

# 1

The rest of the day passed uneventfully, which Andrew was grateful for. He wasn't sure that he could take any more surprises.

As he was pulling the doors in front of the theatre closed and preparing to lock up, he couldn't get his mind of what Mr Grieve had shared with him.

He was now rich. Not private-jet-rich, but rich enough that he realised he really didn't need this job anymore and wouldn't really need one for a long time. His curiosity was also spiking into high gear and he began to wonder what this bookshop was like, and where was this house that Mr Grieve referred to. A house Andrew had never heard of, nor had he apparently ever lived in it.

After locking the theatre doors, he pulled out his phone and punched in an address.

Thirty-three Highwater Road, Cocayne.

Google Maps thought for a second and then dropped a pin on the corner of a street.

Cocayne. It was only about twenty minutes away.

Andrew shrugged his shoulders, said "What the hell. I've got money now," and ordered himself an Uber.

"You want me to wait around man?" The driver asked as the pulled to the side of the road in front of a small brick building.

"No thanks. I'm not sure how long I'll be."

"All good."

Andrew thanked him and got out.

He stood on a street of shops in the heart of Crestmere. Highwater Road. It was a street not dissimilar from where he worked. A quiet

suburb centred around a line of shops. However, it wasn't too far from the beach, so further down the street Andrew could see a restaurants with tables on the pavement, ready for the dinner crowds that would likely be out on a clear night like tonight looked to being.

He didn't think he'd really ever been here before. He'd passed through perhaps, but when you lived in a sprawling city like Auckland, you didn't get to every suburb.

He was on the quieter end of the street. Across the road a small park sat where some mother's sat waiting for their toddlers. Some teenagers stood at a bus stop a few feet away, one boy, maybe thirteen sat against a tree a few feet away from them. Blonde hair. Andrew swallowed and turned away.

The building was a small, single storey brick building. At some point it had probably been a house built some time around the eighties. It sat between a bakery, *Cocayne's Bites* and a daycare centre. There was nothing remarkable about it. A single driveway led down the side, probably to a back carpark. It sat a few feet off the footpath, where a small rock garden had been displayed. A red plastic awning sheltered the green front door and around the edge of the awning letter swirled in faded paint.

*The Bindery.*

Cute, Andrew thought.

*My bindery,* was his next thought.

For a building that hadn't been in use for years, it looked like it was looked after. Andrew quickly did the math in his head. It would have been approximately XXX years and surprisingly there was no flaking paint, no boarded or broken windows. No weeds growing through the rock garden. Everything looked neat and tidy as though someone had just locked up and left.

But, he knew they hadn't. Mr Grieve said it had been closed since his father passed.

Perhaps the law firm had hired someone to look after it over the years.

With an unexpected hesitation Andrew pulled out the key he'd been given and approached the front door. He felt as though he were trespassing, which was stupid. His father was long dead, and the building now belonged to him.

But, the feeling remained as he put the key in the lock. It slid in and turned easily. He had thought the door might give him some trouble after so many years out of use, but it swung open quietly, as though

welcoming him.

He stepped inside.

The first thing he noticed was the smell. A cloud of books and pages unturned greeted him. And something else, underneath it all. Incense perhaps. Which would have been strange considering no one had been here for years.

Perhaps the cleaners? Because that was the second thing he noticed. The shop was clean. The wooden floors were polished with no evidence of dust or the smell of mustiness.

The entrance opened onto the shop where chest-high shelves slanted away from him two deep. A table was set up in the centre with a 'New Releases' sign hanging above it from the ceiling.

Not so new now, he thought to himself.

To his right was a reading nook, placed below one of the front windows. Two comfortable leather armchairs were nestled against a small coffee table. Against the walls of the room were floor to ceiling bookshelves, neat little signs fastened to the top to indicate genres and topics. Directly ahead, beyond the shelves and placed at the back of the room facing the front door was a cashier's desk.

It was a small, welcoming space. A booklover's bookshop. Not the larger chain-store style bookshop which had also been infiltrated by stationary supplies and novelty gifts and children's toys, but a place where people who loved books could come and browse and sit and read and revel in the written word.

At least, that's what Andrew imagined. He had never really been much of a reader himself, instead preferring to throw on a movie or pull out the latest game. But, he could appreciate what this space was offering a world that had become too busy, and as he stood there in the quiet it was as though he felt the room settling itself upon him, a comfortable warm coat that he had forgotten but now felt so familiar.

Which was strange of course, because Andrew was quite certain he had never been in this room, or in this building, in his life. And that raised a whole host of questions.

He turned and saw a light switch to his left. He switched on and, surprisingly the lights, two large iron chandelier affairs, sprang to life, bathing the room in a bright glow, not too harsh, but bright enough for comfortable reading.

He walked around the room, trailing his fingers over the books and,

as suspected, there was no dust. He pulled out a few. The covers and spines were in good condition, no sign of fading that he could see, and the pages had not yellowed.

It was as though this little shop had been placed in a state of stasis for the past thirteen years, its own little world, untouched by the passing of time beyond its doors.

As he walked around the room, questions ran through Andrew's mind. Why had he not known about this place? Why did his parents tell them his father sold insurance? It's not like owning a bookshop was a terrible secret. He felt cheated of a part of his father's life, a life he had only shared a few years with before his mother - Andrew stopped there. Even though it had been many years, he still struggled to face his family history.

He came to the small cashiers desk. Some books were stacked on it, as though waiting for a customer. It was like the owner had just stepped away and would return any second. An old style CT computer monitor took up nearly half the desk, sitting on top of its equally large CPU box. He went around the desk and sat in the seat.

It was comfortable. It fit him. He looked at the room from the new perspective. He had a clear view of the front door from here, and the bookshelves to either side were angled so that he could look down their length.

Idly he pulled open the desk draws to his right. They were filled with the usual detritus that such draws collected. Push pins, paper clips, rubber bands, some old receipts, a pile of order forms, a brass key on a Mickey Mouse key chain. He spun around in the chair. His father's chair. It was an odd sensation, to be sitting where he imagined his father had once sat. Perhaps every day. Watching customers come and go, going about his work, living a life that for some reason he had chosen to keep from his son.

Anger bubbled in his gut. More things that had been kept from him, taken away from him.

He pushed the thoughts aside. They'd only lead to one of his dark moods, which would in turn lead to looking for some liquid relief. And today, he was just too curious to let that happen.

He stopped his spin and stood up. There was a door behind him. There was more to explore.

The door opened onto a small storage space combined with a kitchenette. This area was much less organised than the front of the shop. Boxes were stacked against the walls sharing the space with two

extra large filing cabinets that were as tall as him and a small kitchen table and chairs. Through another door he could see a small bathroom. But again, though this space was messier, it was not dusty or dirty.

Andrew leaned one hand against the closest filing cabinet. The ring on his finger unexpectedly warmed and he felt the cabinet shift.

“What’s this then?”

He pushed on the cabinet and it swung away from the wall easily, apparently rolling on some hidden wheels. Behind it was a hidden door, perfectly matching the size of the cabinet.

More secrets.

The door was plain dark wood, but the handle was an ornate round brass knob, and he recognised the latin words circling the strange circular symbol from the ring he wore.

He tried turning it, but it wouldn’t budge.

Staring at the brass handle and the brass lock plate, Bastion remembered the brass key in the desk drawer out front.

Walking back to the desk, Bastion wondered about the door. And the bookshop. And everything that had happened. He wracked his brain trying to remember if he had been here before, if there was anything of his father that he remembered. But, as had always been the case, all he was left with was a vague picture of his father crouching over him in his bed and kissing him goodnight. Then he was dead. And now, here he was in his father’s bookshop, a bookshop that appeared to hold even more secrets.

Rummaging through the door he pulled out the key and returned to the back room.

Just as he was about to insert the key in the lock, he hesitated. What if what was behind this door was something he didn’t want to know about? What if there was a reason his father kept this a secret and it was somehow related to his death? Which of course should mean that he should definitely investigate.

He inserted the key. It turned easily in the lock.

Placing his hand upon the door handle, Bastion had a slight feeling that he was about to learn things that would change his life.

He turned the knob, feeling the ring on his finger warm against his skin. There was a slight buzzing and then the door swung open on silent hinges. Stairs were revealed descending down into darkness.