find there are a few people around here acting without a mandate, Sam,' he said.

'Rangi,' Polly said. Her voice was low, quiet, filled with menace. 'Get this no good bastard off our land.' But Rangi was not there. Te Kahurangi skipped forwards, towards Bryce, and for a moment Isaiah felt afraid for the man; the joy on her face was so great. But then through the open doors came Rangi, with a chainsaw. He turned it on and revved it loudly. He chased Bryce around the table, once, twice, screaming all the while.

Eventually they left, Rangi presumably to run Bryce off the pā. They could hear them moving away across the field, the chainsaw roaring, Bryce still attempting to reason, Rangi yelling over him.

'Guess we better round everyone up and call a doctor,' Kate said. 'We'll have to make sure the youngest don't have any permanent damage.'

'Should we take legal action?' Sam asked. Alexia nodded vigorously. Isaiah watched with surprise as Matiu slowly began to shake his head.

'Would take a great deal for us to turn someone over to the cops,' he said. 'We lose a great deal of young people to the prisons.'

'Are you serious?' Sam asked. 'He put us all in serious danger...'

'He's right,' Polly sighed. 'And besides, that kind of man; a part of him would love the attention. He's like a worm; cut off the head and the body still lives.'

'Aunty,' Te Kahurangi said. 'Sometimes you can be really obscure.' She turned to the others. 'She means even though we're chucking him out, he'll still try to do something, try to be involved.'

'Best to look the other way, when that happens,' Polly said. 'Best to not to look too hard at a man who wants so much to be looked at.'

They tried to get on with the legal business, but no one had the attention span.

‘Funny how he was just trying to motivate us,’ Melissa said, at length. There was a silence.

\*

Isaiah and Alexia were on the porch. It was nearing dusk. He’d waited a long time for everyone to go away, hoping she’d understand he wanted to talk to her. Finally it was just the two of them, staring out at the bush, the open hills. She played a few chords on the guitar.

‘What colour are the notes?’ he asked.

A bird flew into the window, bashing itself, a fantail. Isaiah moved to help it, but it was gone. Polly came and stood on the front porch of the whare. Isaiah thought she would comment on the bird, but she just stood, shading her eyes.

‘Girl,’ she said to Alexia. ‘Come here. It’s your family on the phone.’

Alexia was on her feet. ‘How did they get the number?’

Polly shrugged. She reached out for Alexia’s hand, taking it in her own. Alexia stared at their fingers, Polly’s woven in with hers. The guitar slipped out of her grasp and onto the porch with a soft clunk. Then she was gone. Isaiah was left with Polly, who shook her head.

‘She will have to go away, boy,’ she said. She studied him and seemed to make some kind of choice. ‘Give her something, stupid, before she goes,’ she said. ‘A gift. Or at least a promise.’ Then she left, patting her hair snootily, sliding back into the house. Isaiah was left to look at the field alone. The lights of the urupa glowed weirdly in the dusk. Well, he wasn’t here to chase women. Maybe it was best that she was leaving. But there it was, she was after all, a friend, and it appeared from whatever had crossed Alexia’s face that she was hurt. But by the time he’d decided after all to follow her, she’d already gone.



## FOUR

Set a man to watch all night,  
Watch all night, watch all night,  
Set a man to watch all night,  
My fair lady.

The fracking site lay before them.

It had once all been pā land. The new settlers had put up their fences over and over again, and the people had gone at night and pulled them down. Then the soldiers pushed in with stronger weapons: starvation, guns, worse things. They resisted but they lost the land anyway, Polly had said, and their chief had been killed. This would have once been shared land, Isaiah's land.

'There,' she'd said, pointing far away over the fields. 'All the way up there, as far as the river, then right up through the bush to the mountain. But they took it, all the way back to the aukati over there.' The boundary line. The bush rose up in a wedge, between the ūrupa and Taylor's place. 'But it's that bastard Taylor's now, and he's doing what he wants with it.' Her string of pearls was knotted artfully in front of her scarf, as always, and her long white hair was plaited into place. But the words twisted at her mouth and pushed tears into the corners of her eyes.

The bush had been allowed to grow up over the line as if to obscure it. But since Isaiah had arrived he was aware of the odd way the locals had of looking. He had thought at first that it was out of respect for the urupā, some finer point of tikanga he had not yet grasped. They would point to the mountain, or gesture to the far bush. They would shield their eyes and look at the sun. But whenever they looked in the direction of the line their eyes would skip quickly past. But Polly had looked directly at the aukati while she was talking, and it was this that had caused heat to rise in her face, and caused her, the

indomitable Polly, to stop talking entirely. Her old brown fingers clenched together, an aged copy of his own.

Now the old pā land was in front of him. The moon hung full and low. Isaiah crouched at the edge of the wedge of bush, which was in fact only a thin veil between the pā and the land being used by the company. Crouching at the edge of the wide, bare space, Isaiah could hear very little, only his own breath and Sam's, ragged from the walk. She came out and knelt behind him. She wore a black bandanna over the lower part of her face, like himself, for the security cameras, but he heard her breathing change as she saw it.

Where he supposed there had been open farmland was a swathe of bare clay that stretched far, far over the land, for many kilometres. In the moonlight the earth's surface showed up almost daylight clear, but cratered, unwhole. He was looking at a land torn open to the sky. As they crouched in the ditch between the bush and the exposed earth it seemed they crouched between completely unconnected landscapes, as though a piece of desert had been picked up wholly and dropped in the middle of rich green land.

Isaiah became aware of a scent. There was Sam beside him, the slightly astringent, cloying scent of some oil she always wore, and her musky body smell. She was so close he could have held her right there, pushed her into the bush like he had done on reconnaissance missions before. That was half the attraction of Sam – her adventurousness, her readiness, the boyish way she would tackle him in the dark and giggle afterwards. But Sam's scent was weak against the overwhelming reek of the pit before them. It took him suddenly by the throat and his chest seized. There was nothing romantic about this reccie, nothing mischievous or naughty or fun. They were crouched on the edge of an abyss like dolls washed up on a beach. He could hardly breathe.

\*

Alexia shut the car door. The house was bland, unassuming, another well-groomed house on a tidy street. The journey from the pā back home had been almost too quick for her to fully realise the news. What the house had to tell passers-by was nothing interesting, that the people inside subscribed to the TV guide, or that they liked carnations, with their sharp cinnamon scent. But the house held for Alexia a thousand other stories: how this was the first house Papou had owned, stories about all the meals cooked and coffee drunk, about how every dollar had been saved and allocated, directed into the right places until each child had been raised and fed and had gone to school, until everyone was clothed and the babies bought

presents, until everyone had married and the marriages had been paid for. How they had come here in the first place. So many stories. They rushed out at her and stopped up her throat.

Her borrowed car was shameful, beside the other cars. It voiced its politics clamorously, now she could see it with her Greek eyes, predicting on its bumper stickers an imminent oil crisis, plaintively requesting there be *No Asset Sales*, declaring its vegetarianism in the face of animal cruelty. Alexia was not vegetarian but had been, to her family's horror. She had given it up one Christmas when her grandmother, Yaya would not stop crying over her refusal to eat the lamb. Now she enjoyed meat on 'cultural' occasions. She saw the vegetarian sticker on the back of her car as her family would see it: a challenge to their own way of life. For hadn't Papou (who lay somewhere now, cold, unmoving) come here and worked his fingers to the bone in a fish shop for forty years so as to provide the family not only with education and better housing, but also with proper food?

Her feet were locked onto the pavement and her fingers clutched a leaf of the shrub in front of the house. The skirt and sandals that had been fine up north were inadequate here; her thin top with lace flimsy and now, in the face of death, frivolous. She should have changed. Her yaya would already be wearing the black clothes of mourning, packing away her coloured house dresses forever. Alexia had come straight from the road. If she had a hair tie she could at least twist her hair away from her face, but Ana had stolen it from her.

In her hand she felt a bud. The shrub was a small olive tree. This was one story that would be obvious to anyone from the street: someone had considered the New Zealand native planted by the council a waste of space. Someone had ripped it out by the roots and planted an olive tree instead, a more practical tree, capable of bearing fruit and providing a family with olives and oil. Alexia clung to the bud, which was green and slightly pungent and cold in her hand. The tree looked stunted. It was unclear at this point whether it would take in the harsh soil.

The front door of the house opened. A wail came from inside. Yaya. It was not a theatrical wail, though her grandmother was a theatrical woman. It was only grief as pure sound, a call of betrayal like a child left alone. Alexia felt it thrill through her body. The lights started then, and in a high clear part of herself she was surprised to see Yaya's grief was a white sheet that came down over everything, one smooth simultaneous blanket of notes. She blocked it. Suddenly she was running, unclear as to why she had lingered there, stuck on the doorstep like some stranger. Her grandfather had died, was dead. Then they were all there, around her, in their black clothes and gold chains and crosses and carrying

somehow the smell of candles, and their hands were on her and they were holding her and she was crying and saying in Greek, I'm sorry, I'm sorry, forgive me, *signomi*, and Yaya was saying why and she was saying because I wasn't here.

Inside her younger sister Katherine was alone with all this Greekness. Alexia swept at her and they were in each other's arms and there was relief in her sister's face: now Alexia would do the talking. Alexia was the eldest and it was her job to fetch and carry and listen. She could move back and forth along the paths they walked and then out again.

She put down her keys on the table and wiped her face and asked how it had happened.

\*

In front of Isaiah and Sam the land was levelled like a cup of flour someone had scraped a knife across. The clay was wet and slick, the kind of clay that would be harsh yellow in the sun. Where the rim of the cup would be, the surrounding paddocks rose up on either side, five feet above the level of the shorn field. It would be a pit but was too large to be a pit, extending thousands of metres towards the mountain. At the edges of this depression were temporary-looking fences made of orange plastic mesh. Beyond these were vague shapes off in the distance, Taylor's herds, now neatly relocated. There were three or four tanker trucks in his immediate view, and further away, still more: huge cylindrical shapes in the darkness, arranged haphazardly, like outsized, mechanical cattle, dotting the plain. From the trucks ran massive tubes, which he knew from his reading must carry the frack fluid, the waste water and chemicals and oil that escaped up out of the ground, containing hundreds of toxic compounds. The trucks were silent. Slightly to the left he could see the water at the end of the tube discharging into an enormous pool. He hadn't expected it to be black.

'Landfarming,' Sam whispered beside him. 'It's happening already.' This was what he hadn't been able to imagine existing, not here at least, not on this massive scale. The company had scraped up grass and topsoil, rolling it back into massive rolls. Now they were dumping waste fluid, millions of tons of it, directly into the open earth. When they were done they would roll back the grass directly on top of the water and waste. Taylor would be given back the field, and his cattle would graze in it, and someone would, eventually, eat the cattle. The river ran like a great dark weal through the land to enter the bush where they were now crouched, their breaths still short with the shock of it, and the smell. The trucks were

parked right up against the water. In some places the effluent hose was aimed directly into the river.

\*

Alexia went through the glass doors and blinked in the dim light as a man came towards her with an outstretched arm. His forehead was high and pale and seemed quietly appalled at the forwardness of his nose. The nose itself was a fleshy bulb. Alexia tried not to look at its exploded blood vessels and wrangled mass as she ducked away. There was a moment of awkwardness where the undertaker bobbed, his hand flailing for the correct hand to press. Finally he settled on Yaya's: lined, wrinkled, capable of being held.

Everything was hushed as if under glass. The undertaker took them through to the room with the waxwork in it. His hands, which Alexia had avoided, were horrid: long and white and capable of things. Alexia watched her feet move forwards in their black ballet slippers, one, two, one, two, like a swing that cannot stop of its own accord. Then they were in the room, bunched close together by the door, and the white-handed man left them. The room was empty except for an enormous arrangement of flowers, a heavy velvet curtain, and a coffin. The coffin seemed small from a distance, a toy boat sailing in the sea of the room.

Yaya held her hand. She walked forwards eagerly, stepping fast despite her arthritic knees, and the family followed after her. Alexia caught her look as her eyes lit on Papou's face; not grief, but rather puzzlement, as if she were waiting for him to wake up. In the room was a feeling of hung silk. Apart from the rustle of their clothes, there was no sound.

Papou's body was a fake. He had been shrunk to two thirds of his size. His skin was awfully perfect, pallid and taut and preserved. It wasn't Papou but rather some replica of Papou, some smaller scale model that had been produced as a mockery and dressed in his clothes. She felt a wild fury. She hummed a clear C, quietly, only to herself, and watched the green flash rise and fall. She had never been to a funeral with an open casket. She'd expected something less tidy, perhaps, more real. She'd expected him to be there.

She would rather he had appeared as they'd described him on his death bed: in his familiar pyjamas. They'd told her he'd died beautifully. She'd imagined him with his hands placed just so, on the coverlet. His head was resting against the pillow slightly sideways, and his face had been relaxed. She hadn't known how clear the image that she'd made up was until this moment, until she faced this travesty in Papou's own suit. She felt Baba pressing her forwards, toward the doll.



'He looks beautiful,' Mama said.

'So beautiful,' Yaya said. She began a low keening.

'But he's so small!' Katherine said. 'The suit we bought him, it doesn't even fit!' She had never seen a dead body either. A body! Alexia leaned against the cool side of the coffin. Her Papou was a body.

'Yes, they lose weight in death,' Baba said. There was a smell in the room: embalming fluid. The room was overheated. The lighting was low to showcase the body more favourably. Alexia felt ill.

Yaya was crying. On one side Mama supported her, and on the other Alexia's uncle stroked her arm. She wiped her face. Alexia's uncle started now to cry, and behind her, Baba sobbed. She felt she wasn't in the room at all but rather suspended above it, in the hot air, taking in the scene while floating above the body, where Papou supposedly would be. She couldn't sense him in the room or anywhere near. He would be doing something funny if he was: knocking over the hideous flower arrangement for Alexia's amusement, or rustling the impenetrable heavy curtain. But the room remained quiet. He wasn't here. In his place was this imposter, this replica they'd paid someone to create. The blank screen of his face appalled her.

Baba was sobbing loudly now and kissing his father's face. Greek men were not ashamed of tears, but it had been a long time since Alexia had seen him so upset, and she guessed Katherine had never seen him like this. She held Katherine's hand against the strangeness of it: their father and grandfather and mother, weeping, the heat, the flowers which were waxen too, perfect simulacra of real blooms. She watched Baba. She would prefer never to cry like that, the messy tears, the snot edging down his face. She knew this was an Anglasika reaction. But she held her sister close, and let the second generation cry.

'Come and kiss your grandfather,' Baba said, as though he had sensed her thought. He used the English not the Greek: a little warning flag that Alexia alone could see. 'This will be the last time you can kiss him,' Baba said. 'We've decided on a closed casket. It's against tradition, but he was a quiet man.' He bent his head and for a moment Alexia thought she was off the hook. Katherine was watching her closely.

'I'd rather not.' She heard her voice sound in the room, a space opening after it like a burn. Baba turned towards her. Katherine's body grew tense.

'But he's beautiful!' Yaya cried. She bent towards Baba for support. In the village they would have had Papou at home for three days before the funeral, in an open casket. The family would have sat with him, prayed with him, touched him, bathed him themselves. This

must be strange for Yaya, foreign, this going to visit the one you loved in someone else's rooms, this crying on demand in an empty lounge.

'We've paid good money for this,' Baba said, glaring. His brother put a placating hand on his arm. 'The least you could do is show your respect'.

'Now is not the time,' Alexia's uncle said, but he was ignored.

'Come, darling, come,' Yaya said, in Greek. 'He would want you to kiss him.' She looked feverish. 'He loves you, he loves you darling, kiss him!' She fell across her husband's body. Her small hand held Alexia's in her fingers, and she was pulled forwards, into the first line of relatives, out of her sister's grasp. No one was asking Katherine to kiss him. Her name was Katerina, but she was called Katherine, after all.

Greeks did not treat their dead as foreign objects to be spirited away; she had been taught that. Then why hadn't they kept him at home, prepared him themselves, the old way? The truth was, none of them knew how. None of them knew what the customs were exactly, how to wash and dress the body, what to say. But it was cold to treat the dead as Alexia was treating Papou. She was being Anglasika, she was. Katherine was watching her. It would only take a moment.

She bent towards Papou, meaning only to peck his cheek. But at the last moment she felt Baba's hand press deeply into her back. She moved reflexively away and suddenly her whole face was against Papou. She smelt something weird and chemical. He was not at all like a person to the touch. But there were his eyebrows that she had played with as a child, as bristled as ever and turned up at the ends. And his thick white hair, his cheekbones like her own. Her hands clutched at the coffin's edge. Yaya prayed loudly. Alexia made a kissing sound with her lips and quickly pulled herself out. Katherine reached for her hand and pulled her back, away from Baba, and then Alexia was crying against her sister's perfumed shoulder.

If he was watching them, he'd think it overly dramatic. Her Papou had been that rare thing: an understated Greek. He'd be laughing at it all, the silly suit, the waxen flowers, the weeping. He'd never even believed in the afterlife. She wasn't sure he'd believed in God, though he gave money to the church all his life. She could see Baba's shoulders heaving as he cried as though he was being dragged physically into the coffin.

\*

'You can smell it,' Isaiah whispered. It was like turpentine. But there was more in it, something rotten and animal-like, as though there were dead bodies in the ground. He

coughed as quietly as he could, and the smell revealed yet another layer, a choking toxic smell like paint in a small room.

'I told you,' Sam said. 'I tried to tell you how bad it was.' She was furious. In the face of small, wounded things, she went mad with rage. She was all black and white. She separated the world into good and bad. Isaiah had not seen anything to compare it to, not the open mines on the west coast, or the vast quarries in the north. This was far more massive in scale. Sam grabbed his hand.

'Come on,' she said. 'We have to move. Security will be round at ten.' She had spent many nights hidden in the bush, tracking the movements of the security guards: the times they patrolled, the shift changes. There were five pods consisting of two guards each. They rotated the watch every two hours. Right now they were between shifts and also on the lazy side of the tea break. The guards didn't carry anything with them except radios. For all their uniforms, they were fairly harmless.

In the bush they'd left a bag of their usual clothes in case they needed to change quickly and escape. Their car was parked on the other side of the pā, and Sam had blacked out an 'R' to look like a 'P', and the 'L' to look like an 'I' with duct tape in case anyone tried to track their registration. They'd walked carefully through the river on the way here, a route that would confound dogs if they were chased. Now they wore black clothes specifically chosen to look casual. Sam carried a dog leash. If they were caught they'd say they were out walking their dog, and that the dog had run away. The dark balaclavas they wore over their faces had the tops cut off and could be pulled down to look like scarves, and all their other gear was concealed. In a hidden pocket he had the monopod for his camera, a tripod with a single leg. It telescoped inside itself till it was only inches long. He pulled it out, watching the horizon and the security towers for movement, but there was none.

He and Sam crawled down the bank to the surface of the water. The smell was strong. In his shirt pocket he carried the camera, set to night exposure so that he could take pictures without a flash. Still, it would take a long time, a minute maybe, to get any good images. He needed to keep the camera still. Sam stood, shielding him from the one visible security camera, while he bent down as though to tie his shoe. Isaiah eased the camera lens through a hole he'd cut in the dark fabric of his jumper. He needed to hide the camera pilot light. Then he slid the monopod into place under his shirt, fixed the camera onto it and pressed the button.

They had not been there a minute when they heard the dogs.

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‘Kolliva.’ Yaya said. ‘To celebrate the spirit of the dead.’ A tear crept down her face. She had been crying constantly since Alexia had arrived. Now it seemed nothing out of the ordinary, like light rain falling on a garden.

‘There’s a way it must be done,’ said Mama. They were cramped into Yaya’s tiny kitchen.

‘The kolliva is like his body,’ Yaya said. ‘It is grains, like we put in the earth, to grow. When we finish it we go to the church, and we light a candle. Then the priest comes and blesses it. And when the people they leave the church we give them a little bag of it, and a tsoureki bread, to take home, and remember him.’

Alexia had the ingredients she’d collected from all over town, working from her mother’s list. She’d been to the Italian shop, the Lebanese shop, the Iranian shop. She had whole wheat, barley, icing sugar, walnuts, cinnamon, whole cloves, sugared almonds, raisins, silver nonpareils with which to spell out Papou’s initials. Her mother pointed to various packets with one red manicured fingernail.

‘This is for the cycle of resurrection,’ she said. ‘And this is for fertility. This is for remembrance. This is for abundance, and this is for the sweetness of life. You must have a balance of each.’ Alexia fought the urge to write the specifics down. But this was not how it was done. She would be expected to know these things inherently, when the time came for her parents, or, if not, to make discreet inquiries. Katherine would not be expected to know. Once mixed the kolliva did resemble crumbs of earth. What happened to the waxwork, after the viewing? They probably had him out the back of the funeral home, somewhere beyond the curtain. She mixed too fast and some of the mixture spilled.

‘Alexia!’ Mama said. She took the bowl and snatched away the wooden spoon.

‘No,’ Yaya said. She took the spoon and elbowed Mama aside. ‘When you make the kolliva it is ta skethia that is important.’

‘The intention,’ Mama said.

‘You must think of the one you love,’ Yaya said. ‘You stir in the memories, the good things in that person’s life.’

Alexia suspected Yaya had made this up. She believed no one else was as good a cook as herself.

‘I’ve never heard that before,’ Mama said. Yaya looked at her daughter-in-law sharply.

'There's a lot of things you don't know,' she said. 'The old ways. You think of him, as you make it,' she went on, 'and what a good man he was.'

Katherine came inside with a card. She gave it to Alexia and put her arms around her briefly before she walked away. The card was minimalistic and tasteful, like everything that Stephen did. Mama looked over her shoulder. She and Baba had thought Alexia lucky to have won a man like him; clean cut, with respectably short hair, working towards a marketing degree and with shares in his father's firm. Stephen would cook when they visited, and when he went out of the room they would ooh and aaah. 'Smart and rich and a good cook too,' Mama would say. 'What more could a woman want?'

'Why don't you get back together with him?' Mama asked. 'He was such a good match. I just don't understand it. He would have given you a good future.' Alexia wiped her face and turned away.

They shaped the mixture into a mound on a round tray and covered it with icing sugar, smoothing the surface with butter knives. It looked like the burial site of a king. Alexia and her mother were allowed to help in the process. Then from the lounge came the sound of the TV programme changing. Yaya patted the kolliva.

'You do the rest,' she said briskly, and removed herself to the other room. Alexia was astounded. Then she recognised the music from the lounge.

'It's her soap opera,' she whispered to Mama. All at once they were laughing, soundlessly, Mama bent almost double at the waist.

'You in there,' Yaya called, in Greek. 'Get on with it.'

'I thought this was all meant to be sacred,' Alexia whispered.

'I guess everyone has their priorities,' Mama said.

Finally the small sugared mound sat between them: a frivolous thing, a crude child's toy, like a mud pie decorated with berries. Mama arranged Papou's initials on top. Until this moment it had seemed like they were all playing some elaborate game. Some part of her had thought that Papou would walk out of the workshop, hammer or saw in hand, and pinch her roughly on the cheek. But there were his initials, clear and unarguable, spelled out in Greek letters.

Alexia's mother held her back so that she didn't get tears on the kolliva. At last she had come down into herself, she thought. At last, she had come back.

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The photograph would be lost. Over the dark pond came a series of howls. Sam and Isaiah did not waste time. As she began to run he closed the monopod and slid it under his shirt. He followed her as she scrambled up the bank, catching her boot heel and pushing it up with all his strength when it slid in the wet clay. As they gained the bank she bent her head towards him and then towards the path back through the bush.

He was dismissed. He was the one carrying the gear, the camera and the monopod, the sample test tubes, the containers for collecting contaminated soil. They had arranged previously that he would slip away, should this happen. It was always a logical decision to split if they needed to run. He was taller and faster, and Sam was better at small deceptions. She would be safer without him, more likely to talk herself out whatever trouble she was in. She swept away from him along the mouth of the pit, pulling a steel whistle from the neck of her jacket, and with her other hand yanked down the balaclava so that her face showed naked to the sky. As he fumbled for the off button on the camera, running towards the wall of bush, she sounded the whistle, shrill in the still night. Briefly the dogs were silenced, then they started again, heading directly for Sam in what sounded like a pack.

‘Toby!’ she called. ‘Toby!’ She whipped the lead out of her pocket, unfurling it like a flag. ‘Here, boy!’

Isaiah turned back.

He was breaking all of their rules, and, more importantly, their code of honour. Sam wouldn’t have let her feelings interfere with an action. She would see Isaiah failing to escape as a cowardly act, one that threatened the whole operation. And she would be right. But there she was, silhouetted against the open pit, waving a leash and sounding the whistle madly, her jacket hood down, the shorn back of her neck white and vulnerable in the moonlight, and the dogs coming. Isaiah ran back towards her, his breath coming in painful gasps, the gas from the pit hot and dry in his throat. He yanked at his own balaclava, stumbling up from his crouch into a half-run, swearing and tripping and almost falling into a pothole, running as fast as he could. The dogs were almost upon them now, their rising howls tripping off something in his body like a panic switch, an ancient call to arms.

As he got to within a metre of her he saw four, five, dogs, running along the lip of the pit. Sam hadn’t seen him yet. The dog in front had his lips set back from his teeth in a snarl. He was aware of the security camera closest to him, aware that he was facing it squarely, face fully visible, and that they were exposed on the right to the security tower, where, in a lit window and in his peripheral vision, he now saw movement. There was a figure coming up behind the dogs, a tall, thin figure had none of the reflective stripes of a uniformed security

guard. The man was whistling and calling as he came. As Isaiah reached for Sam, unsure of what he was doing but deeply convinced that he had to get her to safety, to somehow make her run, she leaned towards the foremost dog and knelt, opening her arms.

Isaiah lunged. But as he grabbed the dog by the collar he realised it was licking Sam's face and fawning at her hands. The strap in his fist was decorative, some kind of sparkly novelty item, and the other dogs who surrounded them seemed motley and varied in breed. Sam saw him. He had time to see the anger cross her face before the dog, frightened by his own sudden lunge, turned and snapped at his fingers. Isaiah leapt back, and another dog took him from behind, the teeth tearing through his thin pants and into his leg. He felt a strange, pain-free pop, and then the dog had his teeth in his leg. Quickly though pain followed, in a hot needling rush. Then Isaiah was on the ground, thrashing, and it seemed they were all on him: Sam's dog with his paws on Isaiah's chest and another still ripping at his leg and one more coming at his face from the side, and Sam was yelling.

Then it was over. He stood up, breathless, aware of his blood pounding and the slick wetness at the back of his leg and the horrible proximity of the dogs, who were whining now, but under some kind of control. The man knelt by the dog that had wooed Sam, holding it back by its collar, speaking in a low, soothing voice. Up close Isaiah saw that he had short, fine hair and glasses and a thin, sensitive face. He glared myopically at Isaiah, like an offended scholar.

'Bloody idiot,' he said. 'What did you think you were doing, attacking my girl like that?' he stroked it under the chin. Isaiah took a step back, away from the dog, who he'd assumed for some reason was male. She was obviously the alpha dog; when she growled the other dogs started a high-pitched yapping. Sam stood quietly at Isaiah's side, but he could sense her nervousness. He'd changed the game plan and thrown her. If they messed this up now it was Isaiah's fault. He faced the man squarely, and did his best to smile.

'Sorry,' he said, putting an arm around Sam. 'Thought she was going for my wife.'

The man stood slowly, giving Isaiah a long, sceptical look through his silver frames. Isaiah could feel the monopod cold against his leg, the test tubes individually wrapped in black tissue to avoid clinking in his pants pocket. Luckily the tear in his leg hadn't hit any gear. Still, he tried not to move.

'She wasn't going for your 'wife',' the man said. 'Seems like your 'wife' had things under control, till you grabbed Fran.' The dog let out a sudden howl and Isaiah felt the smile leave his face. 'Down, Francesca,' the man said. The name was so unlikely Isaiah wanted to laugh.

‘Did you see a border collie?’ Sam shook the lead out. She returned Isaiah’s embrace, leaning on him affectedly. ‘We’ve lost Toby,’ she said plaintively to the man, looking up at him through lowered eyelashes. She knew how to work people when she had to. Before the man had time to answer, she turned to Isaiah. ‘Well, hon, we should head off,’ she said. ‘Maybe Toby’s just gone back to the camper?’ She had put on a vaguely American accent, as though to impersonate a tourist.

The man started to laugh. It was a strange, desolate sound. At once Isaiah was aware again of the smell of the gas and the frack fluid crowding into his lungs, the bald plain gaping beside them like an empty pan.

‘Toby my arse,’ the man said. ‘I should set my dogs on you. You’re coming with me.’ He made a low whistling sound and Sam gripped him tightly as the dogs, smoothly and with a practised ease, surrounded them.

A siren sounded from the nearby tower. From the tower’s base came two figures with torches. Isaiah reminded himself of his rights: he was trespassing, but security guards didn’t have the same powers as the police. They couldn’t legally search him. If they did choose to bend the rules, however, he was concerned about his equipment. He slouched to disguise the hole for the camera lens in his shirt. The siren ceased and they heard one of the men speaking into his radio. The thin man sighed.

‘Well, bugger me,’ he said. Isaiah stared. He looked like a botanist, and the words seemed incongruous with his appearance. ‘You two,’ he said to Sam and Isaiah, ‘just keep ya traps shut. All right?’ Then the guards were upon them. One of them was about to speak but the man got in first.

‘Caught myself a couple of tourists,’ he called.

‘Is that right,’ one of the guards said. His tone was light but he looked at them carefully. He was Māori. Perhaps he was from around here, perhaps even from Isaiah’s own iwi. Not all the locals were against the exploratory drilling. Some needed the money too much to say no to fracking-related jobs. ‘Sure you haven’t caught yourself a couple of...’ he paused, looked at them appraisingly, ‘...explorers? Maybe from that place over there?’ He jerked his head roughly towards the pā.

‘We were looking for our dog, Toby.’ Sam broke in. She gestured wildly with the leash.

‘Right.’ The Māori guard drew the word out till it was clear what he thought. His companion remained silent, his hand resting on his radio as though it were the holster of a gun.



‘I found them, fellas. I’ll take them out,’ the man said. ‘My dogs will find their Toby, easy as.’ The dog that had licked Sam’s face started a low whining, sniffing at Sam’s hands. Suddenly Sam blew on the steel whistle, shocking even the wooden-faced guard.

‘Toby!’ she yelled. ‘Toby!’ Her voice at close quarters seemed slightly deranged. Her accent had gotten thicker, and she acted as though she were close to tears. ‘I’m sorry, hon,’ she said, to Isaiah. ‘I’m just so worried about our boy!’ She put a wobble into her voice. She turned to the guard with the bored expression, who looked away as if horrified. ‘He’s about so high,’ she said, ‘with a cute little jacket on. It’s red. I knitted it. Have you seen him?’ She hurried on. ‘If he’s fallen into this huge pool...’ Now Isaiah felt spurred to action. He used his best American, and launched into a tirade.

‘If the embassy finds out you’ve been holding us, your government won’t know what hit them,’ he said. He wasn’t quite sure of his accent, so he upped the inflections even more. ‘My wife and I came here for some relaxation, not to be held like criminals. I’d think twice if I were you. You don’t know who it is you’re dealing with.’ The Māori guard looked at him like he had gone mad.

‘Oh, I think I know who I’m dealing with,’ he said. He turned to the thin man, as though Isaiah and Sam were his to direct. ‘They’re trespassing,’ he said flatly. ‘We could have them arrested.’

‘This is still my land,’ the man said. ‘I own it, even if you lot are leasing the rights.’ His dogs were restless, waiting at a distance.

‘Fine, fine.’ The Māori guard put his hands palm outwards in the air. ‘Take em. But I don’t want to catch you here again.’ He spoke to Isaiah particularly, as though he knew all about the camera in his pocket. Isaiah kept his eyes firm. They were just hired hands with a trumped up sense of importance, bored between shift changes. ‘They’re all yours, Taylor. Till next time.’ The guards departed, and the three of them were left standing in the mud.

‘Thanks,’ Sam said. She had dropped all trace of her accent.

Taylor was young, maybe in his mid-thirties. He drew himself up with another sigh.

‘I feel like I’m in hell,’ he said. Sam looked at Isaiah behind the farmer’s back and raised her eyebrows. ‘Come on, Francesca. Come on, Petal, Rose, Petunia. Come on Daphne. Come on, you two sorry bastards,’ he said to Sam and Isaiah. Evidently they were going straight back to the path through the bush. It was obvious that Taylor knew they were from the pā, that he hadn’t bought their story about the camper for a minute.

‘Why’d you help us?’ Isaiah asked. Taylor ignored him.

‘Bastard fools,’ he was saying. ‘Blasted mother fu—’

‘What do you mean, you’re in hell?’ Sam asked. Taylor ignored that too. Instead, he looked grimly at the lead she was trailing in the mud.

‘That’s seen just about as much use as a prayer mat at a piss up,’ he said. For the first time, Isaiah realised that Taylor himself had an accent, a slight off turn to his words. He was French, maybe, or Dutch. ‘Two ‘tourists’ in the wops in the middle of the night by this pool of filth – honestly,’ he said, turning to them. ‘Heel, Petunia. Heel, girl. What were you buggers thinking?’

‘What were you thinking, Taylor?’ Isaiah asked. They reached the bush line. Sam gave him a warning look. ‘What the hell were you doing out here in the middle of the night? Did you want to see exactly how much damage you’ve already caused?’

‘Anyone could tell what you were doing, just by looking at you,’ Taylor said. ‘And this is my land,’ he went on. He didn’t seem angry. ‘What do you think I’m doing here? I’m up the boohai shooting pokakas, son, what do you think?’ Isaiah heard the slang as what it really was: an affectation, some phrases Taylor had learned from a book. Then Taylor laughed, and Isaiah couldn’t entirely dislike him. ‘No, no,’ he went on. ‘I’m just here because of the kids.’ In the moonlight his face was tired. But the horror of it struck Isaiah again: the open land behind them stretching out for inconceivable miles, the stinking tanker trucks, the wide torn weal of earth.

‘The pā kids,’ Taylor went on. He leaned down, petted Francesca softly. ‘They come out here to look. Caught one of them the other day, young he was. Eight, maybe. Down by the water. Well, they say it’s partly water. Doesn’t look like it, much.’ He glared at them suddenly. ‘The adults came first to check it out. Now suddenly it’s the thing to do. The kid could have fallen in, if I hadn’t found him.’ He swore, a long stream of expletives, some foreign, that trickled gently into the night. ‘I didn’t want to do it,’ he said. ‘They came in with teams of lawyers, threw the money at me. Said if I didn’t agree, they’d sue. I couldn’t afford to fight it.’ He spat suddenly into the soil. ‘You think I’d want to live like this, on my own land?’

Stolen land, Isaiah thought. Sam pulled at his arm. The blood had congealed at the back of his leg, and the pain had lessoned to a dull throb. Back somewhere down the long path through the bush was the bag of clothes. They still had to recover it and change, hide the evidence of their mission.

‘Take that meat out of your pocket, love, and give it to Francesca.’ Taylor said, and looked remotely at the horizon. Sam slowly drew a bag of raw meat from her pocket and fed it to the dog. He should have known. She was good with animals, but not that good. Again,

he admired her. She was staunchly vegetarian and he knew she found meat repulsive, but she would set even this aside for the cause. A disquieting image came into his mind then: Sam silhouetted against the horizon, whistling and calling out, almost as though she wished to be discovered. Of course, she had wanted to draw attention away from him and from the gear. That had been their plan. But he'd seen odd things happen to activists before, the hopelessness and frustration of the work taking over, until they almost welcomed the contact with the authorities, until it was almost a relief to meet the enemy. It had happened to him, when he was first working, when he was very young. Sam, though – he'd assumed she'd worked all that out years ago. But there had been something confrontational in her stance: a fearlessness, a way of standing that you would sooner see on a stage.

'Isaiah,' Isaiah said, extending his hand to Taylor. 'I'd like to talk to you sometime soon.'

Taylor looked at his hand distantly, then took it and shook. His hand was soft, for a farmer's.

'Isaiah,' Taylor said. 'What the bloody hell kind of piss-awful name is that?' For the first time, he smiled. 'Haven't seen you around the pā before,' he said. 'Come, Petunia, Francesca, Petal, Daphne, Rose. Let's go, girls. Welcome to paradise,' he said, before leaving them at the edge of the bush.

'That,' said Sam, 'is the most depressed farmer I've ever met.' Together they went into the trees. The smell from the open pit dissipated. Isaiah flicked on his mag torch, which he'd hung on a loop in his sleeve. It all felt suddenly unreal; the desolate open landscape, the black waste stretching for miles over the plain. It was like they'd passed through a veil of some kind, and now the birds rustled and called, and he could hear water running. He turned to Sam with a smile on his face.

'So what the hell was all that with you breaking protocol?' she said.

## FIVE

Wood and clay will wash away,  
Wash away, wash away,  
Wood and clay will wash away,  
My fair lady.

The moment came. Baba looked up. She remembered his face as it had been in his drunken rages: tight and florid. Now she saw Papou in the wondering expression of the eyes.

'What are you doing up there, anyway?' he asked. The noise of the family drained away. 'What in the hell is there to do in some out-of-the-way place like that?' Alexia took a koulouraki and began to eat it, though she'd always hated them.

'I was protesting against hydraulic fracturing. Fracking,' she said.

'Whating?' Baba said.

'Frack. Ing,' she said.

'Oh, fuc...!' Baba said, but Mama gave him a look of severe disapproval.

'It's a process by which they drill a deep well in the earth, and extract oil or gas.' She watched him make the links. Baba hadn't worked on the wells for years, not since they'd come back from Australia, and he'd retrained. She hoped he thought of that time as she did: closed. Mama pretended absolute preoccupation with the net curtain. It had never been about Alexia, of course. It was all of it his; his drunkenness, their loneliness, the nights of Katherine as a baby screaming, the heat circulating through their stuffy apartment like some tangible disease. The police turning up, called in by the neighbours. The new, too beautiful lights.

'So there's gas and oil up there,' Baba said, slowly. 'Then there's good work to be had.' But she knew he'd hated his work on the oil rig. They'd all hated it. Then they'd gone bankrupt and returned to New Zealand, to the family home. There, sleeping in the same room as Katherine, Alexia had slowly learned to feel calm. 'Why would you protest that?'

'It pollutes the land, Baba. It destroys the air and the water.'

'I've heard of it,' Katherine said. 'My friend said –'

'No offence, sweetheart,' Baba said to Katherine, 'but do you mean your little political friend? She doesn't know what she's talking about. She hasn't had to work a day in her life.'

Yaya came in with a tray of dolmathas. They all took one, distractedly, Alexia, Uncle Steve, Baba, Mama, even Katherine, who ate like some kind of listless dove. Alexia held the dark green roll like a cigarette, and kept her eyes wide.

'What about your study?' Mama said. 'Aren't you studying? You've got your bar exam coming up soon.'

'She's up there having a holiday,' Baba said. 'Lexi, do you have no respect for the family, for where we've come from?'

'When they frack they drill a deep bore into the earth. They inject fluid into the ground. It's toxic. They're doing this near drinking water and people's homes. The fluid, when they inject it, it explodes the ground from the inside. They've got no idea what effects it has in the long term.' Baba laughed.

'Hippies,' he said. 'Māori radicals, vegetarians, lesbians, and hippies. Those are the only people that can afford to care about that sort of thing.' Uncle Steve's eyebrows went up. Katherine's body clenched beside her. 'Where is this place anyway? I bet there are plenty of good, honest families there who need the work. What are you doing for them, Alexia? Hanging around smoking pot? Polluting the land,' he said, 'polluting the land! What are these dole bludgers doing for anyone, these people you're protesting with? Expecting hand-outs, lying around in front of the bulldozers while all the honest locals just want to do a good day's work.'

There was a brief, appalled silence.

'Smoking pot?' Yaya said.

'What's wrong with being a lesbian?' Katherine asked.

'Now, that's a bit harsh,' Uncle Steve said. 'I read a study that says vegetarianism is good for you.' Mama had her hand on Baba's arm.

'Not now,' she said.

Alexia was surprised to hear herself laugh: a cool, glossy laugh.

'Oh, but I didn't ask for your opinion, Baba,' she said. She felt her sister jump. 'I never asked for your redneck, conservative, ignorant, racist, misguided opinion.'

'I am not racist,' Baba said. He turned to his brother. 'What bloody study was it that you read? It's the iron we need. We're carnivores.' He turned to Katherine. 'It's in the

bible,' he said. 'It's not natural. And how can I be racist, if I'm Greek? I was beaten with the Māoris at my school. That's a fact. I've got nothing against them. Some of my best friends are Māori. But those Māori radicals are something else. Always wanting more land, more hand-outs, and for what? I don't see them getting jobs. They just sit around, starting gangs, thinking the state owes them because of something that happened a hundred years ago.'

'Baba!' Katherine said. 'What's the problem with a woman loving a woman?' Yaya cried steadily.

'Alexia,' Mama said. 'All this aside, I want to know what you're doing about your study, up there in the middle of nowhere. Do you even have access to a computer?'

'Of course she's not studying,' Baba said. There was a kind of sick, pained smile around the edges of his mouth. 'I always knew she'd do this,' he said, to the group. 'I always knew she'd mess her law degree up in the end. The first one of us to go to university. And now you're doing it,' he said. She saw with great clarity the thick dark stubble on his neck. She knew that skin close up, the mottled pink, the large, uneven pores. 'Papou would be ashamed of you. He worked forty years in the fish shop for nothing.' Uncle Steve put his hand up as though he could physically push the words back into Baba's mouth. 'He worked forty years so you can camp out with some Māori radicals and get laid.' Yaya gasped.

She had known it would be bad, but now it was happening the words were strangely mesmerising. It was like being kicked in the stomach so hard you became fascinated with the pain.

'Perhaps you didn't hear me,' Alexia said. 'I'm not interested in your opinion. I'm not interested in the opinions of bigots.' She turned to the rest of them. 'I've seen the water catch fire,' she said to them. 'I've smelt the air go bad. They can't drink the water up there. Their animals are starting to die. This fracking is a terrible thing. If it makes it to the city, we're done for.' She hadn't known until now how much she really cared. She turned to Baba. Inside her were a thousand fists, a scream, something huge and explosive, fire. 'But you're right, Papou would be ashamed,' she said.

She left the room, Yaya sobbing gently behind her.

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It all, suddenly, seemed impossible. They needed to get a legal appeal in to the council by ten if it was to be considered in this week's meeting, and Sam was angry at him for turning

back to help her, and he had a headache from the fumes. There in his head was the new unwelcome image of the land beyond the pā: a dark empty space like the gap left by a tooth that has been ripped out. They had been incautious. To add to his difficulties, his shoes were filthy. He felt personally wounded, as though the company, or Taylor, had coated them with mud.

He took the shoes and walked around the side of the wharekai, where, crouching down, he washed off the startling yellow mud. He didn't want any evidence that he and Sam had been trespassing. Not now, when things were so sensitive between the iwi and the city activists. And, if the police or the SIS or whoever were watching them, as Sam and Kate and the others seemed to think, and if it came to being charged, he supposed an analysis of the mud might link him to the site. It all seemed ridiculous, but he washed the mud off anyway, the clay running off his fingers in small yellow rivulets, vanishing into the darker soil. It was all right for the others to go round trampling on the iwi's wishes, but they looked at Isaiah differently. He was a child of the pā, and so not wholly free to break the law.

He heard a step. Rangi was behind him, smoking a cigarette.

'Bro,' Rangi said.

'Bro.' Isaiah kept washing off the boots.

'Bro, nice boots, bro. Some wicked looking mud there, eh.' Rangi was toying with him. 'Not so much of that kind of mud on the pā, Isaiah. And look, it's on your hands. You make sure to get it off, before Polly sees.'

Isaiah bared his teeth in a grin. He assumed Rangi went on himself at night, treading his own path through the bush. He had seen a hole cut cleanly through one of Taylor's fences. He didn't know who else went, though he could tell from the things the locals said at meetings that they were as well-informed as he was, if not better. Rangi lit a new cigarette and gave Isaiah a deep look.

'You missing your girl yet?' he asked.

Isaiah would not answer this. He turned to walk away.

'I'll bet you five dollars you're too chicken to call her.'

'What? God, Rangi, we're not in primary school.'

'Ten dollars.' His cousin looked at him with a beady eye.

'It's not like that, anyway.'

'There's not much happening around here till the next council meeting. You've been talking about going down there, collecting some of your mysterious supplies. Why don't you call her up, ask her if she wants you to come?'

‘What, to her grandfather’s funeral?’ Isaiah stopped walking.

‘Geez, how dumb can you get? Just turn up, take some food, some flowers. She’ll love you forever. Classic. In with a grin.’

‘You’re disgusting, Rangi,’ Isaiah said. Rangi waggled his eyebrows up and down.

‘I bet you twenty, bro,’ he said. ‘Don’t push me any further. I can’t afford it.’

\*

The priest bowed his head and went towards the nave. The high curved dome of the church arched above. Alexia had spent much of the service looking up into it, so as not to be overwhelmed by the lights. The rise and fall of the liturgia was dark yellow and gold, and laid over the elaborate decorations of the church, its gilt icona and stained glass, its many gold accessories, they made her a little sick. She turned her eyes up into the cool blue, and blocked it. Finally it was over, and she took up the box that held the fake Papou inside, and helped carry it out.

‘What are they all saying?’ Katherine whispered, once it was safely done.

‘O Theos, na ton napapsae,’ she said. ‘May God rest his soul.’

The mourners streamed out and down the steps, kissing the family’s cheeks, pressing their hands. The coffin was shut into a dark car. Alexia went into the shelter of a wing of the church and turned on her phone. It was an excuse to put her head down. There was a message from an unknown number. There must be a hundred, a hundred and fifty mourners, more than they’d thought would come. Most would visit the house over the course of the day. All the food they’d prepared would be needed, and probably more. Baba gave her a look: the family were leaving. She played the message.

‘Hey,’ the voice said. ‘It’s Isaiah. I’m sorry I didn’t really get to talk to you before you left. I don’t know when you’ll be done with the funeral and all that.’ He sounded intensely uncomfortable, as though someone were forcing him to speak. ‘But I’m going to be in town for a couple of days. Got some things to pick up. If it’s Ok I could come by, to your family house.’ He faded out again. ‘I’ll be down tomorrow. But then, it might be all over already, right?’ Alexia heard an exclamation in the background, like someone had told him to shut up. Isaiah coughed. ‘Anyway, hopefully see you soon.’

Alexia watched the mourners getting into their cars. She snapped the phone closed and went towards Baba’s car, where they were still gesturing for her. She told them she’d go



with her uncle. She was not about to ride with Baba. She ignored his outraged face, and went into the crowd.

At the graveyard she couldn't put the spadeful of earth on Papou's coffin. She could not do it. Back at the house she locked herself in a bedroom and dialled. Papou's photograph looked at her from the corner of the room.

'It's Alexia, she said to Isaiah's hello. 'Thanks for the message.'

'You're calling back,' he said.

'I'm calling.'

'Shall we just echo each other for a while then?' he said, but she heard the smile grow in his voice. Papou looked somewhat mournful.

'This isn't a joke for me,' she said.

'Right, Ok,' Isaiah said. She imagined him nodding vigorously.

'What have you told Sam?' she asked.

'I talked to her. Everything's out in the open. Don't worry.' Isaiah's voice had the quality of someone attempting to talk a suicide off a ledge.

'Yes, but what did you *say*, Isaiah.' Alexia said.

'I told her we had feelings for each other and that I might be interested in pursuing something with you.' She imagined him trotting out this speech a dozen times, to various women. 'She said she's Ok about us. It is an open relationship, after all.'

'But I'm not Ok about it.' She observed the sweep of his hair, the high eyebrows that she had brushed with her cheek in the coffin.

'Right.'

'I'm just not that kind of person. I can't pretend to be. And for all your 'open relationship,' I don't believe that Sam is, either.'

'I wouldn't presume to speak for Sam.'

'It's obvious to everyone that you should end it. Last time I checked 'open relationship' wasn't a euphemism for 'letting tired old relationships drag on while you sleep with other women.'

'You're assuming a lot, Alexia,' Isaiah said. His voice was cold. She could not believe how quickly they had come here.

'I'm just not that type of person,' she said. 'It's not that I want you to choose. It's just that I don't think I can do it.'

'Actually when I spoke to Sam I tried to talk about easing it off a bit, between her and I. Now he sounded baffled. 'But, ah, she wasn't really having it.'

‘I shouldn’t even be party to all this,’ Alexia said. ‘I don’t even want to know.’

‘I was hoping you’d take it as a sign of good faith,’ Isaiah said.

‘You sound like a married man promising his mistress he’ll break up with his wife,’ Alexia said.

‘Well, actually,’ Isaiah said. ‘I told her it was over.’

‘Actually? You’re saying you tried, but what? She wouldn’t let you break up with her?’ Papou seemed distinctly unimpressed.

‘She wouldn’t entertain the thought. I’m kind of worried about her. She’s acting really weird, lately. She wouldn’t listen. She just kept saying,’ and here his voice dropped an octave. “I love you, I love you, I love you –” It was music. The lights ambushed her. Aqua, turquoise, green.

‘I love you?’ Alexia asked.

‘I love you.’ Isaiah said.

‘I love you.’

‘I love you, Alexia.’

Green, deep, deep blue. She heard a crackle, a sound like him clearing his throat.

‘Isaiah,’ Alexia said. ‘Sort it out.’

‘Alexia’ Isaiah said. He sighed charmingly, like some intellectual baffled by the workings of women. ‘I will. But I’m going to need a bit of time. I don’t just want to go straight from one thing to the next, do you understand? Because I think we should be careful with each other, Alexia.’

She hung up and looked at the photograph a long time before going back into the family room.

\*

Isaiah was walking near the river, camera in hand. He was far up in the fracking land, beyond where he had explored before. He'd got Matiu to drop him off on the quad bike, bumping over Taylor's rough paddocks. Approaching from this direction Isaiah figured he'd avoid the guards and the fences, which were only concentrated around the bottom of the site. There were no roads here apart from the great orange clay slicks cut into the earth for the trucks, and no vehicles in sight. The river wound away across the plain.

A well was visible from where Isaiah walked, its struts the only mechanical thing in his field of vision, its top bursting with flame. Black smoke came off it in thick puffs. Isaiah

breathed shallowly so as not to take in the smoke. Around the base of the tower the land was scraped smooth, stripped of grass. A pond lay to the left of it, hundreds of metres wide, extending off into the farmland. It was filled with frack fluid, its water grey-black. One of Taylor's grazing herds stood near the edge of the greasy pool. The pond was less a hollowed out dip than a level layer of filth and detritus. It lay on the surface of the flat earth. He could see where rain would push the sheet of water further into the land, how the chemicals would spread freely into the distant paddocks.

His back was to the mountain, where the reserve spread towards the peaks. The national park was once pā land, now held by the government. He took photos at the edge of the frack pool, its rim marked by bulldozer imprints. The workers had laid plastic sheeting between the fluid and the earth. He found its black edge emerging from the orange clay like some exotic mushroom, tested its strength and thickness with his hand. It was not much thicker than a rubbish bag, and the oily water seeped around it already, rivulets descending into the ground.

Close to the pool's edge he saw two kereru, roosting, and a tui, drinking nectar from a flowered kowhai tree. He found a snail he knew was native; its curved shell a brown tight koru of a curl, more like a sea shell. The punters would love that. People were so fickle: a tui had more pathos than a sparrow, a kereru more clout than a pigeon, and a shot of a rare kiwi dressed in oil would be most valuable at all. He had no reservations about manipulating the public. The native fantails were too quick for his lens, but he snapped several shots in quick succession, to splice together later with his editing software: tui: tree: border of fracking land: frack waste leaking onto earth. He snapped another series: kereru: border of park: river snaking past frack pool, rivulets of oil running towards it. And one more: kauri snail on leaf: land border: wasteland with gas rig, smoky emanations.

He'd been photographing for hours. When he got further down he planned to trek to the side, going round the long way, circumnavigating Taylor's land. He would arrive at the pā by nightfall, he hoped, but he hadn't bargained on there being so much to photograph, so many small, telling details. The banks of the river were rocky and rough, the water trickling down into a small ravine. He was forced to pick his way along the lip of this, slowly. The sun came out from behind the cloud cover and burned him. Now he was in the shadow of the gas rig, its stench in his nose, and the banks of the river had descended to almost the level of the plain. His feet were hot in his walking shoes and he only had half a bottle of water.

The smell didn't make him lightheaded or ill, as it had on his disastrous earlier mission with Sam. He guessed the flame at the top of the well, erupting every few seconds,

was burning off the excess gas into the atmosphere. He remembered the brief urge he'd had to sleep with her, the moment before they'd seen the pit. His passion for Sam had always surprised him. He didn't find her all that attractive. She didn't photograph well. She had an air, almost, of asexuality, a sort of scrubbed quality to her hair and skin that make him think of girl's dorms and boarding schools, horses and private lessons. They'd slept together on and off for years, with interesting regularity, along with other partners. But since the recce he hadn't had the urge, not once.

He'd have hundreds of photos to edit. The banks of the river were slimed with runoff. Each new oily rivulet he framed seemed more meaningful; each next frame more affecting than the last. Underlying all of it was the drive, not a thought but more a bodily sensation like the need to eat or make love. It was a kind of constriction that grasped his chest. He caught himself crouched, hot and ruffled, photographing a bird's nest against a backdrop of black river water, holding his hands still with a great wound force. The bird had used twigs covered in a slick film of fluid to build the lining of its nest. He could not tell what kind of bird it was, but one of its chicks had struggled out and was lying on its side, quite still, against the greased twigs. It was a small thing, a pathetic thing.

As he photographed the sun changed and the details were thrown into relief perfectly, as though the light had distilled the image into a purer form, only for him. His body was shaking slightly with the effort of holding still. The drive in him, if it was translated into words would be something like, *there. There.* How could they ignore this? The bird moved gently in its bed of oil and waste. Of course he couldn't save it. It might survive, adapting somehow. He had a non-disruption policy when it came to animals. He jolted away. Each photograph he took was some kind of point in a grand argument he was having with an imagined public who in all probability didn't care.

Now he came into a valley, where the banks dropped even lower and the fluid from the pond leaked freely into the water. Eels were swimming in the depths, though the water was murky and dark. There was a lurid orange algae on the edges of the water. He found a sparrow dead at the edge of the water, took a photograph, moved on. He knew it wasn't the best image, not like the tui and the kereru further up, but he clicked compulsively. He found two sparrows further on, and then a fantail. His camera battery was low. The light was perfect. He found another bird, dead, a starling, its red legs sticking straight up into the air. He walked and stopped, walked and stopped, aware of his hunger, of his thirst, but there were more and more dead birds.

The river fed straight into the pā, to where the animals fed on the grass. This water was their drinking water. This water was his drinking water. He found a sheep; its carcass bloated and full. It couldn't have been long in the river. He'd have to ask Matiu about it, maybe come back and haul it out. But with so much waste running into the river, what importance did one dead sheep have? He photographed and photographed. His throat was sore and dry.

When he and Sam were on their way here there was some unspoken plan, some make-or-break idea that they both had at the back of their minds. It was something about going back to his land, about basing themselves here. They'd talked about it: the gardens they could plant, a quieter, less complicated life, less overrun with other people. There had been small others in the plan, little shining possibilities, never spoken of, but there. Now nothing in him wanted that with Sam. It was Alexia on the land, Alexia he half-thought of when he saw how sick the river was. This place had always been his back-up plan, the place he would go when he wanted to make something of his life, settle down. It would mean a lot of work, of course. He would have to learn te reo, have to study the customs. But the bank was littered with birds. He picked one up in his hand, letting the camera rest. The bird was covered in a slick iridescence. He had wanted to have children here. He laid the bird on the river stones.

\*

Yaya was in a fluster.

'The café, the café,' she said. Alexia took the briki from her and poured the sweet, strong coffee.

'Go and sit down, Yaya,' she said. There was a knock at the door, another aunt. Alexia kissed her three times and brought her inside. The woman was crying already, stroking her cheek. She settled her with the rest of them and went back to the kitchen. All that day the greetings went on.

'Coristimou!'

'Filinatha mou!'

'Koukla mou gliko!'

Alexia allowed herself to be patted and held. They smelled like him, these people, like clean linen and coffee and the aniseed they used in their baking. They pressed dishes into her hands; feta platters, stuffed tomatoes, dolmathes wrapped in vine leaves, legs of

lamb. Moving softly in her good court shoes, she took in trays of offerings: the icing sugared sweets, the powdered courambyethes she had helped her mother bake the night before, the hard koulourakia, the sweet tsourekia bread. She collected cups. She slowed her steps and bent her head like a good Greek girl.

In a rare break in the flow of visitors she went to the attic to look for more chairs. The ladder was at the back of the house. She experienced a moment of complete absurdity on the roof, balancing in her small heels and formal skirt. There was a high wind. It was bright up here, free of voices and condolences and requests. One great wrench of the attic window and she was in, into the detritus of the family's life. An old cot, piles of papers, suitcases, old curtains, one or two serviceable chairs. She stepped rafter to rafter, ducking her head.

The bouzouki was propped against the wall of the attic. It had all its strings. It was wooden, painted gold and red. Its key-patterned strap was still attached. It was tiny, much smaller than a guitar.

It all came down on her at once. Papou's calloused hands. The twanging sound of the bouzouki, playing rembetiko, traditional music. Cigarette smoke filling the lounge every Sunday, the men drinking café and ouzo and yelling about politics. Papou winking at her as he played, his fingers flying over the frets, the men around him playing gammon and chess, swearing softly. The sound of the music, plaintive and wry. She had not seen the lights, then. It was before the lights.

They needed her downstairs. She went at speed, flinging the chairs out the door and down the ladder into a bush at the bottom. Then she was back and her hand was on the instrument's neck. She stepped out and was blinded briefly. A gust of wind rushed at her and she stopped. She stumbled, then balanced, her hands holding the bouzouki across her body, the air scraping her hair back off her face, her bun falling loose.

Isaiah was walking down the front path towards her, flowers in one hand. The door of the attic blew shut behind her. He looked up. There was Isaiah and here she was, on the roof like the figurehead of a marae, clutching Papou's bouzouki like a totem. He smiled uncertainly. Then she was down the ladder and in his arms and laughing, the bouzouki hanging between them.

'Welcome to my big fat Greek whatever,' she said.

'You sure know how to roll out a welcome,' he said. 'How'd you know to get up on the roof? Is that the way you Greeks always do it?' He looked quizzically at the chairs beside them, balanced but askew in the rose bush.

'Welcome to my big fat Greek... funeral,' she said this time, and began to cry.

\*

It was the third day after the burial. The visitors came in waves, the population of the lounge rising and falling by the hour. Then everyone went away, quite suddenly, at dusk, and left the family with itself. They settled into the decor of the lounge in various states of fatigue.

In Isaiah's absence she had heard the words of his mihi running through her head. In the church, over the kyrie elaysons, through the third day blessings and the invocations and the saving of souls: ko Isaiah Tane Mahuta āhau. Through the scooping of cold earth onto the coffin: ko Ngāmotu āhau. Ko Waitotara te awa. The words ran through her head like a musical beat, inexplicably memorised. He had stumbled through it the first time he'd spoken in a meeting. She remembered Sam's pride and Polly listening almost fearfully, Rangi too. Ko Taranaki te maunga. Tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou katoa. She hummed it very quietly, now and then. Burst, rise, fall, burst. She sat slumped on the good chair in the lounge holding a small china cup with a silver rim. The coffee was strong and bitter. The moon was rising and no one had shut the curtains against the dusk.

Katherine walked past in a dress Alexia considered too short. Alexia wore a high-necked shirt, black skirt and stockings. Katherine wore a floral dress that cut her leg high above the knee. Katherine passed Baba and was playfully seized. He pulled her onto his lap where she sat, apparently comfortable. He stroked her arm.

There was a knife in the cabinet next to Alexia. It was long, and curved, encased in its richly embroidered sheath. She saw the colour of the blade in her mind's eye: a dark blue steel. Papou's father had brought it back from Turkey, where he'd been taken during the occupation. When she'd tried the blade as a child it made a mark on her finger: a crescent moon, yellow edged with white. The sheath was decorated with silver, and the knife's handle was made of white bone.

'We need to talk, Alexia,' Baba said.

'It's about your study,' Mama said.

'It's about your lack of study,' Baba said.

'The family have decided what you should do,' Mama said. She spoke as though the family was some nebulous intelligence hanging above their heads, contributing in an advisory capacity.

'The Family!' Uncle Steve cuffed Alexia's cheek as he sat down. 'What is this, "The Godfather"? You'll be scaring her, if you put it like that.' The knife in its sheath was still, unchanging. Its edge was smooth and uncomplicated, a remorseless moon.

'We need to talk to you about your law degree,' Baba said. Katherine perched on his lap like an obscenely oversized doll. She raised one eyebrow at Alexia as if to say, "I have no clue what they are talking about." Baba clasped her to him firmly, his eyes looking out over her sister's shoulder.

Ko Isaiah ahau. Ko Ngāmotu ahau. Green, purple, blue.

'It's obvious you're not going to pass your qualifying exam at this rate. And there's a need here now, at home,' Mama said.

'There is a need,' Uncle Steve said.

'It would be the logical choice,' Mama said. Yaya's tears had taken on a subdued quality, as though she could shed them quietly at will so as to listen better.

'Logica is a Greek word. You know that?' Yaya turned to Katherine, full of pride. 'Always, we always have the language,' she said. Katherine nodded.

'We want you to move in with Yaya,' Baba said. Katherine's lipsticked mouth fell open.

'She won't manage here, alone,' Mama said.

'Traditionally, someone would come and stay after a death,' Uncle Steve said. The word fell down in the room and lay on the carpet. 'But none of us are in a position to move in right now. I've got the business to run, and the house to look after.'

'And I'm working,' Mama said. 'Your Baba, too. You wouldn't need to pay rent, and you would have time to study, and Yaya would have someone here. It's what your papou would have wanted.'

Alexia said nothing. Mama passed a critical eye over her. Her hands, which had been flying about effusively, rested on Yaya's arm.

'Traditionally it would have been a woman,' Mama said. 'An unmarried daughter, or grand-daughter. The eldest.'

Alexia looked Yaya in the eye. She had crumpled into a smaller version of herself. In all her memories Yaya featured as the lower half of her body: thick legs covered in cotton, brusque shoes, always the gold-laden hands reaching down, patting and smoothing, the lap available for Alexia to be held upon.

'I'm not sure I...' she said.

'Come, darling,' Yaya said. 'Come home with me.'



'You can study here,' Alexia's mother said. 'She'll cook for you. She won't be able to help it!' she said, and laughed: a high, cut-glass giggle. 'It'll be like staying in a hotel!'

'It will be good for her,' Baba said. He leaned forward, crushing Katherine's dress.

'I don't think I can do it,' Alexia said.

The knife hung to the left of Alexia's view.

'What will happen to me?' Yaya asked, in Greek.

'I'm sorry,' Alexia said.

'Why, because of your anti-fracking activities?' Uncle Steve was amazed. She saw that everyone had been entirely won over by this idea. It was their perfect solution. The family would pay her bills, look after her, make sure she studied. The room had darkened but no one moved to turn on the light.

'Anti,' Yaya said. 'When your Papou he was in the hospital, I know all the words. Prognostica. Lymphatica. Arthros. I come to this country, and I never study, but I know the words on his chart, because they are Greek. You don't forget this,' she said sternly. 'You be proud of where you came from.' She gave Alexia a look that conveyed mild disapproval, the first such look she had given her in her life. Alexia felt a tremble passed through her body and into the cabinet next to her. It shook, very slightly, the glass shelf with the knife on it.

'Yaya,' Alexia said. 'I can't.'

'The family will pay you a stipend, of course.' Mama said coldly.

'It's in all of our interests,' Steve said.

'It's in your interests,' Alexia said. Baba's hand moved around Katherine's waist.

'If it's money you're interested in, we can make it a generous allowance,' Mama said. And it was all there: Australia, the time away from the family, Mama weeping and screaming, Alexia going to school with bruises and Mama covering them up with thick foundation, all of it. Baba.

'I will not do it,' Alexia said. Katherine sat up very straight in Baba's arms. When the knife was pulled from its case she knew from memory it made a ringing sound, a cold sound of unsheathing. Baba laughed.

'But you are forgetting where she came from, running around with these Māori boys. You've got the family to think about. What would Papou think, if he could see you sitting here, saying you won't look after your own Yaya? Here's a Greek word, for you. Themocracia. The seat of civilisation, Ancient Greece. Light-years ahead of its time. Let's decide this democratically, as a family.'

She saw that none of them, bar Katherine, really thought she would not do it. This was amazing in itself. That they thought she would so easily come to heel.

'All in favour of Alexia moving to Yaya's, raise your hand,' Baba said. They all raised their hands, except for Katherine, and Alexia herself, who did not count.

'So,' Baba said, 'through the process of themocracia, the family have decided.' There was a shifting in the room, a settling down.

Ko Ngāmotu ahau. Green, blue. He had said he would come this afternoon, if he could. Ko Taranaki te maunga. Pink. He had said he was heading back up north in the car tonight. He had asked her to go with him.

'I'm glad. It will be good for your study,' Uncle Steve said, as if Alexia had agreed wholeheartedly. Baba pulled Katherine in to kiss her cheek.

'It's the least you can do for us,' Mama said. 'After all the family has done for you.'

Several things happened at once. A car pulled up outside. Alexia stood up. The car was Isaiah's car. Yaya started to talk about dinner. Her uncle started to clear plates.

'What the family has done for me,' Alexia said. They looked at her and fell quiet. 'What the family has done!' And now she was yelling, turning, spinning recklessly in Yaya's good front room, in the house he had lived in till he died, Papou, a good man. Isaiah was opening the front gate, but still she was yelling. 'What this family has done!' she screamed, and her elbow smashed hard into the glass cabinet, but she couldn't feel it, so she did it again, and the glass scattered into shards on the carpet, and Yaya jumped, and Alexia held the knife with its blue blade out towards Baba.

'What this family has done,' she said.

Everyone went absolutely still.

Alexia crossed the room. It was amazing how easy it was, with the knife in her hand. From behind her came the tinkle of other knick knacks falling: the water wheel with the farmer in village dress, the decorative lighter and ashtray set, the red and black amphora.

Yaya looked from Alexia to her son and back.

'I am not staying here, Yaya,' she said, in her most formal Greek. 'I am sorry. I cannot stay.' She pushed her sister out the door. "'The Family!'" She screamed, though she wished to stop. 'What a great joke! "The Family!"' Baba began to stand up, his face stuck in a dumb flinch, eyes on the knife. She threw it at his feet. Isaiah rang the doorbell. Katherine left Baba where he was, and opened the door.

Isaiah had condolences on his face, but Alexia pushed past.

'Are we going?' she said. 'We can go now, right?' She turned and looked at the family, all the fallen glass. Katherine stepped forwards.

'I'm coming with you,' she said.

'Themocracia,' Alexia said. 'Themocracia. You know what they say about the original democracy, in Ancient Greece? It didn't apply to the women, or the slaves. Some themocracia, when I don't even get to vote. So in fact, you've upheld its principles beautifully.'

She turned and saw Isaiah's face. He looked comically stricken.

'You can't take your sister,' Baba said. But Katherine had already collected their bags.

'No, Baba,' Katherine said. 'I'm going.'

'I'm sorry, Yaya,' Alexia said. 'I'm sorry.'

Katherine pushed her and Isaiah out, and shut the door.

'What was all that...' Isaiah began to say, but Alexia grabbed him around the waist. He was wearing a black shirt and his usual khakis, and a vest: her hand went under the edge of it and she was suddenly against his side, awkwardly, her head pressed into his shoulder.

'Don't even ask,' Katherine said to him. 'Seriously, just don't even ask.' Then she swore horribly, in Greek and English, a long string of expletives leaving her sweet, lipsticked mouth.

Behind them came the sound of the front door opening.

'Alexia!' Baba called.

'Get her into the car,' Katherine said.

Her sister had fooled her. Because she collected vintage dresses and wore crystals and liked cute pictures of animals and pretty shoes, Alexia had assumed that she was helpless. Now Katherine shoved Alexia and Isaiah through the gate. She turned, as neatly as a dancer in her ballet flats, and walked towards the house. Alexia was pressed against the car. Someone was in the front seat, a hooded figure. The olive tree straggled next to her. Katherine from this angle was like an old photograph painted over with colour: her blue dress, her long black hair, the white house with the red step. Baba raised his hand. Alexia ran a few steps, then stopped. The sparks lit and fell, lit and fell, bright hazed aurora around her sister.

Katherine was singing. Alexia watched Baba's hand come down slowly, slowly, with the song's descending notes.

'Kounia, bella,' Katherine sang. 'That was it, wasn't it? Papou used to sing it to us all the time. What does it mean, Baba?'

Alexia watched Baba's face change and change and change, for the longest time.

'Swing,' he said then. 'Swing. Beautiful little girl.' The lights arced and faded.

Katherine turned and walked away. 'Go back inside, Baba,' she called over her shoulder. The front door closed quietly.

They got into Isaiah's car and came to rest, formal, overdressed, in the not unpleasant flotsam of Isaiah's life: open packets of sunflower seeds, daypacks, utilitarian looking belts, rock-climbing gear. Isaiah climbed into the driver's seat and they were, thankfully, moving away from the white house and the olive tree. Alexia's head was on her sister's lap and there was the sound of voices; Isaiah's, her sister's, another's. Her vision had closed in oddly. She sat up.

'So what the hell was all that about?' the person in the front seat said. 'Looked pretty full on, to me.'

'But what am I saying? Introductions!' Isaiah said. Alexia shook her head fiercely. The sick feeling went away, and her vision returned.

'I'm Katherine.'

'And this is my partner...!' Isaiah said.

'...Sam,' Sam said.

Katherine said nothing. But she turned and raised both eyebrows at Alexia, fine, matching arches of disbelief.

'Pleased to meet you,' she said.

'Sure,' Sam said, glancing back at Katherine in her dress and nice shoes in the backseat. 'Cool. How's it going, Alexia?' But Alexia could not answer. Isaiah turned the radio up.

'Crazy stuff,' he said, with exquisite vagueness.

'Yeah,' Sam said, nodding along with him.

They would be travelling up together in the car, the three of them.

Her sister caught her eye. Her makeup wasn't even smudged. 'What the hell?' she mouthed. Alexia shook her head with a despairing gesture, and shrugged.

They drove to Katherine's flat, where Alexia walked her to the door. They embraced. 'Look, you can stay here,' Katherine said. Alexia shook her head and walked back towards the car.

'Text me!' Katherine yelled.

Sam and Isaiah waited in the car, apparently not speaking. Alexia walked down the path.

Then she realised it: she was out. There was the land on an island in Greece. Alexia had always intended to go there, renovate the old house. But now she was out of it, entirely. Now there was no land, no going 'home' one day to Greece, or even home to the family, no red eggs at Easter, no souvlaki at Christmas, no Saint's day phone calls. There would be no 'The Family,' ever again. She walked down a step.

Then she was on her knees, in a hollow at the side of the path, rotten leaves in her fists, vomiting. She clung onto the dirt but it only kicked up its mossed over, decomposing scent. Her face was hot and tears came down it and her bare knees burned on the cold ground. It went

Kounia bella

omorfi copella

Then Sam was there. Sam pulled her back and up off the edge of the step to standing, and kicked the leaves over the mess, wiping at Alexia's hands. Isaiah was inside the car, looking forwards with a kind of desperate attention, as if there were something he was reading on the dashboard. Sam opened the door and got into the back seat, and looked at her very intently. She handed Alexia a T-shirt and gestured that Alexia should wipe her mouth.

'Must have eaten something,' Alexia said.

'Don't worry,' Sam said. She stroked Alexia's hand. Alexia felt like a small wild animal Sam was rescuing: helpless and dumb, unwillingly soothed. Isaiah said nothing. For a moment they both looked at the back of Isaiah's head: his short hair above the long slender neck. Then Sam looked at Alexia and smiled, as if to say, "aren't men useless?"

'Are you well enough to travel?' Sam asked her.

'Yes,' she said. 'I'll be fine.' Sam looked at her critically.

'It was your grandfather's funeral today,' she said.

'We were close,' Alexia said.

'That was your father back there?' Sam asked.

'That was my father,' Alexia said. Sam nodded.

'My question is, after all this, are you going to be up for campaigning?' she asked.

'Things are just heating up at the pā now,' she said. 'You might not like what happens next.'

'What happens next,' Alexia said, to give herself time to think. If Sam had asked this a week ago she wouldn't have been sure. Now her feeling was that this work was much more important than anything else she had been doing, perhaps for years. Polly's face came into

her mind: the high eyebrows and full lips. She saw the eels laid out on the bank of the river, Polly's water bursting into flame. 'I think I might be ready for what happens next,' she said.

Sixty years ago Papou had arrived in this country and decided to stay. After Greece the countryside was unbelievably green, he'd said, the farms unimaginably large. It was like a promised land. This had been the place they had run to, after ruined Europe. Now this was the only place Alexia had. The civil war had done things to people in Greece, Papou had told her, terrible things. Hunger twisted the villagers; people who had once been friends sold each other out for food. Papou had described their first train journey here so many times that it hung in her mind like a series of photographs. She could see it all: the train passing through the great green plains that spanned the distance to the mountains' feet, Yaya and Papou looking out through the window of the train, Baba a baby resting in Yaya's arms, innocent.



## SIX

Build it up with iron and steel,  
Iron and steel, iron and steel,  
Build it up with iron and steel,  
My fair lady.

The locals were unsure about the protest, Polly said. What had happened when they'd protested before? At best, nothing. At the worst, arrests and imprisonments, and in the old days, death. In Polly's living memory there had been three seizures of land. During the last, in the seventies, the council had taken pā land for a bush reserve, to be administered to by the local body. The iwi had protested, saying that they themselves were responsible caretakers. But the seizure had gone through. Three of Polly's relatives had been arrested. Her brother was gaoled, and though it had been a short stay, he had not since returned. Fifteen years later the council had sold the land to farmers, citing financial difficulties. The bush was levelled.

The seizures of the thirties had been more straightforward. Polly was a child, of course, when it started. But she remembered the raru raru that followed each new state-imposed boundary, how the meetings would drag on long into the night as the people argued about what to do. It was a grief to her then, she said, all the talk and wasted energy, and it was a grief to her now. But talk was important; only through kōrero would they come to agreement about how to fight. Then of course there were the bad early years, the years of Polly's grandfather. In those years there had been no time for kōrero at all.

'I say we take weapons.' Sam was fired up. The meeting room was packed. Even the children hung about the edges, drawn in by the importance of it all. Isaiah had agreed with Melissa and Sam when they had wanted to lock the meeting down. There had been whispers about a plant. But the newcomers who had flooded the pā would not be shut out.

'Aye, Sam. I think that would be wise.' Bryce said.

'What kind of weapons?' Rangi's face was strained with a kind of joy.

'They can't obviously be weapons,' Sam said. 'It would give them an excuse to arrest us on sight.'



Polly lifted a hand. The whole room, even the playing children, fell silent. She leaned forwards over the rug on her knee.

'We at this pā have not benefitted from violence. Action, but not violence.' Her voice was quiet but her nostrils flared. 'If you are violent in response to the Pākehā he will have an excuse to crush you.'

'But where has that got you, grandmother?' Bryce asked gently. Everything about him was irritating: his sibilant voice, his height, his undeniable authority. Isaiah did not trust the man. But unfortunately, he agreed with him. And once it was said, there were many nods in the room amongst the younger Māori.

'We lie down,' Matiu said. 'We always lie down.' Polly gave him a warning look, but he carried on. 'I offer no disrespect to those who have gone before. But what happened here in the 1800's? And in the thirties? And the seventies?' He spoke to Polly. 'You were there,' he said. 'We did what we have always done. We greeted the Pākehā. They came into our houses. We gave them kai, we extended manaakitanga. Then they took our land.' The murmurings in the room amplified. Many more people were nodding in assent.

'And when they put up fences in the thirties, we protested,' Rangī said. 'And when they came later with the bulldozers, to ruin the bush, we protested. And both times we went out, with our hands up,' he extended his hands in a sign of surrender, 'and we said, come, take it from us. We will not fight.' He paused and looked around the room. 'When do we get to bloody fight?'

'Open fighting is not the way,' Bryce said. 'They'd take us down fast. Polly's right. It would give them an excuse to arrest us. Then we'd be powerless.'

In the midst of all this Isaiah was occupied by a new sensation, one of not being able to speak. He had always been so confident at meetings in the city. Now it was as if he was clamped and held. People kept jumping in just ahead of him. Sam spoke.

'There are things you can do,' she said slowly. 'In South Korea they have a long history of armed protest. Their government was oppressive. I went to a march in Australia that a Korean group attended.' She laughed suddenly. 'It was a peaceful student march, but the riot police showed up in force. They came towards the front line, where the Koreans were. The white students just scattered. A few sat down, but most just backed away. The cops were in full riot gear: shields, batons, masks. They were coming at us in a rush.' She laughed again. 'One minute the Koreans were walking quietly together. Then they mobilised. They were all carrying banners and placards, all of them, and each had a sharp wooden pole attached. They turned their poles around, points outwards towards the police

line. Then suddenly, as if they'd practised, they formed a wedge shape, and charged the police.' She looked around. 'They charged them! It was insane. All these young cops, they didn't know what had hit them. The Koreans drove right through and out the other side and came back again on the attack. I've never seen anything like it. The cops were so stunned, no one was arrested. They just broke formation and backed away. It was like they were embarrassed.'

'Far out,' Tama said, from the back of the room.

'We could do that,' Bryce said. 'Go in armed.'

'The charges for doing something like would be much more extreme than just for protesting,' Alexia said.

'This pā's strength is not in violence,' Polly said. 'Not now. What will you get if you bite the big hand? Nothing but a smack in the head.' She banged her staff emphatically on the floor.

Isaiah became aware that people were looking at him.

'It's true, we have always backed down,' he said, slowly. He heard himself say the 'we'. 'We haven't fought since the old days. It's true this has not produced the results we wanted. But if we had been more violent, would it have been any different?' He paused. 'Isn't there some kind of middle way?'

'What are you now, cousin, some kind of Buddhist?' Rangi asked. 'Thought you were all famous down south, all those crazy actions you did round the nuclear confer-' he stopped as Sam shook her head violently. 'You of all people,' he went on, slightly chastened. 'Don't you want to show the Pākehā what we're made of?'

'The time for peaceful resistance is over,' said Bryce. Alexia rolled her eyes.

'At least we'd be sending them a clear message,' Sam said.

'What message?' Alexia asked. 'Who's going to care about your message? Who's even going to report it?'

'If we do an action like this, people will notice!' Sam was furious. 'We'll make them notice! And if we lead, we Pākehā, then they can't blame the violence on the iwi. They can't write us off as "violent Māori protestors". We'll make sure all the press photos have got white faces in them. They won't be able to side-line it as a Māori issue: they'll have to see it's environmental, universal, that more people care than just Māori.'

'Just Māori?' Rangi said.

'Shut up, cuz,' Matiu said.

'She's right,' Isaiah said. He was easing into it, but still hyper-aware of the packed room, all the upturned faces. 'They always report these things in the same way: "Māori Protestors Kick Up a Fuss, blah blah blah"'. Then there's a picture of someone in full moko and tats getting in a white cop's face.' He looked pointedly at his cousin. 'If the Pākehā are at the front, it complicates the picture.'

'Then, when the papers come to talk to us, we'll show them all of it.' Matiu turned to Isaiah. 'You've got it all, eh? You been taking pictures. The dead birds, the fracking wasteland, they got to put that in the news. It's so ugly. And the kai tuna? You got the kai tuna, eh?'

'Why would the Pākehā care about a bunch of dead eels?' Rangi asked. 'It's not like they get it. You think they're going to put it on the front page of the paper: "Poor Sad Maori Upset About Dead Pet Fish?"'

'They will care,' Matiu said. 'After the protest, they'll have to. They'll have to see.'  
Ana left the room quietly. Tama took his cat, and followed her.

'I don't want to be led by Pākehā on our home ground,' Matiu said. Behind him, someone said 'Aie' and Te Kahurangi made a sound of assent.

'Why should we be scared of what they think of us?' she said.

'It's not about being scared,' Alexia said. 'It's about doing what's most effective.'  
Isaiah saw again how she would look in a courtroom pleading a case: older, infallibly reasonable. She was furious though, he could tell.

'All your talk.' It was Lizzie. 'All your talk and lies. Why bother being reasonable when they think we're unreasonable anyway? Peaceful or violent, we can't win. They put the same picture in anyway, if it goes in at all. They hardly ever report on anything real anyway,' she said. She eyed Alexia. 'We read the papers. It'll be there, towards the back: "Some Random Maori Oppose Council on Fracking Rights, blah blah blah." So they don't care, so they've heard it all before. Why is it more effective to just shut up and play safe, follow the white leader?'

'They see you as a minority group, with minority concerns,' Alexia said. 'If you take the peaceful approach, then at least they can't write your message off straight away, judge you as some militant group.'

'But like I said, if we whitey's lead, then they can't label us!' Sam said. 'They'll have to see our concerns represent those of a wider community.'

'You're not the wider community,' Alexia said. 'You may think you are by virtue of being white, but you're not. Most of New Zealand wouldn't think of going into a protest

armed. Most of New Zealand doesn't care that you want to save this piece of land. Most of New Zealand is just working, trying to feed their families, trying to get by.'

'Better keep your girlfriends under control, bro,' Rangi whispered to Isaiah. He was thoroughly enjoying himself. Sam opened her mouth but was interrupted.

'She's right, dear,' Polly said. Her voice was soft with a tender edge. Isaiah saw Te Kahurangi look at Polly with something like fear. 'No, no, Alexia's right.' Polly looked Sam up and down, taking in the frayed cords bagging out at the knees, her striped top with the thumb holes poked into the sleeves, her nose piercing. 'Most Pākehā don't care what you think. Most Pākehā just think you're a bunch of no good raff raff, with no jobs.' Polly busily rearranged her shawl. Sam closed her mouth abruptly.

'But where has peaceful resistance gotten you, in the end?' Bryce said. 'At worst, if we go in armed, some of the young people get arrested. But at least they get to show the Pākehā what they think. At least they get to shout it, proud and strong. You've tried speaking their language,' he said to Polly, 'which you use so very eloquently,' he said to Alexia. 'We wrote up that big report and objected in writing a dozen times now and we've applied for exemptions all over the bloody show.' There were 'mmmm's' from the group. Bryce had that effect: he made the meeting seem like his own special audience. 'You've tried peaceful protest for, oh, I don't know, what would you say, Polly? The last hundred years?' It was impossible to read Polly's face. 'You've tried living quietly, in accordance with their laws. And this is what you get: you live here, crowded onto this small piece of land, when once you could walk from the mountain to the sea through your own bush, unchallenged. And now your water's going bad, and your animals are sick, and the river where it comes out of the fracking land is black. No,' he said. 'No. The time for peaceful protest is over.'

'All hail the new messiah,' Alexia whispered softly to Isaiah, who wanted to smile. But now he must speak.

'I agree,' he said. There was a small silence. 'I agree with you, Bryce, as long as we can keep our people safe. We do this in a careful way so that nothing can be pinned on us: no long gaol terms, no charges.' He looked around the room. This was not the ideal way to decide on actions like this: there were way too many people present. But it couldn't be helped. 'We do this carefully so that no one gets really hurt.'

'You mean none of ours, right?' said Matiu. He grinned evilly.

'Well, Ok then,' Sam said. Isaiah could see she had shifted to organising mode. 'Can we get consensus?' There was a blank silence.

‘Do we all agree?’ Rangi said. At first the people in the room were still. Then, one by one, Te Kahurangi first, they started to nod. Polly was the last, her nod almost imperceptible, one small, downward motion of the head.

‘We’ll need two metre long staffs for the banners.’ Sam was already taking notes. ‘How many?’ She looked balefully at the white protestors in the room till several raised their hands. ‘We’ll form the front guard, so we’ll have to practice. We’ll need to look like we’re not organised.’

‘Shouldn’t be too hard,’ said Matiu.

‘Formation practice tonight, next to the wharenuī.’ Rangi said. He described the drills he’d put them through. ‘Bring your mittens, kiddies,’ he said.

‘We need someone to go to town for banner materials, paint, and the staffs. It should be someone who looks...’ Sam looked at Alexia. For a moment, everyone looked at Alexia. ‘You don’t agree with this?’ Sam asked her, almost gently.

‘No, I don’t.’ Alexia said. ‘I think it’s going to backfire. I think it will give them an excuse to come down harder on you. And I think you’re just going to be looked on as some deviant minority. But if this is what you all want to do, then I agree. I’ll go and get the supplies.’

‘We’ll need some lengths of pipe,’ Isaiah said.

‘For locking on? We’re planning an occupation, then?’ Rangi asked.

‘Not an occupation, an attack,’ Isaiah said. He knew he shouldn’t say it outright but it was too exciting. He’d never before spoken to a room of so many people poised to act. ‘An attack on their house of power: the court house. They attack us, with their chemicals and trucks, ripping out trees, destroying the earth. We attack them. Who could blame us? The pipes we’ll slip up our sleeves, like batons. We’ll need a welder too, does anyone have a welder?’ Matiu nodded.

‘We’ll need some kind of armour,’ Bryce said.

‘You’d know about that, wouldn’t you?’ Isaiah asked Rangi.

‘Like I said, man, I look twenty one but I’m fifty, eh. What do you think, I slept through the Springbok tour?’ Rangi was proud. ‘We scrounged these bits of metal, see, corrugated iron, stuff like that, and shoved them down our fronts. There were a few of us who agreed to be up front, against the red squad. They were battoning protestors all over the country. It was just self-defence.’ He shrugged and spread his hands wide. ‘Who’s to say it isn’t now?’ He seemed suddenly enraged. ‘They threaten our land, they threaten our bodies. It’s the same thing.’ He turned angrily towards the Pākehā at the meeting, who sat bunched

together, with Bryce at their head. 'You don't feel like that, but we do. It will be self-defence.'

'Say whatever you want,' Bryce said, in a jovial way. 'On my part, it will be as Isaiah said. An attack.'

'We'll use the metal we've got here, at the pā,' Matiu said. 'But we'll need some more. They used shields in your day, old man,' he said to Rangi. 'But we can't risk going in openly like that.'

'Yep,' Rangi said. 'Need padding too, to protect your arms and legs.' A couple of the young people looked nervous. 'And balaclavas. Helps soften blows, but also good if you don't want to be recognised. Sorry, you lot,' he said to the Pākehā. 'You say you want to be seen, eh? Well, no balaclavas for you then.'

'Can you go to a climbing store, if there is one?' Isaiah said to Alexia. 'I'm going to need some carabiners, some more harnesses.' Alexia nodded.

'Smoke bombs,' one of the protestors said.

'Grappling hooks and ropes,' said Matiu.

'Flares,' Tama's mother Lizzie said. Then they were all talking at once.

Alexia got up and began to leave.

'Guess fighting just isn't in your nature, then,' Sam said to her as she was almost out the door.

Alexia turned and addressed the room. 'Give me a list,' she said. 'I'll go to town in two hours, and get whatever the hell you like.' There was a pause after she left, and then the talk went on.

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On the day of the protest, Alexia went to town early. She was putting a distance between herself and the others, but she didn't care. She treated herself to a coffee, but eventually it couldn't be avoided. It was time.

She headed to the town centre. As she entered the square she heard a low whistle. Rangi was perched absurdly in a tree. She hoped he didn't think he was camouflaged. He looked fairly obvious in his combat boots amidst the sparse foliage, his clothes bulky from the padding underneath. She laughed. He ushered her closer.

'Sis!' he said in a stage whisper. 'You're blowing my cover.'

'You're not particularly well-hidden.' Rangi tapped the side of his nose cunningly.

'Ahh, but I'm the decoy, see?' She followed a flick of his eyes to a man sitting on a park bench reading a paper. 'And there's the cop who's following me.' A small chill went through her. Now Rangi turned his eyes towards the top of the building that bordered the square. There was an almost undetectable movement, the tip of some silver object reflecting, something metallic, a camera, she supposed, or binoculars. She saw a tuft of dark hair, almost invisible. You'd only really see it if you knew someone was there.

'That's one of ours?' Rangi nodded slowly.

'Your boyfriend,' he said. They were a lot more organised than she'd expected.

'But how?'

'He went up last night, with some others,' Rangi said. 'He's a good climber. And committed.' He gave her a confrontational look.

'But it's three stories high,' she said. The face of the building was smooth and apparently without purchase except for large, concrete ledges spaced far apart.

'Got a bit of experience, those ones from the south,' Rangi said, grudgingly. 'That boy's got things going on you wouldn't know about, a innocent girl like you. He's got a record of arrest, like me, but for different sorts of things. Breaking and entering, trespass, obstruction, wilful damage... They'll be after him for sure, if they see him here. Run along now, girlie. I'm meant to be undercover, remember?' He ducked his head and pretended to speak into his lapel, into an imaginary radio. The man at the park bench sat fixedly, unmoving. Was it possible Rangi was right? She walked away. The courthouse stood tall and grand, its Romanesque columns fluting up to the sky as though holding aloft some secular church. She had interned at a building much like this, walking the lofty halls, doing senior lawyers' paperwork.

She felt them coming. It started in her feet, a low, rhythmic rumble. They were coming through the streets and singing. As they drew near she saw their song. It was black and deep, deep green, and hung about the entrance of the court, the notes burning into her retina like falling coins. The front guard wore black. Behind them came the iwi, who were dressed casually and who brought children and kaumātua with them. Polly and Te Kahurangi and Lizzie were there. Polly walked proudly and had feathers in her hair. It was she who was leading the singing.

Alexia hurried to them and slipped in behind. Sam and Aidan and Hannah were disguised in their padded clothes. Polly nodded to her. Te Kahurangi was holding the end of a banner. Wordlessly, she handed it to Alexia. It was not one of those with sharpened stakes like the front guard carried, concealed inside tubes of cloth. She watched the young woman's

long, black hair move through the crowd away from her. There were several young people hurrying to the front, Matiu, others she'd seen around the pā, all from the middle section and all slipping swiftly through the crowd, as though to reinforce those in front. They had decided to go against orders at the last minute.

The elaborate facade of the courthouse reared up ahead. Alexia had a brief flash of the parallel universe inside: the judge perhaps halfway through meeting out judgement on a traffic fine, or a custody case, or maybe banging his gavel lightly to punctuate a comment, or rifling through his papers, or taking tea. It was almost always a he. She could hear the low hum of the air conditioning and see the beige, muted tones of the court upholstery. The song rose up and went above her, more like a lullaby more than a protest chant. Then there was the sound of regimented feet behind them. The feet came rushing on and moved to the front, and people began to yell.

The song changed. It went atonal and harsh, and the lights went green, black, black. Then they went out. Alexia was jostled from behind and from the front, and almost crushed against the back of a large man in front of her. Someone stepped on her foot. The people she'd begun to stumble in the first great push from behind. To her left the children's mother Lizzie tripped and righted herself. The woman had both Tama and Maitai by their hands, and her knuckles were white with the effort of keeping hold of them. Alexia dove for Maitai but missed and almost fell. The police line was not coming as anticipated from the front but mainly from behind, where the protesters had gathered their children and the people not interested in the attack.

The police had shields that covered their bodies from chin to knee, blue-black and glassy, and broad inhuman helmets. They came on in an unbroken wedge, hemming the group into a smaller and smaller space. Now from the Pākehā front guard came a yell, and a violent push back. Sam's voice rose through a gap in the noise.

'The people, united, will never be defeated!' And then someone else, Bryce maybe, took it up, and drowned out the voices of the people around her. There came a bigger push from the front and Te Kahurangi came flying back towards her. She fell down, and Alexia lost her in the crowd. 'The people, united...' But the people weren't united. They were walking separately towards their fates, the actions of those in front endangering those behind.

Children cried out and women called from the back to stand strong, and the people in front chanted louder and louder. The singing rose, fell, and then came completely apart. The police were advancing on either side now as well, coming from all angles, closing in till the people fit into a roughly square shape within the wider square. The tramp of their feet was



like an army but, even though they were surrounded, there didn't seem to be many of them, not compared to the protestors. The police line was imposing, but where they'd split and spread to surround the protest they had thinned their numbers so now they only stood one or two deep. The front guard were screaming at the police, insults, taunts. Bryce's voice came clear over the hubbub, a huge, powerful cry.

'Ake!' he called, and Polly, to the left her, answered.

'Ake!' And then more and more people around her screamed it, and then she was calling it out too. And there was an answering call from the rooftops around the square. Smoke bombs came down on the police, spitting coloured smoke. Lit flares were thrown from buildings by figures in black. A figure belayed himself down the front of the court house.

'Ake!' he called. He flung out his arm and smoke bombs hit the ground. Smoke enveloped everything. The banner was pulled from her hand.

Tama stumbled and his mother picked him up in one swift scoop. Screams came from the front. The front guard had turned their pikes outwards, and finally charged. Lizzie turned to run back, but she tripped. Alexia half-caught her as she fell but Maitai had disappeared, and then they were all on the ground, under the thick layer of smoke and under people's boots. Someone kicked Alexia in the throat. Her face was close to Lizzie's, and they looked each other in the eyes. Lizzie pulled a scarf out of Tama's top, and wrapped it around the lower part of his face. She reached out to Alexia and pushed a handkerchief against her mouth. She launched herself and the boy off the ground as Alexia was still stumbling to her feet.

Alexia headed towards the front, not knowing why, moving against the crush of bodies. She'd seen something in Lizzie's face that had thrilled her. Perhaps she could be of use after all. But at the front she heard something she'd never heard before: the crunch of metal hitting bone. Shapes reared out of the fog. The action seemed distant because of the smoke. The protestors swung the steel pipes they'd concealed in their sleeves. Someone hit her from behind, a ringing blow, one not meant for her, and she fell to her knees. To her left Bryce fended off a strike with his forearm, then disappeared.

'Resistance! Resistance!' Sam was screaming. Aidan was a couple of metres away. Through a gap in the smoke she saw that his boot was in a cops' side and the cop was lying down. She splayed her hands on the ground, frozen in place. This was not the place for her. She had been wrong to come.

Then there in front of her was Te Kahurangi. She saw the grazes on the girl's hands where she must have fallen and scraped herself on the concrete. A policeman came at her from the front and the girl fell back towards her. She'd been struck in the face. Blood spilled from her forehead. Alexia pressed her fingers to the blood as though to stop it. The girl looked at her as though she was mad and pulled away.

Te Kahurangi shielded her as the policeman came on with a baton. Her hands were behind her back, in front of Alexia's face. She slipped a shiv out of her sleeve, a razor stuck in a length of wood and bound with twine: it looked handmade. Alexia felt cold. The cop swung his baton, and it connected with the girl's shoulder. She was so young: sixteen or seventeen. The girl started to bring her hand to the front as if to stab the man.

The sentence! The years in gaol! Alexia plucked the knife from the girl's fingers and threw it down, spinning it along the ground. A knife, a knife, a knife. She turned to run, but the crowd was fighting behind her as well. The police must have got reinforcements from somewhere. She was trapped here, in the thick of it, and the cops had reformed their line. Then she saw Polly.

Polly was on her knees in front of the courthouse, in the centre of the fluted columns, in the middle of the fighting. She had bent her head, and she was singing. The feather had been knocked out of her hair. Somehow she had come all the way to the front while the rest of the people had retreated. A figure in helmet and shield turned towards her and then the smoke passed in front of Alexia's eyes. It cleared. He was advancing on Polly from behind; he could not tell how old she was. His arm went up and then came down. In the next gap in the smoke she saw Polly had been pulled to standing. She lost sight of them again. Her legs turned her around before she was aware of it. She pushed past Te Kahurangi. She passed Bryce, who was yelling incoherently. She passed someone she thought might be Matiu, but whose face was covered in blood.

Polly was being dragged along the ground. She was completely composed. Her lips, as usual, had on their bright bow of lipstick, and she was singing again. Her legs were bandy and thin and knocked along in their good black stockings. She had lost her cane. The man dragging her had left his shield and mask on the court steps and was moving Polly quickly. Of course, she was so light, like a child. And she was offering no resistance.

Alexia saw Polly's cane on the ground. The stick was carved and polished, its head an eel, its snout sharp and inlaid with Paua. She picked it up and cracked it across the cop's shoulders. She raised it again, and hit, and hit. She would stop this. She would make him let go. She would make him stop. The stick was light in her hands, a hot nothing. She moved

faster than she knew she could. Then she herself was nothing, for one, gorgeous instant, nothing but movement and air. There was a moment when she didn't know what happened, and then she was looking at the police man on the ground, still facing away from her, clutching at his head. She saw that there was blood, not much, but there, seeping through his fingers.

She heard the stick drop from her hands. There had been a space like a blackness in front of her eyes, and now here she was, one booted foot still pressed against the man's side and him curled into a foetal position, not moving. Polly looked at her through the last of the smoke, from her prone position on the ground. Polly's look was, as always, calm, measured. She raised both of her thin plucked eyebrows. Her mouth turned down at the corners and Alexia could almost hear her say, "well, who would have thought?"

This was why she never came to protests. Not because she was afraid of the police. But because she was afraid of herself. Alexia was wired to fight.

She heard a low whistle. It was the figure all in black who still dangled on the face of the court building. She noted the small camera hanging from a strap at his wrist, the ease with which he swung through the air. He was almost directly above her, only three metres or so up. She could only see his eyes through the slot of the balaclava. In one movement he signalled for her to cover her face, and pushed both feet against the wall behind him, swinging himself out in a great arc. Of course. She brought the handkerchief up to obscure her nose and mouth. Isaiah swung back towards the building, turning fluidly in the air. As he hit the concrete, taking most of the impact along the side of his body, she saw his elbow hit the lens of the security camera mounted along the side of the building. It smashed. He showed her he had already taken out the one directly above her. He pointed again with his free arm, twice, emphatic and explicit. She was to get Polly. She was to go down the alley at the side of the court building, and get herself out. The arrogance of him.

Alexia picked up Polly, still holding the handkerchief over her face, and pulled her close to her body. Then she ran.

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Isaiah watched Alexia disappear. The policeman's head was still bleeding but he picked himself up. For a moment he looked towards the alley where Alexia had gone. It was in Isaiah to swing out into the air again and make a sound, to divert the cop's attention away. But the man shook his head and went back towards the court house. Isaiah took his elbow

out of the smashed glass of the surveillance camera. He flicked his digital camera into his hand. He sought the young cop's face in the viewfinder almost reflexively, catching the dazed look, the s blood across his temple, the details of his face. The staff lay on the ground, off to the side of the court steps, where it had rolled after she had dropped it.

The smoke was clearing. Sam held her own, still in position with her banner-turned-spear, her padding in place and a fierceness on her face she reserved only for people in uniform. He wasn't worried about her. She fought cleanly, deflecting blows from the cop's baton as they fell, chanting all the while. The intensity of the conflict was flagging as more of the protesters were brought to the ground. There was a collection of them held face down, cheek to concrete to the left of the court house, being systematically handcuffed. Isaiah put his lens to his eye and clicked, clicked. Though the camera was set to silent each time he pressed the button a feeling reverberated in his body like a stone falling into water. *There, there.* Hands being cuffed roughly behind activist's back. Policeman striking Te Kahurangi across the face. Aidan down and yelling, a boot headed towards his head.

Evidence. He flicked the camera into the concealed pocket in his sleeve and hoisted himself up the wall. Half the purpose of him being here above the action was to record any police brutality for posterity. It would be helpful if anything legal were to come of it, to have a record of events. He knew he needed to get back on top of the building quickly if he was to be of much use; he'd spent all his time throwing smoke bombs, too little time taking photos. He was meant to keep out of the fighting. He'd got diversion too many times and could not afford another court appearance.

He swung and hit the building harder than he'd planned. Turning his foot side on-in its rock-climbing shoe he smeared up the wall, adjusting his rope to hang shorter as he went. It was arduous and he slipped a couple of times, the rope breaking the fall. He looked over his shoulder and saw the body of the people had got away. It was only the core left, thirty or forty, but they were surrounded now, entirely penned into the small central space. Black booted figures came in waves from the exits to the square. His breath quickened and he slipped again, found a toehold, held, his body pressed close to the smooth granite and his centre of gravity slowly coming to rest where it needed to be, as close to the slick surface as possible. He crimped his fingers into a crack at the window's edge, locking them as he'd been taught so they formed an anchor in the tight space. It hurt, and they would be bruised, but it held him for enough time that he could lean further in, reach with his toe for a hold on the window's frame. There, edged on the pane, he swung his weight up and sideways and breathed the smell of his own sweat. He was losing time. From the corner of his eye he

caught movement. Police on top of the building. The cops in the square were armed with batons and shields like regular riot police but he was sure he saw a holster on the hip of one of the figures. If they were up there then he had limited time: they might already be on top of this one. He leapt upwards for the next hold.

He caught and gripped, though his fingers were damp. He'd left the chalk bag in his pack in favour of climbing light; he already had enough gear to slow him down. He'd thrown most of his bombs and dispensed with the grappling hooks he'd been carrying, but now he wished fervently for the bag. Climbing like this was different to sports climbing: the gear for sheer building faces was weightier and more tiresome to heft. You needed more rope length, more carabiners for locking in: Isaiah had seven left dangling from his belt and the industrial strength rope was twice as heavy as the one he usually climbed with. He heard a high scream and, turning again, saw Te Kahurangi catch another blow across the face. He couldn't flip his camera out: he was using all his strength just to cling to the wall.

Isaiah gathered himself and dove his way upwards, muscles starting to shake. Distribute your weight evenly on your legs. Don't lock too hard with your arms. Centre of gravity in to the wall. His toes were slipping on the sheer face. He thought he heard steps on the roof, the loud tramps of booted feet. He pushed and held, pushed and held, listening for Sam's voice, for Te Kahurangi's voice, but it was all angry screams, nothing distinguishable. He wasn't breathing now: just working, as if he were in the final legs of a marathon and too spent to even take breath. He knew he couldn't keep this up for long, but it was one, two more pushes and he was there. He gained the lip of the building. No one on their side would be left up here: Isaiah had dismissed them earlier on.

On the top of the building were five cops, six, standing casually against the sky. Isaiah lay at the feet of the closest one. He could flip himself off the building once again, swing free, maybe disconnect himself from the rope and quick-release from his harness when he hit the ground, but his muscles had nothing left. The cop looked down at him almost pityingly.

'Fancy seeing you here,' he said.

Then Isaiah was on his stomach, hands wrenched behind his back. The tendons at the front of his shoulders screamed. He felt himself relieved of his remaining smoke bomb and the flare accompanying it in his modified tool belt. That would count as evidence in court. He was flipped over painfully on his back on top of his cuffed hands, face to the sky. They relieved him of his carabiners, his concealed short baton, and finally, his camera. Luckily it

was not his good one, only a point and shoot, expendable. They took his rope and the gear he'd left up top.

'Shall we get the shoes?' one of the men said to another.

'Think you can walk in those pigeon shoes?' one said to him. He was pushed to standing and made to walk a few steps in his rock-climbing shoes. Another cop shook his head.

'Evidence,' he said.

'What am I being arrested for?' Isaiah asked.

'Intention to damage public property. Trespassing. How's that for a start?' A cop moved towards the doorway in the centre of the flat roof and opened it. He was to be brought down the stairs in a civilised fashion. A cop knelt at Isaiah's feet in a strangely supplicating posture. Isaiah watched as his own foot evaded the cop's hand. He'd had his rock climbing shoes only a few months: they were new, a very expensive brand. 'I'll have you for obstruction too,' the cop said.

'How am I obstructing you?' Isaiah said.

'Your foot is obstructing my hand,' the policeman said. He called on a fellow officer. 'There, look!' he said. 'He did it again.'

'Lets get off this blasted roof,' the first cop said.

Down below everything was too real. Te Kahurangi was down and bleeding from the head. Matiu was cuffed firmly, thrashing, a cop kneeling on his back to hold him in place. Sam had been taken. She was talking loudly about the illegality of the arrests. This meant she was alright. Aidan was face down and not moving. Hannah was quiet too, but looked unhurt. They formed a line of inert bodies on the ground, thirty, maybe forty people. In front of Isaiah were spent flares, smoke bomb shells, banners lying on the ground, broken glass, a smear or two of blood. A cop was being carted off in an ambulance, and, by the exit furthest away, a paddy wagon had arrived. Lizzie was not there, or Rangi. He was shoved out and down the front steps. Sam saw him and her face fell. He raised his chin at her slightly. She kept talking. He saw a movement from his left eye. It was Rangi, peeking from behind the corner of the courthouse. He was so obvious Isaiah wanted to laugh, but somehow the cops had missed him. He raised his eyebrows at Isaiah comically, one, two.

'She needs medical attention,' he said to the cop holding him. Te Kahurangi looked up at him dazedly. The second time he said it the cop bent away, still holding Isaiah but speaking into a radio. Everyone was being frisked. Melissa was weeping, unsurprisingly. He thought of Alexia and the staff, the blows going wide and striking, the lack of control. At

least everyone here was seemingly calm, and co-operating. He was thrown to the ground ungently and lay where he was. He would not move: he would not help them search. A cop, seemingly a sergeant, circulated, giving orders. A small pile of weapons was accumulating on the ground. It was horrifying: smoke bombs, padding, knives, the short batons they'd concealed in their sleeves and the long sharp sticks of the banner poles. There was enough there to put them all away, even the ones without a record. At least something about the fracking would be in the news, and it wouldn't all be for nothing.

'Search them again,' the sergeant said. He stepped away with a small bag of gear. Isaiah saw that he was putting cell phones and cameras into it: anything that could have taken images of the demo. His body was wrung and sore, but he felt if he needed to, he could run and run. He knew this stage too: the near hysteria after being captured, the weird high. It would be replaced soon by interminable boredom while they were all photographed, printed, and individually processed. With a group this large it would take a long time.

'Ok,' the sergeant said. 'Righto then.' He seemed overly cheerful. 'You've been warned,' he said to the group. He turned to his officers. 'Now let them go.'

Isaiah felt the shock go through the police holding him. There was a silence in which even Melissa stopped crying.

'Let this be a lesson to you though,' the sergeant said. He placed the bag of cell phones on the ground and stamped on it with his boot. This was, Isaiah knew, an entirely illegal destruction of property. But no court in the country would look at them, if they were to make a claim. The sergeant picked up the bag. His inferiors stood about, quietly, not moving.

'Well, did you hear me?' the sergeant said, to the police officers this time. 'Let them go.' He waved a hand dismissively, and turned away, taking the bag with him.

Te Kahurangi, Isaiah saw, was turned over and a stretcher brought her way. Aidan got up and brushed himself off. Melissa stopped her crying and Sam leapt up from the ground. Matiu got up slowly. The officers began to uncuff their hands.

'What the hell is this all about then?' Aidan said.

Sam started to scream.

'Arrest me,' she yelled, to the cops. 'Arrest me, you bastards. They're sabotaging us so they don't have to put it on the news!' she yelled. She neared the cop on Isaiah's left. She turned and laid into him, striking at his face. 'Arrest me!' she screamed. 'Arrest me!' None of the other activists moved. But Sam would not let up. 'You bastards!' she screamed. 'Chicken shit bastards!' She hit out again and was deflected. A cop came at her from behind

and she bent under his weight; threw him off. The sergeant took no notice. A young cop faced her. 'Why won't you arrest me? You dirty fascist pigs!' She spat into the young cop's face. Isaiah saw shock register there, and disgust. Sam went on screaming. But quietly, the police withdrew.





## SEVEN

Iron and steel will bend and bow,  
Bend and bow, bend and bow,  
Iron and steel will bend and bow,  
My fair lady.

Isaiah was heading out to take photographs. Despite the failure of the demo he was optimistic that one day a journalist would come to the pā. Then he would have everything ready and waiting: the research showing the toxicity in the site runoff, the portraits of dead eels, the short film he and Te Kahurangi had filmed of Polly's water catching fire. A small hand hit him from behind.

'Uncle Isaiah, wait. I have three important things to tell you,' Tama said. No one had ever called him uncle. He picked Tama up and slung him over his shoulders.

'You can come with me,' he said. 'But only because I'm staying close to the fence.'

'I'll stay with you. I'm looking for my cat.' Isaiah clasped the small bare feet in his hands. He got hold of his bony ankles and Tama held him closely about the head.

'Tell me your three things,' Isaiah said.

'The taniwha came in my dream last night,' Tama said. 'It was bigger than when I seen it. And Mama's got a baby, but it's in her puku. And this is the last thing.' He reached down and passed Isaiah something. Isaiah opened his hand. In it was a key; large, machine cut, with sharp edges.

'A taniwha, a baby, and a key?' Isaiah said. Now they were on the river path.

'Who's your Mama having a baby with?'

'Uncle Rangi,' Tama said, matter-of-factly. 'He's gonna be the dad. The taniwha got big,' he went on. 'It ate another one a their masheens, it said.'

‘Rangi!’ Isaiah hadn’t seen Rangi so much as look at Lizzie in the meetings. Maybe Rangi had agreed to stand in, in the father’s absence. Or maybe he really was the father. He almost tripped on a tree root and felt, to his horror, tears in his eyes. Lizzie was hapu!

‘Yeah, so what?’ Tama said. He almost fell off Isaiah’s shoulders. ‘The baby’s gonna be a boy,’ he said.

‘Did that come to you in a dream too?’ Isaiah asked.

‘Nah. Just, I aksed God for a boy, cos girls are so annoying,’ Tama said.

‘Which god?’ Isaiah asked.

‘That Jesus one,’ Tama said. ‘All the other ones are busy.’

‘Don’t you think Jesus is busy too?’

‘Nah. All the others are looking after the trees, or making storms on the sea, or whatever. But he just hangs out up there on his cross in that church in town. I don’t know what he’s doing up there, just hanging around.’

‘What did your taniwha look like then?’ he asked.

‘Eyes like massive jools,’ Tama said. ‘Head like a hammer. All these patterns on its bum, like a waka carving. And it got stronger, it said, cos it ate a orange truck.’

The path wound up through the thick bush. Isaiah set Tama down on the path and took his hand in his own. It was surprisingly small. The kids here seemed older than they were. A little further up the bush cover dropped away. Isaiah made Tama get down low and, crouched like this, they advanced along the fence line. He got his camera ready. There was a commotion behind him as the damaged truck came into view. Tama was fairly leaping on the spot.

‘Jus like she told me!’ he said. ‘Jus like she said!’

Isaiah kneeled and clicked. He caught the oil leak in close up, where it dripped onto the ground. The hole in its side was wide. He took a close up of it: the sharp edges of steel bent like tinfoil. Stretched around the cab of the vehicle was a strip of police tape. A line was traced in white around the site.

It was a crime site. Something in him twisted in disgust. They would outline a damaged truck in white; they would photograph this piece of private property because a company owned it. But noone wanted his photographs of dead birds, the damaged land lying open and oozing fluid, toxic chemicals leaching into the earth.

Tama yelled. He was a little way off in the bush. Isaiah started to run towards him, but he was already coming back with something in his arms.

‘My cat!’ he said. ‘My cat!’ The cat was dusted around the ears with twigs and looked greatly displeased to have been found. The adrenalin made Isaiah’s hands and face hot. He was stupid to have brought Tama here. It was not a safe place for children. He collected both Tama and cat and carried them back towards the pā.

When he got to Lizzie’s place it was dark and Tama was asleep in his arms. She opened the door in a slip and then stood back, hiding herself behind the doorframe. Perhaps she was expecting Rangi? He handed her her sleeping son. The cat had run off as soon as they hit the pā land. He could not tell if her stomach was bigger yet.

‘Naughty boy,’ she said. ‘He told me he was with Rangi.’

‘Went up the river,’ he said. ‘Found his cat,’ he was still out of breath after the long walk.

‘Thank you,’ she said. ‘He’s been crying for her every night.’

‘He was pretty happy,’ he said. ‘I was up there looking at that truck. There was police tape and everything. They’ll try and pin it on one of us, for sure. Wilful damage.’

‘What truck?’ she said. ‘We been over at the coast at Tama’s aunties memorial. We just got back tonight.’

‘A truck was vandalised.’ Isaiah said.

‘Tama had a dream about some truck being smashed up,’ Lizzie said. She laughed quietly over the sleeping boy. ‘Said it was the taniwha done it.’

It was only after she closed the door that he remembered the key in his pocket.

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‘I say we go direct to this landowner.’ Bryce was in full flight. ‘I say we take him the proposal we’re putting to the council, and ask for his support.’

‘He’ll never do it,’ Isaiah said. ‘He won’t stand openly against the frackers. He’s already accepted their money.’

The meeting was not going well. Alexia had not come, Te Kahurangi was kicking Isaiah intermittently under the table like a sullen child, and Sam was in some inexplicable rage. Bryce was all for personal confrontation, as though by standing on his soapbox and preaching to Taylor he could somehow make him change his mind.

‘I don’t know,’ Sam said. ‘Polly says he’s vegetarian, right? And apparently he loves his dogs. What if they drank some frack run-off or something and started to get sick?’ Her

eyes were wide and innocent. It was an expression Isaiah did not trust. But he didn't think she would harm animals, not even for political gain.

'Let's just ask him,' Bryce said. He stood, pushing his chair back. 'Who's with me?' Rangi stood, then Sam, and Te Kahurangi. Isaiah raised his hand in capitulation. Polly made a clucking noise.

'Might as well try it,' she said. She thrust the document at them: a slim manila folder of research Isaiah had painstakingly compiled, with Alexia's legalese application at the front.

On the way to Taylor's place Tama took Rangi's hand, and Maitai followed. When Rangi agreed to carry Tama on his shoulders he passed Maitai the cat, which occupied its customary position around Tama's neck like some hideous scarf. Its eyes were oddly set and its back was a misshapen hump. Isaiah found it a difficult animal to love. Maitai stormed off as the cat scratched him and yowled. At the fence line they climbed a wooden stile, Rangi with Tama held high and squealing, Sam efficiently as if it was a test, Bryce with his long-legged grace. Te Kahurangi had backed out at the last minute, mysteriously citing 'stuff to do.' Tama was speaking to Rangi. 'Taniwha,' he said. 'Red packet.'

Rangi put Tama down gently. 'Time to go back now, Tama,' he said. 'You can't come with us. We got business with Taylor.'

'He's a bastard,' Tama said, in an offhand way. 'Mama said.' He ran a few steps and stopped and looked back at them. 'Gonna blow up,' he said. 'Told me so. Everything. Like a bomb.'

'What's going to blow up?' Isaiah asked. But he had scooted away. Rangi was gesturing for them to follow.

'Don't pay any attention,' he said. 'That boy gets loose on it, that's all.' He shook his head, as if trying to dislodge something from his great hairy ear, and threw his arms up. 'Messages from beyond the grave!' he said. 'He thinks he knows things.' They were near the river and the ground was irregular. 'He was telling me about his dreams.'

'Is this the quickest way to Taylor's house?' Sam asked. They were circumnavigating a great swathe of farmland and approaching Taylor's pre-fab from the left.

'Oh,' said Rangi, with great politeness. 'You're welcome to go straight there. His dogs'll rip your throat out, is all.'

'Oh, the dogs!' Sam said. 'They like me.' She smiled at Isaiah. He felt for a second that he could take her hand, covertly. They used to be good at things like that: making secret gestures in a group that no one else could see.

'No meat in your pockets now,' Rangi muttered, just loud enough for Sam to hear.

'What did you say?' asked Sam. She turned to Isaiah, her face betrayed.

'No meat,' Rangi said, and laughed crudely. 'For Samantha.' He winked. Isaiah shrugged and Sam looked away. Bryce opened a cattle gate, slipping the hook out of its loop. As always he maintained an air of aloofness, but when Sam passed he smiled at her disarmingly.

'Why didn't they arrest you?' he asked. 'At the demo. You spat in a cop's face. You assaulted them. Why weren't you taken in?'

'Why didn't they arrest you, Bryce?' Sam said. 'I saw you fight.' Isaiah watched the back of her neck redden. He placed a hand on it, then quickly took it away. Rangi was listening.

'It's clear that they have someone here, on the inside,' Bryce said, tapping his aquiline nose. 'If you know what I mean.' His eyes brushed over Isaiah's face.

'I would have put my money on you,' Isaiah said.

Rangi was in their midst.

'Come now, kiddies, don't fight,' he said. 'There's still work to be done.' He gave Bryce a push and re-looped the gate, and, when she didn't move, patted Sam's bottom. She gasped.

'How dare you!' she said. 'Do I have to basically reiterate Feminism 101 for your particular benefit? That was unwanted touching Rangi! I'd appreciate it if you...'

'Never went to uni,' Rangi said. 'They told me it was just for stuck up white girls with trust funds.' He turned, laughing, to Isaiah, who refused to smile.

Taylor's house was a matchbox in the wide dark. He could see five kennels, six, a chicken coop, a terrain buggy, a ute: the usual collection of farm equipment. Isaiah expected the dogs to come streaming out but they made it to the front porch unassailed. A woman opened the door.

'Taylor!' she yelled back into the house. She was wiry and tall. 'Some friends are here to see you.' She looked them up and down. 'From the pā.' She ushered them in and left them in the lounge. After the wooden cottages and marae, the house was tacky and bland. A wall to wall screen stretched over one wall and a pile of climbing gear lay in the centre of the room. Taylor came in. With him came not one but five of his dogs, the one that Sam had charmed at the front. The whole room smelled strongly of canine.

Taylor rushed to Rangi as a man would to an old friend. Sam raised her eyebrows. They sat on couches horribly thick with dog hair. Taylor showed no sign of recognising Isaiah and Sam, but instead clasped his hands together and extended his sincere thanks for

their visit, as if he had requested it. Isaiah sat next to a packed bookshelf that lined the wall opposite the screen. He could read some of the spines. Camus. De Beauvoir. Spinoza. Taylor left the room to make tea, but his dogs stayed behind. Petunia came and sat at Isaiah's feet and growled. He offered her one hand, open, palm up, and she snapped at it. Sartre, Dostoevsky. His hands were sweaty on the manila folder.

'Is that his wife?' Sam asked. 'And is that his climbing gear? Looks like pretty serious gear to me.'

'Nah,' Rangi said. 'She's probably just a farm hand. I think he used to climb, you know, professionally.'

'How come you two are on such good terms?' Sam asked.

Bryce had settled himself comfortably in front of the TV. The dog in front of Isaiah whined and growled and very suddenly thrust its nose between his legs. He tried to push it away.

'He's local,' Rangi said. 'You gotta stick together. Put it this way, if someone gets in an accident out here, you have to call on each other,' he said. 'Like, if I mistook that guy over there for a steer, and my chainsaw slipped.' But Bryce was not listening. Like Isaiah, he was reading the book spines. Petunia snapped and whined. Taylor entered, carrying a silver tea tray with china upon it. He set it down on the coffee table and poured carefully.

'Come away now, Petunia,' he said. The dog went reluctantly. Rangi sniffed at his tea: it was green.

'You trying to poison me, neighbour?' he asked. Despite what he'd said to Sam, his voice was not friendly.

Francesca began to bark. 'Peppermint,' Taylor said. 'Good for the digestion.' The dogs set up a low collective howl.

'Shut up!' the woman yelled from the other room. Taylor patted at his dogs.

'Come, Petunia. Daphne. Come on, Rose,' he said. Isaiah took his tea and laid the manila folder on the table.

'We've come to get your support,' he said. 'We're going to the council to request they make the fracking land into a reserve.' Taylor looked at him incredulously.

'But that's my land,' he said. 'If it turns into a reserve, who's going to compensate me? And besides, I've already signed all the documents. Sugar?' he asked Rangi. Rangi stirred his tea with great deliberation.

'Whether it's your land or not is arguable,' Bryce said. He stood up, and in the low-roofed room assumed all the dignity of a man on a stage. 'Whether it's salvageable is not.'

He looked at Taylor, and then at his bookshelf. 'There's still a chance we can save it. I see you're a well-read man. It appears you've given some thought to philosophy, to ethics.' He stood and placed the manila folder in Taylor's hands. 'Here we have a possible solution,' he said.

'What are you going to be able to do with your land anyway, when the river's polluted and all your grazing cows get sick?' Sam asked.

'Those aren't my books,' Taylor said, sadly. 'They were my wife's. My sheila's.' He said the word awkwardly with his Dutch accent. 'When she up and left me I thought she was pulling my leg. I was,' he paused, a little tragically, 'arse over tit in love with her.' He crossed the room and stroked a book's spine: *Anna Karenina*. 'Now I'm alone,' he said, with no apparent irony. Francesca bit Isaiah's hand.

When she had been beaten off and Isaiah had recovered his composure he tried again. 'Just give it a read,' he said. 'If we had your support it would make a difference.'

'Nothing will make a difference now,' Taylor said. It was unclear if he was discussing the fracking or his wife.

'Man's life cannot be ruled by the ladies alone.' Rangi had recovered.

'Look,' said Isaiah, his hand throbbing. 'That's your gear, right?' He pointed to the rock climbing equipment on the floor. 'I know you must love the land. You must have noticed it all, the river turning brown already, all the dead birds.'

'My father used to take me on climbing trips,' Taylor said. He wouldn't meet Isaiah's eyes. 'Moved out here from the homeland before I was born. Taught me tramping, survival skills, that sort of thing. He was a bit of a dag, I'd say. But his heart was as good as gold.' He eyed the stack of rope and carabiners. Suddenly he turned to Sam and looked her up and down. 'Your American accent got any better?' he asked. 'Did you ever find Toby?' She didn't answer.

'If your father's Dutch then why don't you have a Dutch name?' Isaiah asked. It was not a challenge; it had just occurred to him.

'Telier, it was, when my father came here,' Taylor said. The pronunciation was guttural, difficult for an English speaker. 'He changed it. Meant 'marketplace official,' from the old Dutch.'

'Nothing's changed,' Rangi muttered. 'Capitalism's in his blood.' Taylor ignored him.

'Yeah, I like to go up into the hills a lot and climb,' he went on, as if it followed from what he was saying. There was a something disquietingly mistimed about his speech; his



eyes leapt away to the edges of rooms, and as he spoke he cut the ends of others' sentences. 'My hills.' His eyes flicked up at Rangi, then down again.

Isaiah's own father had died in this particular bush, when he was three years old. He had, like Taylor's father, known bush lore. But along with the usual apparatus of flares and safety blankets he'd had his older, inherited knowledge, the skills that he'd wished to test. He'd gone in, Isaiah's mother said, without food or water, up behind the pā. It was spring and he wanted to try and 'live Māori', she said, to live off the land for two weeks, eating ferns and grubs, sourcing his own kai, to see if he could do it. It was the bush he'd played in as a child. It didn't occur to people that he might not come out.

Some thought he had fallen into a cave or a ravine far up the mountain. Others said it must have been a flash flood. Others thought he might have tried to climb a rocky abutment and simply fallen down. Now Taylor turned and spoke directly to Isaiah as though he was the only one in the room.

'Taught me to fish and hunt, my father,' he said. 'Taught me to climb.' Now everyone looked at Isaiah. Isaiah tried to set everything aside, and put humour into his voice.

'Telier, eh?' he asked, a little desperately. 'So I'm not the only one with the difficult name.'

'I know your name,' Taylor said. 'And I know what it means.' It seemed some kind of declaration, of what Isaiah did not know.

'Shoulda known better than to think you'd help.' Rangi spoke slowly.

Isaiah had pushed himself to learn all he could about survival. From a young age he had elected to go on every outdoor activity, every camp or course, anything that could develop his skills. He had learned to climb: to abseil and belay, to anchor and knot, to crimp his hands onto holds almost too small to see.

'Guess you think you're going to come in here and save this place,' Taylor said, softly now. He chucked Petunia under the chin, stroked Daphne's head. 'Guess you think you're going to ride in here on your white horse and save the pā. Chip off the old block, eh?' he said. 'Isn't that the Kiwi saying?' The dog smell in the room seemed to crest and rise to a sickening level.

'Useless.' Rangi sprang suddenly to life. He put his half-drunk tea on the table. 'Not drinking your weasel piss,' he said. 'Call that tea?' He grabbed Isaiah's arm and steered him out the door. 'Don't worry about this dumbshit Pākehā sell-out,' he said. 'Thinks with his bank book and ruled by the ladies. Be seeing ya, neighbour.' The dogs renewed their barking

and the woman called out again from next door. 'Can't even control his own dogs,' Rangi said.

As they left, Bryce gestured to the folder. 'You keep that,' he said tenderly. 'For when you're ready. All the environmental data we've collected is at the back.' As they filed out Isaiah had a glimpse of Taylor's watery eyes, one hand on the folder, the other resting on Francesca's bony head.

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'First they dirty my air. Then they set my water on fire. Now they take my key. Who would take my key?' Polly said.

'Patupaiarehe. That's who took your key.' Rangi ducked his head as if he expected a smack.

'It was you who took it,' she said. Rangi shifted in his chair, a big, weighty man in camouflage gear, raising his hands in surrender.

'Aunty, no!'

'You're a good for nothing brute,' Polly went on, 'taking advantage of an old lady like that.' Rangi stood.

'Aunty,' he said, with great vehemence. 'It wasn't me. I might be a criminal, but I don't bloody lie.'

'Well, not often, anyway,' Matiu said. 'And then, only by omission.'

'But where did Tama find it?' Polly turned her cold eyes on Isaiah.

'I wasn't with him.' Isaiah said. She turned her gaze to the key on the table.

'Well,' she said. 'Maybe it was the patupaiarehe.' She looked at Alexia, Sam and Melissa, who were gathered for the meeting. 'The fairies,' she explained. 'The bush people.'

Matiu looked embarrassed. 'There haven't been any over this way for a long time, Aunty,' he said. He made as if to roll his eyes at the others, but Polly saw and took offence.

'They're real,' she said. 'And they're mischief makers. Your great grandfather saw one, over Tūhoe way, in te Urewera. That's where they used to live. Not round here. It was a long time ago.' She looked at the Pākehā around the table. 'They have orange hair, or white, and pale skin like you. But they're not human. Atua. The Tūhoe say they're little people, but I heard in other tales they're as big as you and me.'

'What does the key open?' Sam asked.

Polly stared at Sam. She seemed to be looking at something far back in time, something far beyond Sam's understanding.

'The key unlocks the gate to the upper paddock,' she said. 'The one near where they found that truck.'

Melissa gasped loudly. Sam picked up the key.

'If there were any fingerprints, they'd be wiped off by now,' Sam said.

'Who's taking fingerprints?' Rangi asked.

Polly said there was only one key and that it was kept in her secret box.

'The earth mother is angry,' Melissa said. Her eyes filled with tears. 'What are they called?' she whispered. 'Patu—'

'Patupaiarehe,' Polly said. Te Kahurangi came in and sat to her right. She looked at the key.

'What's that?' she asked. Isaiah looked closely at her face, but her wide set eyes were blank and pure. He had seen her wear that same look, though, as she hit a policeman full in the face.

'It's just a key for somewhere you're not meant to go. And someone took it, that's all I know, patupaiarehe or not.' Polly gathered her skirts and swept out of the room. Melissa's tears dropped onto the table.

'What was that all about?' Te Kahurangi said. Melissa sniffed.

'The earth,' she said. 'The earth is...'

'Oh for God's sake,' Sam said. 'No offence.' She laid the key firmly on the table and looked at Rangi and Matiu. 'I'm not discounting your lore and everything but...'

'Everyone knows our stories are true,' Matiu said, slowly, 'but some think they're *true* true, while others think they're true only in the metaphorical sense.'

'Like your bible,' Rangi said, helpfully.

'Nah,' said Te Kahurangi. 'Their bible's full of shit!' She doubled over in laughter.

'But your great-great koro saw one. Really saw one.' Rangi looked at Matiu as if daring him to disagree.

Te Kahurangi was looking at each of their faces in turn. 'So the key went missing?' she asked. 'And Auntie Polly thinks it was the fairies?' she laughed. 'For real? She losing it?' Matiu tried to shush her but she kept on laughing. 'Little fairy people with green eyes and red hair!' she said. 'Creeping round at night and magicking keys away, when they coulda just jumped the fence!'

'How did you know what the key opens?' Isaiah asked her. She turned her wide, innocent gaze on him.

'I've seen it before. I've stayed with Aunty a lot.'

'This is her only defence,' Melissa said. 'After the eels...' She was crying full force.

'Well, they do say the patupaiarehe protect the tuna,' Rangi said.

'Look,' Sam said. 'Look.' Isaiah felt her annoyance. He knew he should help her steer the meeting in the right direction, but he was watching Alexia. She sat oddly still. Her face was in shadow. It made her full lips darker and her eyebrows stand out. He couldn't read her at all. 'We need to talk about some things on the agenda,' Sam said.

'The patupaiarehe protect the tuna?' Alexia said to Rangi. Isaiah felt a ridiculous jealousy.

'They take little girls like you,' Rangi said, lewdly. 'The take them deep into the bush and...'

'Shut up,' Matiu said quickly. 'Well, they are meant to abduct people. But they bring them back, afterwards, of course.'

'After what?' Alexia said faintly.

Melissa pulled a tissue from her pocket. Everyone was ignoring her, but she sobbed anyway. She spoke intensely to the table top.

'It's all starting, like I knew it would. The taniwha. The spirits. All the old things are going to come back to fight.'

'What kinda whack shit has she been smoking?' Te Kahurangi said. 'I want some a that.'

'Do the patupaiarehe play music?' Alexia said. Rangi looked at her very seriously. 'Flutes,' he said. 'They play their flutes at night, in the bush.'

Sam banged the table with great force. She hit a marker that she'd laid slightly off the table's edge, and it shot across the table lengthways, into her other hand. She caught the missile with great dexterity and flipped it so it balanced on its end on the wood. Then she laid it down, next to the key, gently and with great precision. Everyone in the room looked at her. It was a move Isaiah had seen her perform before, but only at times when campaigns were well and truly in need of direction. They had talked about personal leadership and charisma, about authoritarianism and collective decision making, about the dynamics between those empowered to speak and the silenced. Earlier in their relationship, they'd talked until they were blue in the face. But despite all her principles, Sam was not above seizing power when things were out of control.

'We need to make some choices and some plans,' she said.

As they left the meeting house Isaiah watched Alexia turn towards her campsite. He felt such a pull to go after her that he placed his hand upon the porch rail and held himself still. Rangi moved quickly after her.

'You stay out of the bush at night,' he heard him say. 'All this funny stuff been going on. It's not good for a girl to go out alone.'

Isaiah heard her protest.

'Yeah, but. If you been hearing flutes... I'm just saying,' Rangi said. They faded into the dark.

\*

They were in the kitchen, peeling spuds. Alexia was not romantic about communal living. She looked at Rangi, Matiu and Polly, all bent over their various tasks, working efficiently, like a well-oiled machine. So they all got along. So what? Sam, Melissa and Kate viewed the locals with a vampirish admiration. Alexia had heard Sam say how much she liked Māori culture: the collective emphasis, the manaakitanga, the wider family structures... it was something she could wax on about for a long while. Alexia dropped a spud in the bucket, started on another. She'd noticed the kind of people who talked like this were generally those who had no familial responsibility, who probably saw their grandparents once a year on Christmas, whose grandparents, in fact, would probably be cared for by others. Whose grandparents would be cared for by others. She dug the end of the peeler deep into the potato's black eye.

'You don't have to murder it, sis,' Matiu said.

'Cup o tea.' Rangi came into the room gasping. 'Cup, o, tea.' He sat down with a thump, expecting to be served. He was more dishevelled than usual and his nostrils were wide.

'Who do you think we are, your slaves?' Alexia said. She'd never seen him shaken like this.

'It's your people that turned mine into slaves,' Rangi said. 'Not the other way around.' But his heart wasn't in it. Matiu filled a cup from the ever boiling zip and brought it to him.

'Sup, cuz?' he said.

'Ahh, nothing.' Rangi said. 'Got to talk to Polly, is all. It's not right, cuz. It's not right.'

'What's going on?' Alexia said. But it was coming out anyway.

'Call a tohunga, maybe,' Rangi said. 'The lights, round the urupā, they don't look normal.' Matiu put a hand on his shoulder.

'You been seeing things?' he asked, carefully.

Rangi slammed down the cup of tea.

'What I been seeing aint nothing on what some others been seeing,' he said. 'Just fairy lights. Just a whole lotta nothing.'

'Tama's been having those dreams,' Matiu said. 'It's always his nanny that comes. Was it round her grave?' He sat down at the table.

'Whatever the hell it is it's not meant to be there,' Rangi said. 'I'm down with the ancestors, bro, but this puts the shits up me. Dancing lights ...' He stopped, looked at Alexia. 'Bet you think we's all crazy,' he said.

'Not at all,' she said. 'Not even a bit.'

'Well, then, how's this?' Rangi said. 'That Tama's granny never liked me when she was alive, and she don't like me any more now she's gone. Said we doing nothing about all this fracking. Said we all gave up after the protest.' Alexia looked at him and saw tears in his eyes. Surprising herself, she sat and embraced him awkwardly from the side, her arms only fitting round half his width.

'It's Ok, Rangi,' she said. She hugged him. 'I see lights too, you know.' He stared at her.

'What kind of lights?' Now it was her turn to be embarrassed.

'I see them when I hear music,' she said. 'Sparks, flashes, dancing flares. There's a medical term for it. Synaesthesia.'

'Oh, we got a term for that in the reo too,' Rangi said. 'We call that being mental. Ha ha ha. Nah, jokes.' But she could feel him shaking. 'Don't yous tell anyone,' he said to them. 'Got to talk to Polly. Those old people, they got to stay in the ground.'

\*

'Come here, girl,' Rangi said. She looked at him closely. They were still a way off from the safety of her campsite. He was walking her home. Slowly she moved after him into the tight clasp of bush, the path narrowing to a faint track. Rangi got a thing from his pocket and did something mysterious in the dim light. A small screen lit up, and she understood.

‘Been saving this up, for when we really needed it,’ Rangi said. He sounded strangely earnest. They watched the figures on the small screen. It was the phone she’d seen him holding above the crowd at the protest, the only phone that hadn’t been confiscated. ‘Didn’t want to show it at a meeting,’ he said. ‘Not after Bryce, and all that. Don’t know how I feel about the rest a them.’

‘Thanks’ she said. ‘Thanks, Rangi.’

On the screen she saw many heads shot from behind. The picture tilted and righted itself as Rangi moved to a higher vantage point. The people were marching peacefully, banners upheld, the old, weird chanting song coming faintly, crackled and warped, to her ears. She looked at the screen around the faint lights. Their pattern was the same as that she’d seen on the day of the protest, and they set up in her a small panic. The courthouse stood directly ahead. Alexia judged the police were already closing in behind. The camera weaved and dipped, then the view was hoisted higher.

Now she could see clearly what she hadn’t been able to on the ground: the armed front facing the police. Suddenly the police line moved. Alexia saw Sam pushed backwards, recognisable even in her black mask. The phone jerked. When it came back to centre it focussed on three cops, four, raising their batons. The protestors were falling back without fighting. The sound came intermittently, outraged cries and the singing still going on. Then came the cry, *Ake, ake, ake*. The phone cut out. Rangi pressed a button.

Another shot of the police line, from above. When had he scaled a building? But he had. The police moved forwards and back, forwards and back. The crowd behind the militant front was thinning. Alexia saw a half a dozen strikes fall. She knew the protestors were armed but from this vantage point it looked one-sided. The footage cut out again. Rangi pressed the button one last time.

There were the protestors at ground level, recognisable and distinct: Aidan fighting, Hannah crouching down, Melissa lying on the ground, already cuffed. Alexia placed herself slightly to the right and thankfully, off screen. The camera turned slightly, found Te Kahurangi. Her face was bloodied from when Alexia had seen her hit. She was being set upon by three police. Her head snapped right, left, and then she fell. The camera lingered there, the screen shaken, then held still. They kicked her, three large men in protective gear and boots. Te Kahurangi was splayed on the ground. She raised her arms to her head. Still the officers kicked. It went on. It went on. Just when Alexia was going to ask him to turn it off, the screen went blank.

‘Oh,’ Alexia said. ‘Oh, Rangi.’

‘What do you think we can do with it?’ he asked. How hard it must have been for him to sit on this, patient, quiet, waiting. What foresight.

‘What can’t we do?’ she said.

\*

The fences had been cut again, Polly said. As she was old, Isaiah and Alexia must go up the river and have a look. Isaiah saw no point in arguing. As they left Sam gave him an unfriendly look. She had to prepare an educational pamphlet, and so must stay behind. He’d make it up to her later. But when he arrived back she would have already retired to the room where she slept, chastely, with Melissa and Kate.

Isaiah was following Alexia into the bush when they heard Ana call. She caught up and insisted she be brought along. He tried to be firm but she was impervious to his protests. Alexia laughed as the girl took her hand. It was where he wanted his hand to be.

‘What’s this important business you’ve got up the river, then?’ Alexia asked.

‘My brother.’ Ana said. Safely included, she let go Alexia’s hand and skipped ahead. The path inclined steeply but she was not puffed. All the children here were very fit. ‘He said something, Tama. I just wanted to find out.’

‘What did he say?’ Alexia said.

“‘Knock three times, knock on wood.’” Just an old rhyme my nanny used to say.’

‘Are you having dreams too?’ Alexia said.

‘Nah, not me.’ Ana turned to face them. Framed in the bush in her white T-shirt and cut-off jeans and bare feet she seemed unworldly, a sprite of some kind. ‘But Tama’s got the vision. Our nanny keeps coming into his dreams,’ Ana said. ‘Her and the taniwha.’ She laughed – seemingly this stretched even her own view of things. ‘But Nanny tells him when stuff’s going to happen.’

‘What does she say will happen now?’ Isaiah asked.

‘He don’t know this time what she means. He said she’s all like, “London bridge.”’

‘What?’ Alexia pulled at her shoulder.

‘You know that rhyme? “London bridge is falling down?”’ she asked. ‘Nanny keeps singing it, Tama says. And last night she said: “Knock three times, knock on wood, knock three times and make it good.” She used to say that when she was alive.’

‘What does it mean?’ Alexia asked. Isaiah saw the hair on her arms was standing upright. He felt oddly voyeuristic for noticing. They were high up now, Taylor’s bald land



curving away from them, the wells rearing up ahead. It always shocked him: the garishness of the yellow clay, the crane-like towers.

‘She used to say it when we came out of the urupā. Takes the tapu off, something like that.’

‘I see.’ Isaiah said. His eyes had gone ahead to where a new well had gone up. He reached for his camera, fitted the lens, took three shots in quick succession. The burn-off of the gas had not yet started. Construction was still in the interim stage. They would pump the chemicals down soon, but it was still stoppable. The fracturing had not yet begun. He counted three, four more new wells off in the distance, like absurdly magnified telephone poles, grown oversized. There were about forty on the site now, and the count was growing.

‘Here it is.’ Alexia was pointing. Ana and Isaiah came abreast of where she stood and there indeed it was: the damaged fence line, its wires ripped and stretched like old elastic bands. It had only separated completely in two places. The rest was warped, as if something had leaned up against the fence, exuding great force. He had the camera focussed before he was aware of it, his eye pressed to the lens.

‘Away from there,’ a voice called out. ‘Get away.’

It was the Māori guard who’d apprehended him and Sam the night of their recce. He was approaching quickly, carrying tools. Involuntarily Isaiah stepped back: he seemed so urgent, the hiss in his voice all too personal. He put his hand on Ana’s shoulder to lead her away.

‘You should be ashamed!’ Alexia called. ‘Coming here and turning your back on your own people!’ Confused, Isaiah turned to face her, seeing the spittle fly out of her mouth, her face twisted. He felt Ana go still under his hand. There was wildness in Alexia’s voice. The security guard came on fast, brandishing his spanner like a sword. ‘You traitor!’ Alexia yelled. Her voice rose to a scream. The man still advanced. Briefly he spoke into the radio at his pocket: there would be reinforcements arriving soon. Alexia yelled and yelled: a violent stream of abuse, mainly swear words. She picked up a large rock and threw it. Isaiah let go of Ana and stepped forwards to stop her, but it seemed Alexia couldn’t hear him. The guard put out a hand and fended it away. Isaiah remembered the policeman at the demo, Polly’s flying staff. Alexia picked up another rock and another. The man was a bigot, conservative, closed-minded, and oppressor: and she would stop him. A rock lightly struck the man’s head. He began to run towards the fence. Alexia yelled and lunged at him. Isaiah tried to grab her but Ana was there ahead of him, placing herself between Alexia and the

fence and the man, and Alexia tripped and half-fell to her knees, shoving Ana forwards. Ana jolted and lay on the ground.

Isaiah realised at the same time as the guard. Together they ran a few steps, a long few steps, on either side of the fence. But the guard was there first, pushing at Ana through the fence with his rubber boot. She lay on top of a wire on the ground. She jolted again, a little jolt. Alexia was still on her knees.

Isaiah swerved to the side and picked up a long branch. He knelt and pushed Ana off the wire with it, rolling her onto her side. Spit ran out of her mouth onto the ground.

‘She alright?’ the guard asked.

Alexia cupped the girl’s face in her hands. Isaiah almost pushed her off. But Ana opened her eyes, and in one swift movement, stood up. Isaiah was so relieved he laughed. He looked into Ana’s eyes, which were a little too wide.

‘Enough voltage to stun a cow,’ the security guard said. He looked shaken. He eyed Alexia. Isaiah patted Ana as though she was not quite solid.

‘Nanny,’ she said, looking at the branch in Isaiah’s hands. ‘So that was what she meant.’ Incredibly now she laughed, but Isaiah saw the small tears forming at the corners of her eyes.

‘You hurt?’ he asked but she shook her head stubbornly, no.

‘Been shocked before,’ she said. ‘But that was a big one.’ The guard was bent close to the wires.

‘Keep the kids away from here,’ he said, roughly. ‘There’s weird things happening around the site all the time.’ He handled a wire in his gloved hand. ‘Look at this! No wire cutter did this.’ He didn’t seem to be accusing but rather asking a question of some kind. He looked at Isaiah furiously. Isaiah threw the stick away.

‘Knock three times, knock on wood,’ Ana said, and laughed again. She began to leave. ‘Them’s taniwha tracks, Uncle!’ she yelled. She was not speaking not to Isaiah but to the guard over the fence. ‘Them wires got bit by taniwha teeth! And the patupaiarehe are coming again in the night, did you hear?’ Isaiah hurried after her. She might need to be checked out by a doctor. The security guard looked him in the eye.

‘Don’t know much about you cuz,’ he said. ‘But that’s some crazy bitch you got there.’ He inclined his head at Alexia, who stared. Isaiah did not feel like disagreeing.

On the way back he piggybacked Ana, who was now limp and quiet. Alexia came meekly with them. They made their way down not speaking, avoiding each other’s eyes. Her breath came in little gasps, as though it was she who had been shocked.

Ana's mother Lizzie was unfazed by the news. It had happened to everyone often enough, walking around the pā in the dark. Ana went off sulkily after a brief moment of fame. Finally Isaiah got Alexia on her own.

'Inexcusable,' he said. 'I can't believe you'd speak that way in front of the girl. What were you –' but he stopped, aware that Alexia was looking oddly absent, her shoulders slumped, her breathing charged and quick.

'I don't know what happened,' she said. 'I didn't mean –' she looked at him, and in the space between her hair falling over her eye and her hand brushing it back he felt an uncomfortable heat rising in him. 'I just lose control sometimes,' she said. Her voice was very low. 'It was kinda like I woke up, and there was a rock in my hand.'

'You threw it, though,' Isaiah said. 'It's always your choice, whether you throw it or not.'

He watched her go wordlessly back to her camp, the soft curve of her hair falling, her long-legged walk, her awful grace.

\*

Isaiah heard the knock on the door before anyone else.

'Yes,' Alexia was saying to Sam. No, I understand that. But the wording of it has to be more moderate if we expect anyone to read it.'

'But this *is* the fallout of colonisation,' Melissa said. Kate wrung her hands and picked up the scarf she was knitting.

'I know,' said Alexia. 'It's just that no councillor is going to respond well to reading that.' Sam made an impatient noise. 'I'm going to take out the bit about the proletariat, too,' Alexia went on. 'I hope you don't mind.'

A dog ran past Isaiah and into the hall.

'No dogs in here!' Polly yelled.

It was Taylor and Francesca. Isaiah had had a bruise on his hand for days after their last encounter.

'Get your filthy dog,' Isaiah said, 'and get out.'

'God help me,' Polly said. 'I will raise a stick to that dog. I will.' But Francesca was being stroked by Te Kahurangi.

'I'll only stay a minute,' Taylor said. He came in, all lanky frame and long, thin arms, and draped himself over a chair.

'Did anyone say you could sit down?' Polly asked. She banged her cane on the floor. 'Matiu! Rangi! Kick this fullah out!' Te Kahurangi realised who Taylor was, and unhanding his dog.

'I'd get the hell out of here, if I were you,' she said.

'That's not very neighbourly,' Taylor said. His large eyes were filled with tears as if he might cry any moment. He was the sort of person who looked as though he had a drip at the end of his nose, even when he did not.

'Get out,' Isaiah said. Francesca's teeth were close to his thigh.

'You refused us help,' Matiuh said. 'You have no business here. Francesca made a pass at Isaiah. He was aware of Sam smirking from across the room.

'Call Francesca off!' he said.

'That's not Francesca,' Taylor said. 'That's Petunia. The rest of them: Daphne, Francesca, Petal, Rose... they're all sick.' He shook his head. 'They've gone bush. Think they might of kicked the bucket. I keep looking but I can't find them. It's crazy what they've done up there. It's like the end of days.' He looked bleakly into his cupped hands. 'We're all done for,' he went on, in his Dutch accent. 'We're all up the bohai shooting poukakakas, all up shit creek without a paddle.'

'Good God, man,' Rangi said. 'No one talks like that anymore.'

'I know,' Taylor said. He sobbed.

'Look, this is ridiculous,' Sam said to Polly. 'You can't just let this Pākehā farmer walk in here and say he's had a change of heart. What are you going to do, Taylor?' she asked. 'Pull the towers down? Blow the wells up yourself?' Her voice dropped nastily. 'Ride on in here on a white horse and save us all?' But Taylor could not be further embarrassed.

'...help,' he said. 'Just want to help. I'll do anything. I don't care about the law.' Sam turned back to Polly.

'Surely you're sick of crazy well-meaning Pākehā turning up hoping to solve everything, after Bryce?'

Polly gave her an even look. 'Oh, you'd be surprised how tolerant we are,' she said. 'But no, Taylor, it's too late. You held the title of our lands. I know they leaned on you but you could have fought it. And now you come here, hoping for forgiveness from us?'

'Shall I get the chainsaw?' Rangi asked.

Petunia growled. Now there was a flurry of movement and she was at Polly's right hand. But Polly also moved. Her staff blocked the dog's leap and its head cracked into the wooden cane. Polly did not strike it: it struck itself.

'Go home, Taylor,' Polly said. He got up to leave.

'You think I'm not ethical,' he said. 'But I couldn't put together the resources I'd need to fight it. I'm telling you, I'll help,' he said. Rangi held the door open with his beefy arm.

'Shall we have a cup of tea?' Polly said. They all turned their backs.

\*

The first well that could be seen directly from the pā had gone up. Until now they'd been shielded from the reality of it by the swathe of bush. Alexia could see it from the campsite where she crouched, stirring the coffee. She wasn't sleeping well. The fracking went on far into the night, shaking the ground. Her hand was scalding on the billy. She left it there a moment longer.

'Where's me jumper?' Aidan said. He danced a jig against the cold wind and sang a song in which a jumper was tragically lost. When they'd arrived the grass was still lush and green, but now all the colours were steely, as if the cool air had got into them and drained them of warmth. Last night Ana had judged her to be 'a winter'. She was only to wear strong colours from now on, Ana said, reds and deep blues and emerald greens, no more of these prissy pastel shirts. She had tried to teach gangly Alexia to walk in very high heels, painted her nails and declared that she would never find a boyfriend. Alexia handed Aidan his coffee. They looked at the thing piercing the sky like some oddly sentient machine.

There were two types of wells. Some were smooth flues of white concrete, and others were constructed, like this one, of interlaced steel. They would drill an experimental well, and if gas was released when they pumped frack fluid into the earth, they would solidify the structure. As she understood it there were attempts to channel whatever came out of the earth and up into the well, but as the fluid spread out horizontally, discovering fissures and in the rock, she did not see how they could expect to control anything it released.

'Look at it, Aidan said. 'It's blinkin mad. The machines have come to conquer us. Tripods and Daleks. Except that one's on fire.' At the tower's top was a plume of flame. It burned and stopped, so the let-off must be irregular. The tower was built on one of the many maunga between the pā and the big mountain. There were stories about the maunga. They were associated with various spirits, Te Kahurangi had told her. The fire against the sky

made Alexia wish for Isaiah's camera. She felt a flicker of what he must feel: a drive to share it, to have it visually understood.

'Exterminate,' Alexia said. 'Exterminate. What are we on, our fourteenth appeal? Or is it the fifteenth? What will they have left at the pā, if we lose?'

'There aint no recourse to justice for them,' Aidan said. 'You're right to ask that. What will they have when we all bugger off home? Poisoned water, a big file of rejection letters from the council, and a gorgeous new view.'

'Bugger off home?' Alexia said. But of course, there had been the fundraiser and the disastrous demo, and nothing had come of it. They'd written to the papers and the radio in vain. Now it was down to tedious correspondence between the council and the pā: *Your application could not be considered at the council meeting because it did not have the required number of signatories. As you are writing on behalf of a trust, all signatories must be present for your appeal to be considered. Your application was tabled this week due to other issues which took priority. Please accept our sincerest apologies. Your application has been declined.* It was left up to Alexia to field the letters. 'Are you bugging off, Aidan?'

'You mean, have I given up?' Aidan took a sip of coffee and glared at the well. 'I haven't bloody given up. I'm Irish, after all.' He spat out a mouthful of coffee onto the ground. 'Jesus, Alexia,' he said. 'I don't know how you can drink that shite.'

'So what are you meant to do in a campaign like this, when it all fails?' Aidan looked at her intensely.

'Come with me,' he said.

The stash was a few metres from where they were camped. There were some of the 'weapons' the frontguard had taken into battle: the padding from underneath their clothes, the sharpened stakes. There were a lot of flares. They were held in a plastic container, under the cover of leaves, in a deep hole. Aidan brushed his boot over the ground to the left and right of the container, and she saw more lids, and more. He opened another.

'Skyrockets!' she said, loudly. 'I haven't seen those since I was a kid!'

'Would you shut up!' Aidan said. 'Jesus, Mary and Joseph. If you're an undercover agent you're not a very convincing one. And not a very clever activist, neither.'

'Did you think I was an undercover agent?'

'Well,' Aidan said. He looked up into the swaying canopy. 'Of course not. But Sam now, she were certain.' He lowered his voice. 'You didn't bring your phone?' She felt in her pocket and found to her dismay that she had. They had agreed in the wake of the demo to

behave as though they were under surveillance, but she found it hard to take seriously. She handed her phone to Aidan and he slid the battery off the back. The police were able to access people's phones remotely, using the microphone as a recording device, even if the phone was not turned on. Alexia would not have believed this, but then, before the demo, she would not have believed that such violence could happen in New Zealand and then sink without a trace.

'The rockets?' she asked.

'It's a one-step process to turn them into explosives,' Aidan said. 'Nothing major, just something that would cause damage to their equipment.' Hannah must know about the stash. Did Isaiah? Did Polly? Te Kahurangi, surely, would have jumped into the military nature of all this with delight.

'I hope you're not going to hurt anyone,' she said.

'Little miss goody two shoes, are we now? I didn't think you were so peaceful when you were bashing that policeman in the head.'

'...I was provoked,' she said.

'Well,' said Aidan, spreading his arms wide. 'So was I.' He scraped his heel over some more patches, and more and more lids emerged. Ammonium nitrate, gelignite, cans of petrol.

'What's that for?' she pointed to the fertiliser.

'That's a bit more complicated than the rockets. That's more of a two-step process, to turn it into something useful. And this,' he said, pointing to the gelignite. 'We're lucky enough to have a healthy mining industry just up the road. It's not hard to get hold of this if you know someone who works at a quarry.'

Alexia felt ill. She supposed this answer had always been here, waiting for her. And he was right: all their attempts at peaceful negotiation had failed. All their lobbying and letters, all of her measured words. Aidan was in his element, rifling through the boxes, explaining things like a school boy with a train set. She found it hard to connect his excitement with the things that were happening in her head: screams, a siren, some dark-skinned people running, maybe Syrians, maybe Jews, a camera wobbling as the camera man staggered back, bodies covered badly with sheets, women screaming in rubble and dust.

'You're not even fucking listening!' Aidan said. 'Look, we'll use these things responsibly, of course. It wouldn't be without a precedent, if that makes your legal brain feel any better. Did you not know about the militants in the eighties? It wasn't so unfashionable

to stand up and fight back then. You remember the tour?' She was sitting low to the ground, her head close to her knees.

'Of course,' she said.

'The leaders of that movement were trained,' Aidan said, 'in guerrilla warfare. All those people, they're academics now, politicians, whatever. You probably got taught by some a them. Haven't you seen the footage?' She had. 'Those front lines were briefed and organised. They weren't sitting ducks, like us.'

'But Aidan,' she said, despairingly. 'No one's attacking us.'

He looked very, very angry. The suddenness of the change scared her, as did the closeness of the copse, with all its open boxes like so many plastic coffins.

'I stand in solidarity with the indigenous people of this place,' he said, 'who have been robbed and oppressed, and who are now being poisoned. I thought you did too.' She felt as though the whole place was watching her, waiting for her response. She said nothing. At length he closed the boxes and pulled her from the clearing. 'No word of this to anyone, right?' he said. 'On pain of death.'

'What does Hannah think of it all?'

'She doesn't know,' Aidan said. 'She's more the earth mother type than a warrior.' He gave her back the battery from her phone.

'I don't even know where I stand on it myself.'

'Look, these people, they had their land took off them.' As always, when angry, his Irish accent was stronger. 'The white man came and they got sick. Then they closed them into a tiny piece of their own land. It's always the bloody English. But now, you see, it's worse. You used to be able to put a name to the people oppressing you. At least, when they were starving you, you knew who to be angry at. Now it's faceless corporations, market forces, capitalism. Who are you meant to fight? These people who had their rights pissed on have to suck it up again. Now they're coming in and literally blowing up their land, poisoning it underneath them, till they can't drink their water and their animals die and they can't even breathe. In this context,' he said, 'damaging a few bits and pieces of the coloniser's weaponry could be seen as self-defence, don't you think?'

She made a non-committal noise. They walked towards the main wharenuī. They passed the urupā.

'You see this marker here?' Aidan asked. There in the long grass was a large, rounded river stone. 'That marks the place.' In answer to her blank look he went on. 'The aukati's where the soldiers came, and pushed the people back to, in the 1800s. That's away there in



the bush. The people won't go there. But this, this is the place where they killed their chief. He was a well-loved chief, by all accounts. Their last.' She looked at the innocuous spot.

'It was only a couple a generations ago. Every local that walks past this spot, that's what they're thinking: that's the place they murdered him. I mean, there's blood all over this land, their blood, and the Crown's. But the chief was killed here after they surrendered. The Queen's soldiers shot him, in front of his kids. He was singled out. They live it every day,' he said. 'History's not separate, for them. And it's still going on, the injustice. It's just more insidious now: it's chemicals and pollution, not guns.' He looked at her. 'You can't tell me it doesn't make you want to fight.'

'I guess I'm just not a very violent person,' she said.

'I saw you at the protest,' Aidan said. 'Defending Polly. Not violent!' He began to laugh, and slowly she began to laugh as well. 'Not a violent person!' They laughed and laughed.

\*

'We're all going to have to be very careful.' Melissa said. 'We're all going to have to take precautions.'

'Don't worry,' said Rangi. 'I always wear one.' Matiu looked distinctly embarrassed.

'Cell phones, phone lines,' Sam said. 'They're definitely not safe anymore.'

Isaiah put the thing on the table. It was a small mess of wires and electrical tape. It didn't look professional in any way.

'I found it under the wheel guard of my car.'

They all looked at it for a moment, Alexia with disbelief, Kate eagerly. Polly touched it with her finger.

'It's a bug?' she asked.

Isaiah nodded. 'I don't know what it is they suspect us of, but it's something important.'

'We have to take practical measures,' Rangi said.

'It's a culture of surveillance,' Kate said. 'We have to assume we're being listened to, every phone call, every conversation.'

'But how can they listen in to every conversation?' Matiu asked. 'Isn't it illegal to bug you without a reason?'

'The evidence would be inadmissible in court,' Alexia said. 'But of course, laws can always be manipulated.'

'What could you have said in the car anyway to get you in trouble?' Te Kahurangi said.

'Let's not discuss it,' Melissa said. She spoke in a stage whisper. 'Any speculation about actions we may or may not initiate should be avoided from now on. We shouldn't talk directly about any planned act, or refer to anyone else thinking about doing something.'

'Now you're just being paranoid,' Matiu said.

'Not true,' said Rangi. 'They knew about the demo. They were ready for us. They knew we were coming armed. Someone here was working for them, or they had bugs. Or both.'

'Well, not using our phones shouldn't be hard,' Te Kahurangi said. 'Smashed up my one the day of the protest, didn't they.'

'Still, said Melissa. 'I would be careful in meetings.'

'How are they going to listen in on meetings?' Alexia said. Despite the bug sitting on the table she seemed unable to accept all of this. Isaiah thought she might just be going through the various stages of outrage.

'It's not a nice feeling, to know your conversations have been listened to,' he said gently. 'It can really flip you out.'

'But *how* do you think they're listening?' she said. She waved her arms around dramatically. 'You think there's a cop behind that wall with a cup pressed to his ear?'

'Ok,' said Sam. 'There was a group of animal activists up north who were infiltrated by an undercover cop. Afterwards, we did some research about the cops' equipment. It's pretty sophisticated stuff.'

'I don't think of the cops as being sophisticated,' Matiu said.

'Well, some of their gear is,' Sam said. 'They can listen in to conversations on your phone. They can track you and locate you, if you have your phone: that's GPS, that's pretty straightforward. And they can bug you.' She gestured to the thing on the table. 'They'll have people hacking our email lists, of course. We should assume those are not secure. Anything said over email should be regarded as public. And they'll have people tracking the websites we visit on the pā computers. If you have anything private to look up,' she said in a business-like way, 'it's best done from a cafe in town. They can also listen in to you, if you're just sitting in a room.'

'You mean, if they haven't even been into it?' Te Kahurangi said. Sam nodded.

'All they need to do is sit somewhere nearby. They have a thing that emits radio waves. They point it at the space they want to listen into, and it bounces signals back from the window panes. They don't need to have been in the room, or even on the property. They can do it remotely. They could be listening right now.' Everyone was quiet.

'Like, through the walls and everything?' said Te Kahurangi.

'Through the walls,' Sam said.

'Are you serious?' Te Kahurangi said. 'You people all so full of yourselves you think someone's bothering to spend all this money and time listening to you talk about nothing?'

'Kate's right, it is a culture of surveillance,' Melissa said.

'It's just all so Orwellian,' Matiu said.

'That's right, brother,' Bryce said.

'It's like we're living in the future,' Rangi said. 'Back when we got cell phones, I said it: the government will find some use for these, and it won't be a good one.'

Sam lifted one hand. She pulled a piece of paper towards her and started writing something in large letters. When she was done she held it up so they could all see.

*'If you need to talk about anything dodgy,' it said, 'Write it down, then burn it.'*

Te Kahurangi thought this was hilarious. 'You really expect us to do that? In twenty-four seconds, after you read this, this message will self-destruct!' She laughed, a little hysterically.

'You are way too young to know that phrase,' Matiu said.

'I have an interest in classic TV,' Te Kahurangi said. 'I have hidden depths that you wouldn't know about.'

But what is it that anyone's saying that could be so questionable?' Alexia said. 'I mean, we planned a protest, at which,' and here, she paused, seeming to organise the words in her head. Already they were censoring themselves. 'At which we were planning to defend ourselves. So? What kind of terrible thing could they hear that they could misconstrue?'

'Things can be taken out of context,' Isaiah said.

'So if I said I was going to walk into the council chambers with a machine gun and shoot the bastards that declined our application, then kidnap the prime minister, then go to England and set fire to the Queen...' Te Kahurangi said.

'Niece,' said Rangi, gently. 'It's best that you shut up.' Te Kahurangi was quiet.

'So now we cannot speak freely on our own land,' Polly said. She sighed. 'Well, it was only a matter of time.'

\*

'Matiu!' She saw his long, looped figure bent over the fence. He didn't move. 'Matiu!' She touched his back.

'Jesus!' he said. 'Some way to sneak up on a bro.' She pointed to the ear phones in his ears.

'What are you listening to?' He looked at her almost guilty.

'The very best of Mozart,' he said. 'I find it soothing.'

'Matiu!' she said. 'I had you picked for a Vivaldi man.' He grinned and looked back over the fence. Now she could see what he was doing: watching the men at the edge of the fracking site, close to the river. 'What's going on?'

'You don't have your phone on you?'

'Back at the campsite.'

'I've been watching for an hour,' he said. 'Those two up there. They're plainclothes. I'm sure of it.'

'Police?'

'They been going up and down the guard towers asking questions.'

'How do you know...?'

'It's obvious. Look at their car. Generic Honda Civic, beige, town plates. There's a huge aerial, see? That means they've got a radio. And there's concealed lights under the grill of their bumper. And the way they're dressed.' He snorted and offered her an ear bud. Piano sonata number eleven, Ronda alla Turca. She mourned the record collection she had left with Stephen as a kind of pay-off, and then felt guilty as she always did, for missing it more than him. 'Look,' said Matiu. 'See how fake-casual they are? No jeans, right, but those light colour pants that white dudes wear; what is that colour anyway?'

'Beige?' Alexia asked. 'Khaki? Cream?' Mozart was building to a crescendo and she was lost in it. It was mostly very subtle, Mozart: pastel hued notes bursting delicately, to the upper left of her vision.

'The sort of pants you make someone iron before you wear them. And shirts. And sunglasses, for Christ's sake. I mean, what else could they be but police?'

'Oil magnates visiting their site?'

'Those people stay away from the dirty business,' Matiu said.

'What are they looking for?'

'You didn't hear?' He took the ear bud out of her ear. 'Some more stuff on the frack site's been sabotaged. Thought everyone knew.' He put the buds into his ears, both of them. She tugged at him.

'Ok, Ok.' he said. 'First one was three weeks ago. Some tyres stabbed on a guard's car. We know that because our good friend Sammie was doing a patrol.' He frowned. 'So, if it was her, you wouldn't think she'd... '

'What else?'

'More wires cut round the fence line. That coulda been anyone. Then last Friday, shots were fired at a tower...'

'Why didn't we hear anything?' Matiu shrugged.

'Shots fired round here all the time. People hunt. Rabbits, deer, up the mountain, boar. Taylor over there probably has a gun. Most people do. But these shots, they hit the base of the tower closest to us: there, you can see it. Could have been any of us.' He looked at her, searchingly. 'The last thing was I heard some chinks got taken out of a tower base, higher up.'

'What do you mean?'

'Someone used explosives, something like that. Didn't make a shitarse bit of difference, of course. Tower's still standing. You can't blow up concrete, except with something big. And it's all just small fry to them, anyway.'

'So it's not you, then?' His face went wooden. He was looking at her but not really: she could see that. She felt suddenly, wildly guilty, she didn't know for what. Eventually he sighed, like the kaumātua he aspired to be one day.

'If you were me, and this was your land, what would you do?' He turned away and put the buds back into his ears.

## EIGHT

Suppose the man should fall asleep,  
Fall asleep, fall asleep,  
Suppose the man should fall asleep?  
My fair lady.

Sam offered Isaiah a sunflower seed. He didn't know what had shifted in her, but something had. Now, though they had not slept in the same bed for weeks, she was full of smiles. They'd come out of an arduous meeting, in which Rangi and Matiu had diverted the talk to the gardens: the kūmara were drying up and the silverbeet too, and what was to be done about it? It appeared at first to be Matiu's fault: he had not properly supervised the irrigation of the plots. Then it appeared to be Rangi's: he had advised that the kūmara be planted too early, going by the moon calendar, to have a good yield. Then the depressing business of the latest application came up, and after a lot of legal language from Alexia, they learned that there were no large things to be done, only small, frustrating things. Now Sam leaned against him in a companionable way. Alexia, who was playing guitar, did not look up. Melissa and Kate were scattered about the steps, Melissa knitting, and Polly was sitting on her wooden chair. Hannah was doing the dishes in the kitchen, and Rangi and Matiu were up to something behind the house. He chewed the seed and spat out the outer layer. It sat on the ground like a small cockroach.

'I never liked them that much anyway,' he said.

'I know,' Sam said. She beamed. Perhaps now that the issue of sex was out of the picture, their friendship was somehow magically healed?

Then the sound came, like nothing he'd ever heard: a tearing and a thunder.

He looked up and there it was, all in an instant, a large, misshapen sun. Then they were all on their feet watching the ball of light move upwards and out and down from the

sky. The sound went on and on. Sam grabbed at him and Melissa bowled them both onto the deck. She was screaming something but he couldn't hear. The rumbling went on and the ground shook under their feet and they were inside of the sound. Rangi came around the house yelling. Isaiah looked to where Alexia sat transfixed with her guitar: hair thrown back, face coloured red by the light. He tried to get up but could not.

When the great noise was over the shouting began. Matiu sprinted up from somewhere and Polly was yelling in te reo and they appeared to decide something very quickly, between them. The ground shook, then stopped, then shook again. It was as strong as any earthquake he had been in. He watched with unnatural calm as a crack opened up in the path to the marae. The crack was very slim, but there. He watched it widen. The earth moved and stilled, moved and stilled. Sam had pulled her cell phone out and was already dialling. Kate began to cry and hyperventilated in a corner. Even in the midst of it all he saw that Melissa, oddly, was tearless, staunch-faced and transfixed.

The tower visible from the pā was on fire. As he watched, hand going to his pocket where his camera was, he saw the ball of flame disperse and then move downwards. The top of it was falling. A huge piece of the building tumbled and fell.

'Police, ambulance, fire,' Sam was speaking into her phone. 'I don't know. I don't know. All of them. All three.' The earth moved and shook.

'Gas masks,' Isaiah said, but no one seemed to hear. What the thing could have released into the atmosphere, he didn't know. He went down the steps to Alexia and touched her back and they both stayed very still. The earth kept moving a little every now and then. Polly looked up at the people on the deck.

'Come away from there!' she yelled. 'Come into the field. Get everyone out.' She sent Melissa off to find the children and their mother. Mary ran onto the deck.

'Who has done this thing?' she yelled. 'Which of you has done this?' No one answered. Polly came and put her hands on Mary. Something passed between them, and then Mary crouched to deal with Kate, who was muttering and shaking.

'Not safe there,' Polly yelled at Isaiah and Alexia, who had failed to move. They walked the few steps quickly, out onto the field. He was aware of things being organised swiftly around him. Mary came and went with blankets and a battery powered radio. He marvelled at the way Polly walked strictly upright through the little shakes and the big ones, as if unafraid, when even Rangi paused and crouched down.

'It must have released some gas underground,' Isaiah said. He took deep breaths but could detect nothing: perhaps they were far enough away. He heard Rangi and Matiu talking. They were speaking te reo but miraculously, he found he understood.

'I'm coming with you,' he said. They did not argue. He walked with them towards the farm ute.

\*

'Oh God, oh God, oh God,' Kate muttered. Alexia was being driven mad. She didn't know how Mary could be so patient with the women. The shaking had subsided after Isaiah had left, but it still came at intervals. Polly organised her people as if she had practiced for it. Alexia was put to work serving tea. She was grateful Polly had given the job to her. The general thinking was that the series of small earthquakes were brought on by the explosion. Circulating among them was the term "aftershock". No one mentioned the other word, the more frightening one: pre-shock.

The headcount had started. Te Kahurangi was at Polly's right hand, counting people off. Matiu and Isaiah and Rangi were accounted for, and then Alexia and half a dozen activists. There was Hannah, but where was Aidan? The head count halted for a few moments and people made nervous comments about The Irish, as he was commonly called. But suddenly Aidan burst from a bush, accompanied by Bryce.

'Burn!' Aidan yelled. 'Them fuckers are burning!'

Alexia saw that Bryce had lost weight in his time away from the pā. His cheek bones had taken on an austere quality. He loomed over them. None of them had imagined he'd still be lingering, but when she glanced at his girlfriend and partner, who'd remained at his camp, she saw they were not surprised.

'Burn!' Aidan yelled. He danced a little, and raised his hands to the flame as if warming them. 'Celebrate the capitalist apocalypse!'

Polly looked distinctly displeased. But after a moment she looked at the burning tower and seemed to decide she had more important things to worry about. Hannah stood and walked calmly over to Aidan.

'Aidan McBurney,' she said. 'Will you sit down and shut the hell up.' He did as he was told.

'He's right though,' Bryce said, weakly, but with a trace of his former force. 'They deserve it,' Alexia saw he looked entirely manic. But they all had been, a little. She thought



of Sam's recent elation, Matiu's quiet rage, Melissa's self-righteousness. And Isaiah, well, he was always so quiet. The earth shook again, very slightly. How had she even come here? Papou came to mind, holding out a ripe tomato out for her to eat. Polly went right up to Bryce's face.

'Poisoning children,' she said, disparagingly. 'I won't hear another word. You sit there.' Bryce sat.

She turned and addressed them. 'We have people over there,' she said. 'Locals, some relatives. They're just trying to earn a living, like everyone else.' Te Kahurangi carried on counting.

Alexia too was counting between the shakes, seconds not people. The tower was burning now at a slower pace. What was there to burn? As far as she knew the tower was all iron and steel. It must be gas, still flowing from the ground, unstoppable. The shakes were getting shorter, each less strong than the last.

'Forty eight,' Te Kahurangi was saying. 'Forty eight, Polly?' Maitai was calling out.

'My brother,' he said. Alexia put down the tea and went to him. 'My sister.' He was calling as loudly as he could. He was alone.

'Where's your mother?' Alexia asked. She put her hand on him: he was cold. She found a blanket.

'Away at my uncle's,' Maitai said. 'Me and Ana and Tama, we stayed here.'

Every part of her tightened. 'Where did they go?' The people around them were listening.

'His cat,' Maitai said. 'Tama's cat. They went to find it.' He stared at Alexia. 'Tama wouldn't go alone,' he said. 'You made him promise.' He jerked his head up the river, behind which the tower burned. 'They gone up there,' he said. 'Him and Ana, past the place where the taniwha lives.'

'Polly!' Alexia called. But Polly had already heard. As Alexia looked at her a wave seemed to go through the old woman's body, a sort of long exaggerated jolt. Now Polly bent slightly at the waist, ever so slightly, and leaned deeply on her cane. Then she met Alexia's eyes, and pulled herself up. From the corner of her eye, Alexia saw Sam reach again for her phone. But whoever was coming would have to come all the way from town. Polly let out a call, a call that rose as it went on and that contained things Alexia did not want to hear. It was only red. It turned half way into a short, atonal song, a sharp thing with an economy of words and notes, then cut off.

'Who is willing to look for them?' she said.

\*

At the entrance to the fracking land the way was barred. As Rangī parked the ute Isaiah saw an ambulance pull in: how it had got there so quickly he had no idea.

The security guard tried to refuse them. Rangī argued. The guard was weasily-looking and harassed. Eventually he spoke into his radio.

'Nope,' he said to them, and turned away. Rangī moved forwards, looking as though he would strike him. Quickly, Isaiah stepped in.

'We're from the pā,' he said. 'We have relatives in there. We want to know what's happened. Are our people safe?' He only said the words that Rangī had, but the man turned and looked at him as if he was relieved. Isaiah kept his voice low. 'Anything you can tell us. You must be pretty shaken up. Us too. We're just looking out for family. Anything at all.'

'They say it was sabotaged,' the guard said. 'Someone set explosives in the tower. Must have been near the gas outlet. Musta been deliberate.'

'Is anyone hurt?' Isaiah asked. 'Should we move our people?'

The guard looked at him uneasily. Isaiah saw that he did not know the protocols in a situation like this. They probably did not understand the actual risks, either, any better than he. They were not engineers, only hired hands.

'If these guys don't even know how dangerous it is, we'll have to go back,' he said to Rangī and Matiu. 'We'll have to move them out to somewhere safer.' He made to walk away.

'Wait,' the security guard said. 'Wait.' He brought his radio to his mouth. 'I'll call management,' he said.

\*

Mary was handing out torches and Alexia was gathering the few children into a room off the main wharenuī. She'd put on a cartoon. They all watched it, instantly distracted, seemingly happy to forget what was going on. The earth had stopped moving. But Maitai gripped her by the hand and would not let go, though she sensed he was embarrassed by this. Polly was splitting up the people into search parties of two or three. Te Kahurangi was with her wherever she went; running, fetching, moving, entirely in her element. Of the Pākehā left at the pā only Aidan, Hannah, Sam and Alexia would be sent out: they had just enough

knowledge of the pā land and the paths they must search. Alexia took Maitai to Te Kahurangi, who stared at her cousin blankly.

'You need to stay with him,' Alexia said. Te Kahurangi pulled Maitai roughly alongside her.

'Don't you piss off anywhere without telling me,' she said.

'But this is mad,' Kate said. Melissa nodded through her tears, which had kept coming since the quakes. 'We have to wait for the emergency services. This violates all the rules of a safe rescue expedition. You all know it does. Any one of you could go missing looking for them.'

Polly glared at the woman, flaring her nostrils.

'Get the radios, Te Kahurangi,' she said. 'Get the maps.' A wooden table was covered with a large map, which Polly segmented with a red marker. Each pair was given a shortwave radio and flare, and allotted a segment of land to search. They were so swift, so organised, it was as if they were prepared. But of course, Alexia thought. They had lost someone before.

'You are not to go off the paths,' Polly said. 'Keep within the old boundaries. Check within your area, then return. Stay in your pairs. If you are not back within two hours, the searchers will be coming for you too.' Alexia was put with Sam.

'I still think you should wait for the authorities,' Kate said faintly.

'We will work with the authorities,' said Polly, 'when they show up.'

They were ready to go when a woman rushed into the room. She had a dog with her.

'That's Taylor's farm hand,' Sam whispered.

'I need help,' the woman said to all the people in the room. 'Please.' She was staring; Alexia saw the whites of her eyes.

'What is it?' Polly asked.

'It's, well,' the woman said. 'I don't know. It's just crazy, with the explosion and everything. It's just that that Taylor.' She sat down suddenly, and began to cry, and Alexia thought what it must have been like to hear the sound and look out the window and feel the earthquakes in the farmhouse all alone. 'Taylor, he went out looking for his dogs. He's been going further and further into the bush, looking for them. They got sick, you know.'

'When did he leave?' Polly asked.

'Earlier today,' the woman said. 'Didn't have anything with him. You know he traipses about all over that land.' She gestured away towards where they all knew the tower burned, behind the drawn curtains. 'I wouldn't want the mad bastard to come to any harm.'

Now Polly turned to the searchers. 'We have three people to look for,' she said.

'Aunty, no!' Te Kahurangi said.

But Polly said nothing, only held her palm out towards Te Kahurangi, as flexible as wood.

\*

'Look, I'll ask you to stop harassing our people,' the management man said.

'We're not harassing them,' Isaiah said. 'You'll find your men would very much like to know what is going on, as well as us.'

'Well,' the man said. He looked at the guards who had collected around the entrance way. 'Well. There's been an accident, of course. You all know that. Someone's been hurt.'

At that moment the ambulance came through, with its lights flashing. They all stopped to watch it pass.

'Only one?' Rangi said.

'Others,' the man said. 'Minor burns. Just the one seriously injured. He was patrolling.'

Matiu stepped forward and tried a few names. Isaiah recognised some of them: common iwi names. At one, the man grimaced and looked down.

'Oh,' said Matiu. 'Oh.' Behind him, another small part of the tower fell away. It was the security guard Alexia had abused, the one related to Ana. 'Have you notified anyone?' Matiu said.

'He's not dead,' the man said quickly.

'We will pass on the news,' Matiu said.

'I don't authorise you to contact the family.'

'We are the family,' Isaiah said. The man did not challenge him.

\*

Rangi, Isaiah and Matiu arrived back. There was a fraught exchange of information. Mary rushed off to call someone about the hurt guard: she needed a landline as the pā was still short of cell phones. They had decided not to evacuate. The three men insisted they go out and join the search. Polly sighed and handed them the last of the torches and radios.

'Take care of yourselves,' she said. She looked extra sternly at Isaiah, but he didn't see. In the distance the fire on the tower was lower than it had been before, but it still lit up the night. The searchers called out to each other as they crossed the field, cheery comments about having a cuppa when they found the kids and came back. Alexia and Sam walked close together. Soon they came to the edge of the field and entered the bush. The searchers separated. Sam fiddled with their laminated map before pointing to the track they would take. One by one the voices faded and went out, swallowed by the wall of bush.

The sound under the trees at night had a special quality. It was muffled and magnified at the same time. Alexia immediately began to hear echoes that weren't real, cries that sounded weirdly joyful from further off under the trees. She knew it was just the other searchers talking, their voices distorted by the bush, but she felt at each new sound a kind of panic. Sam strode on in her combat boots, apparently unfazed. If anyone would find the children it would be Sam, defender of innocents, protector of small things. She felt oddly reassured to be with her, and for a moment understood Isaiah's attraction.

They began to yell the children's names in turns. Still, the odd noises went on. The bush was damp and cold though the night was not wet. Several times Sam inadvertently let go a tree branch and it flicked back at Alexia. Sam pointed the torch down at the ground a couple of steps ahead of her feet so Alexia could see the trail. The night closed around her. The noises continued: cries and strange cackles that were birdlike and surreal. Could Sam even hear them? They came to the river. Here was the clearing and a convergence of paths. The burning tower was visible from where they stood, turning the slick water red.

'Second to the left, upstream,' Sam muttered. She peered at Alexia. 'You Ok?' she asked.

'It's just,' Alexia said. She felt suddenly physically weak. 'Bit noisy in here, don't you think?' Sam paused.

'It's just the others calling,' she said. 'Here.' She thrust something at Alexia. Alexia opened her hand and found a pile of sunflower seeds. Not knowing what else to do, she put them in her mouth. Sam seemed satisfied. They began working their way upstream. Now they were closer to the fire a dull glare hung in the air and Alexia could smell it; not smoke, something weirder and stronger.

'Tama!'

'Ana!'

Tama was stupid, stupid. Stupid boy! Stupid cat! She could not allow herself to think too hard about what it was they were doing, the actual potential scenarios that could

occur. It was easier to be mad. She walked hard into the gradient, throwing herself at the hill.

\*

‘I’m going back,’ Isaiah said. ‘I’m going to get some gear, then I’ll head further up.’

Matiu stopped and frowned under his head lamp.

‘What’s that going to achieve?’ he said.

‘The kids’ll be Ok,’ Isaiah said. He was convinced that this was true. He trusted them. ‘They’re good kids, local kids; they won’t have gone off the path. And they wouldn’t have got far in anyway. Someone will find them. You guys will find them.’

‘And what the bloody hell are you going to do?’ Rangi asked.

‘I’m going up to look for Taylor,’ Isaiah said. ‘He’s been lost all afternoon. When Search and Rescue come it might be too late. And the kids wouldn’t even have been near the tower. They know not to go on the fracking site.’

‘Don’t let him go, Rangi,’ Matiu said. ‘He’s gone insane.’

‘I know where he would have gone,’ Isaiah said. ‘I’m going to find him.’ He ran some steps back down the track.

‘But we’ve got the radio,’ Rangi said.

‘Don’t worry about me,’ Isaiah said. ‘I’ll leave records of where I’m going. Promise.’

‘Yeah, and aren’t you the most trustworthy guy in the world,’ Rangi said. Isaiah was already moving out of earshot. ‘Don’t worry,’ he heard him say to Matiu. ‘He won’t get further than the river.’

\*

At the taniwha bend Alexia saw a dark shape in the water. She pointed, and even Sam jumped. They shuffled closer.

‘It’s a piece of wood, right?’ Sam said. And then they were laughing and laughing, falling over each other like old friends. Of course it was a log! Only a log! They walked on. Alexia tried to engross herself in the small details: a wet branch striking her face, the uneven ground. But she could hear them; there was no doubt about it any longer. It started as a low hum, in the left ear, not the right, piercing and intermittent. She knew with a deep conviction

that it was not inside of herself, but of this place. It came. It went. She was so scared she could hardly breathe. But they needed to keep calling.

‘Ana!’

‘Tama!’

To her ears their own voices sounded more and more remote, as if they were swimmers drifting out to sea. Alexia was sweating now. The whistles grew louder. Soon they took on distinct rhythms. It had happened to her twice before, perhaps three times, when she had gone to her campsite after dark, past the urupā, through the bush. She stared at Sam's back in the dull light of the burning. They came in flares and bursts. Green. Gold, red. She quelled it. She closed her ears. But still she heard them. She began to breathe oddly. They seemed to be closing in, first on the left hand side, then her right. But there was nothing there. Her face was ticking madly. Only bush only bush only bush sounds. Only birds. They were higher up now than Alexia had been before.

‘They wouldn't have come up this far,’ Alexia said.

‘They wouldn't,’ Sam said. But she seemed unsure. They both looked towards the mountain, where the path continued on. Sam checked her watch.

‘We'll be pushing it to make it back for Polly's roll call,’ she said.

‘Shall we,’ Alexia said, ‘just to make sure.’ But Sam was already walking up the path.

The air was clear and cold and for some time the odd sounds receded. Alexia repeated old Greek rhymes in her mind. She had the idea that certain things worked against them as a charm. Words in her own language. She made herself invisible to them: she was untranslatable. Her hands were still freezing cold. Sam was puffing freely, still calling the children's names every few steps. The lights danced, elusive and then there, in front of her, then far away again. They followed no familiar pattern. Finally Alexia could not stand it.

‘Can't you hear them?’ she asked. She knew, she knew that she sounded crazy. But just then one sounded, close, then further away. They were being led up the mountain. ‘I don't know, Sam. I don't know if we should go on.’

Sam looked at her face closely in the torchlight. ‘Alexia,’ she said, ‘sit down.’ She made Alexia sit on a damp log. She gave her something out of her pocket: not seeds, but chocolate. Alexia loved Sam, she loved her. ‘Look, Alexia,’ Sam said. ‘I think we'll just go a little further, ten minutes or so, and then we'll turn back, Ok?’ When she was speaking Alexia could not hear the odd notes. She wanted to hug Sam, wanted to kiss her. She was so calm and good. They went on for a little while longer, still calling out.

Sam spun around. 'Did you hear that?' she asked. She bent low to the ground. Alexia had only been listening to the odd squeaks and rustling, the terribly organised notes. It reminded her of the nose instruments Māori used to play, but higher pitched. Even now it was hard to concentrate on what Sam was saying. 'They're there,' Sam said. 'They're over there!' She ran a few steps, to the edge of a little rise.

'Tama! Ana!' she screamed. And Alexia heard Ana's voice.

'Told you, stupid,' she said, just a little off the path. 'Wasn't the patupaiarehe. Was just them, coming to get us.'

'Ana!' Alexia was at the edge now, leaning out into the dark. Sam was already climbing down.

'Hello?' Tama called.

'Tama!' Alexia wanted to jump down and squeeze him. She heard a muffled growl: the stupid cat. She could not see well under the trees. She leaned forwards.

'You,' Sam said. 'You stay up there!' But she was too late.

It was not a long fall. She winded herself on a tree root and landed a little above where they were. When she moved her ankle she felt a sharp pain. Still, she was overwhelmed with joy. She reached out and felt Tama climb into her lap. Sam patted everyone in and ascertained that they were all alright. Tama put his arms around her.

'Didn't go on my own,' he said. He was very, very cold. She put his hands inside her shirt. He had his cat.

'He thought they was patupaiarehe singing in the forest,' Ana was talking fast. 'He thought they was coming for us. I told him no, they don't like little boys. We fell down here and I thought we should maybe sleep here if we had to. But we stayed close to the path.'

'You did the right thing, Ana. Now I'll tell you what we are going to do.' Sam was speaking softly, but she was all business. 'We are all going to climb up, and then we are going back, as fast as we can go. And Tama, you are leaving your cat behind.' They started climbing up as she spoke, but it proved difficult for Alexia to get her leg to work. Sam came up behind her.

'My ankle,' Alexia said. They gained the path. 'I don't think I can walk very fast.' She pulled Tama up the last bit. He was shaking.

Sam paused for a long moment.

'I'm going to have to leave you,' she said. 'I'm going to have to get these two back.'

'Not leaving my cat,' Tama said.



'You are leaving that bloody cat,' Sam said. It was this beyond anything else that told Alexia the situation was serious. 'I have to take the torch,' she said. 'I'm not happy about this. You need to understand that this is very risky, splitting up. You have to stay in one place and not move, do you understand me? You have to not move from here.' She seemed furious. Alexia realised Sam was afraid. 'Someone will come and get you,' she said. She spoke quickly into the radio. The voice at the other end was Mary's. Cheers broke out as those at the pā heard the kids were Ok. Sam interrupted them.

'Alexia needs rescuing now,' she said.

Before she left, she gave Alexia the radio. Then they went, Sam carrying Tama and almost running down the path, Ana rushing after them. Before the sound of their voices died out, the music started up again.

Time passed. Tunes looped and overlapped in her head. The lights were overwhelming, coming at her from all directions now. She was crouched on the path, arms around her knees, too cool in her thin layers, ankle throbbing. She tried breathing them out, the odd, sickening notes. She tried looking for patterns, but looking made them worse. Green, gold, green, gold, red. She went over legal knowledge she'd swatted in her head, stared at the canopy, faintly visible through the trees, pinched her own arm. But the sounds went loud and full and thin and faint and high and sharp and low and cool and green and gold, and red, and she could not block it. She had been here a very long time. Flash, fade. Flash, fade.

Then came the great approach. The bursts converged on a point not far from her face. Alexia was drawn in; the colours forming one giant sheet of sound. They were close. She could almost touch them. She stumbled up and forwards. Now the sheet went gold, all gold, and red. A metre from her face. An inch. They were deafening. The songs grew high and fell down through her body. She knew she shouldn't go. She ran.

The blood had left her foot in a great rush with the sprain, and now was pooling back. The pain was sickening and sure, a needle, a needle, each step radiating points upwards. Now that she was moving the patupaiarehe receded a little way. The radio was gone. She was cold. The scales she'd used to practice played over and over in her head, descent, ascent, descent. It held them off and so as she walked and tripped and got colder she sifted through all the songs she had ever heard. But they were there. She was sure. She was.

A branch slashed her face. She had been immersed in it for hours, for days. It was a drowning. The dark was complete but for the bursts of light, which illuminated nothing, not being there. But they were there. How people could have lived here she didn't know. Isaiah

was not afraid of the bush. He could read the birds' songs and identify them, he could tell which trees were good for shelter, which bark could be made into food, which fern to eat. Isaiah would be coming in. He would be coming down the path. Sam would have told him. He would find her. But she wasn't on the path.

She stopped for a moment, confused, finding herself on her hands and knees. The branch

had struck her and  
she had struck her

fallen into this deep ditch. Beethoven's fifth. Isaiah was coming. It was cold it was cold. The cold was an actual pain. The fairies were mischievous, not evil. The flutes called and called. Gold, green. Rangi had said to stay away. They were meant to be friendly. But they weren't like the Irish pixies. Red. They weren't little. They had white faces and red hair. Like Anglasika. Don't look at the lights. She pushed herself up with one hand but slipped and went down again. When had she lost the path? Vivaldi. Moumourakia. Under it they were there. She was not dreaming. Smell was magnified, the death smell of soil under her nails. Gregorian chant. Damp. Everything, her hair, her clothes. It was like those nose flutes but coming all at once, from one direction now, off to her right. Gold. Deep in the

but she wasn't sure anymore what

and she couldn't get off her

Isaiah was coming, and she was being stupid. Die Zauberflote. She staggered up, walked forwards. The flutes sounded a way off. It was ridiculous. She was shaking. She was going to. Green. If she took off her clothes, and left them in the bushes, hanging them there like little flags, then whoever was coming would find them and know that she had gone this way. Breadcrumbs in the wood. She pulled her shirt over her head and snagged it on a twig. Green flashes, gold. The treacherous things. So beautiful. The shaking was uncontrollable. It was breaking up. What? The flutes. Rangi had said not to go in alone. White crumbs. Violin concerto in A minor. They would follow. She began to walk again, took one step, two. Her white T-shirt glimmered faintly in the black, a silver flag. But wait. This was. She was going to step out of her skirt but the stepping hurt her. Needles. But then it

kounia bella

occurred to her quite suddenly that this was counter-intuitive. Of course! She must put her T-shirt back on, immediately. How could she be so? The flutes. She turned and pulled the shirt back over her head. Her fingers wouldn't work very well. Rembitika. When she was very young Papou had pushed her on the swing, back, forth, back again, like the pain swaying up and down her leg. Kounia. Swing. Bella.

beautiful little girl

but she needed to get back. The flutes were coming thick and fast, spanning a broader space behind her. She decided that that was the wrong way, quite certainly, and that she had to go somewhere else. It was no use just sitting here. Isaiah was coming. Bach. Wedding Cantato. Adagio. But the thing was the thing was

kounia bella

omorfi copella

little girl. The ground was cold and the plants cut at her like knives, but she couldn't feel it all that much except as heat. But there it was. She had made the wrong decision. She should have listened to Sam, who had tried to warn her. Flutes behind her. There it was: there was always a choice. She raised her head and pulled herself up the bank. It was easy. The nursery rhyme went on ahead of her. The flutes were close behind. Green red green gold green red gold. I mean, it's quite simple, I mean. Alexia. All you have to do is.

second strings

she'd always had a lead to follow

She went on for quite some time. The pain came and went. At length the flutes began to recede, the nursery rhyme song of Papou's voice filling her head. She cleared her mind of everything else, and followed it.

The grass of the open field was dewed and soft. When she touched it it felt to her numb hands like candy floss. The shudders had gone entirely. She had gone into a new place. The tunes had gone too, all of them, all music of any kind. There were no flashes anymore. She looked dully at the tower. Behind it the sky was lightening into dawn. A man came at her with a flashlight.

‘Who is it?’ Bryce sounded afraid.

‘Where’s Isaiah?’ she saw him look closely at her, his eyes tracking down her face and clothes.

‘I don’t know,’ he said. ‘You thought your boyfriend would save you? What a touching gender specific fairy-tale. Ha ha.’

‘He’s not my boyfriend,’ she said. Now she was pitching forwards. ‘I got myself out.’

‘You’re...’ Bryce said. ‘Alexia, are you...?’

‘Patupaiarehe,’ she said.

\*

Orienteering. Abseiling. Rock-climbing. Mountain climbing. Isaiah had done them all. He’d done a physical education course in his early twenties, thinking it would be useful. He always knew there’d be something coming. The imminent economic global collapse. The fall, then the mayhem, the critical adjustment period, while people looted and fought and established new ways of surviving in the absence of nation states. He would welcome it, if it came. Or perhaps it would be a natural disaster. He’d never taken anything for granted, the continuation of life as he knew it, the natural world. When they’d decided to come here he’d spent a significant amount of his savings on shoes. Sam had hassled him about them; she got all her ill-fitting clothes from op-shops, and would never indulge her feet in such a way.

‘What are you running from after all, that you need such great shoes?’ she’d said.

‘The apocalypse,’ Isaiah had told her. ‘The impending apocalypse.’

Now the apocalyptic shoes carried him well over the rough ground. Rangi was right, he was mad to go in alone. It was the exact opposite of everything he’d been taught about survival in the bush. But he knew where Taylor was. Isaiah would walk in, travelling at speed with his head torch and compass. He would do the half-hour walk to the mountain’s base through the open farmland in a quarter hour, if he went at a run. He would climb for an hour, two, at the most, which would put him beyond when Polly wanted them all back. The

pack on his back with the flares and matches and survival blanket was light, streamlined to fit his body. He would make his way through the bush up the spur of the mountain that he would choose, if he was Taylor, if he knew the land and was looking for a lost dog.

When Taylor went up it would have been light. He must have gone up the spur and come down off it on the mountainside, maybe following a noise in the bush, and gotten lost in the waning light. Isaiah would make his way up, following the ridgeline, till he came out in the sparser bush. He'd been up that way once before, photographing birds. There the bush thinned and opened, the trees dwarfing into smaller versions of themselves, the dense foliage moving into alpine beach and the air cooling. There was only one place a man would go in this area if he wanted a view. Taylor was guilt-ridden and weak, and enamoured of his dogs, but Isaiah did not believe he was stupid.

There would not be snow tonight, but the air was cool and clear, and would get colder as the night wore on. It was about eight o'clock. He knew sometimes his actions could be questionable in other people's eyes. He knew sometimes he acted against the accepted codes: but it was always for a good reason. He also knew that if Taylor had been out since early in the day and the rescue teams took too long to find him, there would be a good chance of him developing exposure. He knew the terrifying largeness of the terrain.

On this side of the mountain there were no paths or trails. The closest hut was a day's walk away along the tops of the mountain's flanks where the bush gave out, and the closest road would be a day or more away, if you were headed in the wrong direction. Taylor would know the lie of the land, of course, and hopefully would do what you were meant to do if you were lost: either stay put or find a river or stream to follow downwards, or climb a ridge and follow that. But Isaiah suspected that Taylor had got turned about. It was easy enough to do.

Isaiah had studied maps of this particular area. Isaiah had studied maps for many hours, trailing his fingers over the marked ridges and valleys, the topographical legends of the terrain. Every time he'd hesitate on a different ridge or hill, hating himself for it, wondering. He knew the clean green lines and blue threads of river on the page were deceitful. It looked so straightforward, so easy. If lost you marked your place by taking note of your surroundings. You stayed put, or when that failed, climb a hill to get some idea of your position. You would build a shelter. You would think of the people at home.

But the symbols on the map were nothing to what they were on the ground, in varied weather. Thin blue line: a minor stream, which in a storm could flood to head height. Thick blue line: a river, the fording of which, alone, could take you under. Track line: the fantasy of safety, one which in real life could slip and fall down a bank, give way, or disappear if not

maintained. Bridge: sometimes vulnerable wood, sometimes three steel wires, upon which you must balance with your pack. Yellow triangle: a hut, warmth, heat, light in an unknown place. This side of the mountain was all hills and valleys, blue lines and brown ones indicating surges in height, rocky outcrops, ravines. Isaiah knew the maps better than anyone. He jogged forwards, the pounamu cold around his neck.

He came out into open farmland now, found the stile, and climbed over the fence. The tower was a little way off, still burning in a satisfying way. The emergency services were all there: fire, ambulances. Some of them would be heading to the pā now, to aid in the search. But he knew finding Taylor was up to him. He began to run on the long grass. The bush line came into view quicker than he'd thought it would. He saw the place where he thought Taylor would have gone in, where any logical person would have gone in, and headed towards it. He'd risen up a little and the earth widened behind him so he could see it all laid out: the tower, the small trucks moving about like sheep on the plain, the pā lands bushed and indistinct. The bush line did something to the pit of his stomach as he stopped and caught his breath.

He felt sick. But he'd made himself for this, after all. It was Sam, only Sam, who knew the weaknesses in him, who knew how reckless he could be; how ruthless. Near the fracking site there were no bird calls, no sounds except the wind. It was wrong to like Alexia quite so much. She didn't know him. In real life he was a man who might commit acts that Alexia would think irresponsible, like going into the bush alone. But Isaiah was the fittest person for this job. Traitor or not, Taylor was a human being. He still had a chance. Isaiah would not let him go.

He flicked his headlamp on. He went in, moving quickly. He began to call Taylor's name, over and over. In his mind he cast the map out like a blanket unfurling. He could see it in three dimensions, almost: the river coming down here, the lesser rivulets going into it at intervals, the angles, even, of the rising ground. He was climbing very quickly, scrambling hand over hand up the steep bank. Then it levelled as he knew it would. His legs had started to cramp and burn, but he ignored them. He had a bottle with electrolytes in it, if he needed it. Further on, there was a cliff which he must negotiate, and then, perhaps after half an hour, he would come out into sparser bush. He called out.

He thought he heard an answer. It was off in the bush, a little to the right: the wrong direction for someone climbing the spur. He moved a little that way. He yelled Taylor's name as loudly as he could, but there was nothing. It had been maybe three quarters of an hour now and his throat was growing hoarse. He turned, and turned again, calling in all

directions, and heard the sound again, a weird, low calling that circled in on itself like a repeated note. A cooeee? His headlamp bounced light off the grey wall of leaves, showing the ripped gap where he'd come up, the bush ahead. He felt the great mass of fear and panic held at bay just beyond the torch light: the despair, and the great, mounting cold. He moved on, changing direction slightly towards the origin of the sound, feeling invulnerable. The bush was his, after all. It was all pā land, once, all of this mountain, and all the lands surrounding it. He didn't believe in spirits or ghosts, but he believed that if anyone could walk here safely in the dark, it was him.

But that was not. It hadn't worked like that for. Then it came. He pushed it away, focussing on pushing back branches and climbing faster up the slope. Alexia didn't know him as he was really, all his weaknesses, all his foolish acts. He heard the weird calling again and stopped, remembering to flick his torch onto the power save mode. His circle of light shrank. He panted and called, panted and called. He took a sip of the electrolytes liquid, and, disturbingly, threw it up. He must have come further than he thought, must be pushing himself too hard. He called again. He was sure that he heard an answer. He stopped and took a reading of his co-ordinates using a compass, panted hard, noting them on the small pad in his pocket with the stub of a pencil. What was Taylor thinking, coming in here with no gear, on his own? What would anyone be thinking?

When Isaiah was a child he was always found last in hide and seek. When he was older he was always first, in orienteering, to find the prize. He understood how to look and he understood how to find. And he understood how to hide in plain sight, a skill which had paid off. The noise sounded again a little way off in the bush. He should be coming out of the heavy trees soon, according to his calculations. He should be able to look back and see how far he had come. But where he thought the bush would be clearing was more level ground, and greater denseness of foliage, which didn't make sense.

Still, he could walk now without using the tree roots to aid him. His head torch faltered and came on again, which was not good. He pushed on regardless. Taylor would be through the next stand of trees. He would be there, and Isaiah needed to prepare himself: he might not be in a good way. He'd never found someone who was seriously injured. He might have to shoot a flare. The rescue teams would see it; he would stay by Taylor's side, they would all come out safely. He called again and the voice answered. But it sounded further away. Doubt crept along his neck, and the torch flickered again. He would not

But then it

This part of the mountain was tapu

He was getting tired. He stopped in a hole in the bush. He had to admit he was off course, not where he'd thought he would be. There were no views and no clear ridge line. There was no sound of water or identifiable bird call. He listened to the sound he had been following, thinking it was Taylor's voice, a weird hum with points in it, a cool descending call. It occurred to him that it might not be alive in the usual sense. This caused him such a blind panic that he found himself crouched down, head clasped between his hands.

He was raised as his father had been with the idea that he was special; that he was meant for something. When he grew older this thing did not become immediately apparent. Instead he saw a world of wrongdoing that he could not engage in, that he was morally bound to oppose. How could anyone see what humans did to the world and not be in opposition? He'd always had the conviction that he was in the right. But what if he was mistaken, about Sam, about Alexia, about everything?

The sound came again. Tapu. In the days before Pākehā came the highest ranking people were put to rest here after death, in locations so secret that no one knew where they were. Their bodies would be taken into the bush and placed high up. There, they were left to the forest. It was the greatest honour. His father would not have come here, not on purpose. But now Isaiah could see for himself how easy it was to go off course.

'Taylor!' his voice went out, and out, into the dark. He stood and ran a few steps, ran and then crashed into a tree. His body was hot but his hands and feet suspiciously cold; now that he thought of it. 'Taylor!' There was a small needling answer, the same as before. It was not Taylor, or a bird. But it was there.

If he had been wrong

A man's life was at stake, a man

If he was wrong in his convictions

He was confused, that was it. He was mixing things up. He tripped and came to rest on his knees, hand on a cool stone. When he closed his hand the stone came up with it: it was not a



stone but longer and lighter. He could not see in the dark. He directed the head torch onto its cool length. It was a bone.

It was not a bone from a small animal. It was not a bird bone, or a pig or a rat bone. It was a part of something's leg, something big. Not big enough to be cattle. It shone up at him, pale in his brown hand.

What if he had

done it on

I was a good boy

A sound that came out of his throat as he fell back, the bone falling from his hand. It was there, there, in the bone on the ground and all around him. It was the thing. And now it all went

Why would someone go into the bush a

She said they were happy

Distantly he heard himself retching. He tipped himself onto hands and knees and crawled back towards the bone. Maybe the other bones were here, too. Maybe he had found him, and all the other old folk, the sainted folk. Perhaps the pressure had been too much, the pressure to save the pā, to restore it to a thriving place, to bring back wealth from the city, to rebuild. Or even, as Isaiah was trying to do, just to save it from further dissolution. Perhaps Isaiah's father was the type to surrender after all.

I was a good boy

perhaps he just wanted it all to

error of judgement. I can understand

There. It was in his hand, the surface flush against his skin. He looked at it.

It was not a bone at all. It didn't even look much like a bone. It was a pale stick, a branch that had fallen long ago, and been bleached by the sun.

Isaiah stood. He took a breath, and another, quick and shallow. He pressed the light on his watch and read the time. He took out his compass and made notes, busily. He took out his phone and turned it on and checked his GPS positioning. He activated the point A to point B route map he had programmed into his phone before leaving, overlaid onto the topographic maps he had saved on the hard drive. His position was a red dot in a wilderness of green, the line a red thread, but as long as he could find north he could roughly follow the line.

He knew he might have been wrong. He had been so convinced. He kicked the white stick away with the toe of his boot, casually, watching it arc out of the light.

Before he turned back, he went down onto his knees, and cried.

\*

The emergency services were there. It hadn't taken them so very long to arrive after all, Te Kahurangi told Alexia. They were just over the fence anyway, cleaning up over at Taylor's place. Alexia submitted to the men in uniform who took her pulse and shone lights into her eyes. She was pronounced alright, but instructed to stay in bed and stay hydrated until the effects of the mild hypothermia had worn off. Her ankle they bandaged firmly. It was not broken.

By the time Bryce carried her back to the pā, Taylor had been found. Search and Rescue teams had seen a shape high up on the ridge overlooking the fracking land. He had been surprised at all the fuss, and reluctant to leave without having found his dog.

The children had come in with Sam, of course, and were apparently unharmed. But Isaiah, and here, Te Kahurangi rolled her eyes, Isaiah had got it into his stupid head to mount his own special search. Search and Rescue had been organised to look for him as well. Polly had been beside herself, for obvious reasons. When Isaiah had come in, an hour late, and tired, and mildly hypothermic himself, Polly had refused to speak to him. But he'd gone and sat by her, Te Kahurangi said, until she took pity on him again. The one thing Te Kahurangi did not know was the status of the guard who had been hurt.

It was bright daylight by the time the police officer interviewed Alexia. It was just for the records, he said. He asked what time she had left in search of the children. He asked how many searchers had been sent into the bush. He asked what their instructions had been. She

was tired, and her vision was beginning to blur and shift. He asked a lot of things, which afterwards, she could not clearly recall. All that she knew was that she was saturated in a thick relief. The children were safe, Isaiah was safe, even stupid Taylor was safe, and the fire in the tower was 'stable.' This officer was kind. He put a reassuring hand on hers. He looked closely at her face, taking notes in a small, neat hand. Under his eye the events of the night tumbled out and gained a kind of order. Why had she walked out of the bush alone? Didn't she know it was more dangerous than staying put? She didn't have an answer to this, so she answered everything else. She had never been so happy to see a cop in her life. She wanted to tell him. She wanted strangely, deeply, to put her head against his uniformed chest, and rest her head.

## NINE

London Bridge is falling down,  
Falling        falling down,  
                         falling  
My fair lady.

It was dawn. Isaiah was sitting on the porch of Polly's house. Polly was beside him, directing Te Kahurangi in the rinsing of a tub of puha. A requirement of staying at Polly's was that they must all get up early. It had been three days since the tower fell. There would be a large shared meal today, and a discussion of what action should be taken over the injured guard. The burned tower was not visible from where Isaiah sat, drinking his coffee. From Polly's porch you could see only a few metres into the dense bush. It was as though none of it had happened; the rough baring of the frack land just over the hill, the tower falling, the searching after, his great error of judgment. Polly had already done her singing in the hall, her greeting of the ancestors. The sun was rising but it was still cool. A tui called, its *brrr, bapp bap bap* going a little way in the bush, then falling quiet into the decaying fronds of fern.

Polly looked in the direction of the birdcall. 'Something's off,' she said, craning after the sound. The phone rang.

'So early!' said Te Kahurangi, and went to answer it. In her absence Isaiah ran the cool puha over his fingertips in the tub. It seemed an almost miraculous shade of green.

Te Kahurangi ran onto the porch, her pupils black and full. Polly stood up. Isaiah knocked his coffee and it spilled over the wooden boards.

'It was the main house...' Te Kahurangi said. There was a man in the clearing with a gun.

\*

‘Get out of the bus! Get out of the bus! Come out of the bus with your hands up!’

Alexia woke. The sleeping bag was rucked around her waist and her body was bare from the waist up and men’s voices were shouting outside. Dimly she realised they were shouting for her. She had been put up in Bryce’s bus while she recuperated: he was apparently elsewhere. Aidan and Hannah had been caring for her and were camped outside. Before she had her eyes open properly she had clothed herself in a T-shirt and was out of bed.

‘Come out with your hands up!’

Black clad figures. Too many of them. Ten? Twelve? All men. Their guns were trained on the bus. What were her rights? Alexia had never been arrested before.

\*

There were many men in the clearing. They had semi-automatics of the kind only used by the Special Forces. Police? Army? SIS? They were surrounded, him, Polly and Te Kahurangi. His mind flitted through the house and out the back door, where a small path led towards the mountain. But the guns were aimed at them: there would be no breaking free.

‘Come down with your come down with your hands up come down with your hands up...’

‘All remaining residents of the building come out unarmed with your with your come out with your...’

‘Lie on the ground lie face down on the ground lie down with your hands behind your ...’

‘Do not resist do not resist lie down lie down with your...’

‘Do not resist...’

They yelled in small, concentrated bursts. Polly grasped her staff and heaved it upwards. He flung his own hands up and stepped in front of Polly. He’d never been arrested like this and could not tell from their gear what they were. Their uniforms were black and unmarked. Polly swung her cane and he saw, with horrible clarity, the hand of the young recruit nearest him twitch on the trigger. He spun and grabbed for Polly’s raised cane, but Te Kahurangi was already there, pressing the old lady to the porch floor.

‘Machine guns, Aunty,’ she hissed to Polly. ‘Machine guns, for fuck’s sake.’

Now Isaiah went onto his knees and called into the space in front of the porch.

I will not let this happen a

‘Why are you arresting us?’ he called. ‘Do you have a warrant?’

‘Come out come out with your lie face down do not resist...’

‘Why are you arresting us?’ he called as loudly as he could. The guns were trained on him. He could count maybe twenty men in his direct line of vision: the situation was clearly insane. ‘Why are you –’ but they paid him no attention. Three or four thundered past into the house.

‘Clear!’ one of them yelled.

‘You have no right –’ Polly said. Isaiah could hear strange sound; the wrenching of fabric, he guessed. A cop directly in front of him gestured down. They wanted him flat on his face on the deck. The rough grain bit his knees. He stalled. ‘Have you got a warrant for searching the premises?’ he asked. ‘Your superiors...’

‘There’s your warrant,’ one of the cops said. He came forwards and pinned it to the front door, where none of them could see it.

‘I am meant to sight it first,’ said Isaiah. ‘Before you enter.’ But the men were carrying Polly’s portraits out onto the porch and lining them up. Now a police photographer came forward, and, as if none of them were there, another man started to rip the pictures from their frames as though something might be concealed behind them. Polly cried out. Te Kahurangi held her down, swearing softly in te reo. Isaiah tried again.

‘What is the reason for this arrest?’ he said. ‘This is a violation –’

‘They said that you would say that,’ the young cop said. He laughed, a short, odd laugh. Isaiah saw that the man was truly afraid.

‘What do you mean, they said we’d say –’

‘They said you’d say,’ the man corrected. His hand shook on the trigger. He was breathing fast, a young recruit, in full fight or flight mode. ‘They said you’d try to tell us some crap about your rights. They said not to listen.’ The man behind him jabbed him in the back, and he was quiet.

\*

Alexia was cuffed, not with steel but with a kind of plastic cord. They were doing extraordinary things to everyone’s gear. Bryce had pulled an old chair up next to his van: the police knifed it open and were pulling out the stuffing. They upended the coffee beans and

were searching the bus, ripping out the upholstery. They slit sleeping bags and packs. She watched a young cop put the battery from Aidan's head torch in a bag and seal it. They photographed the residue on the cooking utensils. She had no idea what was going on. There was a queer smell in the clearing, which she realised after a moment was the smell of young mens' sweat, made acrid by adrenalin.

She was pulled towards the path. Her ankle had almost healed, but still twanged under the bandage. Thankfully she had spent almost two days sleeping, and the hypothermia had worn off. She could hear Hannah speaking quietly to the policemen dragging her. She could see Hannah's feet, the soles bare and vulnerable, the tops of the feet to the earth. Aidan was ahead, screaming. Alexia heard him thrashing like an animal round the bend in the path. They asked her name, which she gave them. The bus was being searched and all the gear flung out of it: the cops were photographing the contents of her pack: her meagre stash of reading material, her underwear. They put her law book in a large plastic bag and sealed it. Now they were asking her address.

'I don't have an address,' she said.

'You are required by law to give an address,' the cop said.

'This is my address, then,' she said. 'This pā.'

'A bus in the bush is not an address,' the cop said. He had a gun in a holster on his hip and something else she thought must be a taser. He looked to his a man ahead of them: his superior.

'This is the only place I live,' she said, a little hopelessly.

'What is your occupation and date of birth?' asked the superior with the notepad. He looked her over. Alexia noticed the man holding her was shaking. She noticed she herself was shaking. The cops wore black stab-proof vests, black guards over their faces, and they all had guns. There were no women.

'Law student,' she said. The superior officer laughed.

'You should know better then,' he said. 'Date of birth?' She tried to make her breathing less ragged. She could hear Aidan screaming about his rights, his status as an Irish international, the UN – screaming and screaming. It didn't seem to be helping him. Hannah went on speaking quietly.

'You're somebody's son,' Hannah said to the cops. 'You're somebody's father. You're someone's brother.' It was like a litany.

'Date of birth?' Alexia asked. 'Why would you ask a lady a question like that?' She judged herself almost old enough to make jokes of this kind. The superior officer looked at

her closely, hesitated, then laughed. For a moment the movement in the clearing behind them, the tearing and sorting and ripping, seemed to pause. 'I mean it's just rude,' she went on. 'We've only just met.' The policeman's had very white teeth. 'Could you loose my hands?' she asked him. She let her smile linger around her mouth, tipped her face up towards his. 'I'm bound too tight, it hurts.' His eyes went blank.

'Move the prisoner to position one,' he said.

It was when she came out into the broad expanse of the field that she realised something large was afoot. The field was swarming with black uniforms. The people were on the grass in front of the pā. Police cars were parked up all along the edge of the small car park and Alexia could see they'd installed a road block. In the clear light it looked like nothing so much as a day of athletic games, with all the people performing obscure physical feats: lining up, gesturing wildly, being made to lie flat on the earth. The iwi were arranged in a group in the centre of the field. Off in the distance, Taylor's land was free of cars. It was just the pā that was locked down. She turned to the policeman beside her.

'Is this about the tower?' she asked. He gave her a look almost of pity. He spoke quietly.

'You're not obliged to speak,' he said, 'without a lawyer present.'

'But I didn't tell you anything,' she said. 'I just asked –'

He looked at her as though she was stupid. She was aware suddenly of the keen attention of the cop behind, and that the superior officer had gone quiet.

'The tower,' she said. 'I hope you don't think –'

'Who do you think it was?' asked the policeman behind her, from behind his inhuman screen. She didn't answer. Up ahead, Aidan was still yelling.

'Violation of me human rights! You fucking bastards! I'll have you!' She saw him struggle before being laid headfirst on the ground. His boots flailed in the dirt. Now she could place half a dozen of the people lying down, but many more were being brought out of their houses, most coming quietly.

\*

Polly refused to walk. Instead she fixed her watering eyes on the porch where photographs of Isaiah's father and grandfather fluttered in piles, and went limp. Her legs bumped over the uneven path to the pā. Isaiah was cuffed aggressively, hands twisted up behind his back until



his shoulder sockets burned. So far, no one had been hit, even when Te Kahurangi spat at one cop's feet.

They came into the light, and saw the field. Isaiah felt several things go through him at once: an odd kind of excitement that was almost like triumph, and a clear, biting horror. He could see children sitting on the ground with their arms and legs crossed, as if they were at school and ready for instruction. The men with machine guns stood over them.

\*

Alexia's cop let her go and gestured towards the ground. She did not want to lie face down. The rest of the police fell back to guard the group. She didn't move.

'Are you arresting us?' she asked.

No one answered. The cop who had held her arm gestured to the ground again with the tip of his gun. Now Hannah was looking at her, and Aidan. Further down the line Melissa was handcuffed and limp on the grass. Kate was in a worse state: her arms twisted and cuffed behind her back. Sam was oddly quiet. Alexia kept her voice clear. She was in a law exam, an oral, a presentation. She was authoritative. They could not make her lie down.

'If you are not arresting us, then you cannot hold us, under law. If you are not arresting us, then you are obliged to let us go.' The whole group was listening now. The voice of the superior cop came from behind her.

'I wouldn't be recommending that they offer any resistance,' he said, in a low voice. 'Who are you, anyway?' Alexia asked.

He turned away without answering. She saw a dark, impossibly small figure being dragged towards the line.

'I will not,' Polly was saying. 'You cannot make me.' She looked at an officer and spat into his face. He dropped her to the ground. The other officer still held her, her arm wrenching up painfully. Polly yelled in te reo. Her limbs were frail, as slender as Papou's had been in his coffin: doll-like and unreal. Polly bit and kicked. Her slippered foot scraped up the grass, and the bright earth showed through, a shocking yellow. The slipper came off. Polly kicked dust up into the men's eyes, pushing herself back up to standing. Te Kahurangi, glaring, and Isaiah, already cuffed, walked towards them. He met her eyes and looked away.

'You let me go,' said Polly. 'I will not lie down in this place.' She lunged and scratched at an officer's face, making two bloody marks. 'Why are we being gathered here?' she asked. Alexia saw a little way off, the rounded river stone Aidan had shown her. Polly

spat again, and another officer backed away. There were five on her now. Alexia was still standing, forgotten. ‘Don’t you know what this spot marks?’ Polly threw an arm out, struck a man in the face. If the men knew the land’s history, they did not show it. The superior approached and went towards Polly to calm her, but Polly would not be quietened.

‘That’s the place you killed him!’ she yelled. ‘That stone marks the place where the Crown murdered our last chief! This is where you killed my grandfather!’

But she was made to lie down.

The wrongness of it made the light go weird and full into Alexia’s eyes, so suddenly the scene seemed backlit. Of course: Polly was a rangatira in the whakapapa of this place. Isaiah’s father would have been in the same line, as Isaiah was himself. Polly’s elbows hit the dry ground. The colours were too vivid, too real. The sky was a deep blue and the marae a violent red and black against it, the people like actors playing at war. The green of the grass was a wall. She stepped forward to try and pierce it with her body but was grasped and held back. To enter, to halt. There was only the untouchable tableau, all the figures apart from Polly frozen, faces pressed into the earth.

Alexia faced her cop. He moved his gun sideways with an almost casual gesture. She was to lie down as well. She struck him. Then she was moving so quickly she did not know how she was hitting or where. When she found her feet she was in the middle of a crowd of police, as Polly had been. The baying started.

‘Get down down on the ground down on the get on your knees on your knees get...’

Isaiah was looking. She struggled a little in one of the cop’s arms. Her face stung where someone had struck her and there was a scratch on her arm. They had no right.

‘Kneel down now on the ground kneel...’

It took the butt of a gun to knock her down.

\*

Isaiah was sure, despite his confusion over their uniforms, that they were police: their movements and training didn’t suggest that of the army, but rather of some elite force.

‘They asked me where me weapons was hid,’ Aldan whispered from behind.

They came to the front door of Lizzie’s house, set a way off from the marae. It was surrounded. A piece of paper was pinned to the front door but the door was shut, and two police were banging on it and yelling. The line passing the front door halted.

The men knocked and yelled, knocked and yelled. Still no one answered. Beside the front door was a ranch slider that opened onto the lounge. This was curtained with white nets, and Isaiah fancied he saw movement inside. Without warning the two cops at the door ran to the side and struck the glass with their batons. The pane shattered, exploding inwards.

‘There are children in there!’ Isaiah yelled. But more police rushed towards the opening, guns raised and crouched low. Before they could enter someone burst through the hole where the pane had been. It was a figure out of a movie, a figure clad in camo gear and slashing and swearing, holding in one hand a large knife, and in the other, a hunting gun.

‘Ake!’ Rangi yelled. For a moment everyone paused, the police frozen in some kind of mass astonishment, the line beside them watching. Rangi surveyed the prisoners, the number of police on the porch, the shattered ranch slider. ‘It was open the whole time, you dumb bastards,’ he said. ‘You could have just opened the bloody door.’

Then they were on him. Te Kahurangi yelled, and Polly, but it was no use. Within moments Rangi was being dragged along the ground towards them. Into the middle of all this came Lizzie, hands up and calling her children to come out.

‘They won’t hurt you,’ she called, ‘Come, Ana, Tama, come Maitai. Just come and walk with Mama like this.’ The police swarmed around her and past into the house. Ana and Tama came out, looking wretched. But Maitai would not come. Finally he was carried out by one of the men, kicking.

In front of the house the police tried to make Lizzie lie down on her face.

‘I’m hapu,’ she said. ‘I’m hapu.’ The officers around her took this for disobedience. ‘She’s pregnant,’ Alexia said. The police around Lizzie looked at her stomach. She was made to lie on her back, instead, and frisked in front of the crowd. Isaiah saw her eyes turning up in her head as though she had become absent.

Now the police tried to lie Maitai on the ground, but he would not go. He was calling for Aunty Polly. Eventually Polly called out that he should lie down, that he should try to calm himself. Even then Maitai kicked and fought. There was a madness in his eyes: Isaiah saw that he could not help it. Eventually he was put on the ground with his arms above his head. A policeman searched him. Ana began to cry. Maitai writhed and lay still. A police man stood at his back and pointed his gun at him.

‘He’s only ten years old!’ Rangi said. But the policeman continued his search, all the way down his body, as if frisking a criminal. The line absorbed them and moved on.

\*

They were led to a cattle shed at the edge of the pā.

‘Are you kidding me?’ Rangi said, but they were led in anyway. When her body resisted at the door, seemingly having none of what her mind was telling it to do, Alexia felt the end of a gun pressing into her back, cold through the thin material of her shirt. Inside it was cool, and there were no chairs or anywhere to sit, only a few bits of old, disused farm gear. The men gestured to the people to sit. It was crowded. Alexia felt the fear in her throat now that the anger was gone. Someone shut the door. She saw Matiu look at Rangi in disbelief. Polly looked entirely unsurprised. Te Kahurangi, was breathing in short, panicked breaths. Maitai was weeping ashamedly, hiding his nose and running eyes.

‘Look,’ Isaiah said loudly. ‘Look, you can’t do this.’ There was a strangled sound to his voice. They didn’t answer.

There was one window. They sat on the floor and stayed quiet. For a long while nothing happened. She took Te Kahurangi’s hand. Through the small window she saw three pigeons land on a telephone line, land and leave, land and leave, circling away and back. She’d read once that all around Auschwitz the birds, strangely, didn’t go near the camps, as though they knew what terrible things were happening there. This meant they were Ok, Alexia thought, because the birds were still here. She knew her breathing, like Te Kahurangi’s, was laboured and that her logic wasn’t working. She watched the pigeons circle and land, circle and land. Maitai kept on crying. Surely they would be Ok.

After a long time Isaiah stood and walked towards the door. He was still cuffed. The police trained their guns on him with expressions of interest. Even now he had that thing about him which made Alexia want to go forward and hold him, just his hand even. It was something about the line of his body and his dark eyes, the way he wasn’t afraid of them.

‘You can’t go that way,’ one of them said. There were seven police in the shed: why hadn’t she counted? She must get herself together. Outside there were four pigeons and one starling exactly, and one sparrow.

‘Why not?’ Isaiah said, a little grandly. ‘By what authority are you holding me? I have not been arrested.’ He put his shoulder to the door and shoved it hard.

They grabbed him and pushed him down. He thrashed madly and she flinched. His face was twisted into the hay. Maitai cried out and was hushed. They watched the officer kneel on Isaiah’s back till his face went red. The barn smelled of offal and shit.

\*

‘This woman needs water,’ Matiu said. ‘She’s pregnant.’ The police looked at each other and to the officer closest to the door. So he was the one in charge, Isaiah saw. He was fair, moustached, youngish.

‘How can you not give a pregnant woman water, man?’ Matiu said. ‘We’ve been here a long time.’ A couple of the other officers shuffled their feet. Slowly the officer near the door nodded. One of the men left the room. Rangi tapped Lizzie on the back.

‘You should pretend to go into labour,’ he said, in a whisper the captives could hear. ‘Go on, give them something to freak out about.’ Lizzie turned her head to look at Rangi.

‘I wouldn’t do our baby the insult,’ she said loudly. Polly’s eyebrows went far up on her forehead.

\*

More time elapsed, and they were brought water. Matiu demanded food at intervals, for the children. They were not brought any. Hannah began thanking the cops profusely. At first Isaiah thought she had lost her mind. It happened to everyone under stress: you never knew how people would react. She thanked them for the water, she thanked them for doing their jobs, she thanked them for their common humanity. He realised she was trying to get behind their masks and make them human. They remained unmoved. He looked at Polly and saw she had lost a slipper. Tama was bent beside her, holding the dry brown foot in his two small hands, chafing it to keep it warm.

Hannah began, slowly, to sing. It wasn’t a song in te reo, but a long stream of other vowels and blurred consonants he recognised as Gaelic. Aidan must have taught it to her, but Aidan was resting with his head in his hands, anger flared and spent. Isaiah watched the song light up Alexia’s face. Isaiah understood nothing of it but it was lilting and a little dreary. Sing, Alexia. He caught her eye and nodded. She blushed as if he had stepped across the room and stroked her cheek. In the next gap she began to sing, a nursery rhyme tune in Greek that awkwardly filled the space. They went back and forth, very low, only murmuring, but everyone listened. The tunes didn’t work together, not really. But there was something in it that was good.

None of the others sang. Maitai sidled up to Isaiah. The odd, cobbled together song ended, and one by one they all looked to Polly, who would sing, who of course would sing. But Polly looked down at her bare foot on the concrete floor, held in Tama’s hands, and said

nothing. Isaiah held Maitai to him, and tried not to notice the tears that Maitai did not want him to see.

\*

The first time I went in I was eighteen. I wasn't all that big, for a boy of eighteen. Not like now. The tats are armour. It wasn't. Don't think of

\*

In the front row. The cop opposite was young, not much older than me. Nineteen? Twenty? I could have grown up with him. I was yelling into a megaphone when he pushed me. I hit him. It was not graceful or nice or clean. Then they were on me.

On the floor I was on the floor. They'd taken my watch and I didn't know the time. I'd never been in trouble before.

\*

I want my koro I want my

\*

If this hurts the baby

\*

'Come here,' Polly said to one of the young cops. 'Come here, son. Ach,' said Polly. 'All of you look like you sat on a bunch a pins. Except you,' she said, to the moustached man by the door. 'You look like you sat on a cattle prod. A big one.' Alexia felt a strange pity for the officer, whose moustache twitched several times as Rangi laughed and laughed.

\*

He put his hands on me and I was on the ground I didn't want it in front of everyone they let him I know he had a gun Mama wouldn't have let him if she

\*

They made me strip. They made me crouch down. They promised someone would be along soon to do the body search. They told me when the time came not to resist. Resisting would make it worse.

I told myself I'll learn my rights I'll learn my rights I'll never let this happen again

\*

I have been waiting for this time, e Pā, e Pā. You told me it would come again. All I can do is comfort them. Oh, my anger. They have hemmed us in. Perhaps I have acted wrongly? They were watching us. All I can do is. But I can no longer speak. My anger. E Pā, why is it me who is called on? You know I have always been the bad one, the least patient of us all!

\*

I want my Da

\*

When we get out I'm going to put this out over all the social networks they'll see what they have to contend with I'll put the panui out to all the activist groups in the country the fascists thinking they can do this and have it pass unnoticed they'll have a revolution on their hands the first thing I'll do is ring the capital everyone needs to know we have to organise

\*

The taniwha said she would stop it

\*

I'm sure they know. Is there a chance they weren't adequately briefed? Of course, they need to treat me the same or the others would suspect

\*

I shouldn't have done it. They've had enough trouble

\*

'Pater hêmôn ho en toes ouranoes

... .amen.'

'Again. Kneel.'

We sat up to do our crosses, three times over our hearts in an anti-clockwise direction.

The candle burnt away.

I swear I swear I swear I am sorry please if you are there please I won't ever do anything wrong again

\*

'Of course I wouldn't say something so bloody serious to a three year old. "Daddy's not coming back!" Are you crazy? Ha ha!'

The dark room, the table, the candles on the cake.

'I wouldn't have said that,' she said, leaning forwards.

He pounamu, he pounamu, he pounamu.

'It's your father's. Now you carry it.' Cold around my neck.

'He would have wanted you to.' He pounamu.

'It's very old.'

'He hoped for you to.'

'He would have wanted.'

'He believed you were destined to do great things.'

'You know he carried the hopes of his people.' He pounamu.

'As if I'd say that to a three year old! What a sense of the dramatic you have, Isaiah. Don't take yourself so seriously, Isaiah. As if I would say something so ludicrous. Ha ha ha ha! "Daddy's not coming back!"'



\*

He made her. She couldn't. I can't be good enough. If I could just

\*

I'm thirsty

\*

They can't seriously expect us to

\*

If they lay their hands on me I will fight I will not let this happen a

\*

Matiu was sitting on the ground, fingers steepled together. He opened his eyes and looked Alexia straight in the eye. The birds circled and fell. It had been many hours. They had asked for food and drink again, and had received only water. Matiu rose.

'Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person.'

The cops did not stir.

'No one shall be held in slavery or servitude...'

'Oh for Christ's sake, Matiu, can't you see they don't give a shit?' Rangi said. Polly looked at him critically.

'Be good to your cousin,' she said. Matiu took a breath and tried to go on. Rangi pulled him down.

'You're just embarrassing yourself, cuz,' he said.

'Where did you learn that?' Alexia asked.

‘School,’ Matiu said, suddenly sheepish. ‘Learned bits for a speech on mana motuhake.’

‘I was trying to remember it myself,’ Alexia said. ‘The Universal Declaration of Human Rights.’

‘Everything you are doing is in violation of it,’ Isaiah said to the police. They had let him sit up some time ago. None of them answered. The air inside the shed was close and rank.

‘They don’t give a drunk rat’s arse,’ said Aidan. One of the officers raised their eyebrows comically, as if he in agreement with him.

\*

It was after the eels I really lost it. What else was I going to do? Nothing?

\*

‘I can’t take it anymore,’ Te Kahurangi said. It was Sam Alexia had had her eye on: but Sam was still oddly quiet.

‘Not much longer now,’ she whispered back. The uncertainty of it was wearing. Suddenly the superior entered the shed, flanked by other police, and began questioning them.

‘What was the plan here?’ he asked. ‘Where is the cache? Where are the weapons kept?’ No one answered. He knelt right down so he was facing Tama, the youngest. ‘Where are the explosives?’ he asked him.

‘I want my cat,’ Tama said.

They were made to stand in a rough line. The man had a list of set questions. Melissa, who had been quiet, and, now Alexia bothered to think of her, oddly tearless, broke into tears.

‘This is unjust,’ she sobbed. ‘Unjust.’

Kate explained to the children that they did not need to answer anything. Everyone there was entitled to a lawyer first and foremost, she said.

Ana came and took Alexia’s other hand.

‘I want Alexia to be my lawyer,’ she said.

‘I wish I could be,’ she said. But I’m not a proper lawyer yet.’

‘You better hurry up and be one then,’ Ana said.

One by one they were taken into an alcove for questioning.

\*

‘If you think I will talk, you have something wrong with your head. I’m a foreign national and you should be afraid of what’s going to happen when this gets out.’

‘You don’t know where the cache is?’

‘You’re all fucking off ye heads, in it? Think this is the Intifada? Think we’re the bloody Sinn Fein? Oh wait, wait, I’ve got Bin Laden on the line. He wants his machine guns back.’

\*

‘Who else is in the cell?’

‘Please, please just let us go.’

\*

‘What was the plan after the tower was brought down?’

‘Death to the fascist pigs.’

\*

‘Who planted the explosives?’

‘You don’t have to talk to them.’

‘You should be ashamed, questioning children.’

‘It was the taniwha that blowed it up. The taniwha.’

\*

‘Forces that you wouldn’t understand are working in this land. Forces that are beyond you, officers. I’ve seen it. You should be afraid.’

\*

‘The patupaiarehe blew the tower up. It was the bush fairies.’

\*

‘Who did it?’

‘I’m hapu, for god’s sake. I have to get out of here. I feel sick.’

\*

‘I have no legal obligation to answer any questions. And when this is over, I will be taking legal action.’

‘What do you know about the movements of the others in the group? How often were people away at night? Did you see anyone acting suspiciously near the fence line?’

‘All the activity going on over there was pretty suspicious. They appear to be poisoning the land for commercial gain.’

\*

‘We already told you. It was the taniwha. It got that dumb tower, and it blowed it out its arse.’

\*

‘Let my children out. They need to go to the toilet. They need some fresh air.’

\*

‘We need more water in here. I’m not talking to you till we get some more water. And some food.’

\*

‘One a youse did it. One a youse did it, so you could frame us. Or it was one a yous acting as us. We’ve seen it coming for months.’

\*

‘The spirits of the land are angry. We did nothing to the tower. Call it patupaiarehe, call it an accident, call it the taniwha. The land takes care of itself.’

\*

Rangi snapped. Isaiah watched as he heaved himself off the floor and at the nearest guard. He was still cuffed but his bulk was considerable and the young man nearly fell.

In the end he was, of course, contained. The officers decided to take action, counting them off into two groups. They were to be separated. Isaiah held his breath and let his eyes rest on Alexia. His number was even; so was hers. She would be in his group. They were led out the door. Rangi, Isaiah, Alexia, and Polly were together. All the children were left in the shed. Isaiah tasted old panic in his mouth, adrenalin, missed opportunities for escape.

\*

Alexia tried to calculate the hours: they’d been seized in the early morning, right after sunrise. She felt a need to memorise all this: their exact movements, the passing of time. Her thought was for the future legal action she’d be taking. How many people had been questioned as they had been, without lawyers present? How many had been held without food? She felt light-headed.

All the armoured vehicles were still there, and men were posted outside various houses. Alexia assumed the people she had seen pressed onto the earth were being held in their own houses. They were taken past the marae, to the adjoining kitchen and hall. Many of the armed figures were passing in and out the front doors. Alexia saw the lock on the door had been smashed off, though she’d never known it to be closed. They were coming out with boxes of material: folders and old legers, records she recognised from the council appeals. A man passed her with another box. It held some zines that Melissa had scattered on a coffee table. Alexia had looked through one once; it was about armed resistance. A sick feeling went through her, the panic from the morning and crowding into her throat. She wanted to rest on Isaiah, to borrow some of his calm, but he wouldn’t even look at her. For what? To protect his fragile honour? She wanted to yell at him. He wasn’t so special after all.

It passed. She was prodded up the steps from behind. But Isaiah stopped and Alexia ran into him. He pointed to a crate alongside them, next to a box of papers.

‘Avocados,’ Isaiah said. Rangi turned and looked at the fruit with great attention.

‘They think they’re grenades,’ he said. He turned to the officer about to lift the crate. ‘They’re avocados, man,’ he said. The man looked embarrassedly into the box, but picked it up anyway and walked away.

‘I guess orders is orders,’ Rangi said, with some wonder.

\*

It was night, and they were still being held in the hall off the main kitini. No one had spoken for a long while, and there was nothing to do. She practised scales in her head, then some more intricate pieces, then just stared at the wall. Rangi belched at intervals but failed to get a rise out of the police officers. He rose cautiously.

‘We’ve got a lot of apples,’ he said. ‘And unless you fullahs want them, I’m going to use them up. Anyone fancy an apple crumble?’

The police men looked at each other. In the absence of their objections, Rangi strode masterfully across the room. He pulled out a crate of apples and got a large knife out of a kitchen drawer. The officers around them did not protest. He nodded to Isaiah, who went to help. When the crumble was done, they shared it around. It was delicious. They did not share it with the police.

\*

Isaiah finished the last of his crumble and asked to go to the bathroom. There was a complex series of nods and permissions granted, and then he was out, in the dim light of the moon. The pā looked as it always did with the doors closed and the people inside: peaceful. He was escorted by three police to the ablutions block, where he looked himself in the eye in the fly-specked mirror. The day was not wearing on him too badly, not like some of the others. But he could feel the tightness in his body from being cooped up so long.

On his way back he was surprised to see the paddy wagon, the crowd of black uniforms, the open door.

‘I’m arresting you,’ the superior officer said. It was so sudden that Isaiah laughed.

‘You’re arresting us now?’ he asked. ‘What do you think you’ll get out of us that you haven’t already got?’ he stopped laughing. ‘Who’s going to look after the children if you arrest everyone?’

‘That’s no longer your concern,’ the man said. He cuffed Isaiah and put him in the wagon. The floor was steel and cold. The man gave him a large, surprising smile, brilliant in its directness, brilliant in its weird conviction. He shut the door.

## TEN

bridge is falling down,

My fair lady.

Isaiah had sat on the bench for twenty four hours. He had asked to call a lawyer, but his request had been declined. This, and the stark reality of the solitary confinement after the drama of the raids, was enough to convince him that he'd fallen sideways, out of the kind of story he knew, and into a new one entirely.

The holding cell was lit by a fluorescent light that they had turned on very early in the morning. Judging by his tiredness it must have been six o'clock. The room disoriented him: its perfectly square dimensions, its slightly rounded corners. It was very new and smelled slightly of fresh paint, with a steel toilet with no seat and the wooden bench the only other feature. He'd been given a rough grey blanket but hadn't used it, the room being stiflingly hot. The one window was high up and had enough wire in the glass that he couldn't see out of it. Getting his bearings was impossible. He'd entered the station from the west and then been led on through smaller and smaller corridors, and he had no idea now which direction he was facing.

He hadn't expected it to be cold and grim with concrete walls and rough inmates: that was a TV version of prison. The reality was both cleaner-looking and more psychologically difficult. Isaiah could hear inmates yelling from down the hall, mingled voices in other holding cells raised in exuberant conversation or conflict. He assumed he was being kept on his own and without information to break him down prior to questioning. That was worrying. That meant they thought he knew something important. No one he knew had ever been isolated like this, in a cell. The other possibility was that they'd taken one look at him and put him on his own for his own safety. Isaiah was not deluded about how people saw him. He



was tall but, for a man of his age, slim and boyish, and his glasses might make him a target, he guessed, for more raucous inmates. But why would the cops care enough to keep him separate? He wasn't sure what was more worrying, this possibility or the first.

He felt vaguely out of his mind. It was the relentless quality of the fluorescents and the lack of anything to focus on or do. He'd paced the floor and found it was four and a half steps by four and a half steps in all directions. The window was one step wide but the ledge was too high to do pull ups on. He'd tried last night, thinking that it would be hilarious for the guards watching him from the surveillance camera which stared from the corner with its unblinking red light. He'd done three and given up. Now he realised why there were all those movies with inmates exercising in their cells. If you didn't exercise that energy out of your body you would channel it into thought. It was easy to see how you could go mad. After one day in solitary he'd started to think about how he could smash the camera's red light. The lens was present as he tried to rest and when he shat in the morning, blank faced, looking into the opposite corner, putting the security guard out of his mind.

If he tried to smash the camera there would be nothing to smash it with but his bare hands. They'd stripped him of everything: wallet, watch, Sam's ring which he wore sporadically and had been wearing yesterday. And if he smashed it, he thought, would that somehow be further proof of be proof of his crime? "See?" they would say in court. "Destruction of property. He couldn't even last a night in the cell without damaging something."

After he'd eaten the toast they brought the room gained a special timelessness as the day stretched into afternoon, the other holding cells now falling silent. He fought the urge to scream or talk, just to make sound happen. Eventually it got so that any sound was as desirable as food. Isaiah discovered that he could make it, covertly, with the edge of his leg and the wooden bench. The sound of his clothes rustling was delicious, a feast. He repeated the motion subtly so the camera couldn't see, feeling worried for himself, but feeling at the same time that he was achieving something, a victory of sorts. Almost as though it was a signal the guard came to collect him.

\*

The policeman looked at Isaiah over the desk.

'You're in a lot of trouble, son,' he said.

Isaiah tried very, very hard, but could not suppress a smile. How could he take this statement seriously, when he had seen so many cop dramas on TV?

'I'd take this a bit more seriously than you are now, if I were you.'

Isaiah cleared his throat. He knew he was being fatuous, but he could not quite unbend his face. He supposed this was the good cop, the paternal one who he was supposed to tell all his secrets to. He positioned himself slightly on an angle towards the door: the bad cop must not be far away. The good cop looked up philosophically into the swinging light, as though he had a problem that was located in the bulb. He had a blue shirt and a moustache and thick brown hair. He pursed his lips in a fussy way and puffed out his cheeks. He looked briefly at Isaiah, then back to the light again. Isaiah was aware that he did not have to speak without a lawyer being present. He still had not had his phone call. He decided not to make an issue of this just yet. Better to play dumb, perhaps, and let them think he didn't know his rights. He imagined that the others were subject to similar forms of persuasion, the others, who must be being held in tiny individual cells, unable to hear each other. He hoped Rangi would hold his tongue.

'You're going to want to talk, son, just between you and I,' the cop said.

'I'm not your son.' Isaiah said, very firmly and gently, as though to a cherished friend. The cop raised an eyebrow and nodded slightly. They were in accord on this. There was no antagonism between them; rather an almost pleased air of expectation, as though they were about to sing a song together, or conduct a business deal. He noticed for the first time that the man had a lazy eye. It was flicking off slightly to the side, to a frame which, Isaiah assumed, held a photograph of his wife and kids. The cop picked up the photograph.

'I'm an ice-skater, by trade,' he said. He turned the photograph towards him to reveal a photograph of himself, much younger and more slender than he was now, with slicked-back hair, dressed in spandex and an open shirt. The cop looked thoughtfully at the print again, and turned it away. Isaiah had the impression that the photo was pre-Photoshop, and that the vague mist that hung around the man in the portrait was real smoke. The cop sighed. 'Got disillusioned with the industry in the nineties,' he said. 'So superficial.' The door opened. The policeman who came in was weedy but unexpectedly handsome, like a miniature model.

'We're charging you with terrorism,' he said to Isaiah, with no introduction or preamble. 'We want you to tell us who else is in your cell. You give us their names, and we'll let you off the larger charges. We can work something out.'

Now Isaiah did laugh. The sound barked out of him. There was a small silence afterwards, in which the good cop stroked his fingernail along the edge of his ice-skating

picture. No one said it was a joke, the terrorism or the ice-skating business either. No one took anything back. The good cop seemed unbelievably calm. The younger cop however was eager, over-excited, quite full of the specialness of his news.

'We're charging you under the new law, with intent to commit a terrorist act, the intention to conspire with a group, and with operating illegal arms. Your bail application was automatically declined.' He puffed up a little more. 'The maximum gaol stay for terrorism in New Zealand is twenty years.'

He certainly was the bad cop. Isaiah looked to the good cop but the good cop was looking away, as though entirely unconcerned. He felt oddly hurt. The bad cop stood awkwardly for a moment by the door like a student expecting a badge for good conduct. He noticed the photograph that the good cop was holding.

'Can I move?' Isaiah asked suddenly. 'Can I stand up?' His hands were still cuffed behind his back. He rose and walked two steps towards the wall. He looked fixedly at the corner, then lifted his arms behind his back casually, as though to stretch. He attempted a yawn, but nothing came. Surely this sort of thing could not happen here? He turned around. The bad cop had moved to the good cop's side. Isaiah witnessed a brief, abbreviated struggle in which the young cop attempted to wrench the photograph away. The older cop won, and put the photograph away in a drawer.

'Sorry,' he said, to the younger cop.

'Are you serious?' Isaiah asked the older man. The man's eye flicked. 'Terrorism?' Layers of possibility unfurled in his mind. The photograph was a prop. He was meant to sympathise with this cop, he was meant to be surprised, then tricked into trusting him, he was meant to be disturbed by the juxtaposition of the man sitting there and the ice-skating youth, he was meant to be frightened by the word 'terrorism,' he was meant to tell them everything. He continued to stand. He felt that being upright might give him some sort of grasp on the situation. But what was the situation exactly?

'Will you talk?' the younger police man asked.

The older cop muffled a laugh, turning it into a cough in a very obvious manner at the last minute.

'What about the others?' he asked. The younger cop looked surprised.

'You mean, are they talking?' he asked.

'Are they being charged with terrorism.' There was a weighted pause in which the younger cop widened his nostrils and then relaxed them again. The good cop interlaced his

fingers and in one graceful and fluid move set his feet on his desk, so that he came to rest looking up at the light again.

'When I left my career on the ice,' he said, 'they said I wouldn't make it in the force. Said I was too much of a sissy.' Isaiah sat down in his chair. 'Not the cops, mind, the other dancers. They were the ones said I couldn't make the shift.' He took the picture out of the drawer again and gave it a baleful glare. 'The police never had a problem with my past. The most I got was some ribbings about my routines. I still practised then, when I was a recruit, just to keep my foot in, you know. When I came second in the New Zealand Junior Champs in 1989 they were all there with me, all my mates from the force. I came second and they were proud of me, that was all.' He stared at Isaiah intently. 'What I'm saying is, it was a different world, back then. It was an innocent world.'

There was a silence. The bad cop cleared his throat.

'Sir, Detective Inspector, sir,' the younger man said.

'Not like now,' the Detective Inspector said. Abruptly he pulled his feet from the table and placed both hands on it.

'I want to speak with a lawyer,' Isaiah said. All the air left the good cop in a large puff.

'And finally he says it,' he said. 'About bloody time.' He looked at Isaiah with his good eye, then his bad. 'Good on you, son,' he said. 'There's more than one way to skin a cat, as they say.'

'I see what you mean, sir,' the Constable said, though plainly no one was quite sure which cat was being skinned, or why. The Detective reached slowly, slowly pushed the picture of himself towards Isaiah, until it looking at it was unavoidable. Isaiah saw that it was, indeed, genuine. Up close the ice-skater was a figure of beauty, all light triangular torso and muscular legs. His hair was cut in a full-bodied, eighties way. There seemed no sign of his lazy eye. For some reason this was all more terrifying than if he had been pushed around or hit.

'Gold, 1987. First division. Gold,' the policeman said. 'There's nowhere to go to after you've won gold. The only place you can go is down. But I was saying, those were different times! Not like now. Back then, people were what they appeared to be.' He leaned back and waited, as though he'd made a good case for Isaiah giving up his story, and it would soon come out.

'Sir, the defendant has requested a lawyer,' the younger cop said. The older man ignored him.

'How many others did you arrest?' Isaiah asked. He had kept the images and sounds away, but now they came on relentlessly. Men in orange jumpsuits. Black hoods. Shaky footage of dim cells. Unlikely durations of time in gaol, with no trial pending. The older man suddenly seemed to lose patience.

'How many?' he asked, viciously. 'How many are there in your group? What would you say if I said we'd got all of them, Isaiah Tane Mahuta Brown, and that they've all already talked?' His pronunciation of Isaiah's name was chillingly impeccable, though the man was Pākehā. The bad cop turned on one heel.

'Sir, Detective Inspector, sir,' he said. 'Permission to exit with the prisoner.' The Detective Inspector stirred as if from a long reverie and nodded vaguely.

'Yes, Constable, go ahead,' he said. 'Go on. But no lawyer.'

In the corridor, the Constable stopped him. Isaiah thought he was about to be struck. This was where it would begin, the casual blow in the muted corridor, followed by the walk to a smaller room, a darker one, where things would happen, and someone with a masked face would ask him questions. But the Constable just looked him in the eye. He reached around Isaiah's body, moving quickly, and then his hands were free. He rubbed his wrists where the steel had left an indentation.

'There you go, mate,' the Constable said.

'I thought you were supposed to be the bad cop,' Isaiah said.

'Just between you and I, none of your mates are in here.' He spoke so softly Isaiah had to lean close. A door opened somewhere in the building. 'You're the only one. If I were you, I'd think carefully about my options. Twenty years is a long time.'

'But how can you charge me with terrorism if you think I'm working on my own?' Isaiah asked. The Constable seemed to take this as a theoretical question.

'Well, you do have your standard issue suicide bomber, don't you? Ultimately, they work alone. But you're right, we do have you on conspiracy charges.' He seemed unsure.

'I'll speak with my lawyer now,' Isaiah said.

The younger cop gave a shrug, and ignored him. Isaiah was led along the corridor and past the guard into the now familiar room with the wooden bench, the army blanket and the steel-rimmed toilet in one corner. Then he was locked in, to sit on the narrow bench and wait. The police man went away without further mention of the lawyer, and Isaiah was left turn this new word over and over in his mind helplessly, blocking the pictures as best he could

orange suit

orange suit

hood

until the sky outside the window turned black.

\*

'Guard!' Isaiah called. The guard came: a man squeezed too tightly into his uniform. He looked peeved and ready to be stern, as though he'd been interrupted watching a TV program he enjoyed. 'I want my phone call,' Isaiah said.

He'd been asking intermittently for three weeks, since he'd been arrested. He'd had no contact with a lawyer or anyone on the outside. They had started keeping the light on all night. It was a deliberate act, one that did not bode well. The light was there whether he closed his eyes or not, fluorescent, harsh, centering everything in the room in on itself. He wasn't sure anymore of the rate of time's passing. He had been called in for questioning seven more times, and each time he told the Detective Inspector that he knew nothing, and each time the Detective Inspector told him some ice-skating related tale. It would not be so disquieting if he had been given his rights. The night after they'd said the special word he'd worked himself up to yell, and had continued for hours. Usually the guards checked him in the middle of the night. This time, no one had come till morning.

'You want your phone call?' the guard sounded tired.

'I have a legal right,' Isaiah said. His own voice sounded thin.

'You have a legal right.' The guard said. He could have been repeating lines learnt by rote at school. His eyes looked behind Isaiah to the wall beyond

'If you don't get me in contact with a lawyer... '

The guard looked embarrassed for him. What would Isaiah do? What could he do? Alexia was there, somewhere on the outside. They would be working, trying to get to him. They would be wondering why they had not been contacted. They would be doing all they could.

'You're to come and see the Detective anyway,' the guard said. 'May as well come now.' He let Isaiah out of the cell and escorted him to the office.

Every time Isaiah arrived the Detective Inspector was seated the same way, his feet up on the desk. Every time he gazed philosophically at the photograph of his former self, rather than at Isaiah. Isaiah decided to start today's interview a different way.

'I'll complain to the Human Rights Commission' he said. 'And the Board of Prisons. And the government. And the Police Review Authority. And the local council. If you don't let me see a lawyer.' The Detective Inspector looked at him in a mild way.

'We have you in here on a charge of terrorism,' he said. 'Don't you think those people haven't already been notified?' The man picked at his nail. He stared for some time at the photograph, then at the light that hung from the ceiling.

'You're here on a charge of *terrorism*,' he said again, drawing last word out very slowly. 'This is quite different to our usual charges. It's new. You're new. Don't you know what this means? It means we can hold you, and your friends, for as long as we like. The normal rules don't really apply.'

Isaiah decided on silence. He felt his body, strangely, relax entirely. It was a relief, in a way. He wouldn't have to be so insistent anymore. They would bring him food on a tray, they would light his room all hours. He did not have to fight for his rights: he had none.

'So do you have anything for me today?'

Much as Isaiah hated himself for it, he liked the good cop. There was something attractive in the quality of his attention. Even while he looked at the light or the photograph Isaiah knew the Detective was watching him, wholly and entirely. The man gathered his eyebrows together into one hunched caterpillar and squinted eagerly at Isaiah. His mouth puckered, and he blew air upwards so hard that his hair ruffled.

'Isaiah Tane Mahuta?' As always, the Detective's pronunciation threw him.

'Not until you get me a lawyer.' The Detective looked at surface of the desk between them, which was pocked and marked. Why did the police not get their detectives new desks? And why did they cramp them into such small rooms? For a moment Isaiah felt indignant on the detective's behalf. But perhaps this was all fake, these people just actors in some protracted, low budget joke. It was possible he'd been transferred in the night, that they'd given him drugs and that he was unaware of it, and that these were not police at all, and he was in fact somewhere else, in an underground bunker. The window in his cell with its cycling of light and dark was just a light and a timer behind a screen.

The Constable came in. He went to the Detective's side and stood at attention, like an army officer.

'I want my phone call,' Isaiah said.

'Funny thing,' the Detective Inspector said, 'dentistry.'

Isaiah had eaten poorly that morning, a thin oatmeal that could only be described as gruel. Sometimes they brought him reconstituted mashed potato with a piece of spam on top. Other days it was 'stew,' or dry bread. There was a distinct lack of fresh vegetables. Last night he'd requested vegetarian meals, thinking this might get him better rations. His vegetarian dinner arrived: a packet of unopened juice crystals, in a bowl.

'They called me Pearly White,' the Detective Inspector was saying, 'on account of my dazzling smile.' He turned the photograph towards Isaiah with a flourish. 'Naturally gifted to me, that smile was. Always just had them, good teeth.' He gave the light bulb a significant look. 'Never had a filling till I was in my thirties. It's all downhill from there. It's inevitable, really. One day you're an athlete, on top of your game, shooting half-axles and spinning with the best of them, then, the next day, *boom.*' He struck the table hard. Isaiah jumped, but so did the Constable. 'You expire, son, you expire.'

'I'm not your son,' Isaiah said, as gently as ever.

'Ahh, but you're someone's son, aren't you?' the Detective said. 'Got a lot to live up to, coming home, haven't you, Isaiah Tane Mahuta?'

'I want to speak to a lawyer,' Isaiah said.

'Tell me what you were planning to do,' said the policeman. 'Tell me how you were going to blow up the fracking well. Tell me who was involved. Where are you keeping the explosives? We know you were a key member in the planning of the riot,' he said. It took Isaiah a moment to realise he meant the protest. 'We know you advised the development of various weapon caches. We know you were involved in facilitating the *attack*. We know you knew what you were doing.'

Isaiah said nothing.

'Your comrades have already turned you in,' the Detective said.

The other cop stirred uncomfortably.

'Sir, I think we should let this man speak with a...'

'Terrible thing,' the Detective Inspector said, 'when the people you thought were your comrades turn on you.'

Isaiah screamed.



It surprised him most of all. His scream went up into the air and filled it. It was a short scream, wordless, but he let the words go into it that he hadn't said. He jumped as though someone else had screamed, not him. It was a horrible sound. Anyone standing outside the room would have thought he was being tortured. A look of panic crossed the young cop's face. The good cop looked distinctly impressed.

'This has gone on long enough,' the young man said.

There was a silence in which Isaiah looked at his hands.

'Permission granted,' the Detective said. The young cop led Isaiah out.

In the hallway he looked the young man in the eye.

'Is it true about the ice skating?' he asked. The Constable hesitated, then shrugged.

'I've seen old videos,' he said. 'That guy was magic on the ice.'

\*

There was a complicated process around the phone call, involving many forms. Eventually Isaiah was led to a rough stall. Above the booth was a window through which he could see the courtyard in front of the station. He had not been moved, drugged in the night and smuggled away. It was daylight outside. He watched a scatter of sparrows, their complex arrivals and departures. It was incredibly beautiful. He traced his finger over the lawyers section in the phone book and picked a name at random, dialled. The lawyer was in. It seemed a small miracle.

'Terrorism,' Isaiah said, eventually.

'Terrorism?'

'Terrorism.'

'... right,' the lawyer said. 'It's not my specialty.' He gave a small laugh. 'But then, I wouldn't say it was anyone's, in New Zealand. There are no precedents.'

'I've been here for weeks,' Isaiah said. 'They've been keeping me in solitary and haven't allowed me any calls. I've been allowed no contact with anyone aside from you. They say under a new law, and the usual rights don't apply. I need to be bailed,' he said, aware of his own voice rising. 'You need to get me out on bail.'

The lawyer paused. When he spoke again he seemed ruffled.

'I suppose, under the new act, they could do that,' he said. 'But what the hell do they think they're playing at? What on earth is it that they think you were doing?'

Isaiah thought it best to say nothing.

\*

When he hung up he didn't want to look at the Constable and face the next few moments. He would walk back through the metal door with its re-enforced glass into the corridor. He would be escorted back to his cell, where the light would burn. But the Constable was looking at him intently.

'Want another call, mate?'

Isaiah could not stop his hand from jerking towards the phone.

'Go on. It's only you and me.'

'I need an unlisted number,' Isaiah said.

'I'll sort it.' He picked up the phone. 'Operator,' he said. 'We need a line to the pā, out west. You know the one I mean.' He smiled and handed him the phone. 'That's the number you wanted, isn't it? Let them know you're all right.' Isaiah watched his face carefully but he seemed guileless. The phone was ringing.

'Kia ora.' It was Rangi.

'Rangi, its Isaiah.' The bad cop moved away discretely. There was a short silence. Then Rangi let out a great whoop and cry, words in te reo streaming down the phone like a battle cry.

'He's on the line!' he called to the others presumably in the room.

'Listen, Rangi, they're holding me in here without bail. They haven't let me speak to a lawyer until today. Listen, Rangi...' But he could hear a great number of whistles and calls. He could almost pick out voices: Melissa's shaky cry, Sam's yell, though the words were indistinct.

'Cuz, we been trying to find out where you are. What prison. They wouldn't tell us nothing. Tried to get someone in to see you, but they wouldn't authorise it. Cuz...It's good to hear from you.'

The Constable made a slicing motion across his neck. Isaiah realised his time was nearly up. Steps were approaching in the hall.

'Rangi,' Isaiah said. 'I've got to go.' He could hear the others clamouring to get on the phone.

'They treating you well in there, cuz?' Rangi asked. Of course, Rangi had been in gaol himself. He knew how things worked. Isaiah paused.

'They're keeping me in solitary, Rangi,' he said. 'They won't turn out the light.'

Rangi was quiet.

'How many days I have been here?' Isaiah asked.

'Three weeks, five days, and this morning, cuz,' Rangi said. 'We're gonna get you out.'

The cop hung up the phone.

\*

He and the Constable took an unexpected turn. Isaiah found himself in a different grey room.

'What's this?' he asked.

'He requests a form for visitation rights,' the Constable said to the guard. 'The prisoner would like to authorise a guest.'

The guard reached into a steel filing cabinet behind him in a leisurely way, and laid two forms on the desk side by side. Isaiah cast his eye over the authorisation form. How was he meant to spell her last name? It was something long and Greek and complicated. He approached the desk but saw there was no pen.

'Could I have a pen?' he asked. The guard didn't speak, but gestured calmly towards the other piece of paper on the desk.

'Application for a pen,' he said.

The Constable stared fixedly at the wall. Isaiah looked around. There were no pens anywhere in sight, not on the cabinet, not on the desk.

'Well,' he said. 'Can I borrow a pen, to fill out the application for a pen?'

'Pens are fifty cents,' the guard said.

'I don't have fifty cents,' Isaiah said.

'Pens are fifty cents,' the guard said again. The Constable's face was still impeccably blank. It must be something they taught them to do in police training school. The guard stirred himself in a grandmotherly way, like he'd just had a too rich meal. 'Your money is kept in your account,' he said. 'You use the money in your account to buy the pen, to fill out the forms. Then you can apply to have a visitor.'

'How do I get money into my account?' Isaiah asked.

'Your visitors put it in for you,' the guard said.

'But my visitors don't know they need to do that, until they visit,' Isaiah said. 'And they don't know they can visit, until I call them.'

The guard swung around on his swivel chair and got another piece of paper out of the drawers. He laid this carefully on the desk.

‘Application to make a phone call,’ he said.

‘Come on, Officer,’ the Constable said. ‘Give the prisoner a bloody pen.’

The guard popped open a drawer in the desk. It was filled with pens. He handed one to Isaiah, and sighed.

‘There’s no guarantee the requests will be granted, of course,’ he said.



## ELEVEN

Falling      falling  
                 falling down

Alexia's good court shoes clicked on the marble floor. The elevator she'd climbed many times before on her undergraduate placement stretched before her. But now the law book that she needed to revise for the bar exam languished in some police vault, labelled evidence. She wore the same clothes she would have worn on her work-experience: a high white collared blouse, a black pencil skirt. Sam came after her muttering about the fascist state and Melisa and Kate went on ahead, whispering fretfully. Isaiah had been denied bail twice already.

None of them were dressed for court as Alexia was, or as her family, with their great immigrant respect for authority and decorum, would have been. Rangi came after Sam in his tattoos and camo gear. Alexia wore her best gold chain and family rings on her fingers. The glassed roof of the court opened out into a many-storied room, making the activists look up into the appalling space. What did Polly make of the crest at the entrance, a Māori woman and a white woman standing side by side in apparent harmony? She imagined she knew exactly what Polly thought.

Alexia was buckled together with chains and her tight belt and charms. So much of what happened in the courtroom was costume and performance; didn't these people understand? But why should Rangi change the way he looked? This court was not his court. They ascended the staircase: three stories, four, as if on a production line and about to be processed. Up there somewhere, in a holding cell in the depths of the building, was Isaiah. If he was released it would be through a doorway to the rear of the building. Alexia and Sam would face the cameras outside, while Te Kahurangi and Rangi would collect him and take him away. The plan was for Isaiah to avoid as much exposure as possible. Polly had chosen Alexia and Sam, who knew they were to be the face of the protest. Isaiah would be whisked

away, free, though probably under bail conditions. Alexia would see him tonight, at the marae: perhaps he would sleep next to her. Her hand sat obediently on the moving elevator rail. It was travelling slightly faster than the rest of her and she marvelled at its apparent calm, its assuredness as it moved away. A weird tension set itself up in her body, her thin brown wrist moving forwards, her feet in their smart court shoes staying behind.

The foyer carpet went beige at her, beige, beige, beige. The room was crowded and oppressive under the bright lights. Everyone from the pā had come up on a bus together and were staying at a city marae. Alexia was back in the city she had studied in, but her flat with Stephen had gone, and she didn't even know where Stephen was, if he had gone overseas to work as he had planned to, or not. She didn't even care. She hadn't contacted any of her university friends. What would they have said? The word terrorist was plastered over the newspapers. Here Alexia was, with the protestors who'd stood outside with tino rangitiratanga placards, with the activists with patches, with these people, Polly, Te Kahurangi, Matiu, Rangi, for whom the city was nothing and their poisoned corner of land everything. It had been only a few months since she had left.

'Alright, sis?' Rangi asked. He clapped his great hand across her shoulder. They sat together on the plastic seats facing the doors, which remained firmly shut. The court agenda was up but she knew without looking that the hearing started at ten. There was every morning now a frantic briefing on the latest legal matters, which Alexia compiled as best she could. Māori and Pākehā supporters she didn't know circulated with instant coffee and cups of soup. But all that the busyness and updates and activity masked was that nothing had been happening. Isaiah had been denied bail even when Alexia thought he would most likely be granted it. Denied, then, remarkably, denied again. But the whole thing was without precedent, a thing her legally trained mind failed to accept. For without precedent it would be hard to argue, either for or against.

It was hard not to believe that the judges were being influenced by that word, 'terrorist,' and all its connotations. It didn't help that Isaiah not been allowed to shave and that in the past weeks his hair and beard had grown out, so that at the last hearing he'd looked unkempt. With his dark skin and grown out beard he could be anything: Lebanese, Syrian, Palestinian. If he lost this hearing he would be in gaol while the state prepared its case against him, for however long that would be.

Sam approached with her customary briskness, clipboard in hand. Alexia felt wildly guilty, guilty in a way that only a Greek Orthodox woman or a Catholic might feel guilty.

Whenever Sam spoke to her she wanted to shout that since that first time, they'd never done anything wrong.

'We need to have a talk,' Sam said, 'quickly before we go in.'

They went to the far corner of the foyer. Kate and Melissa had suggested they might work out their key messages before facing the cameras. Sam talked about sound bites and speaking to evade crafty editing. The TV news would be looking for something sensational, something that could be taken out of context.

'Don't you miss him?' Alexia said. She was feeling antsy: wanting to challenge, wanting everything raw and true and in the open. Sam's blunt finger stopped on the page. She looked at Alexia in a baffled way.

'You must realise,' she said, 'that this is what he is. That this was always going to happen.' She examined Alexia's face and reached out to a passing volunteer, and got them coffee. Alexia became aware that the space around them was charged and respectful. Of course: everyone here knew who they were, or who Sam was at least. People had cleared a space around them: Sam, the known campaigner and loving partner, bearing up bravely in the face of adversity, and Alexia, the group's unofficial legal advisor. The young volunteer who gave Sam the coffees dipped her head: she could almost have bowed. 'He's trained for this, for years,' Sam went on. 'He was prepared for this to happen.'

'Being labelled a terrorist and what? Taking the blame for some mythical group's illegal actions?'

'He always knew we were being surveilled. And any activist who has ideas like Isaiah has is going to be caught out at one stage or another. If you could talk to him you'd probably find he doesn't care that he's being 'blamed,' as you put it, if it's drawing attention to the cause.'

'You talk about him like he's some kind of saint. How are you so sure of what he's feeling?'

Sam gave her a measured look.

'Long association,' she said, and took a sip of coffee. Suddenly she leaned forward and tilted her head and spread her hands out wide, much, Alexia realised, like Alexia herself. 'And who do *you* think blew up the tower, Alexia?' She looked at Alexia for one, two seconds. Alexia said nothing. Then Sam changed, sat back, became swiftly herself, so that Alexia had to wonder if she had really sounded so mocking. 'I just wouldn't waste my time feeling sorry for him, that's all. He's probably happy with what he's achieved.' Alexia felt something in her bow down, defeated by Sam's steadfastness.



‘I don’t know how you do it,’ she said. ‘Stay so calm.’

‘I don’t “do it,”’ Sam said. ‘I’ve never done this before.’ She looked around. But of course it was easy for her. Sam did not feel Isaiah’s continued imprisonment as she did: a constant stinging lack. Alexia thought of him as soon as she woke and as soon as she went to sleep. It was like looking at a light and then looking away. His physical absence overlaid everything she saw, his face ghosting in, upsetting the usual order.

‘You’ve lost weight,’ Sam said. ‘You should watch yourself.’ Alexia looked down at her legs. This was what people under stress were meant to do; lose weight. It had never happened to her before. ‘It’s not going to help anyone if you let it get to you,’ Sam said. Melissa and Kate were watching Alexia distrustfully, from a distance. It was a quarter to ten. The nerves went orange in her throat. Since the day of the raids there had been no music in her head, no extra sounds.

‘Doesn’t it bother you that he might not come out?’ she asked.

‘We’re lucky,’ Sam said. ‘In other countries, if you oppose the state, they come in the night and shoot you. At least here, there’s the semblance of upholding human rights.’

‘That doesn’t mean this is right,’ Alexia said, weakly. Sam seemed to look through her, right into the back of her head.

‘I’ve never been able to hate you,’ she said. She leaned in and grasped Alexia’s arm. ‘I didn’t mind him fucking anyone else,’ she said. ‘They were people we knew, usually, our friends, or random girls...whatever. You can deal with that.’ She looked at Alexia, at the court agenda, at the coffee cup, at her own feet. ‘And I had my own adventures. You can deal with it, when there’s trust, enough love. You hate them, a little, just at first: it’s biological of course. Then you see the hate and change it. Then you can love them. It’s a matter of overturning our idea of private ownership. It’s a matter of strength of will.’

Written on the clipboard between them was *What happened to innocent till proven guilty?*

‘Problem was, I couldn’t properly hate you in the first place,’ Sam said. ‘You’re too much like him for me to even feel resentful. You’re way too messed up.’ Alexia felt suddenly, keenly, the body she inhabited: so much darker than Sam’s own, containing all her varied history.

When the court room doors opened Alexia went in gladly.

Polly sat to her right with that bottled lavender smell, Te Kahurangi sat to her left. It was no great surprise to Alexia, the layout of the court, its pomposity and decorum, but she could see it shocked them. For a moment she saw it as Te Kahurangi would: a stratified

hierarchy of tiers. The brown people, the supporters, all sat on one level in rows towards the back. They were hushed by the room's gravity. Next rung up were the lawyers; Isaiah's with his assistants on either side, and the Crown's many lawyers. The Crown could afford good prosecutors, and a lot of them. It was one of the problems. From this row forwards, everyone was white. It was a stark fact that Alexia had grown used to. There were various advisors and typists and court officials. The lawyers' desks were layered with papers, and in front of them was a place where they would pace before the court. At the highest desk of all sat the judge himself. Architecturally the room gathered itself and swept toward him, a collection of inanimate, supplicating shapes.

'They actually wear wigs?' Te Kahurangi whispered. 'And dressing gowns? What century is this?' But Alexia could tell she was afraid.

Alexia looked again through Te Kahurangi's eyes. How odd it was, she must be thinking, that this one lone person up there in a wig, an old white guy, as indeed, he happened to be, could make decisions about the lives of all of them down here. Now that she had lived on the pā she could see how clunky and inappropriate this old apparatus was. She could see that for Polly, whose grandfather's father had been taken by the Crown, that to walk into this room and sit under such a judge and wait to see if your nephew would be taken away would be intolerable.

Isaiah was led into the room by a bailiff. There were gasps and calls of support. Melissa began to sob. Polly stirred and Te Kahurangi half-stood up and had to be pulled down again. Rangi called out a loud greeting.

'Order in the court. Any further disturbers of the peace will be held in contempt.' The judge's tone was measured. Alexia appreciated how keen he must be, given the protesters outside, to keep a lid on any disobedience. He must not be seen to be sympathetic.

'Kia kaha,' Rangi yelled, one last time, and was quenched.

Isaiah turned and looked her in the eye. He waved to everyone, but his eyes were on her. The cut of his cheekbones in his face, his full lips. She looked away, to the prosecutor's table, to the guards around him. They uncuffed him. It had been six weeks since she had seen him led away.

She told herself to breathe deeply, not to blush. Sam was seated behind her, a little to the left. Perhaps he was looking for Sam's face in the crowd, not for hers. She looked up again and it was a true undoubtable thing, and there. He wore ill-fitting clothes. There was a new sparseness to his face behind his beard. Then the long talking began.

Unlike some of the others, Alexia did not expect things to happen fast. She was not surprised to find that they were through morning tea and into lunch, without anything significant being said. After lunch the serious action started. It was the nature for the courtroom: the sonorous reading out of charges and counts, the methodical presentation of evidence, the ceremonious addresses (“Your Honour,” “Council”). In the past, it had made her feel an odd, official kind of satisfaction. Now every second was a small trauma of waiting; the collected seconds like a fist in her chest, while her body went torpid with inactivity. They had brought in character references for Isaiah; an old lecturer, a family friend, a man who had worked with him in an environmental NGO. She appreciated what they were doing, and tried to explain to Te Kahurangi at lunch: the Crown was making allegations about conspiracy and terrorist acts. The first thing would be to show that Isaiah was not an immediate threat to society. This shouldn’t be too hard, she told her. Isaiah’s last character witness sat down.

‘Permission to question the defendant.’ The Crown’s head lawyer was standing. She had hoped Isaiah would avoid this. Isaiah stood. Polly grasped at Alexia’s hand, though she seemed unaware of it. The Crown lawyer asked his name, and his date of birth.

‘You are pleading not guilty to all of your charges.’

‘Yes.’

‘You expect us to believe that you, a seasoned activist with a criminal record ...’

‘Objection. Prejudice –’

‘Objection sustained.’

‘You expect us to believe, that someone such as yourself, a man passionately committed, as we have heard, to environmental causes, who has a known record as a protestor and organiser of demonstrations, would return to his ancestral land to find it polluted, and do nothing?’

Isaiah took a moment. ‘Well,’ he said. ‘I didn’t do nothing. We did organise a fundraiser –’

‘You expect us,’ the Crown lawyer went on, ‘to believe that when your appeals to the council failed and your protests did not draw attention, that you rolled over and gave up?’

‘Objection, your honour. Leading the witness.’

‘Sustained.’

The torpor of the last few hours had dropped away. Alexia leaned forward in her seat.

‘We’ve been told,’ said the Crown lawyer, ‘that you are a fine upstanding citizen. One, we would be asked to believe, who does not pose a threat to his or to any community, or

the general public. A fine, upstanding citizen, as your character witnesses said, ethical, intelligent, uncommonly professional.'

'...Yes,' Isaiah said, into the pause the lawyer left.

The Crown lawyer turned theatrically to the court audience.

'A pacifist,' he said. 'An advocate for peace.'

'...Yes,' Isaiah said. His eyes turned to her, behind the glasses. The Crown lawyer turned towards the judge. Now his voice was quiet.

'You're aware, your Honour, that charges such as these have not been heard before in this country. You'll be aware of the importance of the Crown's allegations. You're aware that the police do not lay firearms or conspiracy charges lightly. You're aware that the Crown has sufficient, beyond sufficient evidence, for proving that, quite in contrast to the peaceful exterior Mr Brown likes to portray, Mr Brown is in fact the leader of a highly organised, well-resourced terrorist cell.'

At the word terrorist, the court fell quiet. The judge seemed not to know what to say.

'Permission to present exhibit 2.a, your honour.' Permission was granted. Alexia watched the court attendants set up speakers at the front of the court. The Crown prosecutor seemed almost gleeful. The surveillance. They really had been listening all along. 'Play the recording from 3.42 minutes through, please,' the Crown lawyer said, brisk now, as if disgusted with the whole affair. The recording began.

'We'll need some lengths of pipe,' Isaiah's voice said.

'For locking on? We're planning an occupation, then?' a voice asked. Alexia recognised it as Rangi's.

'Not an occupation, an attack,' Isaiah's voice said. 'An attack on their house of power: the court house. They attack us, with their chemicals and trucks, ripping out trees, destroying the earth. We attack them. Who could blame us? The pipes we'll slip up our sleeves, like batons.'

The recording clicked off. Then Isaiah's lawyer was up and talking, and his assistants were scrambling through their papers, and the judge was telling everyone to quieten down.

'We are asked to believe,' the Crown lawyer said, 'that this man is of good character; law abiding, peaceful. He is accused of plotting terrorist acts against the government, of sabotaging private property, of conspiracy with a group with the intent to cause violent harm to the people of this country. He says he is not guilty of these acts, and he asks us to take him at his word.'

Bail was denied. Kate came screaming the news out to the supporters waiting outside. There would be no speeches to the waiting cameras, no clever challenging of terminology, no pithy interviews. There would be no Isaiah being led out the back door. Alexia saw the news go along the corridors of the court and out into the waiting street. She stood for a moment in front of the court doors, afraid she might be sick.

‘Get her out of here,’ It was Rangi. He spoke over her head, to Te Kahurangi and Polly. ‘Get her out.’ And mercifully she was whisked from the front door to the back, out into someone’s car, through the crowd around the courthouse and back to the marae, into a chair, where she was given a cup of tea. Polly sat by her.

‘You expected something else?’ she asked. ‘You expected them to let the Māori terrorist go?’ She laughed. Alexia had never heard her sound so bitter.

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The next day, they released Rangi’s tape.

TV One

The Morning Report

And today a potential terrorist attack, or a case of police brutality

TV Three

The Noon Report

Someone’s calling from the newspaper

Paramilitary raids on a small rural

Evening news you’re here with

Terrorist

The nation is divided over claims that the police

Someone needs to take this call. Someone needs to write something. Sam? Sam?

Alexia?

Local resident Rangi Tuhene says the community had tried peaceful protest

Sam?

We were just protecting ourselves, he said. We were just going in prepared

Are you Ok? It’s just, I heard the news Alexia

Māori are calling for investigation into the

Morning Report

One News

Raids on a small rural community

I can come if you need, Alexia. Alexia?

Black uniformed government forces entered the small rural community

Terrorist

Noon Report

It's the lawyers. It's the legal team. Alexia?

Māori are calling for an apology

A local resident took this footage with his phone as he was caught up in the

Six o'clock report

Terrorist

He said the group had been trying to get their concerns heard for quite some time before the

The young girl you see in the footage is seventeen

Morning Report

Alexia, can you take this call? The radio

Following an incident with a gas exploration tower the small rural community

Noon Report

Terrorist

Footage of a young girl being brutally beaten by the

Māori are calling for an apology

The group had been trying to have their case heard for quite some time

Alexia?

Nationwide concern over the nature of the police response

Rangi. He's on the phone. He's on the phone, Rangi. Alexia?

Six o'clock news

Was the action justified?

Terrorist

The accused is still being held after being denied bail

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'Are you Ok? It's just, I heard the news, Alexia.'

'I'm fine!' She was so happy to hear Katherine's voice. Not one of the rest of them had called. Not that she would have wanted that. 'How's Yaya?'

‘She’s gone mad,’ Katherine said, abruptly.

‘What are you talking about?’ Alexia was crouched beside a wing of the city marae. Isaiah was still in gaol.

‘All this stuff looks pretty serious on the news. I can come up, Alexia. Alexia?’

‘You don’t need to do that. Tell me about Yaya.’ Katherine sighed, one of her hopeless sighs.

‘She’s thrown out all of Papou’s things.’

‘The bouzouki?’ It was selfish. But it was the only thing. His aged hands on it.

‘It’s gone, Alexia. I wish I could have stopped it.’

‘...’

‘I came this morning and saw them loading the last of his clothes into the car. The bouzouki was already gone.’

‘... .well. Well.’

‘I don’t know what happened. I think she just couldn’t bear it. It’s been bad down here, Alexia.’

‘...it’s only a bouzouki, after all. It’s only an object.’ She looked up into the bare sky, clouds crossing as white as bones.

‘They say this kind of thing happens to old people sometimes.’

Alexia saw the gold-edged frets, the painted key designs. Last time she’d held the small round belly in her hands she had been talking to Isaiah, he at the pā, she at Yaya’s. She’d propped it on the windowsill with Papou’s favourite things: his tobacco box, long disused, his comboloya beads for throwing and catching. She’d believed it was a temporary thing, putting the bouzouki down. She’d believed it to be hers.

‘You’re not alright, are you, Alexia? I’ve been watching the news. I’ve only got a few days till uni’s over. Then I’ll come up.’

Alexia didn’t speak. How could Katherine, in her dresses and makeup and shoes, come here, where her best friend was a tattooed ex-convict, her ally an eighty year old woman, her companion a young girl whom she had prevented knifing a cop?

‘Look, she wants to talk to you. I’m at her house. I’ll put her on.’

‘Yiassou, Yaya.’

‘Alexia. I tell you something. I tell you, I leave my family too.’ And it was true. Yaya had never been back to Greece, not once, not for all her nostalgia. ‘I leave my Mama. My Baba. Do you understand?’ Her silence was a complex thing. Alexia did not know how to answer it.

‘Now what is this I see on the television, your boyfriend? They all try to tell me. I see everything, Alexia. You must explain. What is this thing? They say he is in gaol.’

‘We’re trying to get him out, Yaya. It isn’t fair.’

There followed a long excited passage in Greek. Alexia listened with all of her attention. But she became aware of a new thing, a disconcerting thing. She couldn’t understand the words. Perhaps it was the line. She pressed her ear to the receiver, turned the volume up, but it was no good. Yaya was speaking fast, but no faster than usual. She caught something about the news, guns, the Māori, Neo Zealandia. But the grammar slid over her ear like water. She could not make sense of it.

‘Do you hear me, Alexia? I ask you a question. I ask you.’ Yaya spoke in English.

‘Why did you give away the bouzouki?’ She heard her own voice. It was too free with what was inside of it.

‘Sorry, daline. You want to use it? Why you want it? It was old. Too old. None of us use it anymore.’ Yaya had not gone mad. She’d just cleaned the house, in her pragmatic, immigrant’s way, that preferred new houses to old, that preferred clean lines to antique, that judged newer to be better. ‘I buy you another one, a better one.’

‘What did you want to ask?’

There followed more words in Greek.

‘Yaya... I don’t understand.’ There was silence on the line.

‘You somewhere noisy?’ Yaya asked. Not waiting for an answer, she went on in English. ‘I think this man, Isaiah, he was born here.’

‘Yes.’

‘I think he is a Māori.’

‘Yes.’ There was a long pause.

‘Then why everyone talk about a tourist?’

Alexia took a moment, then began to laugh. She put her hand over the receiver but it was out of control, it was too awful, she could not stop.

‘It’s “terrorist,” Yaya. “Terrorist.”’

‘Oh. Like the Palestinians, the people with the bombs.’ Alexia stopped laughing. ‘This boy, he’s a nice boy, Alexia?’

Katherine came back on the line. She wanted to know how Alexia was, how she really was. Alexia was fine, she was fine. She would not tell Katherine about this new thing, this hole like a lost tooth in her mouth, the loss of her understanding.

‘So you haven’t been able to see him,’ Katherine said. ‘Is there anything else?’



‘I haven’t,’ Alexia said. ‘Actually,’ now her own voice was upbeat, impossibly casual. ‘I’m late with my...’

It was a strange thing; it was only as she said it that she knew it to be true. How could she have entirely forgotten? She remembered the time last month when it should have come, and didn’t. It was in the wake of the demo, and real life was on hold. She had put the whole episode aside, anyway, and not bothered to worry about it. But she supposed, statistically, there could be a small chance. She had been a few days late before, but only ever a few. She was pressing both feet into their shoes very hard. There was a silence.

‘It’s not very likely. It’s not very likely that I’m pregnant at all. It would be a very outside chance.’

‘I’m coming up on Saturday,’ Katherine said, brightly. ‘I’ll text when I get in at the airport.’ Alexia saw no further use in resisting.

\*

They came for him in the early morning before it was light. There was no explanation of where he was going. He had no possessions anyway, and went in the clothes he stood up in, the clothes he had worn to the court appearance. The guard signing him out looked him up and down.

‘Sad to see you go, Greenpeace,’ he said, and the other guards laughed.

‘Jeez, at least the other fullas in here, they usually got something for their trouble before they got caught.’

‘Shut up. He’s famous now. A star. You better not cross him or some hippies will protest outside.’

‘Make you eat your veges, ha ha ha.’

Isaiah demanded that people be notified of his destination. The guard looked at him thoughtfully.

‘Not usual practice,’ he said. ‘Not even for a superstar.’

They opened the van. ‘Bye, Greenpeace. Go save a whale for us.’

‘Go plant some trees. Good luck.’

The inside of the van was lined with steel cages, like crates of robust chicken wire. They uncuffed him, then opened one of the cages and locked him in. He quickly grew cold. The cage did not allow him to lie down, or to sit up fully. There was no seat. He had to

crouch, holding his knees. One by one others were led into the transport and locked in. Eight of them, and one, swinging bulb.

An hour in, someone had to go to the bathroom. He was told he had to wait till the only stop, half way down. He didn't make it.

Another hour in, Isaiah himself had the burning need. He mediated on a spot on the metal floor. The cages jolted and rattled, jolted and rattled. They had not been given breakfast.

Another hour in, one of the other inmates lost it. He screamed for water. He screamed that they were all bastards and treating them like animals in cages. They didn't get any water.

Another hour in, they stopped and got out at some tearooms. They were led through with shackled ankles. They got sandwiches, the edges of which had been neatly trimmed of crusts.

On being locked in again, Isaiah closed his eyes. He would think of anything but this jolting under the bright light. But his body was soon screaming to be stretched. He'd never known anything like this: the hot pain in his knees, the cramps in his back, the inevitable limits of the body. He focussed on the point, and became it: nothing, just a small blue dot on the floor. He focussed on a point. It became everything: the pā, the forest, the bone, Sam and all the mistakes he'd made, Alexia, and how it felt like she was somehow of his body. Polly, how she carried herself, the cool proud angle of her neck. It took a long while to reach their destination.

\*

Isaiah had been transferred. He would be transferred to the prison closest to the pā, where he would be, for the duration.

As they pulled up the road to the pā everyone looked. But the shape of the burnt tower was gone. There was no police presence, no unknown cars lingering too long on the public road that paralleled this one, no extra supporters. Everyone had gone home.

'They pulled it down so no one could take pictures,' Matiu said. 'But what about the land around it? Can't clean that up fast. We can show people that.'

'Ka pai, Matiu,' Polly said. 'We got to be the hosts now, invite people here to look around.' It was Isaiah's dream, and he wasn't here to help them realise it. Alexia would have to get access to Isaiah's photos so she could give them to the press. He was so

scrupulous that she knew he must have saved back-ups somewhere. Sam would know. But that would entail navigating the gap between her and Sam. It didn't matter. She felt their urgency leaking away. Sam would go soon. What more was there to do, but raise funds and wait?

They pulled in. There was no welcome home. Everyone had come to the court. Polly walked a few steps into the green field. The land was cruelly beautiful, and the sun was shining. Alexia went after her. She waited, but Polly did not say anything, or sing, turning instead towards the marae. She walked towards it slowly, unlike her former self, looking at the ground.

Tinny music burst into the carpark. All the others were dispersing, but one or two stopped to watch the red hatchback that barrelled up the drive. It pulled in, spewing loud music and then falling silent. Katherine got out and ran to her, a tangle of scarves and lipstick smell and vanilla perfume and crystal necklaces. Alexia found that she was laughing, somewhere inside the circle of Katherine's lacey clothes.

'I borrowed a car!' Katherine said, magnificently. 'I drove here, by myself!' She had been redirected at the last moment. She opened her eyes wide in amazement at her own self, and Alexia could not stop laughing. She walked her sister to the wharekai, where everyone convened for a cup of tea. Mary bustled around, adding sugars to a cup for Katherine, and beginning to make scones despite having only just arrived. Polly sat and considered Katherine for a long time, then brushed her cheek with her hand.

'You look like your sister,' she said sternly. 'Too skinny.'

Matiu did not know where to look. Lizzie hugged her. Rangi hongied Katherine gladly, his large form nearly crushing her. Te Kahurangi blushed.

'Katherine, Te Kahurangi,' Alexia said. 'Te Kahurangi is a student too.'

'History and Politics,' said Te Kahurangi, shortly, looking at the floor. Alexia recalled there had been no more talk about her absent girlfriend.

'Me too!' said Katherine. She looked quizzically at Te Kahurangi. 'You look familiar,' she said. 'Have I met you before?'

'That's me on the news,' Te Kahurangi said. 'At the protest. Where the cop's beating me up.' She touched the long line of the scar on her forehead.

Katherine gave Te Kahurangi what Alexia could see was perhaps a special smile.

\*

‘I’ve approved her as a visitor,’ Isaiah said. ‘She’s on my list of people. Can I call her?’

‘Not today,’ the guard said. ‘She has to apply to visit you.’

‘I know that,’ Isaiah said. ‘But how is she meant to know that?’

‘I guess, if she loves you, she’ll know,’ the guard said.

\*

‘Radio interview, done. Doco interview, done. Kate, have you sent the files on to the paper?’

Sam was running things again. Alexia sat in the corner, quietly interjecting or clarifying a point from time to time. Flanked by her sister, she was immune to the cooling between herself and the others. The night Katherine arrived, Alexia’s period had started. She was not pregnant after all.

‘Does this, like, happen to you often?’ Katherine had said. ‘God, how stressful.’

‘It’s never happened before,’ Alexia had said.

The phone rang. Kate answered.

‘Rangi. He’s on the phone. He’s on the phone, Rangi. Alexia?’ Alexia made it to the phone first.

‘You’re on my approved list,’ he said. Katherine was watching her, from across the room. Everyone was watching her.

‘Do you need anything?’ she said.

‘Cigarettes,’ he said. ‘No, seriously. I need them for trading. I could do with another pen, and some toothpaste.’

‘Right,’ she said. ‘Isaiah, it’s all on the news. The gas exploration, your photos, everything. They’re doing a special tonight.’

‘Right,’ he said, and paused. ‘I won’t get to see it,’ he said. ‘You could write to me about it? Or try and remember for when you visit?’ She could read unpleasant things in his voice. Hours in grey rooms. Walks down bright corridors. Small humiliations.

‘Right!’ she said, cheerily. ‘I will!’ But she didn’t feel cheery at all.



## TWELVE

London Bridge is fallen down,  
Fallen down, fallen down,  
London Bridge is fallen down,  
My fair lady.

### *Three Months Later*

It was routine to her now, the complex process of checking in, the jumping through metallic hoops. But it was never ordinary. The prison reared up, a grey block in a green landscape. At the first hoop she passed through the steel automated doors into the cool, air conditioned room. The second hoop required of her name, date of birth, and occupation. The third required her visitor's code, and the next, her keys and wallet and bag. The next required an x-ray image of her body, all the bones revealed, innocent as anyone else's bones, an image meant to prove she was carrying nothing inside of herself that Isaiah might use to escape. Then she was taken and claimed by the space, having left her identity at the door. She moved awkwardly along the pathways with the other visitors, unescorted, following signs. The first time she had come she'd been hot with nerves, and this moment, the moment when the last steel door slid soundlessly closed behind her, was then and now the worst. She was locked in.

But he was there. He was there, and ridiculous, in a bright orange suit and with long hair that the former Isaiah would not have permitted. He was eager. He started forward towards her and then dropped back, as if he was ashamed. They moved towards the round table. It had chairs attached to it that could not be moved. There was no screen between them, but on the first day when they'd tried to embrace, her head against the rough skin of his suit, the guard had gestured them apart. The rules were no hand-holding, no hugging. No

touching at all. The one time they'd had sex had been so awful, so very awful, that they had never talked about it.

'Tama's mother Lizzie had her baby!' she called across the space between them. Everyone else ceased to exist: the milling prisoners, similarly intent on their visitors, the guards lined up like toy soldiers along the walls. 'A little boy. Now Tama's decided he believes in Jesus. He asked him for a brother, of course.'

'That's awesome,' Isaiah said. 'Is Rangi proud?'

'You should see him,' she said. 'No one can shut him up.'

'Any news about the appeal?'

Alexia shook her head. Isaiah had been having trouble getting messages from his lawyer. 'Nothing's happened. Nothing. Oh, they are calling it sabotage, what happened to the tower. Apparently they found something they think was used to blow it up.' Isaiah nodded slowly.

'Have the documentary team left?'

'They've gone.' So had Kate, and Melissa, and, finally, Sam, who had held on stubbornly, righteously, fighting for a cause who had turned into Isaiah. Bryce had lingered around the edges of the pā, but when it was found that his wife Steph was a police informant, he left in apparent disgust. Even Aidan and Hannah had left, to go and raise funds for the legal battle in the city. After the bail hearing most of the Pākehā seemed to have finally had enough of Isaiah. They'd loved him at the pōwhiri, then hated him after the fundraiser, then loved him again, when he was arrested. The police had unwittingly made a hero of him. In the grey space that followed the hearing everyone drifted off, seeping away back to their lives. Katherine, though, was still at the pā. She had taken time off uni. She had discovered a love of animals and was learning how to milk. Te Kahurangi stayed, too. Someone had to care for the cows, she said, and with Matiu deep in legal applications and Rangi going gaga over his baby, someone had to do it.

'That security guard who was injured,' Alexia said. 'He's leaving hospital in a week, and going home.' This was very good news. It had seemed for a short while after the explosion that the man would not pull through. Now, he was being released, the contusions to his head mainly healed. The legal implications were good.

'That's great,' he said. 'Poor guy. But why are you so happy about it? You did throw rocks at him that time.' He tried to smile, and so did she, but they both failed. 'How's Maitai?' Isaiah went on, hurriedly. Visits were only twenty minute long. 'Has he come back?' He was doing the new thing where he spoke too fast.

‘Maitai won’t come back,’ she said. ‘He’s still staying with his dad.’ He hadn’t been able to sleep at the pā. She would not tell Isaiah about Tama’s bad dreams, or about how Ana cried more often. She would not tell him about Polly, about how quiet she was now, how tired.

‘I suppose you’ll leave too, one of these days,’ he said.

Three months of polite visiting had come to a point. Alexia found herself staring at him. Her hands were working at each other methodically; she stopped them. The guard called time.

‘Polly’s asked me to be a music teacher here,’ she said. ‘At the kōhanga.’

She had already said yes. He laughed suddenly, a sound she realised she missed. His beard was grown out and dark, his skin tanned from all the hours in the courtyard. He’d told her their outside time was rationed, and that he spent as much time as he could there, doing extra work so he could see some foliage, glimpse the sparse trees around the prison grounds. Did he take photos in his head, the same way that she heard music? She had started hearing tunes again sometime after he’d been transferred. It had been this more than anything else that had convinced her she should stay.

‘What will your family think of that, then?’

‘They’re not talking to me. It’s probably a good thing. I did talk to Yaya. They all think I’m corrupting Katherine, that I’ve coerced her into staying here. I didn’t want to tell her Katherine’s doing a good job of corrupting herself.’

‘But when will you sit your bar exam?’

‘If I enrol in next year’s test, I’ll have time to study. I’ve decided I do want to be a lawyer.’

‘Good. It would have been a waste otherwise.’ He paused. ‘I would have felt terrible if all this had distracted you.’

‘All this a distraction? This is our lives.’ She had said it without thinking. Now it lay on the metal table between them. He looked at her quietly. ‘I shall be a defender of the innocents,’ she said, grandly.

‘I hope so,’ he said. He leaned forward suddenly. ‘I know you must want to talk. After everything that’s been in the press.’

‘It’s not like we can talk,’ she said. There were cameras here, the guards, surveillance of many kinds. ‘Not any time soon.’

‘Alexia,’ he said. ‘What do you think my sentence would be, if I was found guilty?’ Now she was quiet. ‘They can’t expect me to just stay here, can they, until they’re ready to



put me on trial? It's like I'm in stasis. I mean, this waiting is a trial in itself.' He grabbed her hand. A guard near the door stirred. Stasis, from the Greek; a standing still. The liturgia was broken into kathismata, seats, and after each seat came the stasis, the pause. Mama would chant, while Alexia would kneel, watching the lights interminably rise and burst.

'No touching,' the guard called out.

'You're the lawyer. How long do you think this legal stuff is going to take?'

'It appears...' she did not know what to say. 'It appears it may take a long time.' He looked away.

'Well, until we can talk, I guess you're just going to have to trust me,' he said.

She looked at him. His thoughtful eyes and glasses and long hands, his earnest face.

'I guess you're just going to have to trust me too,' she said. The guard called time again. Inmates started to rise and take their leave.

'It's funny, isn't it?' he asked. 'We might have sabotaged ourselves. I mean, I thought that we could have been mistaken.'

'That night, in the bush?' she asked. 'It was stupid, and impulsive. It could possibly have ruined everything.'

'I'd like to think we knew what we were doing,' Isaiah said, 'even if we rushed into it. Even if it didn't turn out very well.' The colour was high in his face. She stood to go. She smoothed her hands over her dress. They were sweating. He stood, a bearded man in an orange suit, tired-looking, thin, possibly hers. The guards shepherded the visitors towards the door, and the leaving siren sounded.

'You can always choose, whether to throw the stone or not,' she said. 'But you can't always tell where it will fall.'

Then he was against her, the coarse fabric of his suit against her skin, his hand in hers. Alexia looked into his eyes for one second, two, before the guard came and pulled him away.

THE END

