

Tempest

Ep 1: The Way of All Things

Written by

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First Draft

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Blue-dark dawn over the south pacific ocean. Shoreline cliffs. Rocky beach.

HIGH ON THE CLIFFTOP

An obscure Victorian-looking tripod instrument sits by a whirligig. Pinwheels fluttering in the breeze. Old photos attached with wooden clothes pegs.

DOWN ON THE SHORE

A wooden raft bobs in shallow water. Guided by hands. We can't see faces.

A body on the raft. Dressed in a folkloric robe, deer horns and paua shells and dried octopus tentacles. Strange colored flowers. A female face still and calm - dead? Dreaming?

The raft glides softly out into the ocean, into this vast unknowable frontier. The dawn sky in radioactive glory.

INT. CONFESSION ROOM - GREG'S INTERVIEW

DETECTIVE GREG KIRK, 33, stares at us. Battered. Tired. A man who's been through hell.

GREG KIRK

She was never a liar. Straight to the point, right from the beginning. No matter where it led.

INTERVIEWER (O.S.)

And when was the beginning?

GREG KIRK

Person does something bad. That's an event. But you go back, you see context. Maybe they got divorced, started drinking again. Bullied at school when they were a kid. Parents who hit them. And those parents worked jobs they hated, got married too young. Dad had a tall neighbor with green eyes who abused him behind the local swimming pool when he was seven years old. Back it goes, back and back and back, family, history, society, a river of cause and effect running hundreds of years. Drive you mad, thinking about that. The 'beginning'.

INTERVIEWER
 (exasperated)
 When did the sequence of events
 involving the disappearance of Lana
 Tiger occur?

Greg raises an insolent eyebrow. Is such a plain question even worth answering?

INT. CONFESSION ROOM - BRONWYN'S INTERVIEW

BRONWYN DARROW, 35, stares into the distance. Like Greg, she's bruised and scarred. Her left sleeve hangs loose - one arm? But when she speaks it's with crisp accuracy.

BRONWYN DARROW
 11th of June, touchdown in New
 Zealand 1:15 PM. Arrived at the
 site by 2:20.

INT. AIRPORT CUSTOMS - DAY

A near-deserted customs arrival hall. This used to be a busy airport, but now... where did everybody go?

Abandoned trolleys. Fading posters. A bright, cheery, 'Welcome to New Zealand!' sign defaced into a howling grimace.

Bronwyn and ELSA DARROW, 15, her daughter, make their way through the eerie space, each trailing a portable luggage cart.

We notice Bronwyn has both her arms, and presents differently than in the (future) interview room. Here she's stylish and capable, an international fixer on the move.

Bronwyn strides forward. Elsa follows reluctantly, uncomfortable with everything.

They pass a HOMELESS PERSON sitting on a bench holding a placard: The End is ~~Nigh~~ Here.

Another sign: ANXIOUS / DEPRESSED / UNSTABLE? REPORT IT!

Deserted luggage carousel. No processing booth or security.

BEYOND THE EXIT DOORS

waiting for them, a uniformed POLICE OFFICER.

INT. CONFESSION ROOM - GREG'S INTERVIEW

Greg leans forward.

GREG KIRK

You know how many flights land at
Wellington airport these days?
Charter flights?

Raises his eyebrows - 'that's a whole different world.'

EXT. WELLINGTON COAST - DAY

The battered police car winds its way through New Zealand's striking landscape. Rough hills. Foaming sea. This vast pacific sky. Wellington city in the distance.

INT. GETAWAY FARM HOUSE - MURDER SCENE (INTERCUT)

A SCENE TECHNICIAN's hands explore the landscape of a dead man's body. Rough pores. Scratchy beard. Folds of a leather jacket like black mountains.

The hands stop. They've found something.

IN THE BACK SEAT OF THE POLICE CAR

Elsa watches the outside world with fascination. Towering cliffs. Ramshackle wooden houses.

A hunched figure on the side of the road—

IN THE MURDER SCENE

Greg Kirk, healthier and shaven than in the interview room, stands up from the Scene Technician's inspection. We watch his face as he considers the scene; questing, absorbing, troubled by implications. We haven't seen the full body yet.

IN THE BACK SEAT OF THE POLICE CAR

Elsa breathes, pushing away the beginnings of a panic attack.

Pulls up her sleeve — something that looks like a tattoo. It's actually a synthetic mood regulator that responds to her emotional state. Right now it's pulsing gently, tendrils breathing in and out across her forearm. A visual incarnation of barely-controlled anxiety.

She breathes again, controlling it.

Bronwyn, sitting next to her, notices.

BRONWYN DARROW

When we get there, you're going to
wait in the car, and we're not
going to talk about it.

Elsa responds by looking out the window again. Bronwyn looks out her own window.

The Police Officer in the driver's seat looks back, coming to his own conclusions.

OUTSIDE THE CAR

Massive clouds on the horizon. Touches of radioactive light.

Huddled camps of people tenting by the side of the highway. Praying to the sky.

INSIDE THE CAR

The edge of Bronwyn's sleeve. Just visible, under it, her own tattoo, pulsing.

EXT. GETAWAY FARM HOUSE - DAY

The Police car pulls into a long driveway leading to a secluded farmhouse. Everything – the well-cut grass, the fence posts, the house itself – is in notably better condition than the general state of New Zealand we've seen so far.

IN THE HOUSE

Greg hears the car.

GREG KIRK

Ok boys. Not too hostile. But not
too friendly, right?

OUTSIDE, SOON AFTER

The police car arrives at the farmhouse. Greg, back straight, awaiting these visitors into his domain.

INT. GETAWAY FARM HOUSE

The farm house feels consciously rustic – like something made for wealthy visitors, which in fact it is. This is Kiwi escape by way of Architectural Digest.

Greg brings Bronwyn through the winding interior.

GREG KIRK

Call came in from a nearby farmer before dawn. Lights were on, he investigated.

BRONWYN DARROW

Uh huh.

Greg stops by a doorway guarded by a POLICE OFFICER. Something ominous beyond.

GREG KIRK

No disrespect, but I'm not clear on your role or your authority here. It's a police scene, and I'm New Zealand police.

The Officer nods – our guy.

But Bronwyn's ignoring the power games for now, taking in every detail of the setting. Assessing. Finding and discarding theories.

BRONWYN DARROW

I'm not clear either. But I'm here to help.

GREG KIRK

My experience that word means different things in different contexts.

BRONWYN DARROW

It does.

And with that she's somehow already past him and the officer, moving into the scene—

INT. GETAWAY FARM HOUSE – MURDER SCENE – CONTINUOUS

The body we saw earlier, now in full view. Lying on an elegant kitchen floor near fruit bowls and spilled food.

Male. Matted, overlong hair above rough rider gear. An obvious, massive head wound. A STRANGE PATCH on his leather jacket.

We see what stopped the technician's hands, what's troubled Detective Kirk. The visible skin has sprouted gnarled, colored growths that look like fungal plants. How'd that happen?

Bronwyn gazes, inscrutable.

GREG KIRK

We've combed the property, no other signs of life. Kept everything in place as requested.

BRONWYN DARROW

What're those growths?

GREG KIRK

They happen sometimes. Here.

But they still trouble him. Bronwyn considers, skeptically. Refocuses.

BRONWYN DARROW

No sign of Lana Tiger?

Greg shakes his head.

GREG KIRK

None. But your — client? — was staying here. Neighbors confirmed about a month.

He holds up a holo-image of LANA TIGER, technologist billionaire. Impressive. Focused. Beautiful.

Bronwyn's right wrist, nearly out of sight under her jacket sleeve, twitches as the tattoo pulses.

She bends down, examines the dead man, his head wound, the alien growths.

BRONWYN DARROW

Who was he?

GREG KIRK

Not sure yet. The patch relates to some local activity.

Bronwyn stares at the patch. The world pressurizes around her—

Lana Tiger in Bronwyn's mind for a moment, smiling that mocking knowing smile she always had—

EXT. GETAWAY FARM HOUSE

Bronwyn takes in the full surroundings. The hills. The ominous sky. Gulls in the air. Trees reaching out. The house, this weirdly fake-feeling oasis amid an ancient landscape.

A few police tramping the grounds. But not enough?

She's searching for insight. Something doesn't feel right. The narrative's not how it should be, here.

FROM THE CAR

Elsa watches too. She's fascinated by the house, by her own mother, by the mystery of this place. As Bronwyn strides over Elsa starts to open the door, hoping to join in, be a team—

But Bronwyn blocks it with her body. Shakes her head.

EXT. WELLINGTON POLICE STATION - DAY

Wellington city feels half-abandoned. The streets are depopulated, swept with old rubbish.

A forlorn police parking lot sits by a vintage brick slab building. Battered, under-serviced vehicles parked haphazardly. Feels like the forces of law and order are diminishing in this world.

INT. WELLINGTON POLICE STATION

Bronwyn points Elsa to a moldy chair.

BRONWYN DARROW
Sit the fuck there and don't move.

Elsa complies, radiating resentment.

The inside of the police station isn't much better than the outside. Like the faded ghost of a 1970s office building.

A group of middle-aged cops and detectives mill around the desks, none younger than 35, almost all male.

General muted hostility at Bronwyn's presence as she strides towards Greg and CAPTAIN SMITH, who runs the station.

Captain Smith steps forward, courteous, maybe a little too courteous.

CAPTAIN SMITH

Ms Darrow. On behalf of Wellington Station, we'll extend you every courtesy.

Greg, perhaps trying to avert the confrontation he can already see coming, brings up the picture of Lana Tiger on a briefing screen.

GREG KIRK

Disappearance, possible abduction of Lana Tiger, wealthy technologist out of the former States. Was using New Zealand as a retreat of some kind, like people who can afford to these days. Last seen by neighbors two nights ago.

CAPTAIN SMITH

Ms Tiger doesn't have personal security, tracking devices, safety beacons, that sort of thing?

BRONWYN DARROW

She does. Extensively. But not when she goes off grid.

CAPTAIN SMITH

You hear that, Kirk - we're off grid, down here.

GREG KIRK

A miracle we've got running water and clothes.

INT. MEDICAL EXAMINER'S ROOM

A grimy space in the basement of the police building. Worn instruments, unwashed walls, years of mounting neglect from under staffing.

The MEDICAL EXAMINER - old, nearly retired - cuts the clothes off the body with scissors. Greg, Bronwyn, Captain Smith observing.

GREG KIRK

Holden Plumber, convicted twelve years ago in Whakatane. Tattoos indicate affiliation.

He tries not to say it ominously, but there's extra meaning there.

BRONWYN DARROW

What does affiliation mean?

GREG KIRK

Last twelve years, since the Exchange, a large number of associations, gangs, spiritual groups, have proliferated along the south coast. Extreme beliefs and activities.

BRONWYN DARROW

Cults?

CAPTAIN SMITH

(doesn't want to admit it)
Matter of definition...

MEDICAL EXAMINER

Officers...

The last undergarment peels off the body. The tattoos underneath are powerful, disturbing (including one SPECIFIC GLYPH we should remember) and...

The whole body is encrusted with the mysterious plants. Growing in the skin.

Everyone stares. It's grotesque.

MEDICAL EXAMINER (cont'd)

That's the worst I've ever seen.

BRONWYN DARROW

I need a detachment.

Captain Smith looks at her, smirking.

CAPTAIN SMITH

You have no standing here, Ms Darrow. This is something that happens sometimes. We're going to do our little ole' off grid best to figure it out.

Elsa, who has snuck downstairs, watches her mother from the doorway. How will she play this?

Captain Smith watches.

Bronwyn considers—

Looks at the obviously hostile room—

Her tattoo pulses—

BRONWYN DARROW

Then I need a phone, with an international line. I'll pay cash.

Captain Smith nods.

CAPTAIN SMITH

That, we have.

The body sits there, disfigured and protuberant.

Elsa whips her head back out of sight just as Bronwyn turns to head upstairs—

INT. WELLINGTON POLICE STATION

A FILING CLERK moves through the station, carrying a RED BINDER.

Passes Bronwyn, who's struggling with an old manual phone in a corner of the briefing room.

Greg and Captain Smith watch from afar, sipping coffee.

GREG KIRK

Given everything that's happened to the world, do you think the global north should have ANY authority, moral or actual, down here? Any standing?

CAPTAIN SMITH

I do not.

GREG KIRK

I do not either.

They sip their drinks. The coffee's terrible.

BRONWYN

keeps dialing the line, to no avail.

The Clerk continues past, clutching the red folder.

BRONWYN DARROW

I need a check on exact status.

Cracking on the line. No connection. Bronwyn holds her frustration in and keeps trying.

Greg mooches across, a smirk on his face.

GREG KIRK

Atmospheric radiation plays havoc with communications. But then you people know all about that.

Bronwyn ignores him.

But behind Greg she sees the clerk putting a new photo up on the board, apparently taken from the red folder.

THE PHOTO

Shows two versions of Holden Plumber, the dead man, arm-in-arm in a pub.

Elsa, from her perch across the room, has also taken notice.

GREG KIRK (cont'd)

Yeah, there's two of 'em. The Plumber Twins. So if our dead man walks through the front door of the station, don't be—

This sparks a connection in Bronwyn's brain. She slams the phone down, hustles straight past Greg.

GREG KIRK (cont'd)

—disturbed.

EXT. WELLINGTON POLICE STATION - DAY

Bronwyn strides out of the station. Elsa right behind her. Gets into a battered police car. Elsa follows. A sense of mother-daughter team that we haven't seen before.

Greg and Captain Smith hurry out, just as the car zooms away.

EXT. WELLINGTON COAST - DAY

Driving with purpose under storm clouds. Massive waves along the coast. Radioactive twinkles in the atmosphere.

EXT. GETAWAY FARM HOUSE

The car arrives back at the crime scene house. No cops there any more, just a deserted, creepy feel.

SOON AFTER

Bronwyn stands in the half-dark of the kitchen, scene tape still visible. Trying to analyze.

Elsa hovers nervously, deeply uncomfortable.

ELSA DARROW
It's getting darker—

BRONWYN DARROW
Where would you go?

Elsa stares. Considers her own perception of the suddenly weird geometry of the house—

OUTSIDE BY A TOTARA TREE

They lift a hunk of soil and grass, revealing a a buried door. A bunker!

Mother & daughter look at each other — the cops missed this.

INT. BUNKER

Down into the dark, Bronwyn with a flashlight. Rusty iron stairs. Black and ominous. What's could it hold?

In the half-light both their arm tattoos are coiling—

EXT. GETAWAY FARM HOUSE - DAY

A police car arrives in a hurry.

SOON AFTER

Greg emerges from the car, pissed off, determined to stop whatever's going on.

INT. BUNKER

Greg stalks down the stairs. Points his gun and flashlight.
Bronwyn and Elsa in the dark space beyond. Elsa crouching.

GREG KIRK
Move out with your hands up.

But as Elsa stands and raises her hands, we see black
bloodstains glistening in the torchlight...

SOON AFTER

All three of them move through the darkness of the bunker,
following a line of blood-spatters on the iron-grilled
floor. Elsa's first, now with Bronwyn's torch, moving past
the edge of a bunk-bed and a portable stove—

But a savage face contorts in the torchlight!

Elsa screams.

SOON AFTER

Free-standing scene lights reveal the bunker properly as
more cops and techs cover the scene. It's a full-on
survivalist retreat. Comfy but serious. The walls are
stacked with supplies.

GREG KIRK (cont'd)
Every damn billionaire loves these
rat holes.

The savage face belongs to a man in a security cage in the
corner of the bunker. He's howling. Bashing himself against
the bars.

BRONWYN DARROW
Not like any billionaire I've seen.

GREG KIRK
Oh, not up to the social club
standard?

Elsa stares at the man from a safe distance.

ELSA DARROW
So he's the twin?

Bronwyn nods. Indeed, the man is the spitting image of dead
Holden Plumber.

BRONWYN DARROW
 Jamie Plumber.

Jamie's eyes full of madness and fury—

SOON AFTER

Scene techs hustle the man out of the bunker, wrapped in a blanket.

GREG KIRK
 So maybe this isn't a kidnapping or cult stuff. Maybe she was working with them. Or keeping THEM as prisoners. Experimenting, or something.

(off Bronwyn's
 scornful look)
 Nothing about this is obvious. You'll admit that. A shitty crim dead, his brother insane, one of the richest people in the world vanished into thin air...

He sees Bronwyn's distress. Tries another tack.

GREG KIRK (cont'd)
 Another other discoveries?

Bronwyn looks around the bunker, recalling her search.

BRONWYN DARROW
 Nothing more on Lana. But—

She gestures and we take in the full scene: the cage, the room, a visual river of fantastical art crawling all over the walls like madness itself.

Including a coiling, ominous GLYPH that we've already seen on dead Holden Plumber's body. That we're going to see a lot of.

BRONWYN DARROW (cont'd)
 (to herself)
 What were you doing....

GREG KIRK
 You and your boss are bringing a whole lot of trouble with you.

BRONWYN DARROW
 Feels like it was already here.

GREG KIRK

Well you're stirring things up,
which nobody needs.

EXT. GETAWAY FARM HOUSE - DAY

The sun's lowering, headed for dusk. Greg, Bronwyn, Elsa
head for the cars.

BRONWYN DARROW

Those growths. On the body. What is
that?

GREG KIRK

People along the coast. Especially
ones who go out on boats, or do...
other things. They get it
sometimes. Like a fungus. 'Cept
more than that. Responds to your
emotions. Never seen it that bad.

BRONWYN DARROW

He went through something.

GREG KIRK

Everyone's going through something.
Do you know anyone who's gotten a
full night's sleep in ten years?

BRONWYN DARROW

I know when people are hiding the
truth. You all act like Hobbits
down here, all safe and nuclear-
free, until the knives come out,
eh?

Greg looks at her. He hates being belittled, especially with
the truth.

Looks to Elsa.

GREG KIRK

She always like this?

ELSA DARROW

She's usually mean.

Dry as a bone. Perfect.

EXT. WELLINGTON HILLS - SUNSET

The fading light over the darkened hills. A vast, ominous ocean of night. Wellington city lit up like an island.

GREG KIRK (V.O.)

That's when things first began to change. Became clear that maybe the Lana Tiger case had legs. And horns.

Wellington city streets. People walking, hustling home from work. Life continues here, a little stranger and less populated than before the world tried to destroy itself, but it continues.

GREG KIRK

Not just another rich tourist. Not just another consequence.

A HOMELESS WOMAN sheltering beside a supermarket, her nose and cheeks blistered by the old scars of radiation fallout.

EXT. HOTEL - NIGHT

The Wellington Ridgeway, best hotel left in town.

INT. HOTEL LOBBY

A functioning hotel but it feels almost deserted, underpopulated. A few diners in a spacious dining room. A single porter at the desk. Eerie.

INT. HOTEL ROOM

Bronwyn sits on the edge of a tatty bed, desk phone in hand. This was once a high-end suite but maintenance has fallen off.

A poster: Where were you in '32?

Whispering into the phone. But something's distracting her—

A series of THUMPS and BANGS from the bathroom door—

Trying to talk, but the noises get louder and angrier—

She finishes up, bangs the phone down, strides to the bathroom door—

THUMPS angrily back—

Silence.

The door opens forlornly—

Elsa, in pajamas, the toiletries a destroyed mess behind her. Soap smeared on the mirror. Elsa bereft, like a doll with no battery. Standing there.

Bronwyn's anger sluices away. She hugs her daughter tight.

INT. JAIL BLOCK

Greg, short on sleep, stands next to the sole occupied cell in the police station basement.

GREG KIRK

Would you have children, in this world?

He taps a cigarette out.

JAMIE PLUMBER, the sweaty madman from the farmhouse bunker, sits restrained in the far corner of the cell. Quiet now.

GREG KIRK (cont'd)

Jamie Plumber. Just a singleton, now, eh?

Jamie gazes with deep intensity at Greg, like he'll kill him in cold blood if he gets free. Greg's unfazed.

GREG KIRK (cont'd)

My condolences, for what it's worth. No one deserves to die alone. We just all do.

Jamie winces. Struggles. But doesn't speak.

Greg strolls, back and forth.

GREG KIRK (cont'd)

It's all gone down, Jamie, hasn't it. The sun. The future. The things that happened in that farmhouse. All gone down behind the hills and the ocean. All beneath us now. Just memories.

EXT. WELLINGTON CITY - NIGHT

Bronwyn and Elsa share an ice cream on the near-deserted streets, under a gas lamp. A loving moment of warmth and light in the darkness.

INT. POLICE STATION LOCKER ROOM

Greg, looking like hell in the harsh light of a locker room.

Looks in the mirror. Pops some pills. Checks his phone: nothing. Stares.

We realize Greg's falling apart, though making great efforts to hide this from others.

INT. JAIL BLOCK

Greg strolls back into Jamie's view. Calm and collected, no sign of what we just saw in the locker room.

GREG KIRK

I've got nowhere else to be, Jamie.
And neither do you. So we're going
to have a little talk about all the
things we're are not supposed to
know... all the secrets.

Jamie starts to shake and roar defiantly.

Away from the two of them, the jail cell a cold & tiny oasis in the enveloping dark.

EXT. WELLINGTON COAST - NIGHT

Silhouetted against the radioactive sky, the Victorian-looking tripod instrument we saw right at the beginning whirs impatiently, as though waiting for someone to hear its signal.

EXT. FIJI RESORT - DAY (MEMORY)

Sunlight across a lagoon. A beautiful morning in paradise.

Bronwyn and Lana Tiger curled under covers, talking to each other. A better time.

LANA TIGER

It's out there. I know it. Just needs finding.

BRONWYN DARROW

You think everything's a problem to solve.

LANA TIGER

So do you.

Outside, the sky glitters gently with high-atmosphere radiation.

BRONWYN DARROW

I know when things are NP-hard. I know when to stop.

LANA TIGER

Uhhh-huhhh....

Lana jumps, just like a tiger, and they both laugh—

INT. HOTEL ROOM - MORNING

—But Bronwyn jerks awake from her memory into reality, which is this faded soulless room with a cheap plastic phone near her head, beeping insistently—

As she scrambles to get it we see that Elsa is curled up protectively in the bed too, like an animal seeking shelter. A rough night of bad thoughts, even after the ice cream.

Bronwyn grabs the phone—

GREG KIRK (O.S.)

Wake the hell up and get down here.

INT. HOTEL LOBBY - MORNING

Sunlight through the smoky glass walls of the lobby. Still faded and empty.

Greg waits for Bronwyn by a depopulated gift shop rack.

GREG KIRK

(frustrated)

You pulled rank. Or money.

Bronwyn doesn't get it—

GREG KIRK (cont'd)
 Orders from on high. Full co-
 operation in OUR investigation.

He's pissed – especially at the 'Our'. Wants to fight about it but Bronwyn just nods, keeps moving toward the exit.

EXT. HOTEL - MORNING

Greg's battered grey sedan waiting. No labeled police vehicle for them now.

GREG KIRK
 Lead came in last night on the
 twins. Family connection, maybe. Up
 the coast.

BRONWYN DARROW
 Let's do it.

But Greg pauses, his car door half-open.

GREG KIRK
 You know there's 80 suicides and
 disappearances every day in this
 region? But most of them aren't
 billionaire technologists.

BRONWYN DARROW
 You know I lost two hundred million
 fellow citizens in a single day?

GREG KIRK
 All personal friends of yours.

BRONWYN DARROW
 Shut the fuck up and let's move.
 Unless you need me to drive.

She clambers into the passenger seat without waiting further permission. Greg lingers just a moment – he kinda respected that.

EXT. WELLINGTON HILLS - DAY

The sedan winds through picturesque but wild hills.

It's much brighter today. Flowers blooming in riotous colors. The sky an intense blue.

BRONWYN DARROW

It's beautiful here. A different world.

GREG KIRK

Small towns all along the coast. Dozens of them. Two hundred years ago they were whaling stations, smugglers dens, trading posts. Now they're just places for people to cling to the remaining illusion of a society.

BRONWYN DARROW

It's nice to have any kind of illusion. Believe me.

GREG KIRK

Seen some things, huh?

BRONWYN DARROW

New York. Paris. Shanghai. The Delhi riot.

The way she says it, they weren't cosmopolitan trips.

GREG KIRK

Private jet'll take you anywhere, I imagine. Look at the rest of us, crawling along the ground like beetles.

Bronwyn looks at him sideways. This guy's got a real chip on his shoulder. But she understands why.

THE CAR

Keeps climbing the winding hill road. Ramshackle cottages looking down from the ridgeline like crows.

EXT. KA PAI ROADSIDE BURGER JOINT - DAY

An old food truck in a roadside rest area. Bright sign, peeling paint. Greg takes two burgers on chipped plates off the PROPRIETOR, plus a third thing wrapped in grease paper.

GREG KIRK

Hey, you know a blue-haired lady roundabouts? Maybe an artist?

The proprietor points up the road. Greg nods thanks.

SOON AFTER

Bronwyn bites into the burger, enjoying it. Speaks with her mouth full.

BRONWYN DARROW
How'd you get this lead?

GREG KIRK
Oh, you know. Methods and persuasions.

She sees his knuckles as he bites into his burger. Bloody from his 'conversation' with Jamie Plumber. Doesn't say anything.

INT. ARTIST HOUSE

An hand pulls aside an old lace curtain from a window. The hand's owner, unseen, watches the grey sedan rumble up a dirt driveway towards the house.

EXT. ARTIST HOUSE - DAY

The pair emerge from the sedan, walking towards a sprawling, bohemian structure that was once a 1950s weatherboard bungalow but has been extended many times. Old tires in a pile on the dirt. Bits of ancient appliances.

GREG KIRK
Let me take lead on this one, all right.

BRONWYN DARROW
Okay, partner.

She's kinda messing with him, but he can't tell.

A BLUE-HAIRED LADY, artistic and bohemian, 60s, emerges. Suspicious at any visitor.

GREG KIRK
Good day, ma'am. Do you mind if we talk a moment? I brought some food, 'case you or yours are feeling peckish.

He holds up the grease paper bundle he got from the roadside stall.

A tiny head pops out of an old tire nearby. A LITTLE GIRL, 6, excited.

INT. ARTIST HOUSE

They follow the little girl through the maze of this cluttered dwelling. Coffee cups on the sink. An old half-broke TV with rabbit ears. But also artwork, everywhere. Shockingly beautiful and strange abstract pieces. Explosions of blue and fiery red.

Bronwyn and Greg take it all in, Bronwyn with observant interest, Greg impatient at the 'weird stuff' – not his taste.

The Little Girl looks back eagerly. Points to a drawing on the wall – rough crayon, we guess she did it – a girl and a family and a blue haired lady under a radioactive sky. Bronwyn smiles, nods: but there's something disturbing captured in the eyes of the family members.

They find the Blue-Haired Lady again, smoking a joint before a half-completed painting that's hidden from our view.

The Little Girl runs to the lady, whispers in her ear. The lady nods, breathing smoke around the girl. The girl goes to Greg, hands out. Greg plops the grease paper bundle in them. The girl nods, disappears back into the maze of objects that fills the house.

GREG KIRK

You want to roll her up a joint too, 'stead of just blowing in her face?

The Blue-Haired Lady doesn't take the bait.

BLUE-HAIRED LADY

Dreams she's having, I'd keep her high twenty four seven, if I could.

GREG KIRK

Everyone's having it rough. Doesn't mean drugging our kids.

BLUE-HAIRED LADY

We pumped kids full of drugs for decades, they just had labels on them. Now we actually need the things the earth grows. What's your business?

She pulls a drape over the painting. We still haven't seen it-

EXT. ARTIST HOUSE - DAY

Greg stands outside the house, fidgeting. Taking in the air. Smoking.

This landscape. This massive sky.

This lonely weird house with its backyard beckoning him...

INT. ARTIST HOUSE

The Blue-Haired Lady and Bronwyn sip tea from old chipped cups.

BLUE-HAIRED LADY

Dead, you say? Both of them?

BRONWYN DARROW

The one. Holden. And the other's...

BLUE-HAIRED LADY

Mad as a frog I assume. Those two boys were always close. Always trouble. Even back before the exchange.

BRONWYN DARROW

So you knew them a while.

BLUE-HAIRED LADY

Along this coast, everyone's connected. One way or another. Can't tell one family from another. But what's this all to do with you? You're a LONG way from home...

Bronwyn considers. Decides to play it straight.

BRONWYN DARROW

The house Jamie and Holden Plumber were in. My boss was living there. Now she's missing.

BLUE-HAIRED LADY

That Tiger lady? Very smart I hear. Ambitious.

BRONWYN DARROW
Smartest I ever met.

The Blue-Haired lady observes, sharply, Bronwyn's change of emotion when she talks about Lana Tiger.

BLUE-HAIRED LADY
Wish I had someone come looking for me at the ends of the earth.

BRONWYN DARROW
It's my job to solve problems. Wherever they are.

BLUE-HAIRED LADY
You've got a big to-do list then!

She snort-laughs, deep and throaty.

Bronwyn takes in the explosively beautiful artwork around them, a different sort of response to the insanity of the world.

EXT. ARTIST HOUSE - DAY

Greg wanders across the yard, round the side of the house. Its weatherboard exterior like a creaky old body.

THE BACK YARD

This overgrown place. Broken toys and knick knacks. A single gnarled Totara tree.

The Little Girl sits perched in the long grass. Her makeup like war paint. Watching him. A feral quality.

Greg chooses to ignore her. Scans the yard.

Something hidden behind the Totara tree—

INT. ARTIST HOUSE

The Blue-Haired Lady washes the dishes in her sink. Bronwyn helps dry with a faded teatowel.

If we're super observant, we'd see that the teatowel is actually an old-fashioned souvenir tourism map...

BRONWYN DARROW
That girl—

BLUE-HAIRED LADY

Zoe.

BRONWYN DARROW

Her daddy?

BLUE-HAIRED LADY

My son. Drowned himself last year.

BRONWYN DARROW

I've got a daughter. Fifteen. No idea what she's growing up into.

BLUE-HAIRED LADY

You and me, we're getting out early. It's them that's going to pay the real price, as things go on.

She pulls the plug on the sink, starts to let the water drain. Helps Bronwyn find a home for the plates.

BLUE-HAIRED LADY (cont'd)

Further round the coast, is what you're looking for. I'll show you a couple places to go.

She strides across to her easel, wiping her hands on the teatowel as she goes. Again, we see the edges of a map on the fabric.

Pulls the drape off the canvas—

BLUE-HAIRED LADY (cont'd)

Now I started painting that three days ago.

Bronwyn stares, perturbed, at the image we still can't see.

EXT. ARTIST HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Greg rounds the Totara tree.

The Little Girl watches from across the yard.

Greg stares at what he's found placed among the tree roots. Deeply perturbed.

EXT. WELLINGTON CITY - DAY

Streets full of bustle and shopping. A city being a city.

People saying hi. Chatting over coffee. Dresses and shoes and books on sale in store windows. The selection's smaller than it once was, but consumerism's not dead yet.

Elsa walks through it, jeans and casual top, her embroidered satchel on her hip. A teenager being a teenager. Almost.

She's bemused by how normal everything is. A rare quality, these days. And she likes it. She really does.

A big smile lights up her face as she enjoys the moment.

EXT. WELLINGTON COAST - DAY

The sedan roars along a coastal road. Sky-high clouds in the distance. Threatening pacific whitecaps on the ocean.

INT. CAR

Bronwyn studies the teatowel map as Greg drives. Turning it left and right. It's very different from the 'real' map Greg's following on the GPS, and super kitschy, but there's something compelling about its depiction of the coast...

GREG KIRK

What'd you see back there?

BRONWYN DARROW

Something I didn't want to.

GREG KIRK

Me too. Me too.

He tries to focus on the road. Can't.

GREG KIRK (cont'd)

I ask you something? Why would anyone bring a child into this world?

BRONWYN DARROW

Elsa was born before the Exchange.

GREG KIRK

I'm talking about that girl back there. Living with ole' blue hair. Someone made a choice. A bad one.

BRONWYN DARROW

You think everyone should stop fucking.

GREG KIRK

I think everyone should stop having babies, yes I do.

BRONWYN DARROW

That old film. Children of Men. Youngest person in the world is sixteen years old. That's what you want?

Greg gestures out the window. To the world beyond.

GREG KIRK

I don't want any of this. No one in their right mind does.

BRONWYN DARROW

Well, right mind's the whole question these days, isn't it. For everyone.

GREG KIRK

You bet.

Bronwyn puts down the map. Decides to make a point.

BRONWYN DARROW

But every bold step is an act of optimism. Of defiance. It has to be. Lana says that—

GREG KIRK

Don't know how much you've noticed of the world, from your perch, but optimism is not called for. The world's fucked. Cults are multiplying, even New Zealand's not safe any more, people are STILL having goddamned kids... what's your billionaire doing to defy that?

BRONWYN DARROW

You got kids, Greg?

Greg's unnaturally quiet...

GREG KIRK

GPS isn't working. Guess we're on teatowel navigation from here.

EXT. WELLINGTON COAST - CONTINUOUS

The car drives forward into what looks like a rising storm...

BY THE ROADSIDE

Some strange purple flowers we'll know as Whisper Fingers begin to unfurl. An echo of the growths on Holden Plumber's corpse.

EXT. WELLINGTON CITY - DAY

The same type of flowers in a charming pot. A sidewalk cafe in a narrow pedestrian street.

Elsa sits nearby at a table. Sipping a hand-colored cup of... something. She puts it down. Looks at what she drank. Decides, ok, she likes it.

Around her the city bustles. There are certain compromises we might notice, like very simple packaging, less food, but it's all there. Life as it once was across the civilized world.

Until an invisible breeze runs through the place. An eddy of emotional weather.

The WAITRESS blanches - like she's just had a cramp - then continues serving. An old man grits his teeth. A range of reactions play out across people in view.

Elsa observes, an outsider, with interest. She can feel it coming too, as her forearm tattoo coils-

EXT. WELLINGTON COAST - DAY

The wind rises. An unnatural-looking storm sweeping in off the ocean.

INT. CAR - CONTINUOUS

Driving, Greg feels it. Sees something on the road ahead. People, scurrying across.

GREG KIRK

Hold on.

He slews the car off onto a dirt overlook-

EXT. WELLINGTON CITY - CONTINUOUS

The invisible weather is rising now, all around Elsa.

Her tattoo crawls along her arm, spidering as it works to regulate her mood. Elsa tries to breathe steady. Tries not to panic.

Others are definitely panicking, though. The crowd scatters. The Waitress heads abruptly inside off the street, slams a tiny apartment door behind her. The old man presses his hands against his skull, trying to keep voices in his head quiet.

Elsa's brain is working overdrive—

EXT. WELLINGTON COAST - CONTINUOUS

The sedan sits on a high bluff above a windswept beach. Bronwyn and Greg brace on the hood, hunched, looking out over the sands.

ON THE BEACH

People are running desperately towards the water from hastily parked cars. Tripping, stumbling. Some tearing their clothes off.

Once in the water they splash and cavort. Trying to wash their feelings away in harsh salt water.

Faces. Moments of raw emotion. People punching, wrestling, hugging each other. Anything to distract.

Bronwyn watches, absorbing.

Greg is outwardly unaffected. Cups his hands to smoke in the rising wind.

GREG KIRK

Calms us, somehow.

BRONWYN DARROW

Nicotine?

GREG KIRK

The ocean. Welcome to New Zealand.

EXT. WELLINGTON CITY - CONTINUOUS

Elsa's tattoo levels her out, morphing and flowing just enough to blunt the worst effects of this mindstorm.

She breathes. The worst of the moment seems over.

The people on the street start to recover too, even without the benefit of a high-tech implant. These moments are just a regular part of life here, now.

EXT. WELLINGTON COAST - CONTINUOUS

People stagger in from the waves, hugging and supporting each other. An exhausted, relieved conclusion as the storm dissipates.

BRONWYN DARROW

Beautiful, in a way.

GREG KIRK

No. It's not.

EXT. WELLINGTON CITY - CONTINUOUS

Something SMASHES onto the table next to Elsa!

The waitress. Dead. Look up – she jumped from a third storey window–

EXT. WELLINGTON COAST - CONTINUOUS

Greg looks grimly out over the ocean.

GREG KIRK

It's a fucking mess. With no one to clean it up.

EXT. WELLINGTON CITY - CONTINUOUS

The waitress isn't dead. Only maimed. Her leg broken and her skull fractured. The jump wasn't high enough.

Elsa stares in horror as the bleeding woman reaches out, eyes lolling like a terrified horse–

An EMERGENCY CREW hustles in–

Elsa clutches her satchel. The tattoo recedes up her arm, its guilty victory assured, for now.

EXT. WELLINGTON COAST - DAY

The car crawls along the coast. Truly wild country now. Swells hitting the coastline.

INT. CAR

Bronwyn shivers as something invisible runs through her. But she shrugs it off. Sips a Kiwi-brand soft drink - PAEROA.

THE CAR PASSES

A man-made bonfire with homeless people around it. Everyone looks suspiciously at the car as it passes. Greg gives the 'cop stare' back. Shakes his head, disgusted.

GREG KIRK

Bad to worse.

BRONWYN DARROW

This is heaven. It's much worse overseas.

GREG KIRK

I know there's all the places got hit directly. But that's the north. Ten years on, this is the best of us? The rise of the great global south?

BRONWYN DARROW

One thing about Lana Tiger: she's an optimist.

GREG KIRK

Billionaires tend to be.

BRONWYN DARROW

Money's the thing you made yesterday. Lana's focused on tomorrow. On next.

GREG KIRK

Well good for Lana. My Mum's an optimist too. Lives up Foxton way. Nice little town, still, 'cept when the howler gangs drive through. And when I go and see her, which isn't often enough, she sits in her front room with the blinds drawn and a little cup of tea and an old biscuit in her hands, and she says,

(MORE)

GREG KIRK (cont'd)
 Greg, you should get ready for
 school tomorrow, all your
 friends'll be waiting. Primary
 school. Because my Mum thinks it's
 1996.

Silence as the car drives.

BRONWYN DARROW
 Everyone's dealing with something.

GREG KIRK
 Like the pain of having all the
 money and brains in the world.

BRONWYN DARROW
 Like being kidnapped or murdered by
 cultists in this self-satisfied
 little horror-movie backwater.

Greg considers. That was a good one. He actually kinda
 respected it.

GREG KIRK
 We prefer "boonies" to "backwater".
 Gotta get the lingo right, you want
 to blend in round here.

They both take in everything – the two of them, this road,
 the ridiculousness of it all. Could go either way--

Bronwyn snorts a very human little laugh.

BRONWYN DARROW
 Drive the car, ya boonie arsehole.

And so Greg does...

INT. HOTEL ROOM

But back in Wellington city, something's wrong in Bronwyn &
 Elsa's room. Sobbing. Wrecked bedclothes. A trail of shoes
 and socks and that distinct embroidered satchel.

IN THE BATHROOM

Elsa, huddled fully clothed in the tub, the shower running
 over her, howls and shakes as she tries to work the trauma
 out of her body.

Even the latest in nano-tattoo tech can only go so far.

EXT. COASTAL ROAD - DAY

The car reaches a dirt track turnoff.

IN THE CAR

Greg studies the malfunctioning GPS while Bronwyn inspects the teatowel map.

GREG KIRK

Not anywhere on the system.

BRONWYN DARROW

But it is on the map.

She holds up the tourist-ey teatowel. The dirt road is there, exaggerated, with a cartoon picture of a camp ground and an ocean. The illustration style is so cheery it's creepy.

They look at each other—

THE CAR

Turns onto the dirt track.

ON THE HORIZON

Rainclouds scudding in again, fast. Almost with intent.

EXT. SEASIDE CAMPGROUND - ESTABLISHING

It's like a mirage from the 1950s. A wood cabin and a series of tiny baches along a shoreline. The kind of place that was built over a century ago for workers and veterans. Somehow existing through to the 21st century.

As the car enters, are there people in the baches? Eyes watching them?

IN THE CAR

Greg speaks sideways to Bronwyn.

GREG KIRK

Don't play rich foreigner here.

Down below, Greg checks he has his pistol.

AT THE CAMPGROUND

A mottled man we'll know as WAMBLE PLUMBER slouches on the steps of the main cabin. Waiting for them.

SOON AFTER

Greg and Bronwyn exit the car, cautious.

WAMBLE PLUMBER
Rain's comin' in. Long way to come
just for getting wet.

Greg with his best calm-detective tone.

GREG KIRK
Afternoon sir. I apologize for the
intrusion. We're here with news
about two brothers you may be
familiar with, Jamie and Holden
Plumber—

Wamble considers.

WAMBLE PLUMBER
Great-nephews. Dead?

GREG KIRK
Holden is, sir, and Jamie's in
custody, up Wellington City way.

Wamble considers.

Eyes everywhere, peeking from the baches. Greg's danger
sense is rising—

RAINCLOUDS

Racing down the coast, they'll be here any minute—

Wamble nods. 'Come on in'.

INT. WAMBLE PLUMBER'S CABIN - CONTINUOUS

A dark, close warren of surprising density. Worn communal
furniture. Portraits on the walls. Placemats and campground
signs. Cleaning and digging equipment.

Wamble leads Greg and Bronwyn in. Notices Bronwyn's interest
in the building.

WAMBLE PLUMBER

Built from old ship timbers. The Southern Voyager. Got wrecked just out there, 1876.

BRONWYN DARROW

How'd it get wrecked?

WAMBLE PLUMBER

Took the wrong turn on a dark ocean.

Glances at her just a moment, indicates a pot of tea on the table. Both Greg and Bronwyn shake their heads.

Wamble nods, goes to the back of the cabin, begins fussing with something. Talks back over his shoulder.

WAMBLE PLUMBER (cont'd)

So those boys did something stupid?

GREG KIRK

Incident at a farmhouse. A woman's missing, we're trying to find her. You didn't have any sense they were planning something?

Bronwyn looks at the walls. Rows of portraits and fading photos. A long, tangled family history.

WAMBLE PLUMBER

It's a big family on a big coast. Someone's always planning something. But no. I wasn't in on it.

He's fixing a plate with meat cutlets, setting it down by a dark open shaft. Almost like bait...

GREG KIRK

Did they used to stay round here sometimes? In the baches?

WAMBLE PLUMBER

Sometimes. Not recent. People come and go. Got to keep care of our own, you understand.

He stands, raps the wall, walks back to the middle of the room.

GREG KIRK

I do understand, sir. That's why—

WAMBLE PLUMBER

Then why you not with your mother
right now?

He says it in passing but it hits dead on. Greg stares — what? Did he even just say that? He looks to Bronwyn for help—

But Bronwyn's examining the photos. This fascinating mix of moments across more than a century: the extended Plumber family fishing, diving, hunting, climbing, mining. A parade of faces with every expression imaginable, grim to ecstatic.

She digs into her pocket, finds a picture—

BRONWYN DARROW

Her name's Lana. Lana Tiger.

Wamble does her the credit of studying the photo intensely.

WAMBLE PLUMBER

Looks like someone from another
planet.

BRONWYN DARROW

She's my friend.

Wamble looks right at her. Perceives something.

WAMBLE PLUMBER

Huh.

A SCRAMBLING SOUND—

as something emerges from the shaft!

A SPINDLY BOY, 12, near feral. He grabs the cutlet plate, starts wolfing it down. Notices Greg and Bronwyn, their surprise and disquiet, but ignores them.

Wamble heads over. Rubs the boy's head with obvious love.

WAMBLE PLUMBER (cont'd)

(to the boy)

Rain's coming. We got to help some
people.

The boy nods vigorously. He clearly lives in a different mental geography.

Finally stops eating, the crumbs still on his mouth. Wamble smears them off affectionately.

The boy notices Greg and Bronwyn. Bronwyn steps forward, a kind hand extended.

BRONWYN DARROW

Hi.

But the boy LEAPS, twitchy and terrified, then disappears back into the dark shaft!

WAMBLE PLUMBER

He's okay. Weather gets him. Like all of us.

Bronwyn stares.

BRONWYN DARROW

Seems troubled. He treated right?

WAMBLE PLUMBER

You going to find a lot of things in this part of the world are not what they seem.

Rain starts falling on the roof. Wamble heads for the door.

WAMBLE PLUMBER (cont'd)

Welcome to join us.

Greg, looking outside, sees—

EXT. SEASIDE CAMPGROUND - DAY

Rain pounding the campground. People emerging from the baches. A bohemian, half-Manson-family gaggle heading toward the beach.

GREG KIRK

In what?

WAMBLE PLUMBER

Things that have to be done.

And now there's a menace in the room — is Wamble holding something? Are they about to be ambushed?

Tense. Tight. Greg doesn't know what to do. Bronwyn reaches for her back pocket—

Wamble sees this. Smirks. Moves past them—

WAMBLE PLUMBER (cont'd)

See you soon.

The portraits and photos of the Plumber family line look across at them—

Wamble's out the door, letting it bang shut behind him.

Rain pounds the roof. Greg and Bronwyn recover, slightly.

GREG KIRK

I have other places to be.

Bronwyn looks outside. Sees what's going on.

BRONWYN DARROW

Not sure I do.

EXT. CAMPGROUND - CONTINUOUS

As the rain pounds, a remarkable scene unfolds on the beach.

A stream of hippie-looking people of all ages flow onto the sand.

At the center, the spindly boy. Helped by others.

The flow of people and rain and wind creating tracks in the sand that glisten with the after-touch of atmospheric radiation—

That coil into things that look just for a moment like alien sign language—

HIGH ON A FARAWAY CLIFFTOP

The obscure Victorian-looking tripod instrument that we saw at the very beginning. Clearer now in the daylight, it resembles a surveyor's theodolite. The whirligig spins furiously. We see one of the old photos clearly — the face looks exactly like Elsa Darrow. But it couldn't be.

BACK ON THE SHORE

The spindly boy, transformed momentarily into the shaman of this group, looking up at the sky, right up at us, screaming the scream of the infinitely mad and glorious—

END