

POVERTY BAY

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PROLOGUE

Marlin Hasler was a man with a plan. Revenge, a heaping plate of it, served chilled. Inside his combination workshop home on Harper Road, he was carefully and quietly building a bomb. He'd never built a bomb in his life let alone seen one for that matter. He was into new country now. A dark, detached, bitter place.

The instructions on how to construct the bomb were downloaded from the Internet. From the Anarchist Cookbook site. The bomb was made with Solidox. Easy, simple, effective. A Solidox bomb.

Solidox is used in welding applications, as an oxidising agent for the hot flame needed to melt metal. The most active ingredient is potassium chlorate, filler used by the military in World War 2. He bought a standard can of it from the local welding supply outfit, no questions asked. He'd done a little welding sculpture work over the years, in copper and stainless steel. Birds, fish, insects and abstracts. For outdoor landscaping.

Marlin pried open the can and removed all six sticks. Next, he carefully ground them up with a small mortar and pestle, one at a time, into a fine powder. His heart and head raced as he worked. His hands were jerking, his neck twitching. He was sweating, anxious and, all the while, suspicious about what he could hear outside. Every few minutes he would sneak over to the kitchen window and peep out nervously from behind the curtains. Thinking the law was outside, about to bust in and get him. Twice he even walked outside to look around the property. But there was never ever anybody or anything lurking about. It was all in his head. It was part of his new territory.

He was sweating. Drips fell on the table, his shirt was stained. He took another pull on his water bottle. He was always doing that. Sucking away. Trying to replace the fluids seeping out of his skin.

He weighed up the ground powder on his electric scale and mixed in an equal amount of fine white castor sugar. Finally he packed the lot into four empty pickle jars from the kitchen cupboard. Two large, one medium, one small. And screwed the lids on tight.

Marlin walked outside into the warm end of summer sunshine that squeezed past the shelterbelt and sprawled like octopus legs over the field of weeds. He placed the smallest jar about 20 metres from the back end of the workshop. On the left edge of the property. Right next to the half-grown cedar and pittosporum shelterbelt. Then he ran back inside to fetch the 9mm Beretta automatic pistol he kept in the cupboard next to his bed. It was unregistered. Marlin liked his firearms that way. He wasn't a hunter or a sports shooter. No, he just believed that having guns was his business, his right.

Bracing his elbows against the bonnet of his Ute and holding on hard with both hands, he fired off a round at the jar. It missed, and kicked up a little wisp of dust. Short and to the left.

He loosened his grip and concentrated harder. Slowly exhaling, dead air vented out. It sounded like someone had stepped on a rat. He slowly lowered the barrel on the jar and this time and very gently squeezed the trigger. The second round struck home and the explosion blew a hole a metre deep and two across. When the dust and haze settled, he shouted "Christ, just what the doctor ordered."

On a Saturday afternoon out in the valley, no one noticed what he was up to except a few blackbirds and starlings that flocked off, squawking hard out. The noise was normal. For the last few weeks air guns had been going off to keep birds away from the grape crops. The sound of two pistol shots and a small bomb explosion just blended in to the usual noise out in the valley. It sounded as if someone was shooting birds or maybe blowing an old stump.

The next morning 10 kilometres away in town, Kate Black was just back from her morning swim at the local pool. She was almost religious about it. Forty lengths a day. Two kilometres. Sometimes a full-out, fast freestyle. Some days, a slow relaxed backstroke. Kate enjoyed staying in shape. The pool was just part of her fitness routine. She was also into surfing and Tai Chi. Exercise made her feel good and look good.

And she was good looking. Tall and thin with long wavy brown hair and big brown eyes, she turned heads wherever she went. She was a stunner in anybody's book. But Kate had her feet flat on the ground. She didn't let her natural beauty go to her head or use it to twist men around her finger. She didn't play games.

In the kitchen she was dealing to the last of the packing, and cleaning out the bottom of the fridge. The movers were due with their truck in half an hour and it just couldn't be soon enough as far as she was concerned. Kate was like that. If there was something to be done, she just got stuck in, shoulder to the wheel and did it. Kate rarely left anything to chance. She wasn't one to just do it. No, you often heard her say "I just did it."

She looked out the open kitchen window and smiled at the healthy plants she had nurtured over summer. Roses, dahlias, lavenders and hibiscus. She'd planted each and every one of them and they belonged here now. In fact they looked like they'd always been here. Like some kind of French impressionist painting. Globes of colour, bright, bold, almost musical.

It caused her to think. The flowers will die down soon. Life is short; you only get one shot at it. By her count, she had seen enough negative crap to last two lifetimes. It was time to move on. The plants could stay. It was time for her to stand up and walk.

But like the flowers she had planted out along the back fence and in front of the rental unit, she could only grow if she was in the right spot. She also needed care, attention and a heap of love. She had found all that in Dave Anderson. He was the man willing and happy to deliver it in spades.

CHAPTER ONE

Dave Anderson got up early as usual even though it was Sunday, his day off. It had been a totally crazy night. Sleep wasn't the main course on the menu; it appeared to be just the starter. He'd been woken at 1:30 by a phone call from the security company. Something or someone had tripped off the alarms at Coastlands Garden Centre, his place of business. When he arrived to check it out at two in the morning, it was all on. Two police cruisers, lights flashing, were out front. A gaggle of neighbours were standing around in their dressing gowns and slippers, excitedly talking about an explosion. The security alarm was blaring.

Dave quickly introduced himself to the police, unlocked the main gate and turned the alarm off before walking through to the rows of potted shrubs, trees and plants. The officers attending were right behind him. They could clearly see three sections of the perimeter fence completely blown down. Potted plants and trees within a 15-metre semi-circle were blown over. The police confirmed that some kind of an explosion had occurred and decided it was best to investigate the situation in daylight. To check it out thoroughly. They said it was standard procedure. They also told Dave to come back out through the front gate, to protect the scene. They said it could contain evidence.

At first glance, it didn't make any sense to them. Mind you, it didn't make a hell of a lot of sense to Dave either. Like, why would someone want to blow up a bunch of potted plants? The officers secured the perimeter with yellow 'Police, do not cross' tape to secure the place until morning. Dave then directed his security company people, who were also on the case, to keep watch on the place until the police arrived back in five or six hours' time.

The local natural gas company also arrived, thinking it could have been a line burst. But their line was on the other side of the street and the garden centre wasn't hooked up to the mains. With nothing further to be gained, Dave drove back home to sleep. It felt great to slide back into a warm bed. He'd turned on the electric blanket before he left. But slumber escaped him. He tossed and turned like a fish on a hook, and looked at the clock time and time again.

When he dragged himself out of bed at seven in the morning, feeling like a flat spare tire, he immediately phoned the police and his lead supervisor. They all met down at the garden centre 20 minutes later. The police had a number of questions about money being left on the property, missing items, who could have done this? Was fertiliser stored in that area? Could it have been the cause of the explosion? And so on. They said a specialist forensic team was due in from Rotorua at about 11 in the morning and that the business could not open until they had completed their on-site investigations.

Dave handed the whole situation over to his supervisor and headed straight back home. He was totally determined to take the day off as planned, fishing with Roy.

When he arrived back home 10 minutes later his stomach was growling like an old dog locked in the garage. He quickly made breakfast and then fired up the computer to check out the marine weather forecast on the net. He keyed in the commands while eating. It was a real ritual for him, breakfast. Exactly the same thing every day. Crunchy peanut butter on two pieces of Vogel's sunflower and barley toast. Washed down with two big cups of fresh roasted Italian filter coffee. No sugar, no milk, piping hot.

The weather web detailed: For the Gisborne Coast from Table Cape to Cape Runaway. Fine, a slight swell, with 5-knot breezes from the North East. The outlook changing to westerly, 15 knots in the following 24 hours.

He stood up and walked out on the deck to check himself. The weather people often got it wrong on this Coast. And he had long ago learned to never assume anything was what it was supposed to be. The sun was just beginning to rise over the big hill that overlooked the harbour and the town. There wasn't a cloud in sight. Just high red streaks streaming across a beautiful big powder blue sky. It was perfect for a day out on the boat.

"Great, fishing is on," he said out loud. He often did that, talked to himself. Usually when he was angry, to inanimate objects like a shovel or hammer.

Then, as he did every morning, he went out to the back garden to feed his goldfish. His home fronted the beach. The back, which included the main entrance, accessed the street. The pond was at the back corner of the property surrounded by leafy taro plants, nikau palms, cycads, two huge flowering banana palms and a massive blue jacaranda. The goldfish came to the surface of the pond

the minute he appeared above them. They knew the routine, and floated slowly around until he spooned in their meal of flakes. Then they quietly surfaced, gulped and swished down under. He marvelled at their colours and gentle motions. They were truly peaceful creatures.

Then he went back inside to the computer and switched over to his e-mail account. There was nothing of immediate interest, except one from the insurance company. The message header said: "Your life insurance policy is due for renewal". I'll deal with that later. He shut down the computer and grabbed the phone to talk to his fishing buddy, Roy Van der Zam.

"Hey, Zip. The weather looks great. It's absolutely a perfect day for fishing. Are you on to it?"

"Yeah for sure. I'm really looking forward to a day out on the briny. Hey, you'll never guess who popped in for coffee this morning. Your old partner, Marlin."

When he heard the name Marlin, Dave's blood pressure popped up a couple of notches and his palms felt wet and clammy. Why was he over at Zip's place? He never was a big coffee drinker in the past. What the heck is that rooster up to now?

"He looked like he hadn't slept in a couple of days," continued Roy, "or had a bath for that matter. Jeez, he smelled like a dead rat stuck in a drainpipe. I think he'd been on some kinda bender, but I never pressed him on it. He was like sniffing and sweating the whole time he was here. He seemed to have no control over his body. His hands were jerking like he was hanging onto an electric fence the whole time. And he was constantly looking out the window, talking about people outside the house wanting to come in. It was totally weird man. Paranoia plus.

I even looked to see what the hell he was on about but there was nobody outside. I think he was hallucinating. I just know he was stoned out of his tree. But I did get some sense out of him. We talked about his growing season. It looks like he's had another bad year. Sounds like the bank is about to foreclose on his place out in the valley. I think he's going down the gurgler."

Dave knew, like a lot of other people who made a living from the land, that the weather had not been kind to rock melon growers in the valley. It seemed the

spring was just too wet and cold to allow this crop to reach target export size. But he wondered how much of it was due to Marlin's mental state and his free-wheeling lifestyle. Still, he never liked to see anybody suffer.

"Hey, Zip. We can talk about it on the boat. I'll be round to pick you up in 15. I've got all the gear. Just bring your hat and goggles mate, and we're outta here."

Roy hung up and suddenly felt a gurgling in his gut. Like the sinking feeling futures traders get when the bottom falls out of the oil market, and they'd wagered it wouldn't. He headed off at a fare rate of knots to the bathroom.

Later, as Dave was driving over to pick up Roy, he was thinking again about the blast at Coastlands. Who the hell did it and why? It just didn't make a damn bit of sense. Maybe it was just some dumb kids up to no good.

When Dave pulled up at Roy's, he was standing out front by his big elm tree, enjoying the end-of-summer morning sunshine. But when Roy pulled open the passenger door of the land cruiser, he looked like death warmed over.

"Hey, you look a bit green around the gills buddy."

Roy hopped in and pulled the door shut. "I don't know what I've done to deserve this but my guts are killing me and my back end is on overtime."

"Jesus mate, are you okay to fish?" Dave was worried. Roy was hardly ever crook.

"Drive on, commander. I should come right by the time we launch the boat."

Roy was a typical Kiwi of Dutch descent. His family had come out to the east coast in the 60s. His dad had worked hard to become a successful dairy farmer then switched over to kiwifruit in the 80s. Roy grew up working the land, stock and vines. When he finished school, he trained as a carpenter. He liked building and working with his hands. Although building was his day job, he owned a small block of land producing Hass avocados and Meyer lemons. His father helped him get started.

Roy was built like a beanpole. A full two metres tall and never more than 87 kilos in weight. If he turned sideways and stuck out his tongue, he looked like a zipper. That was his nickname. Zip. His hair was blond and tight-curled. His eyes a little more grey than blue. He was a gentle man who had many friends and

few weaknesses. He'd played his rugby for the local provincial team, as a lock. Dave had played as a flanker. Between them, they had racked up 97 games.

The boat in tow, *Sundancer*, was a locally made White Pointer. Another success story from the coast. An 8.5 metre off-shore weapon. It was a hard-top aluminium welded rig with all the bells and whistles. Eight millimetre welded hull plating with a hefty 300hp diesel stern drive. It was equipped with the latest colour fish finder linked to a GPS and screen plotter. Plus it had automatic steering, marine band VHF radio, a live bait tank and even commercial grade sonar. It was an expensive machine that Dave had owned only since the spring. Before that, he owned a second-hand 17-foot Pilex fibreglass job christened *Matrix*. He'd sold it to Roy when he bought *Sundancer*.

"So what's the story with Marlin coming over?" enquired Dave, as they drove along the main road to the Tatapouri ramp.

"I have absolutely no idea Dave. I haven't seen him for months. It's not like he was invited or anything. He just showed up out of the blue and knocked on the front door. Said he was on his way up the coast and suggested we have a coffee," replied Roy.

"He never drank coffee when I knew him. What's all this about him looking out the window, saying there were people outside?"

"It was totally strange, mate. I'm so sure he was on speed. Not that I'm any kind of expert or anything but he was clearly paranoid and hallucinating."

"Jeez, if he is, that shit'll kill'im. Marlin has a hard time saying no."

Dave had known Marlin since he'd first come to the coast. He was an addictive kind of guy. If it was work, he was flat out. Surfing, the same. Drinking or smoking, the same. Like a Russian tank, he only had two gears. Fast and faster. No reverse and no neutral.

"Hey, talking about strange, we had an explosion at Coastlands last night. The security outfit called me up at one thirty this morning. I didn't get a heck of a lot of sleep. Maybe it was some kid with a homemade bomb or something. It blew three sections of the fence right over and about 400 plants. Nothing was missing though."

"Who the heck would want to blow up a garden centre? Maybe you pissed off the gnomes and they're plotting a revolution?" Roy laughed in reply.

"Nice one, Zip" Dave smiled. "I don't know but somehow I don't think it was the gnomes. The police are doing their thing this morning. They're even bringing in the bomb squad crew from Rotorua to check it out. I'll phone them when we get back in. Maybe it was just kids fooling around. Like, I don't think it was GE freaks looking for another headline."

By the time they coasted down the big long hill to the boat ramp, Roy was unfortunately looking worse. He was a pale shade of green, like a small tree frog. "I'm not going to make it, Dave. My guts are absolutely killing me. I'll drive the truck back and come to pick you up when you're done. Sorry mate, I'm just too crook to carry on. I don't know what's come over me. Musta been something I ate. But going out by yourself doesn't make a lotta sense. Why don't you call up Wayne or Jim Hunter to come along with you?"

"Zipper, I feel for you, but I just don't get that many days off. And the weather is good, and the tide is right now. I'm just going up the coast a bit, so I can't see anything going wrong. Actually going out by myself will be good. It'll give me some serious quality time by myself. I need a break," smiled Dave.

There wasn't much of a line-up at the boat ramp, despite the fact it was a beautiful day and the weekend. Then Dave remembered. The autumn fair was on at the arboretum. That would explain it.

Roy was just able to help him launch the boat. Dave checked the hull and made sure the bung was in while Roy removed the rear tie-downs and put them in the truck. Dave disconnected the trailer electrical system, released the bow tie-down and climbed aboard. Roy backed on down the ramp, hit the brakes and the boat slipped smoothly into the water, picture perfect. He pulled the trailer up the ramp, yanked hard on the emergency brake, jumped out, and sprinted for the bushes to relieve himself for the third time that morning. No time to find toilet paper. He wondered how he'd managed to get so bloody crook. It came on right after Marlin paid him a visit. Since he had no paper, he just pulled up his pants and waddled back to the foot of the ramp. "I'll shower when I get home."

Talking from ramp to boat, they agreed Roy would go home to try to shake it off. If he managed to come right, maybe he could help Kate unpack or keep her

company. Either way, he'd come back and pull the boat out at 4:30. Dave explained where he was heading before starting the engine and heading out to sea.

Dave Anderson was an agreeable kind of guy. A people person. He liked sharing friendships but he also liked a chance to get out on the water to chill out. Both from the pressures of life and to get closer to nature. He put a lot of pressure on himself but rarely let it show. Stress and anxiety, he had to manage himself.

He'd been through the pills, the yoga and the meditation. In the end he worked out his own system for managing life. Eating a balanced diet, not eating anything after 8 at night, getting eight hours sleep every night and regular heart-pounding exercise. Usually he completed a thirty-minute run down the beach out in front of the house at night. To burn off excess energy and deal with any latent anxieties or wild free radicals. Mind you, if the surf was good and it was still daylight, he'd get stuck in. And sometimes, if the morning looked particularly beautiful, he would go for a nice long swim. Winter or summer.

He worked long hours and people depended on him. The boat was the place where he did his thinking. Where he questioned his behaviours, reflected on his good fortune and considered new challenges.

He also rode a 1340cc Harley Davidson big block bike, the choice of champions. That was his second method of escape but it didn't include any thinking. When he only had an hour or two to spare, he would blatt up the coast or out in the valley, to chill out.

Dave strapped on his life-jacket, shouted, "hasta la vista" with a wave to Roy, and headed on up the coast. It was an absolute pearler of a day. He always wore his life-jacket. Ever since a good mate of his had drowned just 800 metres from shore on a flat calm day. He wasn't strong enough, or sober enough to swim to safety. Poor bastard.

All Dave wanted was to escape for the day. To have a bit of peace and quiet. To enjoy the coast. Actually, being alone today was not such a bad thing. It was a real bonus round. He spent every day with people. He rarely got that much time to be by himself. Better yet, with himself. Weird he thought. You spend a lifetime being with people but at the end of the shift you make the journey

alone. He thought about that for a little while, as he was looking out to sea. Being alone, on the boat, on the ocean.

He twisted the radio dial, but didn't feel rock'n roll or talk show banter sounded right on such a peaceful morning. So he switched over to the CD, and put on some island music he'd picked up on his last trip to Fiji. Beautiful, slow'n easy, the Castaways. He could almost see the palm trees, the white beaches and all the beautiful tropical fish in the water. It was one of the best holidays he'd ever had. Being with Kate made it super special. They fell in love in Fiji. Two became one.

Sundancer cut a clean wake as it built up to cruising speed. Although it was still early in the day, he felt like a beer, pulled a bottle of German beer from the chilly bin. He'd packed six cold beers, two litres of water, two light berry yoghurts, six navel oranges and four wild sockeye salmon sandwiches for the trip. Too bad Roy was so crook. The poor bastard was missing out on a good day. He wondered if Marlin's visit had anything to do with it. Roy had the constitution of an army drill Sergeant, he hardly ever got sick.

The German Pilsener beer was crisp and cold. He sank the first one in three minutes flat and reached for another.

CHAPTER TWO

Out in the heart of the valley, Marlin August Hasler was alone as usual, lying on his couch like a lizard on a hot rock. Staring hard out at the TV. The TV was never off, and neither was he. He was clenching the remote, clicking from one channel to another. It didn't matter that it was another beautiful day. In fact it didn't matter that it was daylight at all. Nothing mattered any more to Marlin.

The last four years had been hell. First it was the break up of the garden centre partnership. Then, despite all his best efforts, time and borrowed money, the melon crop had again failed to produce.

Sure, the weather had a lot to do with it. The spring was just too wet and cold. Mind you, no one else growing melons in the valley had made a go of it. But then again, Marlin prided himself as a better grower than most. The returns from rock melons were absolutely fantastic when you hit the right size at the right time. But the growing costs were pretty incredible too. Ten hectares cost him 40 grand to set up for a season. There were kilometres of irrigation tape and plastic cloches that had to be replaced every year.

He'd first considered growing lemons and avocados but figured the lag time between cost and profit was just too great. So he went with the melons. More risk but with it came the opportunity for more profit. But only 10 percent of the crop ever reached export quality, and it just wasn't enough to cover the cost of sorting it out at the pack house. So the whole crop went on the local market at a third the export price. A heap of hard work and effort and he didn't even break even on costs for the third year in a row. It was enough to make a grown man weep. But crying wasn't his style. It just made him mad.

Now he was completely out of cash and credit. In the past three weeks he'd sold anything and everything. All his lines of credit had been completely cut off, but he still needed money for gas and what little food he ate. He'd sold his golf clubs, water-skis, surfboards, the stereo system, DVD player, video camera, welder, power tools, farm tractor and even the lawnmower. Virtually anything that wasn't bolted down. But he kept his computer, dive gear and TV. He was well and truly at the bottom of the barrel.

But being a cunning guy, and after three years of failure with the melons, he did have a backup plan. And this one was going to work. In fact it had worked. The crop of home-grown was right now halfway through harvest. He had a good local partner, a cash buyer from Auckland and knockout heads. He'd ordered top quality seeds from Marc Emery's Vancouver website. Guaranteed females. Skunk #1. Twenty bucks a seed. It always pays to use good seed.

The marijuana was a blend of 75 percent Sativa and 25 percent Indica. It was an original cross between Afghani, Acapulco and Colombian Gold. The blooms had long thick bushy buds, varying in colour from light green to golden. The flower to leaf ratio was super high. When smoked, the aroma was soft and sweet. The high was a very strong up, not a fuzzy numb blotted out down. It was his kind of high. He preferred to be high rather than down.

The plan was to use the money from the dope crop to freehold his patch in the valley, pay off his debts and plant up afresh with citrus. In short, to come clean and be a model citizen again.

He had the mixed pittosporum and cedar shelter belts up, and had seeded, potted up and grafted his own citrus stock. He chose Encore as the cultivator. Five by three metre spacing required 666 trees per hectare. Five hectares were reserved for mandarins. Encore was a true summer mandarin. The fruit was harvested over a long period, from October to February. And it could be stored until April without any loss of flavour.

The other half of the block was going to be planted with Yen Ben lemons. Originally from Queensland, they had high juice content, thin rinds, low seed numbers and high yield. And they had been grown commercially in the Bay for years. They cropped almost year round with the main pick in winter, which timed in well with international markets. At that time of year northern hemisphere crops were limited, so South East Asia took the lot, at much better than domestic prices.

First he had grown the rootstock, trifoliata. The seeds were grown in beds, then transplanted to non-rigid black plastic bags. They were T budded in October last year, having been bagged from the bed the year before. All up, he had produced his own nursery stock at 15 percent of the price for commercially bought material. It would have been a lot easier just to buy grafted plants from a nursery, but he didn't have the money.

Soon his days of debt and failure would be behind him. But the failure of the melon crop again had cost more than money. He had changed. He used to think that hard work and effort led to success, but now he knew it was a myth. At least as far as he was concerned. The harder he tried, the worse things got. And no one worked as hard as he did.

He'd bought a second-hand 10 tonne tandem axle dump truck three years ago. That was shortly after the garden centre partnership with Dave came to a grinding halt. It was also the same time he got into growing melons. He hauled grapes, corn and squash before getting on as a sub-contractor with one of the local forestry outfits. Helping to build logging roads up and down the coast.

When some mainland Chinese bought them out, he made a bid for the whole roading contract and won it. It meant he had to mortgage his beachfront house to secure the starting finance for three new trucks and a second-hand boom loader. The other machines, a D9 spread cat, D15 grader and a belly dumping motor scraper he sub-contracted out. The price was as sharp as a tack, but he was making the payroll and all the payments. But it all turned to custard when the Chinese stopped paying the bills and went broke. It seems they'd bought a forest with the best stuff already plucked out of it, and at a price that was too high for the market. Forestry, the next big promise for the coast, went into another big slump.

He was owed \$180,000 in back-pay, but the machine company lost absolutely no time in picking up his gear. Two weeks later, the bank foreclosed on his house mortgage. The house was on the main beach just out of town. He had it built before the prices went through the roof. When he was flush with cash. So, he was forced to move out to the workshop on his 10-hectare block on Harper Road.

Then, the icing on the cake, Kate left him. When it rains, it pours. Darling Kate. He'd met her seven years ago. She was everything he ever wanted in a woman. Good looking, bubbling over with fun, she exuded happiness. At the time they were both working as rootstock harvesters in the valley. They had a bit in common. Neither one of them was born on the coast, and they were the same age, 27. They played tennis together, surfed and competed in a few triathlons on the same team.

Before long they moved in together and five years ago tied the knot and got married. It seemed an ideal match. He was stable, hard-working and going

somewhere. She was loving and trusting. They enjoyed being together and living together. They had talked often about having a family but it never happened. Maybe it was never meant to be.

When the trucking business went under, Marlin worked wherever he could. He pruned grapes, picked oranges and spent time in a shearing gang. It was all contract work. You got paid on what you produced. But it was never enough to cover the overdraft interest. Even working the night shift, freezing peas and corn and a full-on, eight-hour day shift picking fruit out in the valley didn't help. He started using P to keep going, but the random drug testing at the plant cost him his night job. He was bailed up twice with traces of amphetamine showing in his urine. He just couldn't talk his way out of it. Who could?

The last few weeks had been hell. He'd completely given up working for a living and just hung out at his workshop home, alone, high on P. He never slept. He just stewed about all the things that had gone wrong. It ate him up, big time.

The P thing was weird. Sure he liked to party but this little bit of fun time had now completely taken over his life. And now a life with P was like normal. At least as far as he was concerned.

Kate left him when he needed her most. When the forestry contract went down the gurgler, a year ago. But they had been drifting apart for a while. Maybe it was the drugs. She never did anything bad. Maybe that was part of her attraction to Marlin. He was a bit of a trip on the wild side.

But a bit wild turned crazy. P had a hold on him and it was really hard to stop. He knew he had to stop some day, but not today. Still, no one could carry on at the rate he was at, not even Superman. He was using half a gram a day. Too much.

Now the bank had given him two more weeks to reduce his \$100,000 overdraft, or face forecloses on the valley property. With no forward cash flow or payments, they didn't have much of an option. The bank had already taken the house at the mortgage price, not the sale price. And if he didn't manage to pull off the crop of home-grown, he would be left with nothing. No house, no land, no wife. Nothing but memories after years of hard slog and grind. And there was still a heap of provisional and penalty tax to pay the stinking IRD.

All he needed was a bit of luck. It was certainly his turn for some, he reckoned. Along the way, he would settle a few old scores. Dave was on the top

of the list. Kate was a close second. At least that's what he thought was right, after being high every day and night for the past three weeks.

After his visit with Roy that morning, when he slipped a heap of laxative into his coffee, he went back to the workshop and stewed. Roy told him Kate was moving in with Dave and was thinking of nothing else as he stared blankly at the TV. By 10 in the morning he'd had a gutful of thinking about what had happened. He decided to go straight over to talk with Kate. To front up and talk some sense into her. When he pulled up at her rental place, the movers were near halfway finished.

He bounded up the steps and grabbed Kate by the arm when she popped out the front door with her parrot. "You have got to stop this move. You are not going to be happy with Dave."

"Get your sweaty hands off me," shouted Kate as she spun away from him. The parrot started squawking. "Go the coast. Go the coast." Marlin had taught him how to talk. The bird was seemingly mad on rugby.

Marlin let go of her arm. "I just need to talk with you. You can't throw away the past. We mean so much to each other. I love you. I have always loved you." He looked horrible Kate thought. He'd lost at least 10 kilos since she'd last laid eyes on him. His eyes were like bloodshot bullet wounds sunk deep into black sockets. The skin on his arms was a mass of scabs and welts. He looked like he'd been wearing the same clothes for the last month. And he stunk, real bad.

"Look, dirt bag. We've finished talking. You and I are finished. Understand. Done, over, kaput! Now get out of my way and out of my life. In fact, why don't you just get the hell out of town? You've blown it, you're such a loser," snapped Kate. She wasn't normally that sharp with anyone, but it seemed Marlin hadn't got the message yet. He needed to get the message.

The parrot chimed in. It was excited with all the loud talking. "Kick the ball" it squawked.

"Look Kate, I just need one more chance. Come on babe, you can do that. Please, give me one more chance. Things will come right real soon. You and I can start from fresh. We can even move away from here, if you want. I've got some money

coming and my debts are going to be taken care of. And I'm going to quit the dope and come clean. You've got to believe me."

Kate cut him off. "Look, I don't care what you say or what you do. You and I are finished. Can you get that through your thick skull? You can't be trusted. Get lost. You are such a bloody loser. You're so stoned. Look in the mirror meathead. You have absolutely no idea what you're doing, or what effect you have on people around you. I never want to see you again. Get out, and stay out of my life."

Kate then marched off down the front stairs to put the bird in the back seat. Bob didn't need a cage, as his wings were clipped. He was yelling again and bobbing up and down, "pass it man, swing it wide."

In the heated, spaced-out state Marlin was in, he wasn't thinking rationally at all. He stared angrily at Kate as she placed Bob in the back seat of her car. Why won't she listen to reason? What do I have to do to get her to understand? Then he made his move. He raced over to the car and ripped the keys out of the ignition. "Stay and talk to me, please Kate. I need you, I love you. Forget the past. I'm talking about the future. We're a team you and me." He was snivelling now.

"Give me the key's you stupid bastard. We're not married any more and you have absolutely no control over my life." The argument easily drew the attention of the movers, who had stopped to watch the show. "Hey lady, are you okay?" one of them hollered. "This jerk has taken my keys. He's hassling me. Can you help me out here?" Kate answered back.

The two movers were good at shifting things and only too pleased to help. After all, this lady was a bit of a looker. In five seconds flat, they grabbed Marlin by the arms, ripped the keys out of his hands and threw him to the ground. It wasn't much of an effort. He was no match for two big strong men.

But in a flash, Marlin got back to his feet and spun away from them. He was frothing at the mouth. His eyes were bulging out of their sockets. The veins on his head and neck looked like they were going to pop. Smoke seemed to come out of his ears. "All right Kate, I'll fucking deal with you later," screamed Marlin, becoming more and more incoherent. "Not everything is as it seems to be. Just remember sweetheart, when you think things are going great, someone will come along and piss on your parade. I know. Then you have to make things right

again. What you see right now, is not what is fucking happening. You're blind to the truth. You wait and see. Just you wait. You'll see. It's your turn next."

Kate stood shaking by her car as Marlin ran back to his Ute. He jumped in and roared off, yelling at himself. "I'm going to get what I fucking well want come hell or high water. And no fucking asshole is going to get in my fucking way. I'm going to burry that prick six feet under. Then she'll come back. Pleading, crying for me to take her back."

He fired up a cigarette. He didn't really feel like a smoke. It was just something he did when he was stressed. Now more than ever. In the past few weeks he'd been going through two packs a day. At this rate, he figured he'd be dead before the end of the year.

His head was spinning. Why won't she come with me? Will the second bomb work? Will the connection from Auckland be straight up with the cash? Can I get the blood-sucking bank off my back?

He knew P was messing things up. The drug had totally taken over his life. He was always up, never ever even wanting to come down.

At the roundabout, he looked at a family in the car next to him. They were all belted in, happy, going somewhere, laughing. Off on a picnic or something. Why do I have to be so stoned to enjoy life? Why do they enjoy the day high on fresh air while I need to fill myself up with dope?

He looked again at the family. Why don't I have a family? What went wrong with Kate and me? What is possessing me? It was a good question. They were all good questions. He was afraid to look in the mirror, or the people in the car at the intersection. Terrified that he would be exposed to himself. He was sick of the life he was living. His choices, his failures. Nothing had gone right.

Nothing but questions, but Marlin needed answers. He knew he needed to come down. To get his mind straight. To clean up his act. Then he could deliver the solutions that he so desperately needed to stay alive.

For Marlin, it was no longer a question about where he was coming from, where he was going or how long he had. No way, he just wasn't an ordinary kind of guy. For him it boiled down to one simple question as drove along alone out of town that day. What the fuck am I doing?

CHAPTER THREE

After leaving the boat ramp, Dave Anderson plotted a beeline course for the Monowai Rocks. Just off the top end of the marine reserve. Crayfish tend to walk around quite a bit, especially the big ones. From deep to shallow water, in line with summer and winter. Unfortunately, they don't have a clue where the reserve starts or ends, and Dave had pulled in a couple of good hauls from a spot he'd recorded on his GPS plotter earlier that summer. The government had done a fair amount of testing at the reserve over the past two years. Dave knew they didn't really have the full picture of what was happening. To him, it was just another example of trying to count after the fact. After the place had been totally hammered. After the whole ecosystem had been turned on its head.

The sea offshore was almost dead flat. The colours a blend of dark bottle green and deep navy blue. The slight breeze was from the north east, as predicted. Short little waves quietly rolled along the side of *Sundancer*.

Today was a spring tide day. A hard case description, since it was the end of summer. The full moon was acting in tandem with the sun to make for a huge tide drop. He reckoned it would be excellent for fishing, and so did the fishing calendar.

He took a big swig on his second beer and fired up a cigar. He'd quit smoking cigarettes nine years ago, but allowed himself the odd cigar on special occasions. And today was certainly one of those.

This was a planned trip. One hour before the 2pm low tide he was going to put in his two cray pots, on the northern edge of the reserve at Monowai Rocks. From there, it was a half-hour run to Penguin Rocks for a spot of snapper fishing, a cruise back to pick up the crays and out of the water at 4:30. Short, sweet and simple.

Six and a half hours on the water and not a worry in the world. Life just didn't get much better. He thought about how life had blessed him as he watched the coast unfold its beauty. The hills were covered in fat woolly sheep and big Black Angus cattle. There was still a lot of green grass.

It used to be that everything just dried up in the summer. But it had been much wetter the last few years. Good for the hill-country farmers. It was the La Nino effect. It had an effect on the whole country. It also had an effect on the southern ocean. Dave believed the ocean was like a big set of heart and lungs for the world. If it was in good shape, then people on the land would be in good shape. It was part of the balance of life. He knew that fish moved around in bands of temperatures. They lived in an ecosystem that was temperature controlled. The food they ate moved with them. His fish finder measured ocean temperature. It helped him to find fish and then haul' em up and water ski them to the boat.

Sundancer cut a sparkling wake through the small sets of waves. It was heavy enough to be totally smooth in both light and heavy sea conditions. He set up his snapper-fishing rig, cruising along on autopilot. Halfway along his first tack, he sighted a mob of gannets working up a big meatball of anchovies near the marine reserve. It was late in the season, but there was probably some kahawai working the same meatball. The water was too cool for tuna, 14 degrees. It was now a rich dark blue, like the backside of a barn swallow.

Dave grabbed his binoculars and watched as the gannets dived straight into the water, just tucking their wings in before entry. They hit the water at about 70 kilometres an hour and hardly created a splash. On surfacing, they'd rest a while, before doing it all over again. Beautiful. He loved birds. He knew they could only keep this up for a few seasons. Eventually their eyes clouded over from the impact, and they went blind and died. He thought about that as he watched them hunt for food. Nature teaches us some hard lessons. Life is nasty, short and brutish.

He scanned up and down the coastline with his binoculars. Where the grassy green hills hit the water there was usually a thick tangle of native bush. Pohutukawa mixed with titoki, rewarewa, rangiora, and mahoe. Where it was really steep, there was nothing growing. Just eroded brown cut banks of an old sea bottom sliding back home.

Dave was thinking. All the stuff on the news was depressing. Terrorists everywhere, they used to be called freedom fighters. America was like the sheriff of the world. Leading possies here and there. It sure didn't look like a winning strategy. Just more young American dead, and for what? The world didn't look one bit safer.

Dave knew his history. He knew that despite the pictures on TV, this stuff had been going on for ages. Just like the gannets, the kahawai and the anchovies. It was a struggle. Not for democracy and justice, but just to survive. It wasn't really depressing, just the plain hard cold truth. He lived in New Zealand, a long way off from the troubles of the world. Life here was sweet. Especially here, sweet as. Even poor people here were better off than billions of other people around the globe. Terrorism was just something that happened on TV.

But it was the situation of the planet that bugged him the most. Sure some people were without water, health and education. But the ocean was over-fished, the forests had been mown down, cities just seemed to breed chaos and on top of that there was AIDS, people trafficking, wars and a host of other ills. He wondered how much longer it could last. Something had to give. After dwelling on it for a while longer and coming to no conclusions, he whipped out his cell phone to talk to Kate. To see how she was getting on with the shift. He didn't like thinking about negative stuff, it never did much good. He reckoned that all anyone could do was lead a decent life. To lead by example. Maybe other people would then pick up on it, and give it a go themselves. The phone rang six times before she answered. "Hey babe, how are you getting on with the shift?"

"Hi, darling. Far out, I was just going to phone you. I had a big fracas with Marlin." This was the second time the name Marlin had come up that morning, and Dave smelled trouble. "Tell me what happened," he probed.

"Well, I was just about all done with the packing up when he came by and grabbed me and spewed forth a whole pile of dribble about starting up again, and don't move in with you and then he grabbed my keys and I had to get the moving guys to rip them out of his hand. He looked totally wasted and was just behaving like a complete animal. He even smelled like an animal."

Dave broke in. "Calm down Kate, you're talking too fast. Did he hurt you? Why don't you phone the police and lay a complaint?"

"Oh Christ, I don't know." Kate was thinking about the five years she'd lived with Marlin. Things were good until he got wiped out with the roading contract. He got so totally angry. Then he started using drugs and lying about it. He was living in total denial. She'd moved out just over a year ago, when the bank pulled in the house mortgage and had not seen him since. She wondered why the

hell he decided to come by now and hassle her on this of all days, her moving day. How did he even know she was moving?

Dave was looking out across the ocean, trying to think of something positive to say that would help Kate. "I really don't like the sound of this. Do you want me to turn the boat around and come back to take care of this jerk?"

"No, no, steady as she goes skipper. I can look after myself, but thanks for thinking about me. I'd rather that you have a nice day out on the boat, you deserve it. He won't show up again today. Don't worry about it. I'll just wait for you to come back and we can sort things out then."

Kate felt bad about what had happened to Marlin. The relationship had hurt her. It scared her to think of how pessimistic and emotionally beaten up he appeared. But she had made peace with her past. She was grateful to have Dave's love. It was unconditional.

"Look, I'll be home to cook you a lovely crayfish dinner with all the trimmings in a couple of hours. Zip is coming over to help you with the unpacking. He's got a crook gut, but thought he'd shoot over around lunchtime. Listen up. If that creep Marlin shows his face again, I want you to phone the police right away. Can you do that for me, babe?"

But she didn't hear a word after 'crayfish', the phone went dead. *Sundancer* had just pulled round Turihaua Point, out of cell phone range. Dave realised that intuitively and got on to the VHF radio, Channel 16 to book in with the Coastguard. "Gisborne Coastguard, Gisborne Coastguard. This is *Sundancer* ZM 0934. Do you copy, over?"

"Roger, *Sundancer* ZM 0934, receiving, go ahead."

"Roger, Gisborne. Here is my trip report. I have just launched from Tatapouri. One on board. The plan today is a run up to Monowai and then on to Penguin Rocks. Returning to Monowai at one five three zero. ETA Tatapouri one six three zero. Will contact you again at one six three zero, over."

"Roger, *Sundancer* ZM 0934. I look forward to your call. Have a safe day. Gisborne Coastguard over and out." Dave kept the radio on low to listen to the normal chatter, and in case anyone got into trouble. Then he changed the CD to

The Best of the Byrd's and sang along with them. "To every season, turn, turn, turn, there is a reason, turn, turn, turn."

The run to Monowai took only 10 minutes. He checked his depth sounder and found a few likely spots for the pots, baited them with some frozen bonito and squid and snubbed them down nice and easy using the side winch. They would be down for four and a half hours and catch both ends of the tide. Perfect, the spot looked good. It was really so easy to pick up three or four legal-sized cray per pot. All anyone needed was a boat and a little local knowledge. He left five metres of slack on his floats to deal with the tide swing and any current shifts.

Now the plan was to make the 26-minute burn to Penguin Rocks, but really he felt like a run up the coast to enjoy the day and try out a new fishing hole. The call from Kate had changed his mind. It was 17 miles to Pourewa Island, just off the southern entrance to Tolaga Bay. Roy had mentioned yesterday that it was good just south of there for snapper at this time of year. So he got back onto Channel 16 to notify the Coastguard of his change in plan but the headland at Gable End was blocking his radio call. It didn't worry him, he'd call in from Pourewa.

So he set the course on the autopilot and made the run in 40 minutes, going passed Waihou Bay at 25 knots. The music was good. He sunk another Beck's. No one seemed to be on the big white surf beach. Even the marae looked abandoned. The only boat he saw on the whole trip up the coast was the old *Cassino*, chugging along just south of Tolaga.

The East Coast of New Zealand is special. Discovered by Maori over a thousand years ago and again by Captain Cook seven hundred years later, it is steeped in history. Old tribal wars were common, either in competition for food resources or to satisfy old wounds. Things got real ugly when Ngapuhi from up north attacked with muskets. The guns they used were way more effective in battle than traditional clubs and spears. It was in many respects a forgotten holocaust. But Ngati Porou, despite the slaughter, did not retreat. They held their ground and regrouped. Not every tribe on the coast of Aotearoa was so fortunate.

War was an annual event, but some clashes were critical for all the people on the East Coast. The defeat of the Hauhau rebels in 1865, with the help of the Pakeha, where seven fighting Pa were destroyed and 1300 rebels captured, was a huge turning point. It was actually part of the Ngati Porou civil war. Another

was the campaign for and against Te Kooti. But despite all the history, or maybe because of it, the tangata whenua were strong on the coast. They still had heaps of land, many could speak Maori and their tikanga was super strong. The only thing in short supply was work.

Dave's great grandfather had come out from Sweden after the fighting had well and truly stopped. He started as a clerk at the Taruheru freezing works in 1892, and transferred to the Kaiti works when it opened four years later. Clever, affable and hard-working, he was promoted to General Manager in 1902 at the age of 28. From then on, the family fortunes were firmly linked with the land and people of the coast. The Anderson's were into farming, real estate, dairy, wine and cheese. Still, all the kids came up the hard way. They had a little help from the family, but were expected to make their own path in life. Dave had done just that. He worked a variety of jobs in pack houses and citrus blocks after leaving school, and then started out on his own at 19.

He noticed how Gisborne was blessed with hundreds of beautiful large Phoenix palm trees, how they produced plenty of seed in summer that just rotted on the ground. So he picked up thousands and sprouted them in a seed bed prepared and rented from a family friend who wanted to see if the young man would make a success of himself. He potted up the best-looking ones in bags, grew them on for two years then sold the lot to an Auckland wholesaler for \$7 each.

He did this for six years until the market was well and truly flooded. By the time he was 25 he had \$250,000 in the bank and had branched out into growing nursery stock. Citrus, avocados, apples, peaches, nectarines, grapes, palms and cycads. Whatever the market wanted. Not everything worked, but he learned a lot and never repeated his mistakes. Later on, he formed a partnership with Marlin in Coastlands Garden Centre, but that had been wound up three years ago when Dave took over his share.

Back on the water, on reaching Pourewa, the fish finder was showing plenty of promise at the twenty metre mark, so he let loose the Danforth Anchor. It set hard into the sandy bottom. He threw over a bag of burly to bring in the fish, but it was slow until the tide turned. He was stray-lining with a Penn Liveline, using 10-kg line on a three metre Jarvis Walker Whitetail spinning rod. He set the drag just right, and tested it with a light tug on the line.

Big snapper often run only a short distance with the bait held loosely in their mouth. He knew to wait, to set the hook on the second run. His stray-line rig consisted of two hooks and a three-ounce weight. One hook was tied directly on the end of the line, the keeper. The other was a slider. For bait, he was using squid. He was careful to set them on the 7/0 hooks so that the big cunning snapper's wouldn't just pull off the tentacles, and leave the rest of the bait behind.

The current was running from the boat to the reef and rocks. Perfect, the stern was facing the fish. Stray-lining is a bit like hunting. Snapper are a shy fish and will not hang around and feed if they are aware there are people and boats around. He always found it more productive to sneak up on the fish and make as little noise as possible.

The first action came within 15 minutes of the tide swing. A little tug, a short run then ZZZZZzzzeeeeeeee. Line fair flew off the reel. Wow, what a fighter. He set the drag a notch tighter and lifted his rod tip up, to let it do its thing. The line was tight for the whole fight.

In the next two hours, he pulled in three good snapper, eight-pounders, and lost a fourth. Nice fish. It was an absolutely magnificent day. The ocean was still reasonably calm, the wind still light. Just a few puffs of cloud were building out in the east. He ate two of the sandwiches and sunk another Beck's. That was his fourth beer. He normally stopped at three drinks, whether on the water, at home or out on the town. But he was having a good time. When the fish stopped biting, he decided it was time to head back to the cray pots and then home. He wanted to get back to Kate. He was apprehensive about Marlin.

Having stowed the fishing rod forward under the cabin, and the three snapper in the ice box aft, he went on deck to wind the anchor line around the winch, and put the boat into slow forward. When he got under way he would get on to the Coastguard again to notify them of his change in plans, not that it made any difference to his arrival time at Tatapouri. It was just part of being a responsible boatie.

Back in the cockpit he hit the front winch switch. But it was the last thing he did on *Sundancer* that day. He was looking back at the transom when he hit the switch. That probably saved his life.

A terrific eruption ripped the boat apart. The front hull plates peeled open like a banana and the Plexiglass window on the hard top shattered into a thousand pieces. Some of them embedded in the back of his head. He was blasted clean off his feet and into the water.

Dave was left floating face up, bleeding and out cold. Luckily he had his life jacket on. It was a good one, designed to float people face up. The boat went down like a proverbial stone. In less than 30 seconds, *Sundancer* was on its way to the bottom. The only thing left floating was Dave. Everything else was gone. The Beck's, the yoghurt, the snapper, seat cushions, anchor line, cell phone, everything. Maybe something would float up later on. But for now, it was as if *Sundancer* had never even been there. And Dave just drifted along. Out cold, south with the current.

CHAPTER FOUR

Lyn Rodgers woke up in the heart of Kaiti that same Sunday with a big fat head. It had been one hell of a party, a real good blow-out. The kids had been farmed out to her mother's for the night, so at least she didn't have them to worry about during the party or for a while longer.

Riwai, her soul mate, was still sleeping. He was snoring like a D8 Cat. He didn't look too good, on top of the sheets. Still wearing the same clothes he had on last night. Even his boots. Stained with blood from the scrap he got stuck into at the party.

When she sat up on her the side of the bed, her head began throbbing. It felt like a team of small Welshmen driving railroad spikes in an old American Wild West movie. Thud pound thump. Her throat was a desert, complete with dry sand and heaps of those tall forked spiky cactus.

She forced herself to stand up and make her way through to the kitchen, to get something to drink. She as dry as a bone, thirsting for anything wet. When she opened the fridge door, there wasn't a heck of a lot to look at. Some milk, half a tray of eggs, a loaf of white bread, some tomato sauce and a couple of old corn cobs. She pulled out the milk and turned on the stove to boil up a pot of water. Coffee, that's the ticket. But a search of the cupboards for some coffee was a lost cause. There wasn't any, she remembered now. They'd run out of coffee three days ago.

Lyn groaned a little and then poured herself a cup of milk. It would settle her stomach, which was like an empty gas tank. No fuel, just fumes. The milk came out of the container in lumps. It was off, well off. Giving up on the milk, she went back to the sink to get a drink of tap water when she spied seven full bottles of beer in a crate on the kitchen floor. Bonus round. They weren't cold, but so what. She used the top of one bottle to hook off the top of another, tilted back her head and took a long gulping swig. It actually tasted all right, wet and hardly warm at all. Who fuck'n needs coffee?

After a short trip to the toilet, she shuffled over to the kitchen table, sat down and began rolling a smoke. Can't have a beer without a smoke, she thought. They're made for each other. Just like me and Riwai.

The tobacco was bone dry, like the sand at the top end of the beach in the middle of summer. The packet had been left open over night. When she fired it up, it was like smoking the ass end of a 767. It ripped her throat apart.

All those little cacti in the desert of her mouth burst at the same time and she coughed hard out. Three barking rough, dry-retching coughs followed by a big yellow wad of slime from her lungs. Almost gagging, she spun round and spat it out the open kitchen window. She instinctively took another long swig of beer. It seemed to help. Her second drag on the hot sand-like smoke only produced one small cough. Then another guzzle of beer, and she felt a bit better.

By the time Lyn finished the first bottle, her head had stopped pounding and her throat felt almost normal. It was like that in the morning. She was a bit like an old truck starting up. A bit hard to get going, but ready to haul ass in short order.

She got up from the table, popped open another bottle and headed into the living room to see if everything was still in one piece. The house was a mess as usual. So what. The party just endorsed it. The furniture, what there was of it, was filthy with beer stains and peppered with cigarette burns. Empty crates, bottles and cigarette butts littered the bare wooden floor. The front room, like all the others, had just one naked light bulb hanging from a stained yellow wire. The curtains were old bed sheets, hung at odd angles on wire supports. There was a new hole in the wall from some wild punch. She didn't see the TV, but then it came back to her. The 36-inch rental TV, the pride and joy of the house, had been shifted to the kid's room while the party was on. The sound system was still in one piece. Don't know how we'd get along without music.

Lyn turned it on and stuck in an old tape. No fancy CDs here. Prince Tui Teka crooned. She smiled and stepped out the back door to smoke and drink some more in the sun. It was warm and sunny, a little past midday, a beautiful end-of-summer's day.

Riwai woke to the music. "Where the fuck are you woman. Bring me a beer." She did as she was told, knowing that he would be hurting more than her that morning. His words didn't worry her. His bark was always worse than his bite.

She walked into the bedroom smiling. "Well we survived another night of it, how are you feeling hun?" Then she sat down on the bed, bent over and gave him a big kiss.

"Shit, like I've been driven over by a freight train. What the hell happened last night?"

"The usual. You picked a fight with the toughest looking guy at the party and then filled him in big time. Did he manage to land a punch, is that why ye're hurt'n?" She handed him her beer and he sucked it back like a sailor on leave.

"Nah, no one's that lucky. Jeez I had a weird dream. Roll me a smoke while I tell you about it." He took another long swig on the warm beer and started. "There was this guy with red eyes, wild looking, who was wearing all black. A Maori fella. He had the number 222 tattooed in black on his forehead. And he was carrying a wooden spear, with feathers tied to the top if it, a taiaha. I gave him a punch but it went straight through him. Like he was a ghost or sumth'n. But I was in his face, and I could smell his breath. It was like puke, real piro, like sun-baked rotten corn, you know what I mean? She nodded and took hold of his hand.

"Then I began to run. But this bastard just appeared in front of me every time I stopped. Like there was no getting away from'im. So's I just ran and ran. And then there was three of em. They all had 222 stencilled on their foreheads. And they were chanting. 'Addem up, what does it come to.' I was so fucking tired from running I just fell down in a heap. But they were just laughing at me, pointing at me, with the taiaha saying 'addem up, what does it come to.' Shit, it is so fuck'n weird."

Lyn lit up the smoke she had just rolled and handed it to Riwai. His hands were shaking like a runaway vibrator when he took it.

"I think it's just a bad dream that means nuth'n. Just your mind playing tricks on you. Take a pull on that beer, you'll come right real soon."

It wasn't the first bad dream that Riwai had experienced. In fact he had experienced parts of that same dream a number of times. It was the number thing. What did it mean?

He took another pull on the warm beer. "Shit. It don't mean shit, hun. Ka tika tau. Justa buncha shit. That's alls dreams are. Fuck'n bullshit."

Fair enough, neither Riwai or Lyn had any dreams in the daytime. Why worry about the ones at night? They never dreamed to win Lotto, or have big house fulla

flash furniture and all the trimmings. They just took each day as it came. Drinking, smoken, the odd scrap here and there, a bit of luven. They never asked nothing of the world around them, and that's what they got in return. There was no need to worry. They got by. After all, they were on the payroll.

Every week came with a guaranteed payday. The money was pretty good for sitting on your ass. The benefit and accommodation supplement was 440 bucks. Easy money, every week.

Out of that came 120 bucks for rent, and 50 for power. There was no heater, no phone and only a few light bulbs. That left \$270 for food and beer every week. Occasionally they'd get into deficit with the bank, and go over the \$500 credit limit. But the welfare usually bailed them out, and if they didn't, they could pawn or hoko something.

Twenty-three grand a year in the hand. Not bad for doing nothing.

Riwai had a real job 12 years ago with Watties. Fulltime, all year round. Shit, they were paying 20 grand a year then. But they shut it down and he never worked fulltime again. He tried some part-time seasonal stuff, but it was hard to get back on the dole when it stopped. It was easier, and worth more money in the hand, just to stay on the dole all year long.

Lyn and Riwai Rodgers had three tamariki. Joel, 12. Hiria, 10 and Tipi, the youngest, who was nine. The kids were growing up fast. It seemed like only yesterday they were crawling around on the floor.

Joel was into hip-hop. "Thinks he is somkinda flash black dude from Chicago for crissake," Riwai would say. He'd already given up at school. The reports home were always negative. Mind you, he was rarely ever at home. He spent most of his time with his mates, a band of young gang hopefuls who were just starting to get the attention of the law.

Hiria was still full of youthful innocence. She didn't understand why she couldn't do things like heaps of other kids. Like go on summer camps or learn to play an instrument. To get to the netball courts or touch grounds they had to walk. They had no car. She had to hitch rides with parents of her mates. It made her feel stink. Just about everyone except them in Gizzy had wheels. She couldn't understand why they didn't have a car.

Tipi was doing OK at school but he couldn't do much running around or sport. He was born with his left foot pressed hard up against his shin. They straightened it out with splints when he was still just a baby, but now he had problems just walking a few blocks. His leg would hurt so much that he had to sit down and rest. Coupled with that was his bad hearing. He had a bad infection a few winters back, when it was real cold and there was no heat in the house. It left him partially deaf.

It seemed like the children were destined to grow up and be just like their parents. A lot of kids do. At least they had parents, a heap of their mates didn't. But any ambitions they showed had been knocked flat out of them. Like their parents, they lived day to day. Not expecting much and not giving much in return.

Some people could call them a family of going nowhere no-hopers. Living in a street full of poverty. State houses, no gardens, no flowers, just the same ugly old government-built holding pens for poor people. It was like looking at a big mirror when you looked outside. The front lawn had never been mown, same as the back. The backyard was littered with empty beer boxes, old tyres, a rusted-out transmission, a pile of rotting squash and bags of old garbage ripped open by the local rats and dogs.

This was the view that Riwai and Lyn enjoyed as they poured back the last of the beer left over from the party. Then the cops pulled into the driveway. In the back seat was young Joel. It wasn't the first time he had been chauffeured home by the law. Constable Glen Matthews got out of the car and walked up to talk with Joel's parents. As a community-based officer, he knew the family.

In his half-cut voice, Riwai spoke first. "Well officer, seems you have our boy in the back seat. Whatz he done this time?"

"Well Mr Rodgers, we picked Joel up downtown, in broad daylight smoking marijuana with a bunch of other young troublemakers. You know the law on this kind of thing Mr Rodgers. What you may not know is the effect that drugs can have on such a young person."

"And I suppose you do? Call me Riwai, officer, and I'll call you Glen. You OK with that?"

"Yes, Riwai, but I am not OK with Joel mixing with the wrong crowd and getting into trouble. Next it could be small crimes and stealing. Perhaps it will turn into burglaries. At the rate he's going, something has to be done or Joel is just going to end up on the losing side of the street."

"So what do you expect me to do about it?"

"You're the father. Surely you can understand that Joel is your responsibility?" Constable Glen Matthews was always pushing the rights and responsibilities line. He believed it was the solution to youth crime.

"Look, I told him not to smoke pot and to stay outta trouble. But he doesn't wanna listen to me. I can't do nuth'n about that. Hei aha maku."

"Riwai you have a legal responsibility here. You are responsible for the actions of Joel until he legally becomes a man. You can't just throw your hands up in the air and turn a blind eye to what's going on."

At this point Lyn cut in. Normally she let her man do all the talking to the police, but a couple of beers had loosened her tongue. She lurched up, pointing her finger in front of the constable's face, and launched into him. "You fuck'n think it's easy raising a boy in this goddamn slum? You think it's easy to go without every fuck'n day of the week? You think we can just say a few fuck'n magic words and all this crap is going to disappear?"

He instinctively took a step backwards. "Now, Mrs Rodgers. Hold your horses. I'm not saying raising a teenage boy is easy, but I just don't see how you can blame someone else when he gets into trouble every weekend."

"And who the fuck am I blaming?"

"It's not that Mrs Rodgers. It's more a question of who is the responsible parent and what are the right decisions to be made to get on top of this kind of behaviour."

"Are you saying I'm not a good mother, cuz I am. They get food in their bellies and clothes on their backs. What more do they need? It was enough for me when I was growing up. It fuck'n well oughta be good enough for them."

"Look, I don't think we're getting anywhere with this. Why don't we just arrange to talk about it when you've stopped drinking?" He knew it was the right thing to say, but he really just wanted to chew her head off.

This really set her off. "Are you calling me a drunk? Well you got no fuck'n right to. Let my boy outta your car and get the fuck off my property."

"Mrs Rodgers, you're hardly in a position here to be calling the shots. I'll give Joel over to your custody, but next week I will be arranging a family conference to see if we can get something positive out of this situation here."

"Ya ya, fine fine. Do what you want. A fuck'n conference is nothing but a waste of fuck'n time. Just you let my boy free and then you can piss off."

Realising there was little more to be gained except abuse, Constable Matthews handed the boy over and drove back to the station to fill out his paperwork. He was used to this kind of behaviour. He got a lot of abuse in his job, but he was trained to deal with it. He had already arranged seven conferences with this family and the victims of Joel's behaviour. It was soul-wrenching stuff, dealing with failure, but he'd notched up a few wins on his watch. That's what kept him going.

Joel came in through the back door of the house and collected a quick clip around the head from his father. "That's for getting caught you little shit. Keep it up and you'll end up in jail boy." Joel retreated to his room, but just hopped out the window. None of it made much sense to him. "The heck if I'm staying around here with these bloody pissheads."

As it turned out, Riwai and Lyn had just run out of beer. Nothing new, it happened all the time. They had cash, so they went over to the neighbours to use the phone for a taxi to pick up two dozen big cold bottles from the local, and just carried on drinking all afternoon.

Lyn's mother Betty showed up with Hiria and Tipi at five o'clock. She had done a good job of taking care of them. They'd watched three videos and ate pizza for tea. And she made sure they had full bellies before they came home. There was never much to eat for the young ones in this house. Riwai greeted her at the back door, pissed and slurring his words. "Heya, mama. Seems you lost Joel again. The cops brought him home a little while ago."

"Really, what was he doing?"

"Seems he was smoking dope with his mate's right in the middle of town."

"God, they start young these days. He left my place at ten this morning to go play with his mates. How was I to know he was up to no good?"

Riwai put his hand on her shoulder and cut in. "You weren't, take it easy. Shit happens. Hey, any chance of a loan of the car this Tuesday? My cousin Joe, you know Auntie June's boy from Waihau, well he was at the party last night and said why don't we come up for the day to get us a feed of cray. I can get some for you if you loan me your wheels. Whaddya say?"

She didn't enjoy being so close to Riwai. His breath stunk of beer and cigarettes. She instinctively turned away and took a step back. "Well I suppose. As long as you don't drink and drive. I'm not insured for that kind of carry on you know."

"Ka pai, we'll drink when we get back. No worries, I promise," laughed Riwai.

It was a risk, but Betty gave in. It would be good for the kids and Lyn to go up the coast and visit with family. "Well okay then. I'll drop the car off on Monday night and you can drop it off at my place on Tuesday night. Is that okay?"

"Sweet, thanks for the loan. We'll see you Tuesday with the cray. Joe's gonna jack us up a permit, all nice and legal. So we should get heaps."

Betty then headed back to her car and drove back home. She wanted more for her grandchildren, but it was hard. Hard to break the cycle.

When it started to cool off outside, Lyn and Riwai shifted to the kitchen. Hiria and Tipi pulled the TV out of the bedroom and plugged it in. Then they curled up on the couch, together, under a blanket. Glued to the TV. Later on, Riwai sent Hiria down to the corner dairy to get saveloys for tea. Lyn boiled them up and ate the lot with Riwai. The kids were given the broth with some white bread. She called it saveloy soup.

Joel missed his tea. He was off with his mates again. Mind you, saveloy soup wasn't the kind of meal that put meat on your bones. He had mince and cheese pies with his mates. And nobody at home ever missed him.

Hiria and Tipi stared at the TV till they were shunted into bed.

Lyn and Riwai carried on as usual, drinking and smoking. Later, they fell asleep together. On the couch.

Joel came home later. Half-past eleven. He turned the TV off, and put a blanket on his sleeping parents and then hit the hay himself.

It was the routine most nights. Same old shit, just a different day.

CHAPTER FIVE

That same Sunday, further on down the road, the morning sun inched its way up John and Nola Foster's summer duvet. They lay snoozing on the king-size futon in the master bedroom of their Wairere Road, Wainui home. The large smoked-glass window was folded wide open to a charming deck fronting an outstanding ocean view over the surf beach.

It was a new house. They had bought the property a year ago for a song after a mortgagee sale. Just before prices were going through the roof on coast-view properties all over the country. They'd doubled their invested value. It was money for jam, John was fond of saying.

Their life was like that, sweet and sugary. Everything they touched seemed to turn into money. The Midas touch. First it was the plumbing business which he started at age 26, franchised nationwide five years later then sold out at 40 for a bundle. He had plenty of dollars and sense and time to burn. So he got into buying up old Muller Thurgau and Dr Hogg grape blocks and run-down dry stock operations in the valley, and converting them to citrus and grapes. That led to establishing their own wine label, shares in a winery and a short time later buying a local packhouse and coolstore operation.

Lately he'd been trading on his own account in foreign currency movements. A cent here, a few points there. He was no expert but he made money trading money. Millions in fact. Now they really had more money than they knew what to do with.

Upon waking, John pulled on his silk dressing gown, stepped into his fawn soft Italian leather slippers and strode outside to pick up the Auckland Sunday paper from the mailbox. On the features page was an article headlined "The truth about poverty in New Zealand". He started reading as he strolled back into the house. The facts were listed by bullet points.

- 77% of people on a benefit had problems paying for food
- 64% went without meals
- 22,000 children lived in homes with no heat

And on and on. The gist of it said some people didn't have enough money to participate equally in the community. They couldn't afford to do things that many other people did regularly, such as visit friends and family, take part in sports teams or go on school trips.

John didn't believe it was that simple. He strolled back through the massive kauri stained-glass doors and into the huge kitchen that also had a spectacular view of the ocean. Except for one of the three bathrooms and the laundry, every room in the house had a view of Wainui Beach. At a glance he could see that the wind was going to be okay for surfing later on, when the tide was coming in. A big surf contest was planned for right out front today. He planned to give it a go, see how he could do against the young guns. He was bit out of shape, fighting the battle of the bulge, but he still surfed regularly. It was his only form of exercise, unless you included counting money.

He fired up the Italian espresso machine for a morning latte, thinking all the while about the article on poverty. He reckoned some people just didn't know how to manage their money. Money that was handed to them gift-wrapped every week. All they did was have more babies so they could collect more money from the taxpayer. Jeez, he'd even heard that the useless commie schoolteachers at one of the local colleges taught students how to get the dole. That was at age 15, just before the no-hopers and future bludgers dropped out. What really bugged him was that they didn't go out and get a job. There were jobs all over the place. Growers in the valley and around the country were always crying out for pickers. Some local growers were even talking about importing crews from Fiji to harvest crops next year.

Whatever, the whole story line pissed him off. While the coffee was happening, he leafed through the paper and found an article on the hidden taxes that the Labour government had delivered. They were an odd assortment. Most he hadn't realised were happening. He knew of the income tax increase for people like him, earning over sixty grand, but the others were completely new.

- Fringe Benefit Tax up from 49 to 64%
- Trust Income Tax up from 19 to 33%
- Petrol Tax up 15 cents a litre and the ACC levy on petrol up from 2 to 5 cents a litre.

- Road user charges for diesel vehicles up 30%
- Alcohol Tax up from \$21 to \$38 per litre of alcohol
- ACC levies on self-employed up 40%
- ACC levies on workers up from 10 cents to \$1.20 per \$100 of income
- Birth, Death and Marriage certificates up 43%

And on and on. It made him fume. He just hated this politically correct, poll-driven government. He was financially active in the National Party, but the odds were fairly well stacked against getting a blue from the Coast into parliament. It was a red seat. You could put up a gay rooster in a red jumpsuit and it would win. Hands down.

That was the way it worked. John compared politics with rugby. In his view, it was a case of taking the points on offer. If one side was dumb enough to concede penalties then the other, by taking the three pointers, could win the game. As long as they played a team game and ran hard and straight.

The rabble-rousers were always talking about honouring the treaty, and following the principles. As far as he was concerned, it had gone on for way too long. He preferred scrapping the treaty and making the country a republic. That would sort the bastards out, once and for all. Principles, the bloody treaty never even mentioned the word. Either the Maori or the Pakeha version!

Like most New Zealanders he felt the treaty created divisions between people, that it shouldn't have so much influence in government decision-making. It was just taking too long to settle the claims. Shit, even the bloody tribunal was wading into it now. He figured they were applying the standards of today to the actions of the past. They had totally given up writing objective history and were instead focusing on Maori sovereignty, the wankers.

He warmed up four croissants and put them on two plates with soft cheese, jam and fresh fruit. Then he loaded the tray with two lattes' and the paper. Nola always took breakfast in bed. He liked to pamper her, and she liked to be pampered. They were opposites.

As usual, he took his breakfast on the deck. Whatever the weather, he liked to sit on the blue canvas deck chair with his feet up on the kwela table.

There was no one else living in this huge house, just the two of them. The kids, Brianna and Kelsey, were both busy with their own lives. They came home for Christmas, but the rest of the contact was by phone. Nola did all the phoning. She was the communications hub of the family. The glue that kept everybody together.

But things weren't going so well for her that morning. She had swung into a down mood. It seemed odd that a person so rich, a person with everything going for them could be so bummed out, but she was.

For the past week and a half she had been feeling great. Happy and outgoing. That was the other half of her health problem. She was bi-polar. When the good times came she was over the moon, spending money, playing golf, going out for brunch at the Wharf Bar with her friends. But when the tide turned, she was down in the dumps. Alone, afraid to do anything.

Originally was prescribed lithium carbonate for her depression, but it caused problems. A toxic build-up in her liver and kidneys. Her doctor then prescribed Epalim, a mood stabiliser that didn't poison the system. It usually took care of the depression. For the manic behaviours, she took 4mg of Risperidone, an anti-psychotic.

Today she felt totally useless. Like her life had added up to nothing more than a bag of brownies. Nothing but negative thoughts. Nola nibbled at her breakfast and read the paper in bed. She didn't want to bother John with her feelings. Not that he wasn't sympathetic or caring or anything. She just didn't want to pull him down into her personal world of self-pity and doubt. No one anywhere deserved to be dumped on with all that negativity. It just bubbled over in her mind. That's what she thought. Instead, she tried hard to sound upbeat.

"John, I see in the paper here that they caught a bunch of poachers up the coast again. 500 crayfish, 467 undersize, in violation of the permit. One of them said it was his right to catch as many undersize cray as he wanted, when he wanted. He didn't believe that anyone had the right to stop him and that he was going to fight it in the courts. He claimed that his treaty rights guaranteed him use of the fisheries resource and no one could take it away from him."

John didn't look up. He was leafing through the paper on the deck. "What's his name, Nola?"

"It's a Mr Urimaita from Tolaga Bay. Why, do you know the guy?"

"No I don't, darling. I just wanted to know who it was, that's all." John was like that. He had a mind like a steel trap. He would sponge and store little bits of information and then surprise people by pulling out some small fact that was usually worthless by itself, but sounded good. He was, to anyone who knew him, a bit of a know-it-all.

Later that morning, the crowds started to gather on the beach for the surf contest. John kitted up and headed down to register in the novice class. They were expecting surfers from all over the country. The total prize pool was over ten grand. It was the fourth of a series of professional surf contests held that year. This was just the Gisborne leg of it. He liked the thrill of competition. It wasn't a case of winning, he was well beyond that.

Nola stayed in bed all morning and half of the afternoon. It was her blanket, her security. If she didn't get out of bed, she didn't have to face up to the demands of life. She didn't have to fret and worry about where or if she fitted in. She didn't have to expose herself to extra negative thoughts.

Unlike John, she didn't find life a box of fluffy ducks. The money thing didn't mean much to her at all. Sure, she had everything a woman could want, except maybe some grandchildren. But life just seemed empty to her, without meaning, without purpose. Like a bag of dead air.

Just before noon, right after John sauntered off down to the beach to pretend he still had it; she got on the phone to talk to Brianna.

Her daughter was in Auckland, in the last year of a law degree. She was deep in study when Nola phoned. "Thanks for the call, mum. I need a break. How are you doing?" Brianna was like that, genuinely concerned about other people, how they felt. She'd picked that up from her mother.

"Well your father is off down the beach surfing. I've just been reading the Sunday paper in bed. But I'm not feeling so good."

"What's wrong, Mum?" Brianna had heard this many times before.

"Well I just can't help thinking that I don't have any friends. I don't have any hobbies and I don't have a life."

Brianna was looking out her window at the leaves falling of the Dutch elm tree as she spoke. "Come on Mum. You have heaps of friends, what are you talking about. Are you keeping up with your medication?"

"Yes, but it doesn't always make a difference. Some days I just can't get up."

The leaves were falling very slowly. More than half of the tree was bare. "Maybe you should go to see the doctor again, and have a review of your treatment plan. Maybe you need your medication level increased, or maybe they've got something else they could prescribe?"

"Oh, I don't know. Do you think I should?" Nola replied cautiously.

Brianna laughed. "What have you got to lose, Mum? More importantly look what you could gain. It could be just what the doctor ordered."

Nola could see the merit in it. Maybe she would feel more normal. "But even if I did get more drugs, how is that going to help me find friends?"

"Oh Mum, don't you understand? It's a state of mind. If you feel better about yourself then maybe you'd realise that you do have heaps of friends. I mean you can't tell me that having taught school for over 25 years, that you don't have any friends?" She'd had this conversation with her mother many times.

"Well it certainly feels that way. I mean I know a lot of people, but I just don't go out and do anything with them. And they don't ring me up to do things with me. You know what I mean? I just feel so hollow inside."

"Yes I understand what you're saying. But try and listen to what I am saying. It's all in the mind mum. You just need drugs to come right, to stay level, that's all. You're a wonderful person, you've just got to understand that. Mum, are you and Dad OK? Like are you talking to each other?" enquired Brianna, trying to change the subject. She knew her mother's illness only too well. The mood swings, the negativity. Then full-on manic. Buying everything in sight, organising parties.

"Oh yes, your father is a wonderful man," replied Nola.

"Mother, I mean are you really talking to each other, about what you feel inside, about how you are hurting?"

"Well I just don't want to bother him with all these negative thoughts I keep on getting. What good would that do?"

Brianna knew that her father was kind and compassionate to a point. He usually tried to take off the worst of her mothers behavioural excesses. A bit off the top, a little from the bottom. Like some kind of psychological barber. But he was only herding fish. "Listen, Mum. I think you should come to grips with what you are thinking. Maybe it would help if you kept a diary, and wrote down what is going through your mind. Maybe then we could begin to understand what is driving you to feel this way?"

"Well I suppose I could do some writing. I think I would like that."

"Now you're talking. Get going on that and I'm sure that good feelings will pop out of it. Don't sit back and do nothing. You gotta deal with your feelings mum. You should write down what's happening, what's going on inside your head. Only then will you come to grips with the highs and the lows. Only then will you be able to understand that it's okay to be the way you are."

"Maybe you're right," responded Nola attentively.

"Of course I'm right. Sit down right now and write a page on why you feel so lonely. And then e-mail it to me. And don't feel like you're the only one going through this. Believe me, you have heaps of company."

"OK, I can do that. I might even write a page a day on what makes me happy. That could balance the days when I feel so worthless."

"Great, now you're on to it mum. Hey, I think you and Dad should hit the road and do some travelling. Go see what the rest of the world is up to. It could really help you put things in perspective."

"You could be right, darling. I think I'll put it to your father. What a good idea. Travel, maybe we could go to India. I'd love to go to India. To eat the food and experience the sounds and smells. And see the Taj Mahal."

"That's the sprit mum. Get up and get going. Make yourself busy and you just won't have the time to feel depressed. Hey isn't the autumn fair on out at the arboretum today?"

"Yes. It's on till four o'clock."

"Well, why don't you go out and enjoy a walk in the forest. And they have a wearable art award and live music. It will be good for you. To be among people, to be with other people." Nola agreed and Brianna said goodbye. She felt it strange that her mother could swing so fast between depression and doing something positive to deal with it. But this wretched illness was like that. Her mother was in the zone where she could swing from low to high on the strength of the tide.

Brianna whipped out her address book and called up her mother's caseworker from the local mental health team, who knew her mother well and her mental state. But it was Sunday, no answer. She made a note in her computer diary to ring the caseworker on Monday and then got back to her study. Final exams were only two weeks away.

Nola did get up and get going. She went to the fair. It was a lovely autumn day. Really warm when the sun was out but cold when it sunk behind the clouds. The dry leaves were falling off the trees on to the ground. Crowds shuffled around, crunching the leaves underfoot. Nola Foster hid behind her sunglasses, not wanting to make contact with anyone. She was still not feeling good about herself.

It was so strange. Here she was, alone in a huge crowd of people, shuffling solitary. Thinking all the while that she didn't have a friend in the world. And feeling, thinking, believing. That she just didn't fit in. Anywhere, anytime.

CHAPTER SIX

At the other end of town that morning, deep in the heart of Elgin, Jack Davies had been up since six. He hardly ever slept in. He was keen to make Sunday breakfast for the family. They didn't have much, but they really enjoyed their food. Jack did the cooking. He enjoyed playing the provider role.

Julie and the kids were sound asleep. He thought he could tempt them out of bed with some warm blueberry muffins. They were quick, filling and easy to make. And they didn't cost much.

He fired up the gas stove, pulled some frozen berries out of the chest freezer and mixed up a large batch. Enough for three charges in the Texas muffin tin. Big muffins.

Then he went outside to watch the sun come up, the best part of the day. As the oven was coming up to speed. The east was streaked with red clouds. The sky was an unreal powder blue. Beautiful.

The backyard had a couple of big fruit trees in it, and they always attracted birds. The birds were at it now. Singing and chirping to each other. He loved this time of the day. Everything was clean, alive and fresh. Any time of year.

He walked back inside and loaded up the first set of six muffins. Then gently called his dog with a low, warbling whistle. Buddy, a hairy little bitza, bounded off the bed and headed straight for the front gate. He knew the drill. Jack goaded him on as he walked up the drive. "Wanna go for a walk? Shall we go for a walk, Big Guy?" Buddy was anything but a Big Guy. He weighed about four kilos soaking wet. Julie called him Little Man.

He had just 12 minutes before the muffins were done. Enough time for a brisk walk to the Elgin shops to pick up the Sunday paper and some milk. They always seemed to be running out of milk.

The trip there and back was uneventful, as usual. No one seemed to be awake on Sunday mornings. Jack checked out what was growing in people's front yards. Buddy checked out and endorsed every bush and pole along the route.

They got back just in time, the muffins were starting to turn dark brown on top. He quickly tipped them out of the non-stick pan, reloaded from the batter bowl and fired the second set of six into the oven. Then he fixed himself an instant coffee, and headed outside. To sit on one of the lawn chairs, slowly sip at his coffee and check out the paper. It was The Dominion from Wellington. It wasn't as big as the Sunday paper from Auckland, but he felt it was a bit more relevant.

He scanned the front page headlines. A fire down south had killed two elderly people. Bad luck, their smoke alarm batteries were dead. A bit about corruption in the police force and some international news about the continuing slaughter in the Middle East. He opened the lifestyle section to see what the smart and trendies were on about. A bunch of ballet dancers with green hair were the lead item, on page two a story about student loans. He took a small slurp of his coffee and settled down to read. His number one daughter Julia was down in Wellington, in the second year of a science degree. She'd racked up a loan bill of ten grand last year.

The student loan scheme was emerging as a key post election issue. The total student debt had piled up to an incredible eight billion dollars. It said: "Treating universal student benefits as loans enables the government to raise funds on behalf of students without having to account for such borrowings as a part of the government's debt. Student loans are an off-budget part of the public sector borrowing requirements."

It went on to say: "The real problem is the inequitable tax scale that former tertiary students face. An Irish person on the equivalent of NZ\$25,000 will pay 13% in tax and social insurance this year, compared to 20% for a New Zealander."

He stopped reading and returned to the kitchen to fire up the last load of muffins. All the while thinking about the risk his daughter was taking in creating a big loan debt just to get an education. The real risk was when you couldn't find a well-paying job at the end of it. Because the loan interest just kept piling up day after day. They'd always wanted to provide for their children's education but right now there just wasn't enough money to make it happen.

Julia's student allowance was \$122 after tax per week. It was targeted to pay for fees, course costs and to subsidise living expenses. She was living in

Wellington and the rent alone was 110 bucks a week for a mouldy, cold flop-house. The student loan was used to cover food, heat, power, books, fees and course costs. And the odd night out.

Jack worked at Gisborne Sawmills driving a forklift, for 11 bucks an hour. He'd been doing that for the past 12 years. Julie worked during the summer packing corn and citrus and in the autumn did quality control on the rootstock harvest. She grossed about ten grand a year from seasonal work. This year she'd signed on with Montana Wines for the vintage. They paid a bit more than other casual labour employers in the valley.

All up, the household income was 33 grand after tax. Not much, but somehow they'd managed to pay off their mortgage and raise four good kids. The kind of kids that grow up understanding good and bad.

The muffins all done, he put two on a plate to take into Julie with a cup of milk coffee. She liked her coffee done in the microwave with milk, not water. The dog bounded up on the bed at the same time and woke her up.

"Oh...is it morning already?" she mumbled.

"Yes it is, darling. Fresh muffins and coffee, just the way you like it. How did you sleep?" He handed her the breakfast, gave her a kiss and opened the curtains to let the sun shine in.

"Well, Buddy kept me awake half the night itching and jumping off and on the bed." She didn't seem to be too worried about it, as the dog was now sitting up on the bed getting his ears scratched and waiting for his share of the breakfast.

Jack gave her half the newspaper and headed back into the kitchen to fill up his cup and read the other half. They both liked Sundays. A lot. It was your own day. You could do whatever you wanted. Saturday was usually booked out with driving the kids to sports, the main weekly three load wash and shopping for the next week's groceries.

The kids woke up eventually and gobbled up the rest of the muffins. They were still warm.

Jack and Julie Davies spent the morning in the garden. It was the end of the season for most stuff. The tomatoes, eggplants and pole beans were all done and

their remains put into the compost. The old compost was dug back in and fresh seedlings of lettuce, onions, brussel sprouts, snow peas, leeks and silver beet were put in. They'd planted some cauli and broccoli last weekend, and they finished the job by fertilising everything with sheep pellets and watering it in well.

Jack and Julie both really enjoyed gardening. They grew everything in raised beds. It kept the soil temperature up and allowed for free drainage. The three big box frames, 18 square metres of quality soil, produced enough for the whole family, all year.

They made their own pickles, salsa and relish. This year they even tried making some pesto out of the Italian parsley. It turned out great. Every year they bottled fruit from the four mature trees and froze beans and corn in the big freezer. Julie's father managed a station just up the coast at Whangara. He provided all the sheep, beef and pig meat they could eat. That was a huge saving.

They sat down for tomato sandwiches and a cuppa after completing the gardening. As usual, they talked about what had happened last week and what was coming up next week. Not like they were big time planners or anything. It just kept them in tune with each other and the ship on the straight and narrow.

"Well, that was a good effort," Jack said. "Isn't the garden just looking beautiful?" It wasn't as if he needed an answer.

Julie replied anyway. "Isn't it amazing how it's the little things in life that seem to give you the most joy?"

"I'll be happy when I get my Class 5 and start making some serious dosh." Jack had been working on getting his full truck licence for the past three years. Under the new regulations, that's how long it took.

"When do you do your practical?" asked Julie.

"Next Tuesday, after work. I've jacked up a deal with one of the guys that hauls logs into the mill to use his truck for the test. You know the guy. I've talked about him before, Jim Wheatley."

"So what about getting a job then?" Julie was worried that the cost of the exercise would not be covered by a job offer. Each step along the way had cost

money. All up, the family had committed two thousand dollars to get to this stage.

"Julie, they're crying out for truck drivers. This whole licence scam has made it that tough to get a licence that there's a shortage across the whole country. I've talked to John Gilchrist at P and G trucking, and he said he'd put me into a training programme the day I get my learner Class 5. So it looks as though I'll be kissing the sawmill sweet goodbye."

"Did John mention anything about pay?" asked Julie. "Yeah, the deal is 13 bucks an hour while I am training, and 17 bucks an hour after I do my full licence."

"Wow, that really would help," said Julie.

"And all the rest. It means long hours, but they can only work you 70 hours a week. So I may do four days on and three off. All up I reckon I'll be pulling in a grand a week in the hand. That's like double what I'm getting now. It's really going to make a huge difference."

"Bring it on, big guy. What will we do with the extra? Boy this will be a luxury, having more than we need," laughed Julie.

"Well I thought we could put some towards Julia's loan. Then again we've got a heap of overdue maintenance on the house. The gutters need replacing and the place really does need a paint."

But Julie was on a different path. "I'd love to go on a holiday. You know, we have never been on a holiday?"

"OK, let's check it out. Maybe we could go to the Gold Coast or even Fiji for a week?" Jack said.

"Maybe we could buy a better house, or put a down-payment on a second house and rent it out. It's not that long before we both finish up working, and you know how little the government is paying in old age pension. Jeez, come our time, they may even have to cut back on it."

"Well there sure is lots to think about, but don't count your chickens till they're hatched," cautioned Jack.

"Yeah, yeah," she laughed. "Some farmer you are."

But he was right and she knew it. No sense going flat out with new spending. They'd only got this far by being cautious, by not talking risks, by keeping a very sharp pencil.

Jack changed the subject. "How's your work going?"

"It's great. Fresh air, all the grapes I can eat and a real good mob of people to work with. Mind you, some of the grapes are a bit sour. I think they can't wait for them to ripen naturally. They had to start some blocks early just to get them all in. So they must add truck-loads of sugar to the big tanks, otherwise it would just be sour juice. I think the job will end in a week or so. The chardonnay is all in. It's just the red grapes now, pinot and merlot."

At noon, Jack and a mate headed off to Wainui for the big surf contest. The wind was from the north-east. Not perfect but it would produce nice two-metre swells in the afternoon when the tide rolled in.

Jack was in the novice men's section, not being a member of the circuit, just a local. He'd always surfed. It didn't cost much, and it was a blast. He had the standard 20 minutes to make his waves count. He played the waiting game further up the beach from the other three in his set. It paid off. He found a long, peeling right-hander to score 8.25 out of a possible 10 to go with his first score of 6.7. What a laugh, he won the heat.

On the next run he struggled to find two good scoring waves. It was just the luck of the draw. The timing and his position in relation to everyone else. In the end he couldn't find good-enough waves to push for a second heat victory. But it was still another good day out in the water.

Julie and the kids headed out to the autumn fair at the arboretum. They watched the wearable art awards. A thin young girl dressed as a Pavlova won the \$500 first prize. They ate special locally made ice cream and listened to the Massey University Jazz Band.

The family ran into heaps of people they knew. Gizzy is a small town. The weird thing was seeing who was at these kinds of shows. There were thousands of people but, in the whole day, Julie saw only a handful of Maori. She wondered why? Don't they like trees and music?

CHAPTER SEVEN

By eleven that morning, everything had been picked up and unloaded at Dave's place. Kate was moving in lock, stock and barrel. Complete with her cat Friday and Bob, the rugby-mad African grey parrot.

As usual, she looked as good in the morning as she did any old time of day. Her big brown eyes more than summoned attention from men, they demanded it, radiating passion. Thin and tall, she had not put on more than two kilos since finishing high school. Only her nose let her down. It curved slightly up at the tip, a bit like a ski-jump.

Kate had instructed the movers to put all the furniture and boxes in the garage. She was leafing through some old photograph albums when Zipper pulled up in Dave's big blue land cruiser. It was just on midday. She walked out of the garage to meet him as he jumped out of the truck. "Hey, I thought you were out fishing with Dave? What gives?"

"Well that certainly was the plan," said Roy shutting the door, "but I got some kind of mean stomach bug which hit me for six. So I helped Dave launch the boat and went home to stay real close to the dunny. But, thank Christ, the bug seemed to go as fast as it came on. Once my system was cleaned out I ate some yoghurt, had a snooze and now I seem to have come right. So here I am, ready to help. How are you getting on? What can I do to help?"

"Do you think Dave will be OK by himself on the water?" Kate asked. She really didn't like the thought of Dave going out on the water by himself.

"Yeah, no worries Kate. He was just going up the coast to set the pots at Monowai, then on to Penguin for a bit of snapper fishing. I left his trailer at the Tatapouri ramp. I'm going to pick him up at half past four. Maybe you'd like to come along to help us pull the boat out and clean the fish?"

"Well, why not. It really has been a weird day. Marlin came by this morning and was pulling out all the stops before I left with the movers. He even pulled the keys out of my car. I had to get the movers to wrestle them off him."

"Boy that guy is getting weirder by the day. I saw him this morning too. We had a coffee together. He looked like hell warmed over. What's wrong with him?"

Kate knew what was wrong with him. "I think it's the dope. Ever since that Chinese forestry outfit went belly up, he's been either drunk, stoned on dope or wired to the max on speed. It got real bad when the bank took the house."

Zip knew the story on the mortgagee sale and how mean he was to Kate during the bust up. "Jeez, speed. I never knew he was into that shit."

"Big time. He stays up for days at a time, peeping out the windows and locking all the doors, and checking every five minutes to see if anyone is coming up the drive. It's pretty freaky really."

"No kidding, that's what he was doing when he came over this morning. Boy is that shit bad for you or what? I thought he was broke. Where the heck does he get the money for it? It must cost a bloody packet?"

"I don't know and, to tell you the truth, I really don't care. He's turned into such a big time loser."

It was a really good question though. Where did Marlin get money for anything? Ever since the partnership with Dave fell over he'd been in debt. Borrowed money, lived on a tightrope. He was always grinding his teeth and sweating. His speech was slurred, his skin a blotchy mess of sores he constantly scratched. But she meant it. If she ever saw Marlin again it would be too soon for her and too bad for him. The reason she left him was simple. He'd changed. Where once he was positive and happy, now he was negative, cynical and angry. The last few months together had been total hell, nothing but arguments. When Marlin beat her up during one of his stoned binges, it was the last straw. Life was just too short for that kind of carry-on. Marlin was on a hiding to nowhere.

Dave was nothing at all like Marlin. He was happy, generous and caring. He wasn't into getting stoned. Unlike most men, he actually talked about his feelings. From the very start of their relationship, he opened up and revealed himself. He had focus, urgency, and a sense of purpose. She was fairly well emotionally beaten up when they first got involved. But she had never given up on her dream of loving and being loved.

She'd started working for Dave at the garden centre just after the bust-up with Marlin. Dave actually helped her find a place to shift to. Now she was moving in with him. "Come on in and have a sit down," Kate gestured. "I was just about to have some lunch."

Thirty kilometres up the coast, Happi Orupe was on to a good one. Hunting pigs with his three best dogs. Bully the catcher, Manu and Moko the keepers. He'd hunted pigs in this 400-hectare block of pine off and on for the past three years. In a deal worked out with the trust board, he provided free pigs to the two local marae when they wanted them. And in return, he had exclusive hunting rights on the block.

He'd built a small aluminium shed to hang out in when he was hunting. Complete with a porch, a bed and a couch. The dogs had an aluminium cage with a roof. He'd even built a shed with a pit to gut out the pigs he caught. All nice and tidy and clean.

Happi was not from the coast himself but his mother and aunties were all born at Whangara. His father was Ngati Kahungunu. His mother was Ngati Porou, Te Aowera. Most of his life had been spent in the bush. First in Murupara, where his dad had been a bushman in the logging gangs. That's where he'd learned to hunt pigs, smoke dope and party. He'd come to the coast to find his Maoritanga, work for a living and straighten out.

He spoke in Maori to his dogs. He didn't grow up speaking Maori but had taken night school courses at Tairāwhiti Polytechnic to learn the language. It was easier than he thought, and free. With the help of his auntie's whanau, he was now almost completely fluent, could speak on the marae, understand all the protocols and recite his whakapapa all the way back to the first canoe on the beach. Not bad for a guy who had left school at 13 and could barely read or write. On the strength of it, he'd even started taking night school classes to improve his English.

Murupara, where he grew up, was not a happy place when he left. In the early days there was lots of work to be had but when the crews went from company to contract his dad was left out in the shuffle. He ended up on the dole, a casualty of productivity. Two years of idle frustration then, tragically, he was killed in a fight at the hotel. It was just another stupid, drunken mistake.

Over absolutely nothing. Another unemployed pissed bushman stabbed him in the gut with a broken beer bottle and he bled to death before help arrived. He was only 45 years old. Far too young to die.

His mother departed in a car crash with a drunken teenager, coming back from a shopping trip in Rotorua the very same year. The family, six children in all, scattered. Some coming to the coast, some going to Auckland and some to Rotorua. Murupara was like that. Very few people actually came from there. And those who left were usually the good ones.

So he came to live with his mother's side of the family. But work was never easy to find on the coast. Happi started off living in Gisborne, doing the seasonal jobs. Packing squash, disbudding rootstock, pruning grapes and picking citrus. But the city life was not for him. He spent the money as fast as it came in. Easy come, easy go. Good times and bad. It seemed like he was either working flat out or partying hard out.

He'd done a fair amount of tree pruning but it was a young man's game. He was 37 now. The last real job he had was driving a dump truck, building roads in the forest with Marlin Hasler.

Happi eventually got into the pig business fulltime, through his auntie's family. She'd helped him get contracts for the second and third lifts on the block. He got to know it real well and could see the potential for pigs.

It turned out better than planned. He used young feral sows caught in the Raukumaras and bred them with a big Hampton boar he kept at the old place he rented at Tolaga Bay. Then he released them into the trust block.

The whole place was seven wirefenced and surrounded by open farmland. The pigs generally stuck to the pines. Any pig seen in the open was usually bagged by the local shepherds. There was plenty of tucker to eat, and he was catching two pigs a day. He wanted to clean the place out this season. He definitely wasn't planning on being here next year. He sold most of them to a wholesaler from Rotorua. Some he traded for kai moana or whatever else was going. The rest went to the whanau. On the side, he did a little possum-trapping and deer-hunting in the native bush.

The best thing about the block was that he had the only key to the gate, and no one ever came round. Since the last pruning lift and thin to waste, no one

bothered coming to check the block, apart from the annual forest health check late summer. If anyone did want to come in, they had to contact him first. After all, he was the gatekeeper.

He'd hooked up with his old boss to grow smoke for just this year. Two years ago he hired on as a truck driver for Marlin building logging roads for the Chinese forestry outfit. Then it went bung and Marlin suggested getting into the grow business. Happi would guard and grow. Marlin would finance the show and connect with the market.

It wasn't a thing he was that proud of, breaking the trust of his whanau. But just for four months of growing, he would have enough from his share to set him up for the long haul. Too much.

Life was good. He was his own man. No nine to five, and the prospect of a really big payout in two more days. All summer long he'd tended the crop. Four hundred plants in 25 litre plastic planting bags, fully fenced and camouflaged. All linked with 10mm alkathene tubing plugged into the local fire dam. Each plant produced, on average, six dry ounces of primo skunk. That was 150 pounds all up. His cut was \$1000 a pound. It was a 50/50 deal with Marlin. A hundred and fifty grand in the hand for four months' work.

Happi lived in the block while the crop was growing. His hut was constructed with a small bunker under-floor. The shack wasn't connected to the power grid, but he'd rigged batteries and a solar panel to run a radio and TV. For light, he used kerosene lamps.

He enjoyed living in the bush. He woke with the birds and the clean forest air every morning. Living alone suited him at the moment but he did want to get hooked up some day.

It was payday on Tuesday. He was going to use his share of the cash to build a home and buy a boat. Then he would just be nice and legal with the pigs, the possums or whatever else came along. This home-grown thing was definitely a oncer.

That same Sunday, his partner Marlin Hasler was into it big time. Screwed up, step right up, he wrote the book. Having bought enough P to sink a battleship, he was now making his own. This was his second batch. Bigger than the first.

It was a dangerous business. He was wearing a fireproof Holden driving suit with a full facial respirator and two sets of gloves. The exhaust fans were on high and the radio was tuned to Hauraki. He was out of town at his workshop home on Harper Road. No one would smell the fumes.

Getting all the gear to manufacture the stuff was easier than he thought it would be. The flasks and lab gear he bought on line from an American distributor. The recipe, he downloaded from the net. The nitrogen tank was part of his welding set-up. The chemicals were imported from Mexico, disguised as bottles of brandy. He found that connection on his last trip overseas. All nice and legal. Paperwork from the 'Presidente Brandy' factory through Auckland customs brokers and delivered to the front door by FEDEX courier.

He turned on the tank of nitrogen and flushed the set-up. Using the same scales he had made the bombs with, he weighed up 16.2g of magnesium turnings and added it to 66.6ml of anhydrous ether in a 500ml two-neck, round-bottom flask. Next he added a small crystal of iodine and 25ml of 84.3ml benzyl chloride solution dissolved in 333.3ml anhydrous ether. It was a precise business, this P manufacturing.

This he left for 30 minutes to let the reaction start. Time for a little smoke. It had been a successful 24 hours. He couldn't remember the last time he'd slept. He placed a small crystal from his old stash into a small glass pipe and put a lighter to the outside of it. As the crystal heated, smoke started to fill the pipe. His heart raced in anticipation, his palms began to sweat. He knew what was going to happen next.

He exhaled and placed his mouth on the stem of the pipe and breathed in hard. The lighter was still heating the last of the bubbling P. In five seconds he was clear, focused and feeling like nothing could stop him. He swallowed hard and closed his eyes. Large white spots, then blue, appeared. He felt hot. "Too much bro," he told himself. "This shit is just too fucking much."

The second bomb had gone off at the garden centre early that morning. He used a seed timer. A simple jar of water with pumpkin seeds in it. When mixed with water, the seeds swelled up and pushed a contact plate connected to the 6-volt battery and a detonator he had bought from a friend of a friend in Auckland. He had waited down the street for the explosion. It was huge, way bigger than the

one back in the field. Then he drove off to Dave's to plant the second bomb in the boat. He reckoned Dave would personally answer the alarm, and he was right.

Meanwhile, the iodine colour disappeared and the reaction started. He let it run for 15 minutes then heated it to a gentle boil on the electric stove.

Next he dropped 44g of acetaldehyde into the flask and stirred flat out. The temperature went up to 50 degrees Celsius and he held it there for two hours.

While waiting for it to come together, he listened to the radio music and thought about how he had got himself into this P business. He'd grown up in Kaitaia, then came to Gisborne for a surfing competition and loved the place so much he never left. His great-grandfather had been a gum digger, straight out from Albania. His mother was a compassionate woman who unfortunately never got to achieve her potential in life. His father was a drunk, wife-beating, wife-cheating wanker who'd never held a job for more than four months.

All of this had an effect on Marlin who seemed to pick up more of the characteristics of his father as time wore on. He was getting more and more detached from society. Like one man against the world. Pissed off and intolerant of other people's bullshit. Blaming other people for his own shortcomings.

Two hours on, he added 200ml of 40% methylamine in water to the one litre reaction flask. This he slowly heated and held just below 65 degrees. He cooled the bottom condenser with methanol and dry ice. The gaseous methylamine bubbled through the flask for three hours. It took time, but he had bucket-loads of that.

Gisborne had been good to him. He'd worked the usual seasonal jobs and then was employed fulltime on a kiwifruit block as a manager. The good years. He saved his money and bought some land to grow rootstock for the grape industry. There was good money in it then. This had progressed to a partnership with Dave in a couple of other growing ventures. Grafting citrus, growing avocados and stone fruit for the wholesale market. And eventually Coastlands, the garden centre. It was a huge success, and had won two national awards as the best in New Zealand.

After cooling, the residue was methamphetamine base, which he then dissolved in 200ml of dry ether and hydrogen chloride gas. It had taken a full day, but boy was it worth it. He now had just over four ounces of pure meth, enough to keep the whole of Gisborne up for 24 hours, enough to keep one crazy man airborne for

a year. And he was due to pick up the insurance money and exchange the home-grown for cold hard cash in short order.

He took a small hit of the new batch on his pipe and fired it up. It gave off a sweet thin white smoke. He sucked it back hard and felt the warm glow cover his body. It was superb. He felt like a winner. "Everything is going to turn out just fine, my man," he said out loud.

He weighed the P into four one ounce plastic zip-lock bags and stuck them in the freezer. Finally he put about half a gram in each of four smaller zip-lock bags and pocketed them. Next he tidied up the lab equipment, placed it in a metal chest and buried it in the field in the hole that the first bomb blast made. Then he opened all the doors and windows to air the place out, and burned a few boxes of incense to get rid of the chemical smell.

Three hours later he set the alarms and headed up the coast to check out how the harvest was going. Happi had done a great job growing the crop. The Auckland buyers were standing by, on the water, just waiting for the call. His ship was coming in and he was going to be there with open arms to greet it.

CHAPTER EIGHT

The tide had fully turned when Dave hit the water. He floated face up, out cold. Being a rising flood tide, it swung his lifeless body on a southerly set, straight across the wide face of Waihou Bay. This time of year, hardly anyone was out fishing or even on the beach. And this time of day, the afternoon sea breeze was offshore as normal. It was dying down now but it still kept him just bobbing along, well off the coast. Well out of sight, even if there was anyone looking.

As the hours ticked over, the full effect of the tide extended his southerly traverse. His top-rated life-jacket kept his head above the small rise and fall of the light afternoon swell. But the water temperature was not suitable for a long time in the ocean. The blood circulation in his arms and legs was decreasing. Unknown to him, his body was automatically shutting down to protect his core life systems. His heart, lungs and brain. In time, his arms and legs became blue and numb. But he was still unconscious. Maybe he would have woken up if he were on land. But not in the water.

At the bottom end of the bay, the tidal rip took over and spun him into a series of small eddies. Little rips and broad back currents pulled him forwards, backwards and sideways, all at the same time. The drift was faster now, towards the bush-clad cliffs off Gable End. Just around the corner and well and truly out site of Waihou. The headland restricted the flow of green water. There were heaps of shoals and rocks here. The uneven seabed just added to the turbulence.

The sea now turned sharp and choppy. Water splashed over his head a couple of times. And finally, Dave came out of his salty sleep. He spluttered, coughed, gagged and then retched. The spew was just a little salt water he'd swallowed.

He'd drifted about 11 nautical miles, as the crow flies, in five hours. But Dave Anderson had no idea of time or distance.

The salt water stung his eyes. He blinked away the white dots that appeared in his vision. Squinting, he could just make out the green, bush-clad cliffs and the rock-strewn shoreline about 400 metres away.

Roy made a few phone calls himself, to mates of both him and Dave. He also pored over the maps again to see if he had missed something. Kate wandered off to have another hot shower. Roy had his shortly after he'd polished off the pizza.

And later on, for the second night in a row, Roy gave Kate some more of the sleeping pills and put her into bed. He took three himself that night and set the alarm for 5. It would only give them four hours of sleep.

As he lay in bed, drifting off to sleep, he couldn't help thinking. Maybe the Sergeant is just preparing us for the worst. Maybe he's right. Perhaps Dave is sleeping with the fish.

Now Dave had his chance. He'd given up wondering why this was happening or even why it was happening to him. Now his focus was on what he could do to get out of this mess. To get out of this hole and as far away from these dope growers as possible. He wasn't prepared to wait until the afternoon and he didn't trust people who tied him up and threw him in a pit.

When Dave was taped up, there was only one mistake. His hands were tied behind his back all right but his elbows were not bound. He moved as fast as he could, writhe and twisting until his arms slipped under his rear end and over his bound ankles. He ripped the smelly old singlet off his eyes. It was almost pitch black in the bunker. Squinting, he saw small beams of light coming down from the cracks in the trap-door.

He pulled the tape from his mouth then used his teeth to unravel the tape on his wrists. The ankle and knee bindings came next. Dave rubbed his legs and arms to get the circulation moving. His leg was aching a little from where the pig had ripped into him.

The hole he was entombed in was only 1.5 metres deep. On his knees, he pushed with his arms at the trap-door but it didn't budge an inch. Then using his head like the top of a hydraulic jack, he stood and straightened his legs. It creaked a little, but not enough to force the hinge or the dead bolt. In the dark he could feel the small wooden ladder that led to the door.

He grabbed the ladder and began to smash at the trap-door. He focused on the hinge system. There were two of them. He was weak and the movement of the ladder as a ram was hard-going. It kept hitting the bottom of the pit and would only travel a small distance before it hit the door. So he tilted the ladder sideways, to give it more room and momentum before it rammed into the door. That seemed to do the trick. It shifted a bit after three good smashes.

The left hinge gave way first. The right one took eleven good smashes to splinter off the frame. Then one good smash at the dead bolt and presto, the trap door was loose. He quickly wrenched it open and was blinded by the light. Squinting, he stumbled out of the hole and ran straight into the forest. Which way to go? He looked at the path on the left that led to the shack, it looked more worn than the one on the right. It must be the track to the entrance of the forest.

Running as fast as he could, he reached the front gate in two minutes flat. He was out of breath and his legs ached after being bound up for so long in the pit. By a stroke of luck he saw the wire line that tripped the alarm system. He had just stopped in front of the gate and was bent over, his heart racing, his lungs gasping for air. When he looked sideways at the gate, the sun was shining on the thin trip wire. He didn't know what it was but he went under it then hopped over the gate. It was now a race across open sheep paddocks to the farm road that led to the main highway. There wasn't a building in site. He worked hard to keep a steady pace. It seemed to go on forever. From the angle of the sun, he knew he was heading west.

Happi unloaded the fuel and dismantled the alarm system. He realised he didn't have anything to start the fire with. Thinking he must have lost his lighter somewhere, he motored back to the hut to get some matches.

He was startled to see the trap-door busted open. He grabbed his cell phone and rifle, jumped back on the bike and roared off to the main gate. Happi couldn't see his man anywhere in the open paddock. Shit, I've got to get some backup.

He quickly phoned a mate who lived just up the highway. Luckily he was on line. They trained pig dogs together and ran a possum line in the Raukumaras. "Sunny, it's Happi. Are you at home?"

"You just caught me in time, bro. We're just heading off for a hunt."

"Listen I got a big favour to ask of you. I caught a tauhou poaching pigs in my block. He ran off before I could deal to him. He's a Pakeha. Tall, blond, curly hair, blue eyes. Wearing shorts and a singlet. He just ran off down the farm road. Can you pick him up and bring him back? I gotta bag of primo skunk buds here waiting for you."

Sunny was always keen to help a mate, especially with a bag of buds thrown in. "I'm here with Jamie. We'll be on the road in one minute. You say he's on the farm road?"

"Yeah bro, wait for him out on the main highway. Sure as shit, when he comes out from the farm road the turkey will try to hitchhike back to Gizzy. Just pick him up nice and friendly like, and then bring him back here. OK?"

"See you real soon bro, no problemo. We'll pick him up and deliver him in one piece."

Dave had been jogging for over 10 minutes. He was covered in sweat and worn out. He was still suffering from the poisoning incident down on the beach and from the exertion of the cliff climb. His gut was aching, his heart pounding. Being tied up in the hole for 15 hours didn't help either. Now his legs were cramping up. Lactic acid was being released into his muscles. He was in intense pain. Two stitches on his leg had broken and blood was streaming down his inner thigh. But he could see the highway just ahead. He was going to make it. He stumbled across the road and waited for a ride back to Gisborne. An exhausted dishevelled mess. These growers were bandits. I should go straight to the cop shop and file charges, he thought.

The first vehicle he sighted was a green rusted-out Holden station-wagon, barrelling down the road heading south to Gizzy. Great, this will be my ticket out of this mess. He stuck out his thumb and waved with his left hand at the same time. To his delight, the station-wagon pulled over on the metal shoulder and skidded to a halt just three metres in front of him. Then the back right hand door flung open. Two guys were in the front seat. One with tattoos all over his face. Both wearing red and black gang colours. They looked pretty rough but seemed friendly enough.

"Hey mate, hop in the back, you headed for Gizzy?"

Dave scrambled in the back and shut the door. The wagon had a wire mesh screen between the front and back. "Yeah thanks for the ride, what's with the screen?" he asked.

"It's for pig dogs, like you," growled Jamie, the tattooed one. Then he pushed the button that locked all the doors. Sunny turned the wagon around and headed straight for the farm access road. "What's going on, man? What are you doing?"

"We're taking you back to meet with a mate of ours. Seems you pissed him off big time." Dave knew right then that his goose was cooked. Bloody hell, these guys are hooked up with the same crew that is running the dope operation in the forest. He tried to talk his way out. "Look you guys. I'm not what you think. My boat went down off the coast and I climbed the cliff to get off the beach. Maybe you heard about it on the news. My boat was the *Sundancer*. I'm Dave Anderson."

"Save it, mate. To me you're just another Pakeha."

Dave tried a different tack. "Look mate, I can make it worth your while if you just turn this wagon around and take me to Gisborne."

"What, so you can turn us into the cops for taking you in the wrong direction? Trash talk don't walk here man."

"Look, I'm not what you think I am. I'm not a bloody poacher. I'm not a pig hunter," pleaded Dave.

"You can say that again man. On second thought, howz about you just shut the fuck up. You're no bloody mate of mine and your snivelling makes me wanna puke."

Dave did as he was told. Now what? These guys were animals. They drove through the sheep paddock for about three minutes. "Hey look, here's your buddy," Jamie said.

The Holden pulled up in front of the main forest gate where Happi was sitting on his farm bike, his pig hunting rifle at the ready. A 308 bolt action Winchester, without a scope.

"Thanks, bro," he said as they hopped out of the wagon. They rubbed noses and clenched arms in the traditional way. Then Happi handed his mates two big bags of dry heads. They were delighted. "Too much, bro," said Jamie.

"No worries. Just a koha for returning the poacher. I'm going to teach this asshole a lesson he won't forget."

"Need any help, bro?"

"Yeah, here's some duct tape. Wrap his arms together in front of him, and then tape him from shoulder to his gut. Nice and tight."

They did as they were asked, unlocking the back door to the wagon and pulling Dave over to the gate. They taped up his wrists, spun the tape around him like the backing line on a fishing reel. Nothing pretty, but it was effective. All done, they parted company.

"Cool bro. Ka pai with the heads. Check yours later."

As they drove away, the two pig hunters wondered how much dope Happi had. Maybe he was growing a shitload of the stuff? Whatever, good on him if he was. He was a brother, they wouldn't rip him. They decided not to go hunting. It was too nice a day and right now they had a lot of smoking to do. They headed up to Tolaga instead to pick up some cold tins at the pub. Time to party.

Happi opened the forest gate and pushed Dave in. He also cut the trip wire to the security alarm, and deactivated the system. He rode the bike while Dave shuffled along in front, the rifle trained on his back.

Dave knew he was in deep shit now. This guy was armed, he had mates and he seemed pretty pissed. He was being held prisoner. For what, a dope plot? How bad are these guys? He wondered again if he was ever going to get out of this mess. He had to escape again. Maybe he should try the sea next time, swim around to Waihau. Now that he knew where he was, it would be no more than an hour in the water, and he should definitely be able to find help there.

Happi spilled the beans when they reached the hut. He wasn't as tough sounding as he was with his Holden mates. "Look, I said it before. Just play your cards right and you will come out of this right. I'm not going to hurt you. You know we have a bit of a grow operation going on here. It's no big deal. Today is the day we make the exchange. It's just bad timing for you. When the coast is clear, I'll drive you to Gizzy myself if you promise to keep your mouth shut and don't try to escape again. I've got too much at risk here, man. And I don't want you to screw it up again. Understand?"

They were both in front of the shack. Dave was on the couch, sitting awkwardly with the tape all over him. Happi was still sitting on the bike. Dave was a bit heartened by what Happi had to say. Maybe he will let me go.

"Look, what you do in your spare time is no business of mine. I'm not going to rat on you. If you let me go at the end of today, I promise, I won't say a word to anyone."

"How can I know you're telling the truth?"

"You just have to trust me."

"You're a Pakeha, why the hell should I trust you?"

"Because I'm telling you the truth, I just want to go home. I don't care what you're doing. I just want to get home. Besides, you tied me up and threw me in a pit, why should I trust you? It's a two-way street."

Happi smiled, this guy didn't seem so bad. Trussed up in duct tape, he looked a bit ridiculous. "Yeah I know. I think you may be OK man but, for now, I need to keep you secure until the deal is complete. Can you handle that?"

"Do I have any choice? Look have you got anything to eat, mate? I've had nothing in the past two days except what you gave me this morning."

Happi fed him cheese, bread and jam. He poured three glasses of water from the makeshift sink and helped him drink it down.

Happi then rolled another number and had a puff. "You smoke, mate? It's local." Dave didn't smoke dope. He hadn't smoked dope since he was 21. It did nothing for him. "I could do with some tobacco if you have any?"

"No man, I just smoke this shit." As he was smoking the joint, Happi probed Dave about what he knew. He wanted to hear what this Pakeha had to say. After all, he'd spent the past three and a half months in the forest with only the dogs to talk to.

"So what did you say your name was?"

"I never did. It's Anderson. Dave Anderson."

"That's a big name in Gizzy. Are you the fullas that are rich?"

"Well, some of them are. Our family has been here for over a hundred years," Dave explained. "What's your handle?"

"Happi Orupe. My family has been here for a thousand years. Tell me, does it make sense that you fullas are so rich and we have almost nothing? You stole our land."

"Well I have read what happened here on the coast in the old days. It was your own people who sold the land. Nobody stole it. Ropata was the worst."

"What do you mean by that?" enquired Happi.

"Well, he fought for the crown, and he was the last one in the field against Te Kooti. And after the war he was rewarded with an appointment as the government land purchase agent. Ngati Porou lined up to sell their land. Did you know that?"

"Yes I did. My whanau was on the other side. I am descended from Wiremu Kingi. He fought to keep the land. So did Ngati Kahungunu. They fought with Te Kooti."

"I suppose that makes you a rebel then?" Dave said, not waiting for a reply. "To be fair, Ropata wasn't just a government land purchase officer. He sold and leased land. But understand this, none of it was his land. In 1876 he addressed a meeting of at least 2000 Maori at Waiomatatini, advising them to put their land through the Native Land Court and make it available for either sale or lease. A lot of land was leased out by Ngati Porou to satisfy settler demand. The owners retained ownership for the future. In fact, some major leases ran out as early as 1911 and were not renewed. But Ropata flogged off a lot of land. And it wasn't just hill country. A lot of prime land on the flats traded hands at that time. Mind you, a lot of locals wanted to sell."

"What it tells me is that land was worth fighting for then and it's worth fighting for now," Happi replied. "Ropata was a traitor. He was no bloody hero, like the Pakeha paints him. He sold us down the river. I spit on his bones."

"But what good does that do, Happi? We can only do something about right now and the future. Going backwards does no good at all. It just digs up grief and hostility. And you ought to know that it's the rich Maori who win on this," said Dave.

"What do you mean by that?" enquired Happi. "I mean that in every society there are people who rise to the top. The cream on the top of the milk. Some Maori, who because of tribal rank, are getting all the kickbacks from the government. It's not the ordinary Joe on the street who wins. It's just like the Pakeha, or the Catholic Church, or the Army, whatever. The people on the top get all the cream," explained Dave.

"So how come you're swimming in cream?" asked Happi.

"It's because I worked hard and applied myself. I wasn't fed with a silver spoon like you think. I had to go out and make my own money. No one handed it to me. That's the world we live in now, mate. We all have the same chances. It's just

those who take chances and succeed are the ones that look like winners to you," said Dave.

"Yeah well, I understand what you're saying but for Maori it isn't the same deal. I grew up tough. It was no picnic. That had to be different than you," said Happi.

"Maybe, but it's what's inside you that counts. You are the one that can break the mould. Set your sights and you can be whatever you want to be. It's about desire, with a little luck on the side," said Dave.

"I don't want to be anything other than Ngati Porou. I think what you're talking about is greed," said Happi.

"Fine. I got no bones on that," said Dave.

"But does it mean for you to be rich, I gotta be poor? Like my mother, my aunties and just about everyone else on the coast. Why should they be on the dole?" asked Happi.

"Look into yourself, man. Look into the strength of being Ngati Porou. You sound like you know a lot. I challenge you to be a part of the solution. Exercise your right to be part of the decision-making process. You could show people the way, pull them up, give them a helping hand, some guidance. Instead of all this illegal bullshit you're into," Dave countered.

"Why would they wanna listen to me? A lot of people only see what they want to see you know. They only open their ears when they feel like it."

"What do you mean? If you do the right things, then other people will see the good of it and some will follow you."

"Well here I am. You look at me and make some kinda judgment on who you think I am. Like maybe you think I'm a dumb Maori or a pig hunter, or a kidnapper. It's the same for me. I look at myself and make judgments or draw conclusions on what I am, who I am. Ngati Porou and proud of it. Are you with me?"

"Yeah sort of. I think I know what you're talking about. Jeez you sound like a fairly philosophical pig hunter."

"Yeah well, maybe I am. I read a lot. But what I mean is this. You make a judgment about me and we have only just met. People listen to what others have to say and then make a judgment. Do I believe this guy? Do I wanna even listen to what he has to say?"

"That's exactly my point about history," replied Dave. "The people, who write it, make it. Like Te Kooti was bad. Ropata was good. But it's never as simple as that. Or like someone is rich and someone else is poor. By what measure? Who's making the value judgments? Why do people get sucked into believing things that are this or that, or mean this or that? Most people just live in a blur, a fog of ignorance. The truth is, there are many truths. You get my drift?"

Happi thought about that for a while and decided it was time to put this guy in the hole again. Time was getting on and Marlin would be back soon. No one knew where the truth lay. Words just gave one man power over another.

"Yeah, man, that's heavy. But I gotta move now. I enjoy talking with you, let's do it some more, but later. Right now it's time to put you back in the box. You understand, nothing personal. This is just business, Dave."

"Happi, the lid's broken. How about you just tie me to the bed?. At least I can get some kip, I'm buggered."

Happi tied Dave to the bed in the cabin but didn't bother with the mouth gag or the singlet blindfold again. Dave had seen the plot, him and his mates, so what was the point? They even knew each other on a first-name basis. Happi kind of liked this Pakeha, and he thought the feeling was mutual. He headed off on the farm bike to fire up the big pile and get rid of the last of the evidence. To destroy the past and light up the future.

Out on the water, the search for Dave and *Sundancer* was still full on. It was now high noon on the second day of the search.

CHAPTER 12

The blaze at the empty dope plot was huge. Happi had dumped two full jerry cans of bike gas on the heap. It went off with a bang and blew him to the ground. Shit, the gas must have soaked into the fertiliser. He was totally stoned out. He'd laid a trail of fuel like a wick but, when he set it ablaze, it went off like the firestorm at Dresden. He had fired it up, watched the racing line of flame heading for the pile and then it exploded. The shock wave blew him right off his feet, two metres back from where he'd been standing. Hot flames seared his prostrate body, burning off the beard and hair on the right side of his face. He was literally smoking. Hair, beard and clothes.

Lying flat on his back, he marvelled at the fire. It reached up 15 metres, almost as high as the trees. From where he lay, the fire was sucking in the air at the base like a big vacuum cleaner. He could see pine needles being sucked into the furnace. It was beautiful, hot, licking the sky.

A massive black, toxic cloud then began pouring into the sky above the forest. Shit, what if some one sees it? Ah well, not much I can do about it anyways.

He was so stoned but couldn't help thinking about what Dave had said. That some Maori had really done the dirty. They'd sold the land from right under the people's feet. It wasn't as if it had been confiscated. They were supposed to be acting as kaitiaki for their whanau, iwi and hapu. Some people just took the money and cut the tribe off at the knees. Land was something you could never really own, it was passed on to the next generation. Without it, you were nothing.

He was sorry that some tupuna had sold up. He knew that some of the people on the coast had won from the civil war, but what about the people now? Did any of those people 130 years ago think about the future? Did anyone really think about it now? What did they win?

Happi knew it would come right some day. That his people would stand up and join the 21st century. But he also knew some would hang on to the past. He could understand that more focus should be put on the future. Who could do a damn thing about the past or even now except talk about it? Clearly there was no collective truth. Dave was right. Everything was and is relative.

But the thing that bugged him the most was the hypocrisy of it all. The old war wasn't about fighting for the queen, the king or Pai Marire. It was about power and individuals. In a sense nothing had changed since the old days. People still followed the old tribal elders. People still did what they thought best for the community. But in a sense everything had changed now. More and more people realised that their leaders had taken them to the cleaners. It was in the history. You just had to read between the lines. The leaders had most of the shares in the trusts, the farms, the fish and the forests. It wasn't the ordinary rank and file.

Dave had made him think. My people are their own worst enemy. Greed and political tribal connections means the top table gets the lion's share of everything.

He made a decision then and there, stoned out of his tree but very reasoned, to fight for the ordinary people. To make the chiefs and kaumatua come into line with the wishes of the people. To build the next generation. To deal with the history and create a better future for his people.

He hung around the fire until it had completely died down then kicked in the remains of the plastic water piping to make sure they were totally consumed. Pleased with his work, he headed back to the hut to wait for Marlin to show up. It was getting close to the time for the drop-off. Time to do the deal.

The fire had inspired him. The flames seemed to signal a rebirth of his soul. He felt stronger. Clear about his wairua, his mana, his Maoritanga.

Marlin arrived at the hut at the same time as Happi. "Christ, man. I saw the smoke from the fucking highway. What the hell happened to you? Your hair is all burned off. Have you had a look at yourself?"

He looked at Marlin differently now after his thinking at the fire. This guy is just another wanker. Maori were really no different than Pakeha. There are good ones and bad ones. The sooner the deal was over, the better.

"I'm OK. The fire blew up in my face. All the stuff is totally burned up. There aren't any traces of evidence left man. You have nothing to worry about."

"Yeah well I got the rest of the wet dope back home. Plenty of fucking evidence to worry about there man. Where's our poacher?" Marlin was as usual, nervous and twitchy.

"The bastard actually tried to get away and he almost succeeded. I had to get Sunny and Jamie to pick him up on the highway and bring him back. He was hitching a ride to Gizzy when they caught up with him. He's in the hut right now."

Marlin was pissed when he heard this. His eyes bore into Happi's. "I told you to watch the prick. Now you've involved some other assholes in our show. How soon before they start blabbing their mouths off?"

Happi suppress his rage with a grin. "Look, I hardly took my eyes off him. He's here now. See for yourself. And don't worry about my mates, man. They're not the kind of guys that nark on a brother."

"Yeah well the guy in the fucking hut would," barked Marlin.

Marlin entered the hut and Dave looked him square in the eye. "Hello Marlin, funny meeting you here. Now do you want to explain what the hell you think you're playing at?" spat Dave.

"Bugger you, asshole," sneered Marlin. He signalled Happi with his thumb to move back out of the hut and into the trees. "What's going down here, Marlin? You know this guy and he knows your name."

"Why the fuck isn't he blindfolded and gagged?" demanded Marlin.

"Well it didn't seem to make much sense to me. When he ran off he could see where he was. I gave him the score and he promised not to pull in the cops." Besides, he thought, who the fuck is he to be ordering me around? "Chill out, man."

"You bloody idiot," Marlin hissed. "This guy is big trouble. He will put you and me behind bars for the next 10 fucking years if you give him even half a chance."

Happi was ready to rip Marlin's heart out of his chest and shove it back down his throat. Still, he kept his cool. "Why is he trouble? When we do the deal, the dope is gone, we have the money. It's all in small bills, and the plot is

destroyed, so who can prove a bloody thing? Tell me, why have you got such a big hard-on for this Dave guy anyway?"

"Half the dope, meathead. We're only unloading 75 pounds today. The rest is at my place. Remember? And as for Dave, he's my problem. Like I said, I'll deal to him."

"OK, so what now?" Happi thought it best just to play along for the moment. Patience. Wait for the opening. When it comes, pounce.

"OK, listen up partner. Now we're going to get the rest of the dope out of the bunker and down to the beach. I've phoned my man and he's already floating off shore with the cash. The deal is on the beach at 2:30. I've brought some climbing gear so we can get down and up. Also my Zodiac and an engine. I want you to get the boat out of my Ute and meet me at the cliff. Drag the boat behind the bike and put the engine and fuel tank on the tray. There's a bag in the front seat of my Ute, grab that too. I want you to ride shotgun on this operation, Happi. I'll take sweetie boy here with me down the cliff to make the deal. You stay up on top and if anything goes wrong I'll shoot off a flare gun. I want you to start shooting if I shoot. You got that?"

"What the fuck are you talking about, Marlin? Shoot at what?" Happi couldn't believe his ears.

"At the suckers who might try to rip us off. Just shoot them in the leg or arm. Can you handle that?" sneered Marlin.

"I didn't sign up to shoot Pakehas." Marlin was right off the wall. "I'm not going to shoot anyone for anything, or anybody."

"Look partner, it's just a precaution. It'll probably never happen. But you've got to be prepared for this kind of shit, man. This is the big leagues, partner. You want your cut, don't you? This comes as part of the deal. If someone is going to mess us over, they will pick up some action from us. Understand? Stand up Mister Ngati Porou. You can do it. All blood is red."

Happi understood only too well. Dope and money was one thing but shooting people was another. He didn't sign on for that kinda bullshit and he wasn't going to play follow the leader with Marlin for much longer. But he was still into the deal. It was so close to coming to completion. The whole summer's work was about

to be turned into green folding money. The best kind of money. So, he spun around, mounted the bike and roared off to get the gear from the Ute.

Marlin went back inside the hut to get the dope ready for the transfer. Dave was still lying on the bed, taped and tied up but not his mouth and eyes. He watched as Marlin kicked open the trap door and jumped down into the hole. If he could have, he would have rammed the door shut and sat on the lid to give Marlin a bit of his own medicine. But he couldn't.

As Marlin began stuffing the pound bags into green duffle bags, Dave tried to get him to talk. "Why are you doing this, Marlin? Why don't you just let me go? I know what is going on here. I am not going to blab to anyone. Can't you see that? Christ my boat blew up in the water. I am lucky to be alive right now."

But Marlin didn't respond. He just carried on stuffing three duffle bags with dope. All done, he pushed the bags out onto the floor, jumped out of the hole and confronted Dave.

"Here's the deal, meathead. You and I are going to make a little dope deal right now. We're partners again, just like the old days. It's all about having fun and making money, right? Now I'm going to lower myself down the cliff with two bags. You will follow with the other one. Happi will keep watch on the whole show. If you so much as make a wrong move, he will let you have it. So no funny business. Do as you're told and you'll live to see another day."

"I don't want to go through another bloody hair-raising ordeal. I've been through enough shit over the past two days to last a lifetime. What if I say no, what are you going to do then, shoot me?"

Marlin said nothing. He just glared at him with glazed eyes and a grin on his face. "It's not that simple, my man. Look, just follow the leader, and all will be revealed. Maybe later you'll get what you deserve."

"What the hell does that mean?"

"Shut the fuck up, dickhead," he barked as he pulled out his folding knife and cut the tape that bound Dave. "We've got a deal to do. You do right by me this time and I'll see you right. Come on, grab two of these bags and head for the cliff. We've got work to do."

Reluctantly Dave picked up two of the bags and stumbled down the path to the cliff edge. His leg wound burned with pain.

Happi was already at the cliff edge, waiting with the rubber boat. It was a brand new 12-foot Zodiac, powered by a likewise brand new 20hp Honda engine.

Out on the water, Kate and Roy were searching for the second day. Up at the crack of dawn, they were now slowly cruising along the coast north from Tatapouri.

If Dave was nowhere to be seen out in the bay, then he must be somewhere on the beach, they reckoned. Dave was a strong swimmer and they both found it really hard to believe he wasn't alive.

Roy figured that if he didn't end up on one of the main beaches, he must either be stuck near some cliffs or rocks or on one of the local islands. Maybe he was badly hurt and just couldn't move from where he was?

The day before, they had painstakingly searched the water around Penguin and Ariel Rocks, Whangara Island and Monowai Rocks. Now they were at Monowai again. Going over old ground. There were cray pot floats spaced out about every 200 metres. Big red ones. Commercial type floats. They were all over the coast. The resource had been hammered but it didn't stop the commercial guys from pulling up 300 pots every day. As Roy scanned the rocks with his binoculars, he noticed two white ones, smaller floats that didn't fit in. He motored over for a closer look.

They were in luck. The white floats were labelled with *Sundancer* and had Dave's home phone number painted on them. He'd obviously been there to drop them down but never picked them up. Roy shouted with excitement "Check it out, Kate. Here's Dave's floats. He's been here for sure."

"Great, but where's Dave?"

"Well if we knew that, we would have found him by now," snapped Roy. Then he realised he probably should have said something else, or at least said it differently. His reply was a bit sharp. Kate's eyes were starting to water up and glaze over again. "What I mean is, finding the floats is good news. It means Dave must be alive. He never came to pick up the pots, so he must be between

here and Gisborne. Maybe we should check out the coast again. We might have missed something. I'm going to call Ed with the news. Hey, let's pull the pots out while we're here," cheered Roy, trying to keep her mind off pining for Dave.

It was a real struggle to pull the two pots up. Roy didn't have a hydraulic gurdy on his boat like Dave. Inside the two pots were 23 cray. Sixteen were undersize. They threw them back. She had never seen so many cray in her life.

They were hard to handle for a novice like Kate. They went into contortions as soon as she touched them. Arching back, twisting, kicking to break free. Roy showed her how to hold and measure them. And pointed out the males and females. Kate didn't enjoy it at first. The sharp spines scarred her. She dropped the first three. He showed her again, showed her exactly how to hold them so they didn't break free or stab her soft hands with their sharp spines. She was laughing at the end of it all.

Kate had been close to anguish that day on the boat. Her feelings for Dave always just below the surface. A few words, a view of the ocean, some flying birds, that's all it took for her to start thinking about Dave. And when she did, tears would well up in her eyes. She had just forged a relationship with Dave, didn't want to see it disappear just when they were starting a life together.

But now, for a moment, she was happy. Roy was smiling. It was good to hear her laugh. It had been a while. After stowing the pots forward, he radioed the Sergeant on Channel 16. He told him about finding the cray pots. They agreed that it offered no clues as to whether Dave was north, south or east of Monowai. But it did confirm that Dave had been there and hadn't returned.

"Why don't you check the coast again Zip, from the rocks where you're at, south towards Tatapouri," said the Sergeant. "I'm in the middle of the marine reserve, checking the shoreline."

Roy and Kate scoured the coast, pulling in where the accessible areas stopped and proceeding on foot along the rock-strewn, hard-to-get-to spots. Looking for anything, a pair of sunglasses, a life-jacket, a shirt, a piece of the boat, anything that would give them a clue. It was a slow business. A couple of times they had to anchor the boat, put on their wetsuits and swim to the shore and cover the search by foot. It took an hour just to contend with 300 metres.

By 11 o'clock they were checking out the beach just north of Tatapouri. Roy signalled the Coastguard. "This is *Matrix* calling Gisborne Coastguard, Gisborne Coastguard, this is *Matrix* ZM 4387 over?"

"Receiving you *Matrix* ZM 4387."

"Roger, Gisborne. We're just north of Tatapouri. We've covered the shore from Te Anaopaikea with a fine tooth comb. Nothing found, have you heard anything from anyone else, or seen anything? Over."

Sergeant Malecki broke in, "Zip this is Ed. We have some new plot data from the National Rescue Co-ordination Centre that indicates ..." Just then *Cassino* broke in, "Pan Pan Pan. All stations. All stations. This is *Cassino* ZM 7002 calling Gisborne Coastguard. Over."

"Gisborne Coastguard receiving, go ahead *Cassino*."

"Roger, what's all this about *Sundancer* going missing?"

The Sergeant replied before Gisborne Coastguard had a chance. "Roger, *Cassino*. This is Sergeant Ed Malecki of Gisborne Police Search and Rescue. I'm on the water now. Two days ago Dave Anderson on *Sundancer* was supposed to make radio contact somewhere between Monowai and Tatapouri at one six zero zero hours. He never reported in and has not been seen since. I am in charge of the search. Do you have any information? Over."

"Sergeant, listen up, loud and clear. Two days ago at one one three zero hours, I saw Dave just north of Waihau Bay. He was heading north at full speed."

"Roger, *Cassino* ZM 7002. Confirming *Sundancer* just north of Waihau Bay at one one three zero hours. Two days ago. Over."

"Roger that."

Sergeant Malecki got on to Wellington Rescue straight away to ask for a new plot, from Waihau Bay to Marau Point. His question was specific. If the boat went down, what would the tide and drift be between noon and 6 pm?

They put it on their simulators and got back to him in seven minutes flat. This new information actually expanded the search zone. The Sergeant radioed back "I

will reinstate a fixed wing search north of Tolaga right away. You got that, Zip?"

"Roger, Ed. We sure as hell do. You're looking at a couple of smiling searchers here. Thanks for that. And a super big thanks to *Cassino*."

With that, Roy and Kate headed north. They were on to something more concrete. This was new information. Dave must have been outside the zone they'd been searching. Clearly he had not followed the plans he filed with the Coastguard when he left Tatapouri.

"We've been looking in the wrong places," said Roy. "That explains why we haven't found him. That explains everything. We're going to find him, Kate. We're going to find him in the next few hours. I just know we are. I'm feeling real good about this."

Kate smiled as they zoomed along. She was still watching for any debris on the water or on the beaches but she let her mind slip into a happier mode. All the questions had been producing negative thoughts, and now she was just feeling good. Zooming along the coast. Thinking positive thoughts.

As Roy rounded the corner at Gable End, he saw a billowing cloud of dark black smoke coming from the Nuinuikai Forest. He radioed the Sergeant straight away. "Ed, I see smoke from Nuinuikai, looks like it could be a forest fire."

"Roger that, Zip. I'm three minutes away from you." But when the Sergeant arrived, the fire had died down. Only a few wisps of smoke were evident.

The boats came together, they talked over the side. "If that was a fire, it looks like it's out now. Must have been some kind of a controlled burn, still I'll whistle it in." He contacted the station house to dial the fire service. They confirmed no other calls had been received, and no permits were required. They also had the phone number of the farm manager at the trust block. When they contacted him, he looked out his window and could see no smoke at all. But just to check he called Happi on his cellphone.

Happi confirmed that there was a fire. It was controlled but now out, nothing to worry about. Just a bit of an end of summer clean-up. This was all relayed back to the searchers, the fire department and the police.

A large sport fishing boat from Tauranga was also out in the bay. The *Anne Marie 4* had no lines in the water. It seemed to be just standing still. Strange, thought Ed. Who would charter an expensive boat like that and not have their lines in the water? The searchers, then just 600 metres from Dave, headed north.

The gannets were diving in the water again. A huge mob of them were crashing into the ocean about two kilometres away. Kate watched them through Roy's binoculars. The weather was holding up. No rain and only a slight sea. Roy was thinking Dave might have been heading for Pouawa. He had told him about the good snapper fishing there. "Look this is great news, Kate. We've been looking in the wrong haystack. That explains why we haven't found him."

Kate allowed herself a full smile, "I am feeling good for the first time in two days. Where is the chart? Show me where you think he could be."

Roy explained a bit about what was up the coast, the easy-to-access bays, and the exposed headlands that afforded little access by land or by sea. They circled a few possible spots and pushed on north towards Tolaga.

Meanwhile, the crew aboard the *Anne Marie 4* didn't miss a word of it. They'd been wired to the chatter on the VHF radio all morning. In fact they had been listening in to the police channel at the same time. Clearly, there was a lot more action in these waters than they were looking for. So they cruised north as well, 300 metres off the coast, lines out for snapper. But really they were looking to hook into bigger fish.

CHAPTER 13

Marlin, Dave and Happi were at the edge of the forest, right on top of the cliff. The view was spectacular. They could see the curve of the earth. But they sure as hell weren't there to admire the view. No way, they were there to do the deal.

Marlin began by lowering the first climbing rope down the cliff face. It wasn't at all easy. It kept on getting hung up in the branches until Dave suggested he coil it up and heave it well out towards the ocean. It was about then that Marlin noticed a little more action in the water than he was expecting. Fetching his binoculars from the bag, he could see the *Anne Marie 4*, with fishing lines in the water. He panned left. A further 500 metres off the beach, but nearby, were two other boats heading north, both of which Marlin recognised.

One was the *Matrix*. Roy's 17 foot fibreglass runabout. It was actually Dave's old boat. What the hell was he doing there? The other was painted red and white. It was the local rescue boat. Shit, they must be the search team looking for Dave. Just what he didn't fucking need right now. He whipped his cellphone out of the daypack and dialled up his connection on the *Anne Marie 4* straight away.

"Hey Bob, it's Marlin here. I have you in my sights. I'm on top of the cliff, at the edge of the forest. Cruise in now. Send the dinghy in with your end and we will send our end out. There is 75 ready. Times two that is 150 big ones from your end, you got that." As usual, Marlin was fast-talking. Not waiting or wanting anyone else to get a word in edgewise.

But Bob the connection was not there to be pushed around. He responded tersely, "Yeah, I got that. Now you get this. Let's keep it real simple. We're fishing right now. You should try it sometime. A little R&R. I see heat around this place. Lots of heat. When it cools down, I will bring my dinghy on to the beach, and if it stacks up, we'll do it. Otherwise forget it."

Marlin was absolutely livid. "Look mate, I'm not going to stand around on the fucking beach with 75 pounds of shit up my ass waiting for you to make up your fucking mind."

"Take it or leave it mate, that's the way I wanna do it. The place is full of heat and there is plenty of fish in the sea." Marlin thought about it only for two seconds. This deal was too big to blow now. He had everything at stake. The deal had to go through. He calmed down, "OK, OK, your call Bob. I'm with you. We're all cool here. Chill out. I'll be down on the beach in front of you in one hour."

"Say again, man?" responded Bob.

"If it's clear, like no other boats around, then you'll see me on the beach, at the bottom of the cliff. If it's cool, I'll walk on the beach with the shit. Is that OK with you?"

"OK, I got that Marlin. We're off fishing now, see you later," and the phone went dead. Unfortunately Marlin couldn't call the shots any more. He needed more than half the money just to stave off his creditors. If he didn't pay Happi on this round, he could clear his full debt load. What to do? He didn't want to mess with his partner, but the bank was ready to roll him in another week. Would they accept part of the 100? Then again he had the rest of the crop at his place. If he ripped Happi, he'd have the full payment. Maybe he could just give Happi 50 on this round, then square it all up on the second shift? He might go for it.

But Happi was no fool, he was also thinking as he listened to Marlin talking on the phone. He could smell a rat, a big Pakeha one. He'd risked a hell of a lot to pull this bloody grow show together, his whanau, iwi and his honour. He was going to make damn sure he got his cut, come hell or high water.

As for Dave, he figured if he had done it once, he could do it again. Escape. All he had to do was rappel down the cliff and swim around the corner to safety. Short, sweet and simple. They were always the best-laid plans.

But Marlin had other ideas. He was quick to get everything in place for the big hand off. He would get Happi and Dave to lower him down with the first two bags. The next step would be to send down Dave, then the Zodiac, then the engine and gas tank. Marlin was carrying the pack with the flare gun and six flare rounds. He left his cellphone, smokes and binoculars with Happi. Not because he didn't need them. It was just that he was fully loaded. The two duffle bags added up to 50 pounds and then there were two more climbing ropes, plus connectors to stuff

into the pack. Going down through the scrub to set up all the lines for the boat and engine would be hard yakka.

Marlin had, as usual, thought of everything. He had climbing webbing and a hand rope clamping system he'd bought at the local sports store. The carabineers he carried would fix the three lengths of rope together. The ropes only came in 165-foot lengths, maximum. So he needed three, joined correctly, to hit the beach. Slinging the two duffel bags over his shoulders with the ropes on top, he began his descent down the cliff. Like an SAS commando.

Happi and Dave were left standing on top of the cliff. Alone with their thoughts but together, staring out over the huge expanse of ocean. They had both seen the pick up boat, but never sighted the search boats. It would take Marlin a while to struggle down through the bush, connect all the ropes together and hit the beach. They filled in the time with talk.

"So Happi, here it is, the big day. What do you make of your chances?"

"Oh it'll turn out the way it's supposed to," he said noncommittally. "Tell me again, what do you know about the history of my people?" Happi couldn't resist it. This Pakeha made sense. He seemed to speak the right words. He was worth listening to.

"You tell me first, why you're doing this? Why you're going along with this nutcase. You know he is stoned out of his tree. I tell you, only bad can come of this. Why don't you just get up and walk away? Let me go and call it quits. And hey, pass me one of Marlin's cigarettes."

Happi passed him the pack and his lighter. "I don't want to talk about Marlin or what's going on here. It will either happen or it won't. If it don't happen it wasn't meant to happen, understand. It is not such a big deal. I'm not staking my life on it."

Dave took a long drag on the cigarette. "Well then, why don't you let me go right now? You know you could be had up for kidnapping. You do understand that, don't you?"

"Yeah, I understand that. But so what, it's the chance of a lifetime, for me anyway. I need a break. I never got one like you. Look at me, I'm here living in

a bloody shack in the middle of a fucking pine forest. I spend my days talking to pig dogs. What does that tell you?"

The cigarette made Dave dizzy. "It tells me that you like what you do. You like the freedom of the bush. But I still don't think you're a criminal. You're running a big risk of losing out big time, Happi. Why don't you just let me go?"

"Because that's just the way it is. Don't ask me again. Forget this thing. The deal is going down. I want to talk about what you were saying yesterday. Can you do that? Entertain me for a minute here?"

"OK, I can do that. What the hell. So what do you wanna talk about again?"

"History, your read of it, here on the coast."

"I know something of what happened in the old days, before the Pakeha came. What happened was passed down by word and the old people would paint a picture of what was dear to their hearts, maybe not what had actually happened."

"It's no different than when the Pakeha came," countered Happi. "They wrote what they saw, from their point of view. Who gets to say what happened? You know what I mean? Who knows what really happened in the old days? What or who is anybody supposed to believe?"

"Like I said before, things are never as they seem, Happi. Before all the land started to change hands, before the civil war here, locals grew a lot of things. Like wheat for trade. They had ships to trade with Auckland. When local Pakehas got squeezed out of the market, they countered by selling alcohol. This just ruined the locals. In some places, the whole community was drunk and the people gave up on crops and livestock and eventually starved."

"Hard case, man. Musta been some party. Go on."

"I also know the same thing happened when the land was leased or sold. The government of the day just passed a heap of rules meant to alienate the land from the people," continued Dave.

"Yeah, I know that heaps of land was transferred. The system designed by the Pakehas created disputes. It created injustice," Happi responded.

"Well then, you would understand that most of the land transferred was done so willingly. Willing buyers and willing sellers. Responsible people making decisions.

"What about the treaty?" Like many people Happi had his understanding of what it was all about, and he wanted to hear Dave's read on it.

"Well, I'm just one man with one view but I think most people are fed up with it. Having two language versions just adds confusion. I think most people are keen to see the out-and-out wrongs sorted out. And again I think most people want to see things move on. You know what I mean. To deal with the history, then move on."

By now, they could see Marlin was down on the beach. "We'll talk later man. I like what you say. You're a good Pakeha," said Happi.

For Marlin, it wasn't a case of bouncing off and rappelling. The bush was thick as buggery and it had taken him a good 10 minutes of struggle through the vine-laden tangle before he connected all the ropes together and hit the beach. Going up will be easier than coming down he thought. At least I can work with the branches not fight them. Christ, it'll be hell bringing the boat down.

Dave's descent with only one bag was easier. He was feeling stronger and had already climbed through this bush the hard way. Up with no ropes or climbing belts. Besides, he just followed the swath that Marlin made on his descent.

After Dave unhooked himself, Marlin yelled up to Happi. "OK, lower the engine first, then the boat. Nice and easy." It was now two hours off high tide. The seas weren't rough in the little bay. In fact it was dead flat calm. It was just puffing on shore, from the east. A reasonable wind for fishing, but not that great for surfing.

Dave made his move when Marlin was looking up. Just as the engine was starting to come down the cliff. He grabbed a piece of driftwood and whacked Marlin over the head with it. It wasn't that good a club. Rotten, it broke in half. Marlin spun around, wild-eyed, barely dazed.

"What the fuck do you think you're doing, asshole? Time's up. Prepare to shake hands with your fucking maker," screamed Marlin. It must be the P, thought Dave.

This guy thinks he's Superman. Marlin was reaching into his backpack to pull out the flare gun.

Dave wasn't waiting for that. He jumped him and grabbed his head. He wrestled Marlin to the ground, face first, and jumped on his back. He grabbed Marlin's hair with his left hand and started to hammer blows into the side of his face with his right fist. But Marlin roared up like a bucking bull at a rodeo. The blows didn't faze him at all. Dave jumped back on to his feet and placed a well-aimed kick into Marlin's crotch. An explosion of white hot pain shot up into his belly. With Marlin off-guard now, Dave hooked a punch with all his might under his ribcage. It knocked the wind out of his sails. He slumped to the beach gasping for breath but getting nothing.

Now Dave had his chance. He sprinted like an Olympic hopeful for the water line and dived in. After a couple of strong strokes, he pulled off his runners. He swam a smooth and steady stroke, like a champion. He felt strong. All he had to do was around the left hand corner of the big cliff and he could swim on to the beach at Waihau. It was about three kilometres. It would take him maybe an hour. As he settled into his rhythm he thought about breaking free once and for all from these stoned jokers. Happi seemed to be a reasonable guy, but Marlin was totally out of control and capable of anything.

The buyers on the *Anne Marie 4* watched the whole show on the beach through their binoculars. It didn't look at all good. They wasted no time, powered up and pulled their lines back out of the water and headed on up to Waihau.

Happi stopped lowering the engine when he saw and heard the *Anne Marie* moving off. He looked down the cliff and could see someone in the water swimming. He grabbed the binoculars and focused. It was Dave making his getaway. Shit, things are starting to fall apart.

Then he trained the binoculars on to the beach and spied Marlin lying in a heap on the rocks. He started yelling but got no response. So he gave full slack to the boat engine and it came crashing down through the brush and landed not more than two metres from where Marlin lay. The crash landing came at the same time as Marlin sucked in air.

Marlin sprang to his feet like an angry bear. He saw both Dave in the water going north, and the *Anne Marie 4*, heading in the same direction.

He frantically pulled the flare gun out of his bag, loaded it and fired a shot at Dave, who was now 40 metres offshore. It missed, bouncing off the water in front of him. He aimed again, lower, slowly, holding his breath, and fired. This time it was short, behind him. "Fuck," he yelled and screamed out to Happi. "I'll tie the duffle bags to the line and hang on myself. Attach the farm bike to the rope and pull us back up. Nice and easy." He gave up on the boat engine. It looked fairly well busted up anyway.

Happi did as he was told. It took about five minutes at a slow pace before Marlin broached the cliff. Happi was nearly halfway through the forest when Marlin crested the hill. He was half cut to ribbons from getting caught up and ripped through the undergrowth. He quickly untied himself and the three duffle bags of dope and grabbed his cellphone to signal the boat.

"Hey, Bobo. We've got a change of location."

"What the hell happened on the beach?"

"Don't worry about that. It was just a test run. We're going to change locations to the northern end of Waihau. There's a big pine tree at the top end. Come on to the beach there and we'll do it."

"Hang on a second." The *Anne Marie* crew was wondering if this was some kind of set up. All this stuff about a boat missing and the police out searching made them think it could be a bust. Was there really a boat missing? They decided to head up to the drop zone and continue monitoring both the marine and police channels for any sign of treachery. Also to scan the whole coast with binoculars, to make sure there was no funny business happening on shore. A minute later they responded. "Yeah OK, see you there," they signalled.

Two of the buyers' crew had done big time for dope. They valued their freedom. Only Bob actually knew Marlin. Cruising along, they actually had a bit of sport, catching three snapper and a trevally. The coast was still producing its magic.

CHAPTER 14

Happi motored back to the cliff face. Marlin was standing, sweating and bleeding from the ascent. But he didn't miss a beat. "I'm changing the location of the drop. We've got to get down to Waihau in the next hour. Help me load up the dope into my truck. I told you that asshole was trouble. Look, it's you and me partner. For the money, OK."

"So what the hell happened down on the beach?" asked Happi, looking Marlin straight in the eye.

"The asshole jumped me from behind, that's what happened. He whacked me on the head with a fucking club, the bastard. But now he's in the water. It'll take him a while to swim around the corner and I'll be there to meet him."

"We should have taken him to the hospital the night he arrived here. All you've done now is dig a big fucking mud hole for us to wallow around in."

"Like I said, Happi, forget about it. I'll take care of Dave. Come on, let's go make some money. That's what we're here for partner. Not to fall out because of him. Not today, payday." They loaded the three duffle bags and the backpack on to the farm bike tray. Marlin ran alongside as Happi drove. They left the boat and all the ropes and climbing gear behind.

Happi was weighing things up as he drove along. Why did he bother to drag the boat along only to leave it behind? He needed some insurance. Marlin was too much of a weirdo to trust at this stage of the game. He decided then and there to call his mates to cover the drop. Just in case things went haywire. It looked like they could be headed that way. "Why do we need to change locations? This is a public place you're talking about."

Marlin was still livid but tried hard to appear calm. "Because," he said slowly, "that's the way I want to do it. There is less cover at Waihau. The beach here is just too difficult to work with. I thought we could get the boat down but I think it would probably have got holed in the process. The engine is stuffed anyways, so we can't use the boat."

"Why did you bring the boat in the first place?" asked Happi.

Marlin was at the end of his tether but again calmed himself down. He was prepared to do anything to bring the deal off. "Simple, my man. The boat was insurance, in case things didn't go as planned. It would provide a fast escape."

Happi thought about that for a while. Why was Dave planning on a fast escape? Where to? When was he going to hand over his half of the money, or was he just going to motor off into the sunset? It really made a lot of sense to call in Jamie. He needed a plan if things were going south.

"So your mate went swimming. What really happened down on the beach?" He asked the same question again, wanted to see if Marlin would give him the same answer.

Running alongside the bike, Marlin was panting. "He knocked me out and made a break for it," Marlin seethed. "But like I say, I'll deal with him at Waihou Bay. It'll take him at least an hour to hit the beach and I'll be waiting for him. That is, after the exchange is made. You can bank on it. Dave Anderson is dead meat."

"Why do you have it in for this guy?" asked Happi, trying to understand what was behind Marlin's madness.

"That bastard squeezed me out of a very profitable partnership. I was just taking a bit of cash from the till and he videotaped it, then wound up the partnership. You know the place, Coastlands Garden Centre. We were 50/50 in the deal and it was going great. A cash money business, we were pulling it in big time. Then he threw me out on my ass. Well it's his fucking ass in a sling this time. It's his fuck'n turn to front up with the goods. I might just stuff him and cook him up in a hangi. You might enjoy a bit of real meat between your teeth, a bit of long pork."

But Happi was anything but an old time cannibal. He knew that Marlin was now crazier than ever and wanted no part in this utu thing. It wasn't in his make-up to trust fate. He played the game straight up, no bullshit.

They reached the Ute and off-loaded the dope from the bike. "Hey, man," Happi said. "I don't have my rifle. It must be back at the cliff edge."

"Shit man, hurry up. Go back and get it."

Happi roared off on the bike. He pulled out his cellphone when he reached the edge and dialled Sunny and Jamie. They were still at the Tolaga pub. They had

traded some of the heads for cash and were just getting stuck into some serious partying. A few days of it. "Hey, Sunny. I got some more work for you."

"Too much bro, wass'up?" He sounded pissed, but so what.

"I have a deal going down today and I need a little insurance. I need you and Jamie to meet me down at Waihou Bay, at the north end by the big rakau, you know the spot?"

"Yeah, man."

"Well can you get down there right now? Bring your hunting rifles with you and your dogs. Make like you're going pig hunting. You'll see me with a skinny Pakeha in a white Ute. Just try and stay out of view. I'll contact you when the time is right."

"Too much, bro. Sounds big. What's our cut?" asked Sunny. He knew it was worth more than the last time. He knew they would be doing the deal now. It had to be worth more than a bag of buds.

"A pound of the best, for each of you, a pound each. It's for looking after me. Making sure this Pakeha doesn't rip me. You get my drift?" replied Happi.

"Sweet as, bro. Don't worry, we'll cover you. See you by the big tree in about an hour," slurred Sunny.

Happi motored back to the gate to team up again with his partner. When he arrived, Marlin was pacing around mumbling to himself. Looking anxious, exuding paranoia, virtually sweating blood. As the deal got closer he just got weirder. "Hey man, time for a little Dutch courage," he laughed nervously. He pulled out his pipe and loaded up a medium size chunk of P.

Happi was of two minds about doing any more of this P shit. It was just too much. But inside his brain, it was like a small man was talking to him. You will enjoy it, you know how good it feels. You know how fast you think, how clearly you think. It will help you. You will love it man.

He couldn't resist it, the drug was so powerful. It made him feel so good. The urge to do it was irresistible. As before, Marlin set the hit up for him. Happi exhaled, waited while Marlin focused the lighter on the hit inside the glass bowl. The white smoke curled around inside the pipe. Marlin said, "Now man, now,

suck hard." Once again, it hit Happi like a runaway truck. The rush was way stronger than the last time.

"Shit man, this stuff is wicked, I feel so good, I love it," said Happi. He stumbled over the side of the Ute and looked out at the sheep paddock. His ears were ringing. His crotch was hot. Thoughts raced through his head. I shouldn't smoke this shit but it makes me feel so fucking good. I'd love to get with a woman right now. I need to hook up. But I'm in the middle of nowhere. Shit, I'm going to be rich in an hour. That is if Marlin don't try to rip me. But my brothers are on the way. They will help me get the money. Why do I want money? And on and on. Random thoughts crashing into each other inside his head. It seemed like in 10 seconds he'd tried to sort out and think about what would normally take a day or two to do. Fast, clear, so good.

Now it was Marlin's turn. He needed another big hit. He needed more and more just to feel straight. Just to keep functioning. He didn't want to come down, not yet anyway. The crash was just too much even to consider. Maybe later, when it was all over, when the money was in the bag, he would chill out. At least, that was the plan.

Marlin pulled out a huge chunk and fired it up while Happi was spaced out, stoned, leaning against the back of the Ute. The anticipation of what was going to happen made him shake. He had to focus hard out to keep the lighter flame on the sweet spot of the pipe. But it was working. The white smoke poured off the huge rock. He was stoned before he finished the hit. Having so much of the shit, he could really get stoned. He just loved it. The rush, the first 10 minutes were always the best.

Stoned, both of them. Totally buzzing. They hopped in the Ute and headed off through the sheep paddock. Ten minutes later, they were barrelling down the curvy road to Waihau Bay. They were stone talking, real fast.

"Look. I can see the boat just 300 metres off shore. Right, here's the deal buddy. We park down at the north end of the beach. No one is ever there this time of year. I'll phone my man and tell him to come in on the dinghy. You position yourself up in the big pine tree with your rifle. I want you to cover me. If something goes wrong, I'll fire the flare gun. Then you take their guys out."

"Look man, I told you before. I'm not into shooting people."

"You don't have to. Chances are they won't be armed. Just wing the bastards. Surely you can handle that for 75 grand? Come on, man. Look we're stoned. We're having a good time. We're going to have our hands on the cash in 10 minutes. We are just about there. You can do it, man. We can do it."

"OK man, I'll cover you. Yeah we can do it. We can do anything. The deal is going down, we're going up. We're already fucking up," he laughed. "I mean not that we're fuck-ups, I mean we're up up. You get my drift, man? This shit is so fucking good. Come on, man. Let's do it."

Marlin called Bob on the *Anne Marie 4* when they reached the top end of the beach. "OK. We're set, come on in."

He watched with the binoculars as one man with a handbag hopped in an inflatable and zoomed straight in to the beach.

Happi ran over to the big pine and climbed halfway up it. He had an excellent view of the boat and the road leading down to the beach. He was really stoned. He could see why people got wired to this shit. He really felt like he could do anything. Climb any mountain, swim any ocean. It was still a beautiful day as Happi watched the goings on.

Marlin dragged the three duffle bags down to the beach and reached the tide line at exactly the same time as the connection. He was wearing his backpack with the signal gun and the cellphone in it.

They shook hands. The bagman could not believe how bad Marlin looked. His eyes were like saucers, he was all cut up and he reeked of sweat. "Hey, man. You look like shit."

"Big deal banana peel, this ain't a fucking fashion show. Here's the shit man." Marlin kicked one of the duffle bags. "Show me the colour of your cash."

Bob dropped the bag with 150 grand on the beach. "Here, check it out."

Marlin then heaved the three duffle bags of dope into the boat saying. "OK, man. Here's the smoke."

They both turned to examine their trade. Marlin was checking the rolls of money. One hundred and fifty rolls of notes, tied with elastic bands. He pulled out three of them and checked to see that they added up to a grand and weren't

stuffed with paper. They did. Then he began to count the rolls to make sure there were 150. He was sweating, his heart was racing. He was looking up and down the beach and into the tree line as he counted. Next he looked to see that the cash wasn't counterfeit. This wasn't easy without a microscope and detailed knowledge of counterfeiting. But they looked real enough to him. They were well used bills.

The bagman was also busy. He opened one of the duffle bags and dumped the whole shebang into the bottom of the boat. Twenty sealed bags. He opened one of the pound zip-lock bags, pulled out a bud and smelled it. "Looks good, smells good" he said smiling. He counted the bags. "Hey, man. This one has twenty in it what about the others?"

"The other two have twenty-five, check it out." The connection repacked the first duffle bag and dumped out the second into the boat. He counted twenty-five and smiled.

Marlin was done counting. "It's all there man, and the cash looks good. We're done."

"First, we smoke," replied Bobo.

"OK by me. Here's some papers, twist one up."

Bob the connection pulled one of the hairy heads from a bag he picked at random. He twisted a joint up in 30 seconds flat. The dope was dry but really sticky, a good sign. Still he'd had to rip the head into small bits to make it rollable.

He fired the number up and tasted the smoke. He didn't offer any to Marlin. It wasn't a social thing, it was a deal. It burned well and smoke was pouring off the joint. Bob only took two hits. "Yeah, man. It's good. Nice doing business with you. When do I get the other 75?"

"I'll call you next week. I've got some other business to attend to. Hey, can you give me a loan of your Zodiac?"

Bob thought for only a while as he looked up and down the beach. The Zodiac was an emergency pod. To escape, if things turned to custard. They'd been monitoring the radios and it appeared the police search was real. It wasn't a fake search that would lead to a bust. They were well north of Waihau, looking for a boat called *Sundancer* and a man named Dave Anderson.

"Look, we need the boat, it's a safety thing, you understand?"

Marlin needed the boat more than them. He put his arm on Bob's shoulder and looking him straight in the eye. "Bob, I wouldn't ask if it wasn't important. I really need to borrow your boat. Here, I'll give you something in return." Marlin pulled out two small bags of P from his front pocket. "Here, try this, I made it myself."

Bob didn't want a bar of it. He wasn't into white powder but he could see the desperation in Marlin's eyes.

"Sure, why not. Keep your magic powder man. I'm not into that kind of shit. Bring the boat back next week. We can do the second shift here again."

Marlin thought he'd stash the cash first. "Wait. I'll be back in two minutes."

He raced up the beach to the base of the big tree and called out to Happi. "See, no problems partner. Here's the full wad. A hundred and fifty grand, man. Folding money. It's all here. I've got to take care of our swimming hero. Split it and stash my half under the seat of the truck. You can keep yours in the bag if you want. I'll be back in 20 minutes. Don't run away." He sprinted back to the foreshore.

Marlin and the bagman sped off to the *Anne Marie 4* and quickly unloaded the three duffle bags. Marlin then roared down to the south end of the bay to catch up with his nemesis. He could just make out Dave in the water but he was getting close to the shoreline and the marae.

Happi climbed down from his tree and ran over to the bag. Shit, he had never seen so much money in his life. It was incredible. He couldn't believe it, 150 grand in small bills, out of control. He looked for Marlin again. He was now on his own. The connection had jumped off at the big boat and they were already heading off. Happi knew that Marlin had a big hard on over Dave. It didn't make sense to Happi. This Dave guy was not about to blab to anyone. He could be trusted. Marlin was the guy who couldn't be trusted. Marlin was going down the beach to deal to Dave. How bad is this loser?

He whistled loud to his mates. They were less than 100 metres away and came running over with their dogs and rifles at the ready. "Shit, man. Is that what I think it is?" exclaimed Jamie as he looked in the bag.

"Yeah, man. It's the cash. It's what I've been working on all summer. Here's some for you." He handed them two rolls each. "Sorry it ain't the pounds, man, but I thought the cash would suit you better, seeming how you got two bags of buds from me yesterday. Two grand each, is that OK with you?"

"No worries, mate. The cash is good. Real good, bro," said Jamie.

Happi echoed the same feelings. "Too much. Keep your mouth shut about this, you got that?"

"Yeah, you're the man. We're cool. Shit, I ain't never seen so much money. You're a rich man Happi," laughed Sunny.

"Yeah well, neither have I." They all were just staring at the bag of cash. "What you going to do with it, man?" asked Jamie.

"Well with my share, I'm going to get my own place and a new boat. Nothing too flash mind you. I don't want to draw any heat. Yeah, that's all I wanna do. Just have a place to live in that no one can throw me out of and a boat to enjoy the coast with. Kick back, man. Live in style. Nice'n quiet."

"You're something else man. I ain't never even seen a rich Maori. What does it feel like?"

"Well I don't feel any different than I did yesterday. Do I look any different?" He spun around smiling. Just then he remembered he still had some of the white powder in his pocket. He tossed it to Jamie. "Here, take this shit. I don't want it any more."

"Is this what I think it is? Is this P?" They had both suspected Happi was stoned but couldn't put their finger on it. Stoned more than smoke or beer does to a guy. They were pissed themselves but he looked different. On to it. Like almost not stoned. Except for his eyes, which were wide open. And he was looking nervous and talking fast.

Happi was ripped, to be sure, but he was beginning to wonder if he was following a false prophet. Not the P. Not the dope thing. The big profit, money. Why would money make the man? He began to have second thoughts about the deal. Even though he was holding the bag. Marlin was a loose cannon with this Dave guy. He could definitely screw up the whole show.

CHAPTER 15

The skipper of *Cassino*, Alf Donovan, was just a bit older than his boat. At that moment he was chugging along up the coast, doing his bit in the search for Dave Anderson or any traces of his boat, *Sundancer*. Only, his boat was slow. It was over 60 years old. Kauri shiplap hulled and powered by a veteran, one banger Lister diesel. Maximum cruising speed 10 knots on a good day, with a following tide and a tail wind.

But it didn't matter much to Alf. He was never in a big hurry to go anywhere. Seven years ago he'd retired from a lifetime of long-lining on the coast. He'd converted the *Cassino* to a comfortable live-aboard, and just cruised along the coast, enjoying himself when the weather and fishing was good. He never went out if it looked even half-bad.

He knew the Anderson family well. Shit, just about anyone who was a local did. He wanted to help find Dave. He knew he had to be alive somewhere. It just didn't make any sense to him, or anyone else looking, that Dave would just drop plum out of sight.

After rounding Gable End he noticed a big pleasure boat in close at the northern end of the bay. He trained his binoculars on them. He could clearly see a Zodiac approach the big boat and two men moving bags on to it. He couldn't make out the name of the boat from this distance but it seemed pretty strange. What were they doing, picking up a passenger? Maybe they were trafficking in paua or crayfish? Shit, there was a lot of that going on these days, or so they said. Christ, this time of year it could even be dope!

Then he spied the Zodiac coming straight towards him in the bay, flat out. Who knew what these jokers were up to? Who cared? So he carried on with his search. Looking for any signs of Dave or *Sundancer*. Panning his binoculars up and down the beach from north to south. Looking for any signs of wreckage. But there was nothing that even looked like something had gone wrong. He panned again over to the front end of the bay. What is that Zodiac doing?

He switched his focus to Gable End and panned north towards the marae. It was then that he saw something in the water. It was someone swimming. Strange, it wouldn't be a surfer. No board and no surf here.

Looking again and concentrating he could see the swimmer's movements were slow and laboured. Maybe the poor joker was caught in the rip?

It just didn't look right at all. Alf swung about on an intercept course and moved in at full speed. The man in the water was only 1500 metres away. He would be alongside him in about seven minutes. He should be able to last that long.

The Zodiac was faster. It arrived where the swimmer was when Alf was still a good 200 metres away. Perhaps this was his mate, or some kind of local rescue service? But then he saw that the man in the boat wasn't holding a safety rope in his hand. He was holding a gun and it was trained on the guy paddling along in the water.

Alf could clearly see the man in the Zodiac yelling and waving his arms about. It didn't look right at all. He got on the horn right away, "Pan Pan Pan. *Cassino* ZM 7002 calling Matrix. *Cassino* ZM 7002 calling Sergeant Malecki. Do you read? Over."

The Sergeant responded immediately. "Malecki receiving. Go ahead, Alf. Where are you? Over."

"Sergeant, I am at the south end of Waihou Bay. Something really weird is happening here. A man is in the water and another is in a Zodiac pointing a goddamn gun at him. It doesn't look right at all. Hey just a minute...I think the guy in the water is Dave. Holy shit, I found him... I can see his head now. He's alive, it's Dave, and he's in the water. I can see him now, do you read me, over."

"Say again, *Cassino*. Repeat the message. Over." Ed couldn't believe it, a break!

"Ed, I can tell it's him. I can see him clear as. He's in the water only 100 metres from me. It's Dave Anderson, over."

"Repeat, please Alf. Is it Dave and is there a firearm pointed at him?"

"Yup, it's Dave and it looks like a flare gun to me."

"OK Alf, we're just around the corner, maybe nine minutes away. I want you to take charge of this. I want you to put your boat between the man in the water and the Zodiac. If it all turns to custard then ram the Zodiac, you got that? But keep yourself in the wheelhouse. Civilians are not expected to confront a

man with a gun but Dave's in clear danger and I think you can handle it. Be safe. We're on our way, over."

"OK. I get your drift, Sergeant." Alf Donovan was no slouch. He'd fought in Vietnam years ago. The forgotten war. On the ground, face to face. He knew what taking risks was all about. He'd seen many men wounded, and a lot of civilians wounded and dead. He'd killed men in battle. On his return, he took up fishing on the coast. He knew when not to push his luck, after that mess of a war. But today looked like one of those days. A bit of excitement that called for a cool hand at the tiller. The Sergeant knew that also, and Alf was up to it. He could do something to help, or at least try.

Marlin could see the *Cassino* heading straight for him. He quickly realised that he had to get rid of this idiot. At least if he was going to have any chance of dealing to Dave. He quickly swung the Zodiac around in behind the *Cassino*. When Alf popped out of the cabin to ask what the hell he was doing, Marlin fired his third round of the flare gun. There wasn't more than 10 metres separating them. The flaming white shell smashed into Alf's life-jacket. Burning, smoking and sparking, he ripped the jacket off. The hot phosphorus shell had gone thru the life jacket and now burning into his gut. He used the life jacket to push it off. It fell to the deck with the lifejacket, smoking and sparking, and he crawled back into the cabin and bolted the door. He spun the helm around to run circles, trying to shake Marlin off.

But that didn't slow Marlin down one bit. He came right along the inside, up front of the *Cassino* and cut his engine. He bounded up on to the deck with a line in his right hand and fastened the Zodiac to the side rail. He ran to the wheelhouse door and in the next breath began hammering with his clenched right fist. "Open up, old man, or I'll blow you and this fucking boat to hell and back."

"Get off my boat, you jerk. The police will be here in two minutes. Your goose is cooked. You're done for." At that, Marlin went ballistic.

"Cops ... you fucking nark. I'm gonna fix your fucking whistle, asshole! Prepare to meet your maker." He bounded back into the Zodiac and ripped the fuel line off the gas tank. Tank in hand, he jumped back on deck and began dumping fuel over the afterdeck and wheelhouse door. It only took 15 seconds. Marlin was a

Superman. Fast, strong and unbelievable.

He jumped back into the Zodiac, hooked the tank up and fired up his outboard engine. He gave it full throttle. It was insane. The Zodiac shot forward and then stood nose on tail, straight up and down. He was propelled head-first straight into the water.

But like a Polaris missile, he shot back into the Zodiac. He jumped back on the deck of the *Cassino* and untied the line. The outboard engine was still going, though just at an idle.

The flare gun was in his left hand the whole time. He took aim at the wheelhouse door and fired. The shell rebounded off and fell harmlessly into the ocean. "Here you go, old man. It's barbecue time, and you're the main course!" shouted Marlin, shaking with rage. He reloaded from his back pack and fired a second flare, right on to the deck. The boat gas caught fire instantly, sending a sheet of flame five metres into the air. That ought to fix his bloody whistle. But by now Dave was less than 50 metres from shore, and swimming hard.

At the other end of the bay, the crew on the *Anne Marie 4* was heading north at a great rate of knots. They had all their radios on and saw the fire burst out from the *Cassino*. Clearly the landing zone was getting too hot. Something was seriously wrong and it was bound to draw police attention. After a quick conference, the buyers decided to head at full speed to Tolaga. They had a rental car parked at the old wharf. That was always the plan. Get the dope off the boat, into the car and drive it up to Auckland. Less risk and faster cash flow.

On the beach, Happi also saw the fire on *Cassino*. It didn't look good. What the hell was Marlin up to? Was he out of his fucking head? He talked quickly with Sunny and Jamie. "This is bound to draw heat. You guys should clear out now. I'll be right behind you. Keep your cellphone handy. I may need some backup later on. And keep it quiet. I can see shit going wrong here and I wanna stay cool. No talking. You got that?"

"You betcha, bro. Way too much heat around here. We're cool and we're definitely on the bail." They ran for their wagon with their dogs at their heels. Then, with a the rolls of cash stuffed down their pants, they peeled off down the road.

Happi at the same time grabbed the bag full of cash and ran straight for Marlin's Ute. As he bolted along, he threw away his 308 rifle into the bushes. Then he headed off up the road at full speed, to get as far away from this mess as he could. He was right up the ass of Sunny and Jamie in their Holden.

Marlin could see everyone leaving from the Zodiac. His Ute and a station-wagon screaming along the road, kicking up dust. The *Anne Marie* moving off at 20 knots around the corner to Tolaga. The dope going one way, the fucking money another. And, of course, the man in the water about to make the shoreline. This burned him up big time, "I'm going to kill this fucker." He raced the Zodiac over to where Dave was still struggling hard out to make the last few metres to shore.

"Get in the boat," demanded Marlin, pointing the flare gun directly at Dave's head. But Dave was so exhausted that he barely took notice. Marlin actually had to drag him into the Zodiac.

On board the *Cassino*, Alf put the fire out with his extinguisher and signalled the Sergeant again. "Christ, he fired a damn flare gun at me, and tried to torch my goddamn boat. The man's a bloody nutcase."

"Are you OK? We're still four minutes away. Where's Dave right now?"

"Yeah I'm fine, don't worry about me. But hurry. Dave's in big trouble. The other joker is out of his mind, I tell ya. He's capable of anything. Right now Dave is in the Zodiac. They're headed for the beach, right in front of the marae."

"Roger that Alf, we're minutes away. Hang in there."

Exhausted as he was, Dave asked, "So what now, asshole?" He thought if he could keep him talking, maybe something positive could still come out of this mess.

"It's Show Time meathead. I collect the insurance money. When you're dead, you're worth 100 grand to me," said Marlin, sneering.

"What are you trying to tell me?"

"The insurance, dingbat. When you threw me out of the partnership, the one thing you forgot to cancel was the life insurance. Remember, partner, how it was prepaid for three years? Well the lawyers never cancelled it. Do you believe in fate, Dave?" Marlin smiled.

In disbelief, Dave responded. "You're mad. I cancelled the insurance before I came out fishing."

"No way, man," said Marlin, shaking his head from side to side. This wasn't what he wanted to hear.

"Look, I'm telling you the truth. There is no money. Stop what you're doing before you get into any more trouble."

"You're a bloody liar," sneered Marlin.

"No, I'm not. You need help Marlin. Open your eyes. Realise the truth. You're sick, you need to get off the drugs. You're living in denial."

"You need to shut the fuck up! You talk too much for a man who is about to die." Just then they hit the shore. Marlin ordered Dave out, levelling the flare gun at Dave's stomach. He realised then, he'd forgotten to reload it. He quickly pulled another shell out of the backpack and rammed it into the breach. He only had two rounds left.

"Shooting me won't work you know. It won't look like an accident. That guy in that boat you just set fire to is a witness to all this. Even if there was any insurance, they would never pay out," Dave said, backing away down the beach.

It didn't faze Marlin at all. "Your boat blowing up was no accident," he laughed.

"What are you saying? You did that ... and the garden centre too? Was that your work? You're madder than I thought." Dave was totally blown away.

"That's right," Marlin screamed. "I'm totally insane, a drug-crazed madman. But you should never have thrown me out of the bloody partnership. You're the one who made this all possible."

"It's your own fault, Marlin. You were elbow deep in the till. You were caught red-handed on videotape, stealing from the business. Why the hell would I want to be in partnership with a thief and a liar? Come on Marlin, who would?"

Marlin quickly changed the subject. He wasn't listening to what Dave had to say anyway. He was almost crying. "You took my woman."

"Go ahead, change the subject. Not only are you a thief and a liar, you're chasing a mirage. Kate left of her own accord. I didn't steal her from you. She walked out on your relationship because you changed big time. You were so stoned that you turned into a different guy. A fucking animal. Can't you understand that? You're the one who walked out on her. In fact you have just walked out of life altogether, Marlin. Why the hell don't you listen to me? I can help you. You don't need to carry on with this stupid plan of yours."

But Marlin didn't want a bar of it. "Screw you. You're the bad ass here. You're the one who took everything I ever valued and destroyed it. But not anymore. I don't have to sit and listen to this shit and before too long, no one will be hearing you. Start digging."

"For what?"

"For China, dickhead. Just dig a hole in the sand right here." He pointed the flare gun at a spot five metres from the tide line. Dave was still keen to stall for time. "Marlin. We all have choices in life. Why is it that you think it's a good idea to use your choices as an excuse? Can you tell me that?"

He stuck the gun in a face and yelled, "dig like hell or I'll blow you're head off right now."

Marlin immediately sunk to his knees and scooped out handfuls of sand, wondering if he was ever going to get out this jam alive. Clearly Marlin planned to bury him alive in the sand or allow the incoming tide to drown him. He was just so messed up.

Meanwhile the *Matrix* and Sergeant Malecki's rescue boat were barrelling along, three-quarters of the way down Waihou Bay. They could see that the fire on *Cassino* was out but a cloud of black smoke was still clearly visible, drifting offshore.

Kate and Roy could see Dave and Marlin on the beach. They headed straight in. Their boat was faster than the Sergeant's.

Dave was bent over on his knees digging up scoopfuls of sand with his bare hands, wondering what the hell could possibly happen in the next few minutes. In no time at all he struck wet sand. That wasn't surprising, since he was only a few metres from the tide line. But out of the corner of his eye he could see

Marlin, nervously pacing back and forth across the beach, looking out to sea. Now both of them could see two boats coming down the bay at high speed. This had to be the police, thought Dave. He knew Marlin was capable of just about anything in the state he was in. If the boats got any closer, Marlin would probably just shoot him with the flare gun and that would be the end of it.

Marlin was beside himself with anxiety. It was the P. He knew this would be the local police. He recognised the lead boat as the *Matrix*. The second one had to be the law. Ignoring the fact that his options were now limited, his mind raced to find a way out. All I should do is get the hell out of this place and meet up with Happi to collect the cash. It probably doesn't really matter what happened to Dave now. It's a done deal. The dope had been sold. Happi had the cash. There is no evidence. If I keep up with this shit, I'm just gonna make things worse. Better to high-tail it and cut my losses while I'm still ahead.

As much as he wanted to bury Dave alive in the incoming tide, he knew he could pull off an eleventh-hour escape. He paced back to Dave to let him know that he was going to be set free. He'd be let go with a warning to keep his big mouth shut. He had to do it. He had to stop this death wish thing. He had to switch back to his old self. But only for a while. When things cooled down, he would serve him a meal to choke on.

But just as Marlin was about to deliver his message of peace, Dave made his move. He could sense in Marlin's face that he was about to do something. Now he had the element of surprise. He spun around and threw sand straight into Marlin's face. Marlin dropped the flare gun and put both hands to work trying to clear the grit from his eyes. Dave jumped out of the hole, grabbed a big piece of driftwood that was laying nearby and smashed Marlin right between the eyes. He didn't see it coming. Par for the course, the driftwood was rotten. It broke into three pieces on impact with the bridge of his nose. Still it had the desired effect. Blood squirted from his nose and Marlin went down in a screaming heap, clutching his face.

Not waiting for anything else to happen, Dave bolted down the beach in the direction of the incoming *Matrix*.

Kate shouted to Roy. "My god, he is coming towards us. Drive in and pick him up." Roy was already moving at full tilt towards the beach. Twenty metres out he spun the boat side on to the surf. "Hang on Kate. This is going to be a bit

hairy." The first wave spun them nose first into the waves. He put the engine in reverse and gave it full noise for six seconds. Now he was just five metres from the shoreline. He switched the drive arm to forwards and gave it a burst just as another roller crashed over the bow. The engine hit bottom and it looked like the force of the wave was going to rip the transom off and take the engine with it. It wasn't exactly a textbook landing.

At the same moment, Dave ran into the surf and scrambled to the side of the boat. Another roller swept him off his feet just as he made his lunge forward. But he managed to clamp his hands on to the side railing. Just then, Roy throttled forward to meet the next wave. It lifted Dave up level with the free board of the boat. He twisted over on to his back and used his forearms and the motion of the wave to muscle his way into the back of the boat.

Roy looked back for a split second to see what was going on. He saw Dave flip over into the boat and knew, if he hit the throttle now, the lifting action of the wave would pull his prop out of the sand and allow them to move forward.

"Hang on," yelled Roy, as he gave it full noise. It worked, the prop, free of the sand, blasted the boat forward. And almost immediately, *Matrix* ploughed into the next wave. Kate lost her grip and crashed forward into the cockpit chair. Roy, who was gripping the throttle and the wheel, was thrown head-first into the windscreen. Dave was the least affected of the three. He was so limp after flopping into the back of the boat that he just rolled sideways and slammed into Kate. Then the windscreen shattered.

Water poured into the boat. Roy kept his grip on the wheel and the throttle. Blood was flowing out of his nose where it had smashed into the windscreen's aluminium frame. He was able to cut back the engine just as the next breaker hit. The boat went up, hurling Kate and Dave back into the transom. For an instant they floated on top of the wave then slid down the other side.

They were in the clear now. Out of the surf-line breakers and into smaller rolling swells. Dave was smiling from ear to ear and hugging Kate on the floor of the boat. Roy, blood pouring from a broken nose, was yelling at them, "we did it, we made it. Yeahooooooooooooo."

Kate and Roy were shocked at Dave's condition. He was gasping for air. His legs had welts all over them. His eyes were bloodshot. On the inside of his leg, the last of the stitches had broken and blood was leaking on to the floor of the

boat. Dave screamed. "Head out to sea full blast. He has a flare gun and is stoned out of his tree. Now Zip. Hit it."

It was a good call. Marlin was not out for the count, far from it. He was stunned but, on standing and clearing the gritty sand from his eyes, quickly saw Dave was going to be rescued. He hurried down the beach but was too late. They were out of range but he fired the gun anyway. The starburst shell fell short. Then he saw the Sergeant.

Ed Malecki drove his red and white rescue boat straight into the beach and started running at Marlin. This guy was really stupid, thought Marlin. He reloaded the flare gun and put it behind his back. It was the last round. He waited until the Sergeant was only three metres in front of him, pulled out the gun and fired it point blank at his chest. Ed saw the move and spun sideways. The round ploughed into his right shoulder.

He'd considered something like this might happen. It knocked him flat on his back. Smoke and white flames poured out of his shoulder. The shell was burning a hole in his flesh. The pain was unbelievable. Without waiting for the next move from Marlin, he rolled over three times to his left into the surf.

He thought water would put the flare out. But it kept going. They were designed to work in the worst conditions. Smoke and flames were still coming out of his body even though it was under water. The shell was burning a hole in his shoulder the size of an egg. It just wouldn't stop. There was only one thing for it. He used his left hand to pull it out. He shoved his finger and thumb into the hole and pulled the phosphorus-flaming white ball out his body. It was excruciating. The pain would cause anyone else to pass out but somehow he kept his focus. When he regained his breath, he picked himself up and stumbled deeper into the ocean, away from the nut on the beach. Into the pounding surf.

Kate and Dave saw it all happen from the *Matrix* and raced back to help him. They could see Marlin running up to the row of houses next to the marae at the south end of the beach, away from them.

The pick-up was a little easier than the first. Roy throttled up and down and spun the boat into the surf line. Kate grabbed the Sergeant and with a rush of adrenaline, pulled him into the back of the boat. Roy then headed off in the direction of the *Cassino*. The Sergeant asked for the radio mike. Kate pulled out the first aid kit to deal with everyone's wounds. Roy, with blood streaming out

of his nose, grabbed a large dressing pad and shoved it into Ed's shoulder. The Sergeant screamed in pain. Kate gave Dave a pad to hold against his leg wound and then helped Roy to tie a bandage around the Ed's shoulder. They put him on his good side in the recovery position and Roy handed him the radio mike. "Gisborne Coastguard. Gisborne Coastguard. This is Sergeant Ed Malecki. I have a police emergency. Can you patch me through to Gisborne Police?"

"Roger that, Ed. Murray Fletcher here. Give me five seconds."

Dave spoke while the Sergeant waited. "It's Marlin Hasler. He's the bandit on the beach."

"Sergeant Malecki, this is Sergeant Jeff Gray, shift commander, how do you read."

"Loud and clear, Jeff. I'm here at Waihou Bay. We need assistance immediately. We have got a major incident here. I am reporting a male, Caucasian, 37 years old, with blue eyes, named Marlin Hasler is suspected of kidnapping and attempted murder. Right now he's heading up towards the houses on the beach. Request the Armed Offenders Squad be activated. You'll need to establish roadblocks. He is armed with a flare gun, but he could have other weapons."

The Sergeant turned and spoke to Roy to confirm the vehicle he could be driving. "OK. He drives a white Toyota Ute. Can you get on to this and send a chopper to evac myself plus one and maybe another for Gisborne Hospital? We will be in the middle of the beach. Copy that?"

"Roger, Ed. Sit tight and leave the rest to us. Are you OK?"

"Just some minor flesh wounds. But great news, we've found Dave Anderson. He's alive and kicking."

"That's excellent news, Ed. Hang in there, we won't be long, and good work."

Ed handed the mike back to Roy. With a smile of pain on his face, he asked, "So Dave, tell us what the hell you've been up to?"

Kate had finished patching up Dave and Roy, and was now sitting up supporting Dave in the back of the boat.

"It's a long story." Dave was absolutely knackered. The exertions of the last few days had totally drained him. But the adrenalin was again pumping through his veins. It gave him the energy to talk, to unload.

"Here's the gist of it. My boat exploded Sunday afternoon. I think Marlin planted a bomb in it. I think he also planted the bomb at the garden centre on Sunday morning. I washed up on the beach just around the corner and tried to send out smoke signals from my fire, but no one saw them. The next day I climbed the cliff to the forest and ran into a bloody dope-growing operation run by Marlin and a friend of his, Happi. I tried to escape once and was caught. They kept me tied up until today, when they were about to make a big dope deal, to sell a bunch of the grass they had been growing. I made a break for it this afternoon swam around Gable End to the beach here. He was just about to kill me when you came along. He's gone bloody crazy. Hey, what about Alf Donovan? I saw Marlin torch his boat. Is he OK?"

"I'm not sure," Ed said. "Zip, head for the *Cassino*. Jeez, Dave. You've really been in the bloody wars. Shit, I wonder what that outlaw Marlin is up to now."

"I'm already on my way. But no one here is in any condition to confront Marlin. Isn't it best just to wait for your mates to bag him at the roadblock?" asked Roy.

"Too right, Zipper. The boys are on their way. They'll bag him in the next half-hour, you watch."

Dave and Kate were locked in an embrace when they pulled up alongside the *Cassino*. Alf was on deck, his engine turned off. "Well, Sergeant. Big day at the office. I saw what happened on the beach, are you OK?"

"I was about to ask you the same question. Your stomach looks like it was hit by the flare gun, just like me."

"Sure did, mate," Alf said. "But I was wearing my life-jacket. It slowed down the shell burst until I could get it off. Good to see you, Dave. How the hell are you?"

"Alf, you saved my life. If you hadn't come along when you did, Marlin would have skinned me alive. And thanks to everyone else here. You guys all deserve a medal."

Kate was still locked in Dave's arms. Looking straight into his eyes, she said, "I'll settle for a kiss." As worn out as he was, he responded for a few seconds then forced a smile. "Has anyone got any water?"

Roy fixed a line to the *Cassino* and they climbed on board. Kate fixed Alf up with a bandage for his stomach wound while Roy rigged up his lifeboat and released it over the side. The three wounded men climbed in and headed for the beach to rendezvous with the chopper. Alf was rowing. He was in better shape than the others. Kate and Roy busied themselves with securing two lines aft to swing his boat on to.

They would use the *Cassino* to tow *Matrix* back to town. The Sergeant's boat was a write-off. It had laid side-on to the beach and the surf smashing into it had weakened the hull structure. If they had tried to tow it off, it would have sunk. Besides, it was full of water, and heavy as.

CHAPTER 16

Things had gone from bad to worse at Lyn and Riwai Rogers' place back in Kaiti. Early that Tuesday morning the police had arrived at the door saying Joel had been in trouble again. But this time he wasn't sitting on the back seat of the cruiser. He'd been picked up selling dope at a tinny house not more than three blocks away.

Constable White did all the talking. "We believe he was under the influence of methamphetamine or P when we executed the warrant. He was acting very strange, so we had him examined by a psychiatrist. He assessed Joel's behaviour and judged it as not a mental health issue. Therefore he stayed in the cells. It appears he'd consumed the drug the night before and was not exhibiting any signs of psychosis, as the drug was wearing off."

"So what happens now?" asked Riwai politely.

"A doctor will take evidential blood samples from him and later this morning he'll be summoned to appear in front of a judge. We believe the judge will remand him in custody but not here in Gisborne. He will probably be transferred to Napier," the constable said.

"Can we see him before he goes?" asked Lyn.

"Yes. Try to get down to the station in the next hour. The court will appoint a lawyer for him, so you don't need to worry about that. You could take some clothes and a toothbrush to him. He could be away for a few weeks before his next court appearance."

Lyn and Riwai, although no angels themselves, were shocked at what they heard. They questioned the officers regarding their authority to hold a juvenile in police custody. Constable Glen Matthews patiently explained it was standard procedure in cases involving drug trafficking.

When the police drove off, Lyn and Riwai had a couple of quick beers to straighten out. It was a blow they hadn't expected. They knew he smoked pot, but now P? They were pissed off and worried at the same time. The whole thing was out of their hands. They could really only give Joel their support and let events take their course.

They put the car, on loan from Lyn's mother, to good use. They drove to the Police Station in Peel Street to check on Joel who was sheepish when they arrived. Lyn was shocked. Joel's cell was cold and bare with nothing but a metal bench to sit on. They stayed with him for over an hour, gradually dragging out his side of the story. Joel explained he'd been selling dope because the older guys had told him he couldn't be busted for it. Later on, the court-appointed lawyer explained how the process was likely to unfold.

At the court session, six people were formally charged with trafficking and possession of drugs for sale. The prosecutor outlined the bust at the tin house. Three of the defendants were under the age of 16. He stated that they were young gang hopefuls, making their reputation by selling dope. He asked the judge to put all of the defendants in custody. The court-appointed defence lawyer requested bail. But the judge wasn't in a good mood that day. He locked up the older ones and sent the three under-age defendants to Napier.

Lyn and Riwai said farewell to Joel then swung back home to pick up Hiria and Tipi to take them up the coast. It wasn't often they had a chance to go up the coast or anywhere else since they never had a set of wheels. And there was nothing else they could do for Joel. He'd made his bed. Now he'd just have to sleep in it.

They were going on a quick trip to Waihou Bay to meet Riwai's cousin. The trip had been jacked up at the party on Saturday. It was a chance to get stuck into some kai moana. Cray to be exact. His cousin Joe issued the permits that allowed them to get as many crayfish as they wanted. The permit said it was for a Hui. That's the way it worked up the Coast.

Joe wasn't a member of the local marae committee or anything. He and four of his mates just got together, filled out some forms at the fisheries' office in Gisborne, and then started issuing permits for Hui, birthdays, whatever. They ate a fair amount of what they caught and gave lots away to other locals. A heap of them were sold on the market through a connection Joe had in Tolaga. Cash money. The cray went on to Auckland, no questions asked. Undersized, male, female, no problem. They believed most of it ended up in China. The guy in Tolaga also paid cash for paua.

They pulled in at his cousin's house, three down from the Marae. Nothing flash, just an old house that had seen better days. Joe had an old tractor that allowed

him to launch straight off the beach. The boat itself was no big deal. A 20-foot open aluminium flat-bottom job. No hydraulic systems, just a clapped-out 50hp Mercury engine on the back. They didn't dive for the cray, they used pots. Riwai went out with Joe while Lyn and the kids stayed with Joe's mother at the house. It was real good to be with whanau. Even better to pick up a big load of crays.

Just as they were about to fire up the tractor and launch the boat they heard a pistol shot. Looking down the beach they saw a man running to the neighbour's house. There was a boat in close to shore and another floundering around in the surf line. Joe was the first to react. "That bastard's got a gun. Come on, let's get back to the house and call the cops."

Marlin ran straight up to the nearest house at the south end of the beach. He burst through the door and pointed the empty flare gun at the first person he saw. "Give me the keys to your car." She was a middle-aged, no-nonsense woman. "I don't have a car. My daughter takes it to work. Leave me alone and get out of my house."

But Marlin wasn't put off that easily. "Fat chance, grandma. I'm the big bad wolf and you better find me a car in the next 30 seconds or I'll blow your bloody brains out," he shouted, as he waved the flare gun around.

The woman ran as best she could to the neighbours' with Marlin hard-up behind her. She tried to explain to her neighbour what was going on but Marlin butted in after the first two words. "Give me the keys to your car or I'll kill her." The neighbour was shaking and trembling. Marlin was holding her by the arm and pointing the gun at her head.

Just then, Joe and Riwai burst through the front door, half-bowling Marlin over in the process. He jumped up in a split second and pointed the flare gun directly at Riwai. In a measured tone, he said, "Go ahead, make my fucking day." Then he waved the two of them over to the couch. He was yelling, his eyes wide as saucers. "Sit still and shut up or the old woman's going to buy it." Lyn, Hiria and Tipi, who were at the table having tea and cookies with their auntie, were crying and shaking. Lyn wondered what the hell else could go wrong this day.

"OK. Who's got the fastest set of wheels here?" Marlin said. No one spoke. He pointed the flare gun directly in the face of the auntie. "You've got three seconds to hand over some keys. It's your call."

"One ... Two ... Then Riwai spoke. "Here, man. Mine is the blue Toyota out back. Take it. It's yours." He pulled the keys from his pocket and threw them on the floor in front of Marlin.

Marlin scooped them up with his free hand. "Now that wasn't so hard was it? You're smarter than you look mister. OK. I'm outta here. Phone the cops and I'll come back to deal with you, you got that?" No one spoke a word, but Lyn and Riwai nodded. With that, Marlin ripped the phone line out of the wall and ran out the back door.

He burned out of the dirt driveway and headed up the winding road to the state highway. When he broached the hill, he was only 30 minutes away from home.

The frightened group from the south end of the bay were in total shock but knew this madman could never get away with it. He could only go north or south on the coast. Joe ran next door where the phone line was still connected and phoned the Gisborne Police, just two minutes after Marlin had fled.

Marlin knew the people would phone the cops but also knew it would only take him about seven minutes from the beach to the farm gate. It would be a miracle if the cops could block his way in that time frame.

He drove like a man possessed to the hut in the middle of the forest. Happi wasn't there and he had no way of contacting him. He'd left his cellphone in the bag on the Zodiac. Marlin was pissed that Happi wasn't there but then calmed down. Maybe Happi was smarter than he thought. Dave would probably be blabbing away to the cops right now. So they would be on to this place in short order. Maybe Happi had gone to ground up the coast. Maybe he was up in the hills somewhere. Whatever, he wouldn't be far away. I'll catch up with him later.

He knew Happi kept a dirt bike at the block. If he could find it, and get it going, he could get past the cops manning roadblocks that were sure to be in front of him and make a clean break out. He'd grab the wet dope and the four ounces of meth and head up to Auckland, maybe overseas.

The bike was well hidden in the scrub behind the shack. It was a 400cc-enduro job with a full tank of fuel. He put on the helmet and changed into some clothes Happi had lying around in the hut. Then he roared off down the farm road, turned left onto the highway and headed flat out south for Gisborne.

In record-breaking time, the police had established two roadblocks on State Highway 35. One just before Tolaga Bay, the other at the bottom of Makorori hill. Two cruisers and four armed officers were waiting for a blue Toyota at each location. Marlin saw them when he was halfway down the hill. He slowed down.

They weren't looking for a biker. Fair enough. He actually just looked like a farmer. The police were looking for either a blue Toyota sedan or a white Toyota Ute. They had the registrations of both vehicles and a good description of the fugitive, Marlin Hasler and his partner Happi Orupe. They were primarily looking for these vehicles. No one thought to look for a bike. So they only gave Marlin a quick glance and then waved him on. He roared off down through to Wainui, Kaiti and into Gisborne.

Just as Marlin skipped the drag-net, the chopper arrived on the beach to pick up Alf, Dave and Sergeant Malecki. Roy and Kate were proceeding slowly back to Gisborne on the *Cassino*. The three wounded men had struggled to pull Alf's dingy up on the beach. Alf said he would contact a mate to come and get it later.

It took only a minute to load up the chopper and, when airborne, they swung right across the bay. Dave pointed out the beach where he had spent his first night after the boat blew up. The Sergeant signalled for him to put the earphones on, to connect them with the pilot.

"There it is. I spent my first night on the beach right there. Then I climbed up the cliff. Pilot, can you circle over the forest? I can point out where they had the dope growing," said Dave.

But nothing was visible when they lifted up over the treetops. No holes in the canopy. Not even Happi's shack could be seen from the air. They carried on to the hospital.

Thirteen minutes after skipping the roadblock at Makorori, Marlin was back at his Harper Road workshop. He jumped off the bike, unlocked the front door and furiously punched his code key numbers into the security alarm keyboard.

He ran inside and snatched the P from the freezer. Looking around for a quick stash he spied his fishing tackle box in the corner. He dumped out all the lures and weights from the bottom section on to the floor and quickly stuffed in the

four frozen, one-ounce zip-lock bags of P. Then he put the lures and weights back in on top.

He grabbed his passport from the metal file case, where he kept important documents, and put it in the tackle box as well. Next, he grabbed his surf-casting rod and headed for the door. He plucked a set of keys off the back of the key holder on the door, ran around outside the shed and opened the boot and front door of his spare vehicle. A blue Subaru station-wagon. Thank god he didn't sell it, he thought. Always need a backup plan, my man. He'd learned that the hard way. Inside the glove box was \$500 in cash. If anyone cared to look, he was just going fishing.

The next load was a bit harder to hide. The wet dope fadge, all 250 pounds of it, was sitting smack dab in the middle of the shed. He muscled it out through the door and, with a lot of swearing and shoving, stuffed it into the back seat.

Happy with that, he ran back into the shed to get his shotgun and the 9mm pistol. He had two loaded clips for the pistol, eight rounds in each. For the 12 gauge, he had a box of heavy load Canadian goose shot. Twenty-five shells, nine size 3BB shots per shell. Each round could blow a hole through a car and out the other side. He put one clip in the pistol and loaded the firing chamber. Next he loaded the shotgun and put the rest of the ammo in a daypack. The shotgun was a gas automatic. He'd pulled the plug out so it could hold eight shells, plus one in the barrel.

He loaded the weapons in the wagon. Then he realised it had been a while since his last smoke. He needed some more. He was coming down. He had to stay sharp.

He knew another taste of P would give him the edge he needed. To win, to make it, to avoid being caught. He went back inside, sat down on the old couch in front of the TV and pulled a big rock out of the small bag in his vest pocket. Even though he'd been in the water, it was still dry. The seal held. Shaking, almost vibrating, he placed a good-sized chunk of ice in the see-through glass pipe and fired it up. It glowed and then began to give off a thin, wisping, whitish smoke. He exhaled slowly and hard as it glowed. Then he sucked, nice and slow. Same rate as the smoke from the bubbling rock. He finished, closed his eyes, put the pipe down and swallowed hard. Then wham. It hit him like a loaded Mack truck. His heart was racing. It was almost too big a hit. His chest and throat were numb. His eyes popped wide open.

"I can't fucking breathe," he thought. "I'm just sitting on the couch. No air coming in, nothing going out. My heart is going 100 miles an hour, but I'm not breathing."

His mind was frantic, racing. This had never happened before. His involuntary muscles had shut down. Time ticked over. Ten seconds then twenty. Despite thinking, I must breathe, I must start breathing, nothing was happening.

His heart was pounding louder, faster. He felt like it was going to blow up. When ... wham. Forty seconds into the shutdown, he sucked in a huge breath of air. He was back on line. Back from the brink of over-amping. It was too much.

It took him three minutes to come down enough, to do anything other than breathe. His ears were ringing. He felt like he was floating. Then he spewed on the carpet. His innards let go at the same time, filling his pants with runny wet stinking diarrhoea. He was a complete mess. Sweat was pouring off him.

He stumbled into the shower, managed to turn it on, get undressed, and clean up. But it was an extreme effort. "I'm so fucking stoned." All the while thinking hard out. The cops couldn't be far behind. I've to get going.

Being so stoned he thought it a good idea to wire up the last of his bomb material to the front door. To stuff up anyone who came snooping around looking for him. He knew it was only a matter of time before they would come. The cops. The least he could do was give them something they wouldn't be looking for. It would slow them down.

At that very moment, the warning lights were flashing on the Gisborne Hospital helicopter pad. Sergeant Malecki walked into the Emergency Department on the arm of the waiting orderly. After an initial triage, he contacted the station house again. They put him on to the armed offender's squad incident commander Senior-Sergeant John Williams. "John, I think Hasler must have got through the net at Makorori and may be back at his home address preparing to skip town."

"I'm one step ahead of you, Ed. Two armed squads are scheduled to arrive at his Harper Road address in about four minutes. They were the guys at the bottom of the hill. Ten minutes after the road blocks failed to deliver the suspect, I decided to initiate a full road block screen for the district. The armed offender's squad has been mobilised and we have other officers coming in from Opotiki and Wairoa.

We've set up the command post at Makaraka and established checkpoints of two armed officers in four locations. One at Awapuni Road, across from the golf course. Another at the junction of Cameron and Nelson roads. The third one is right in front of you, at the hospital on Back Ormond Road. And the final one with my command post at the Makaraka intersection of State Highways 25 and 2.

As a secondary screen I have a highway patrol unit, unarmed, at the junction of State Highways 2 and 36, just over the Waipaoa River Bridge. And another at the junction of Back Ormond and Waimata Valley.

I also have two officers from Te Karaka, armed, manning a road block at Ormond."

"Sounds like you've got it covered. Great job, John."

It sounded thorough to Ed. They were bound to pick him up. The description was for a white male, named Marlin Hasler, 170 cm tall, thin with blue eyes and greasy, unkempt clothing. He is probably stoned on P and is armed. He is considered extremely dangerous. Approach with extreme caution. Pending charges include attempted murder and kidnapping.

Marlin was going flat out now. It was the P. He knew he only had a little time before the cops would be banging on his door. He pulled out the last of the special pickle jars from the cupboard. From the bottom drawer he pulled out his wire, tape, pliers and the last of his detonators. On the sink bench, he began to wire up the last bomb. He was shaking, quivering with anticipation. Sweat was again running down his brow. It took a lot of concentration to do it right. He was sucking on his water bottle again. He placed the bomb in an old, wooden nail box and filled the area around the jar with bits of wood, nails, some screws, nuts, washers and bolts. Whatever was close at hand. He topped it off with some forks and his corkscrew. Finally, he wired the bomb and detonator to a six-volt battery and placed the trip wire on the inside of the back door. To avoid the set-up, he jumped out the side window to make his exit.

Neither the trip wire nor the bomb was visible from the outside. The surprise was on the inside. Just like a box of lollies, he reckoned.

After a quick scan around the shed he jumped in the station wagon and fired it up. He was thinking about which way to go, north to Auckland, by the back roads to Waikaremoana or due south to Wairoa? He had places he could stay and people

who could help him. Who wouldn't help a guy with a big sack of home-grown buds and four ounces of P?

When he turned left down Harper's, he saw two cruisers heading his way. Sirens and flashers on, going like the clappers. He carried on like Joe citizen, driving at 50km right passed them and turned left on Back Ormond Road to head out of town and out of this mess. Goodbye Gizzy.

Things had not gone to plan. Mind you, they hardly ever did. He knew that he was in deep shit but what else could he do? He still had half the dope and the meth. If he could just get on to a plane at Auckland, he'd be in the clear. But how the hell could he get on a fucking plane with all this dope? He could sell the dope and buy some new ID. Get a new passport. Happi wouldn't talk. And who cared what Dave would say. Who could back him up? The cops would be on to this car in short order. I need to find another set of wheels before much longer.

The police entered the property, came to a screeching halt and flew out of the doors with their weapons at the ready. Just one minute earlier, the incident commander had run a check to see if Hasler owned another vehicle. He identified a blue Subaru, registration ZF 9690. When he passed on the information to the squad at Harper Road, they were already in position.

Two officers went to the back of the house and two went to the front, standard procedure. Officer David Brown banged on the front door. "Police, open up now, we are armed." But there was no response. They couldn't see the cardboard box inside the door or the wire that led to the detonator.

The front entry officers stood back and booted the door open. Instantaneously the bomb went off. It was horrible. Both of them were blown back 10 feet. Bits of wood, nails and screws blasted into their arms, hands and faces. There was blood all over the place. Their bullet-proof vests probably saved their lives. But neither one of them was moving.

Officers Nihau and Peel, arriving from the back of the shed, couldn't believe their eyes. Officers David Brown and Roger Drummond were lying in pools of blood, still alive but only barely. Neither could respond verbally to their comrades. They could not even see straight, blood was flowing from their eye sockets. Bits of wood and metal protruded from their face and bodies.

Constable Peel radioed for an emergency medical evacuation. "Officers down. Request immediate chopper evacuation with doctor and nurse. I repeat, two officers down."

"Roger that, Peel. This is Williams. We are calling in the chopper now. Slow down. Report on the condition of the men and then tell me what happened."

"The place was wired. A bomb went off. It's like world war three over here. The guys are hurt bad. There's blood all over. I've got to get my first aid kit. And that blue Subaru. We saw it just before we turned in. It was heading towards Ormond Road. Over."

"Roger that, Peel. Secure the house," commanded Williams. "One of you stop the bleeding, the other secure the zone. Now. Go. The chopper is six minutes away."

Constable Tony Nihau ran back to his squad car and picked up his first aid kit. He focused on stopping the bleeding in the worst spots and made sure their mouths and airways were clear of blood and debris. Then he put both of his mates in the recovery position and waited for the rescue chopper.

Peel moved cautiously into the shed. He didn't want to destroy the scene evidence but had to make sure the area was clear, had to ensure that whoever placed this bomb wasn't waiting inside, ready to come at them. He instantly noticed the stench of P production. Despite Marlin's best efforts, with the fans, incense and aeration, the chemicals had been absorbed into the curtains, the couch and the carpet. He also noticed clumps of marijuana heads lying around on the floor. But there was no sign of the suspect.

Back at the command post, Williams knew he'd got the information to the squad too late. They could have arrested Hasler before they got to the property. Now he had two officers down and a maniac on the loose.

CHAPTER 17

Seven kilometres away, John Foster was driving out to check the grape harvesting on one of his Ormond Road blocks. Dead centre of the golden triangle, chardonnay country.

He had his ears glued to talkback radio. They were going on again about special deals for Maori. Some people called this type of journalism Maori-bashing. People phoning up with feelings, not facts. Some callers were trying to airbrush history. But he liked listening to what they had to say. It was a free country. People had a right to say whatever they wanted to. No harm in words.

This year's vintage had been a reasonable one. This block was probably the last of the chardonnay to be harvested in the valley. Some years he got 12 tonnes per hectare. Some years, five. Sometimes a brix of 22, others a brix of 16. You just had to roll with the punches when you worked with crops.

He had held this block back for as long as he could. It was for his own vintage. He had a quarter share in a private press established in town two years beforehand. It provided a little market balance to Montana's dominance for independent growers. This block would produce 1000 cases of unoaked late botrytis Chardonnay. A sweet, trendy, dessert wine. It was his second vintage. His label was named after his favourite bird. The banded dotterel, 'Pohowera Estate.' The first year's sales and price were fantastic. He said it was money for jam, but really it was money for grapes. He was really looking forward to the second vintage.

He pulled in through the open gate, strolled down the completed rows to see how good the take was from the mechanical harvester. Nothing appeared to be left behind. It was as clean as a whistle. He wandered over to talk with the truck driver, waiting beside the hopper for his next 10 tonne load of grapes. "Hi there. Howz it going?" he said, offering his hand. "John Foster."

The driver shook his hand, "Kia ora, Tuku Nikora. Hey, I know you from the golf club."

"Hey, Tuku. I didn't recognise you without your bag. Looks like a fair sorta harvest, what do you think?" enquired John. He had long ago learned to ask a truck driver what was going on. They seemed to have their feet on the ground and their ears tuned to the grapevine.

"Yeah, we've been getting some good tonnages out this year. Zorbak's block up the road averaged 13 tonne to the hectare, 19 brix," replied Tuku.

"Jeez, that's good. Well this could be a bit sweeter I think but I don't know about the tonnage." John was an outgoing, friendly sort of guy. He got along with just about everyone. He wanted to shift the conversation away from grapes. He was always trying to get to the bottom of things. This fellow golfer was Maori. John wanted to get his take on what was going on around the country. "Hey, Tuku. What do you think about that stuff going on up the coast with all those illegal permits for crays?"

Tuku wasn't that easily drawn. "Well I dunno, maybe they should pull their heads in a bit."

"Too right, mate. Leave some for the rest of us," said John, smiling as usual.

"What makes the permits illegal? They're just following the rules," replied Tuku. He was quietly up to verbal challenge.

"Well maybe I used the wrong word. What I mean is howcum those fellas get all the small crays when us Pakehas have to throw them all back? Is that right?" John had slipped into the local lingo, in his effort to pull out more information and sound like one of the fellas.

"Them's the rules. We were guaranteed fish in the treaty, so we're just exercising our customary right. Isn't that right?" he said, wondering what this Pakeha on about?

"What does that do to the rest of the crays? Doesn't that just wipe them all out? What are you going to leave for the next generation?" said John, trying to expose the issue of kaitiakitanga. That Maori were supposed to be protectors of the resource, the guardians. He didn't believe a word of it.

"There's plenty of crays out there. Heaps. Nobody needs worry about that."

"Well, to me, it stands to reason. If you poach all the babies, there just won't be any grown-up ones in a few years. There are so many pots out there that the crays are afraid to look at them, let alone jump in the pot and get caught. Are you a marine biologist as well as a truck driver?" John laughed.

"Nope, I don't have to be. And I wouldn't wanna be a marine biologist either. They get the numbers wrong all the time." He decided to pass on a bit of bullshit to this curious Pakeha. "Let me fill you in on a little secret. You know the Fisheries Act. It gave people quota rights based on what they caught in the past," explained Tuku.

"Yes, I am aware of it. I haven't read it, but I know it's supposed to make fisheries sustainable," said John, still smiling.

"Well, let me explain two things. The commercial fishers were given rights of ownership in the Act and so were Maori. Secondly, the promise of sustainable fish is bullshit. All those marine biologists down in Wellington wouldn't know dick shit about counting fish. Every time they add them up, there's less and less. But they just fart around with the numbers and hand over quota to the big corporates who go out and hammer the resource," said Tuku.

"You seem to know a lot about this," replied John, surprised by Tuku's knowledge and confidence. "Some of those big corporates are Maori too, you know. They gotta heck of a big chunk of the quota, for nothing," replied John.

"You're missing the point," Tuku continued. "It's the way it's being done not who does it. Forget about crayfish for a minute. Look at what is going on with orange roughy. Those fish the big guys catch are about 80 years old. The idiots in Wellington just keep on handing out big quota. You wait a few more years and all those fish will be gone. You know they live in one spot, they don't move all over the place. And it doesn't matter how big the ocean is. The whole system is built on greed and the Fisheries Act is not built on sustainability. I mean we are not fishing sustainability."

"How come you know so much about fishing?"

"Maybe cos I used to fish commercially. Here on the coast and overseas. And I read a lot. Don't get me wrong. New Zealand isn't a special case. Fish stocks are in decline all over the world."

"So what about the treaty?" pumped Dave, again trying to wheel the discussion back to where he wanted it. "Are Maori doing their bit to honour it, or is it just a one-sided partnership?"

"Look, some Maori had a raw deal but a lot are just like Pakeha. They get up and get on with it. Not everyone is yelling, 'honour the treaty'. Part of it's the press. They give a lot of time to people who want to stir up shit. Good news is bad news. Then again, the government is not exactly upfront with Pakeha either. Like in most cases where there is an injustice, they just drag things out for years. It's a two-way street and people should read between the lines. Things are never what they seem to be. Hey, I see my load's just about ready. I gotta go."

"It's been good talking to you. See you at the club sometime. We should have a round together."

"Yeah, sure. You really should think before you talk, John. Did I say it was me who was getting all the small crays? And another thing, people gotta eat and if they live next to a storehouse of food, then they should get stuck in to eat it. A lot of them don't have a job. They aren't all rich like you. And one final point. You can't compare a few locals with 100 tonne boats backed up with the latest technologies raping the ocean. They're the criminals. But again, it's those people in Wellington who call the shots. You should really take your complaints up with them."

"Hang on. What makes you think I'm rich? That's a bit of an assumption?"

"Look, I really got to go. I'll leave you with this. I know you're rich because you're driving a \$130,000 Range Rover and you own this grape paddock. And one more thing about the treaty. I can tell you don't like it. But really, it's the process that is pissing you off. Most Maori are just like Pakeha. They want to move on. Hey I'm outta here," Tuku smiled and shook John's hand again. "Been nice chatting with you."

John walked back through the rows to his Rover. Maybe this fella did know something. Maybe he was right? Do I talk before I think?

He drove the big black beast out the gate and turned left to head back towards town. Just past Ormond, he sighted a police roadblock. It looked pretty heavy duty. Maybe they were out catching some of the dope growers who brought in their

crop at this time of year. Right after the grape harvest. Most locals just grew dope in the maize paddocks. It wasn't a big secret or anything.

Two officers with flak jackets and assault rifles were on the road in plain view. They had placed their vehicles as if it was a Gaza Strip checkpoint. Sideways, 20 metres apart on the road. When John pulled up, the lead officer approached his vehicle. The other, stationed behind a cruiser, pointed a rifle at him. John pushed the down button on the tinted window.

"Good morning, sir," said Jim Kelly, the officer on point. Then he recognised John. They had known each other for the past 25 years.

"Hey Jim. What's going on? Looks like you're ready to do someone in," said John with a smile on his face.

"Hi John. We're looking for someone, but it's not you. Please proceed through," replied the officer who was now looking down the road for the next vehicle to come along.

"Jeez you're a bit over the top with all these guns, what's going on?" pumped John, as usual, looking for the inside story.

"Sorry mate can't talk. Maybe later you'll read about it in the papers. But for now, do us a favour, please proceed on through. We have work to do here," said Jim, sounding quite official, but in a nice sort of way.

John did as he was told and carried on down the road towards Gisborne. He turned his radio on again to listen to the talkback show, then turned left on to Back Ormond Road. The valley was beautiful at this time of year. The grapes were all in but the leaves were still on the plants and they were just starting to turn colour. The blocks of oranges and lemons were up for harvest in the next few months, and they were laden with fruit behind their shelterbelts. He was enjoying the drive home, taking it all in when just ahead, at the Waihirere Domain turn-off, he noticed a blue Subaru in the ditch. There was a fella on the road waving him down. He needed a helping hand. John pulled up in front of him and got out of the car to offer his assistance.

"Are you OK? What happened, blow a tyre or something?"

Marlin pulled his pistol out from behind his back and pointed it straight at John's belly. "I need your car." John realised that this must be the guy who the police were looking for just down the road. "OK, fella. Take it easy. The keys are in it. Go ahead, take it."

"OK, mister. First, I want you to grab the bag outta my car and put it in to yours," Marlin directed. John walked over to the car, opened the back door and was immediately hit by the overwhelming smell of dope. He had never seen or smelled anything like it, but he guessed it was marijuana. He grabbed the fadge with the 250 pounds of smelly wet dope in it. He muscled it out, across the pavement and heaved it into the back of his Range Rover. Marlin was looking left and right every five seconds for any car coming down the road. "Hurry up, man. Hurry up!" he kept shouting.

Then John recognised the guy waving the gun at him. He rarely forgot a face. He was at the mortgagee sale. The one who lost his big house at Wainui. "Hey, aren't you Marlin Hasler?"

"Who's asking?"

"Well I'm John Foster. I bought your house at Wainui." As soon as he said it, he realised he'd made a mistake. A thousand images rolled through his mind. He knew from the look of Marlin's eyes that this could put him over the top. He knew that his number was up and there was nothing he could do but accept it. It was the end of the line. He should have thought before he talked.

Marlin reacted in a split second. It wasn't what he wanted to hear. Some gloating fat prick with money fair falling out of his pockets about to say he was sorry or something. Who the hell did he think he was? Did he have any idea of the shit he'd been through in the past three years? He doubted he had any fucking idea of what it was like to be at the bottom of the heap. He wouldn't know what the truth was if it was staring him in the face. He wouldn't know how many people he had walked over if he fell over them. He deserved to die.

It was the P talking to him. Failure possessed him. The evil that had been growing inside his mind took over. He pointed the gun directly at John's head and squeezed the trigger. The back of his head blew up like a watermelon that had jumped off an overloaded truck on to the road. His legs folded and he crumpled to the ground. Blood was pumping on to the asphalt. Chunks of brain and

hair were splattered across the road. John Foster was dead before he even hit the road. Marlin had just murdered an innocent man. He didn't even think about it. It was just like a TV show. Just like his next move.

He grabbed his victim by the legs and dragged him into the ditch. Then he ran back to the Subaru, grabbed his shotgun, the rucksack and fishing tackle box, and then jumped in the Range Rover. He fired it up and turned around, headed up the valley. Straight back towards Ormond.

It wasn't a good decision. He had no idea of the roadblock ahead. The officers on duty had just seen this same vehicle go through in the other direction 10 minutes ago. The windows on the big black cruiser were tinted. Officer Jim Kelly motioned for him to stop and wind down the window, "Hey, John. What did you ..."
He never finished the sentence.

The evil inside Marlin was in full control. Marlin levelled the handgun at him just as the window came down. He shot him in the chest. It blew him back four meters. Then he pointed the gun at the point officer and lobbed off four well-aimed shots in his direction. Stoned as he was, he missed.

The back-up officer ducked down just as the first round ploughed into the hood of his cruiser. He immediately grabbed his shoulder microphone. "Command. This is checkpoint Ormond. Officer down, repeat officer down. I am under fire. The suspect is here." Marlin booted the Rover forward, passed the point man and down the road towards Te Karaka and out of town. It was coming apart at the seams. At this rate he wasn't going to get out of Gisborne alive. "Fuck em. I'll take em all down with me. Bring it on assholes."

CHAPTER 18

The radio alert brought just about every officer on duty with a car screaming down the road towards Ormond. The shift commander Sergeant Jeff Gray and the armed offender's squad incident commander, Senior-Sergeant John Williams, had a hell of a job reining them back in.

Williams was still calling the shots from his mobile command post at Makaraka. What he didn't want was 10 cruisers converging on one spot. It was his job to manage, control and contain the possibility of more violence. And, of course, to bring Hasler in.

Three officers were down. Jim Kelly at the Ormond Road checkpoint was saved by his bullet-proof vest. The 9mm pistol round had ploughed into him from two metres away. It was travelling at 350 metres per second when it embedded into the Kevlar matting. He was severely bruised and winded but otherwise OK. The ambulance was four minutes away.

Officers Brown and Drummond weren't so lucky. The chopper had just picked them up from the Harper Road address and delivered them to the hospital. They were in severe shock. Both had lost litres of blood and suffered from extensive facial and arm lacerations. Brown's left eye was hanging, just connected, out of the socket. He was missing three fingers on his left hand.

Drummond's right knee had a 150-mm steel bolt stuck in it sideways. His right ear was shredded clean off and his nose was broken. It was just as well that the doctor and a nurse were on the chopper for the pick-up. The doctor not only stabilised the two wounded officers, he saved their lives. He also picked up the fingers and ear that had been blown off in the explosion and carefully put them in sterile bags. He knew a consultant surgeon could possibly stitch them back on at the hospital.

Williams now directed more resources into the dragnet. As a backup, he stationed two cars at the Awapuni Road and State Highway 2 junction. Plus one more car to the junction of State Highways 2 and 36, across the Waipaoa river. All of these officers were unarmed. He dispatched another unit from HQ to deliver jackets and rifles to them. These officers were not trained armed offender members, but they had received training in firearms use and hostage issues both in basic training

and during regular annual refresher courses. They screened the flanks of the dragnet. Williams didn't believe that Hasler would make it that far. It was, unfortunately, another error in judgement that would come back to bite his backside.

Marlin was travelling at 140 kilometres an hour, heading for Opotiki on State Highway 2. Within six minutes of clearing the roadblock, he passed over the Waipaoa Bridge. He knew that the cops would have Gisborne well and truly bolted down by now. But he figured they wouldn't have every road covered and with a little luck he could make a clean break of it. He knew the roads around the area better than most. Especially the logging roads. He made a snap decision to turn hard left after the bridge on to Lavenham Road. This would take him straight to Patutahi.

As he zoomed along he considered his options. He could take the back road to Rere or the Tiniroto Road to Wairoa. Cops were bound to flank him at Matawhero or Manutuke. Then again, they would catch him if he headed inland anyway. But the bastards wouldn't be looking for him in Gizzy.

If he could just bypass the roadblocks, then he could deal with darling Dave. Maybe he could plead temporary insanity from the P? But he'd killed that fat prick at Waihirere. I'm driving his bloody truck.

Then he looked at the gas gauge. The damn thing was on empty. How could a prick with so much fucking money drive around in a tank with no fuel in it?

He turned hard left on Judd Road. A dead end, it angled straight back towards the river. There were grape vines everywhere on both sides of the road right down to the river. Ahead was a small house with a car in the driveway. And just beyond that, a white Toyota four-door Ute parked up on the side of the road. He slowed down then came to a full halt, swinging in behind the Ute. He jumped out and walked briskly over to the driver's door.

It was unlocked. The driver's window was down and the keys were in the ignition. "At last, some good luck," he laughed. He raced back to the big black Range Rover and pulled the fadge of wet heads out of the back and dragged it down the edge of the road. He tried lifting it up into the tray of the Ute but it was too heavy and unwieldy.

He went back and pulled out his shotgun, stuffed the pistol with its second spare clip into his daypack. Next he opened his fishing tackle box, pulled out his stash of P and his passport and stuffed them in the rucksack. Just as he turned around with this armful, a woman with a pair of secateurs and a bag full of grapes confronted him.

It was Julie Davies. She had started this job 10 weeks ago. Going around all the vineyards, getting samples from each row. Working to a set plan, delivering the little bags of grapes twice a day to the testing lab at Montana in town. They used the information on grape quality to schedule their fleets of mechanical harvesters and 10 tonne trucks that brought in the harvest to the crushers. It was the end of the season. Most of the grapes in the valley had been harvested. This block was pinot noir.

The job was outside with the birds and bees. She really liked it and the people she worked with in the vineyards and at the winery. It paid 12 bucks an hour to boot. And she got the Ute for the season to take home at nights and use on the weekends if she wasn't out working, which was every sunny day during the harvest.

"And who might you be and what do you think you're doing with my truck, mister?" Julie demanded.

Marlin didn't miss a beat. He simply spun around, brought the shotgun up to waist height and said, "I'm the big bad wolf and that makes you little Red Riding Hood. If you wanna see the sun come up tomorrow, just do as I say. Now move it, lady. Grab the bag here and help me put it on the tray."

Julie couldn't believe it. It was a big fadge of bloody dope. Wet green heads. That's what this guy was in to. Dope.

"OK, let's put it in the tray," Marlin shouted. It was a struggle to get it up over the side panel. It weighed so much. She didn't have the strength to lift her end up and over. Marlin let go of his end and quickly lowered the tailgate. At the lower height, they managed to shove it on to the tray. All done, he grabbed the keys out of the ignition and told her to sit in the driver's position. He was pointing the shotgun at her again.

"OK, OK. No need to pull a gun on me. If you need a ride somewhere I can help." Inwardly her mind was racing. Who was this guy? Why was he threatening her with

a bloody shotgun? What was with all this dope? "OK, you're the man. Where do you want to go?"

Marlin looked up and down the road. "Sit still."

He ran back to the Rover and pulled his folding pocket knife out from his front pocket, bent down underneath the rear left tyre and stabbed at the gas tank. Gas trickled down on to the road. It followed the camber and made a small line heading for the ditch. Then he lit up a smoke, took a big drag and placed it directly in the path of the gas.

Sprinting, he raced back to the Ute, jumped in the back seat and threw Julie the keys. "Move it, head for Patutahi. Now, go." She fired up the Ute, jammed it into first gear and raced off as fast as the two-litre diesel would go. Twenty seconds later, before they had made it back to Lavenham Road, before she had even got the Ute into fourth gear, the Range Rover exploded. It lifted about a metre off the ground and sent a column of smoke and flames shooting into the sky. The sound of the explosion almost caused Julie to drive off the road. She could see the flames and smoke out her rear view mirror. Marlin was looking straight ahead. That will get rid of some fingerprints. Then again it will draw some heat. "OK, turn left. Drive the speed limit. No funny business and you'll make out all right."

As she motored along, Julie tried to strike up a conversation. The guy ponged all to hell and he looked wild. His eyes were bloodshot, his arms were all scratched with scabs on them. Why was he carrying a shotgun? Why did he hijack my Ute? "What's your name, mister?" she enquired meekly.

"What are you writing a book or sumth'n lady?" replied Marlin. "Howzabout you leave this chapter out and make it a mystery. Just drive."

"Where to?" She didn't think they would be stopping at Patutahi somehow.

"When I know, you'll be the first to hear it. Just go straight for now," barked Marlin. His mind was racing. Images were flashing into his consciousness at 1000 miles an hour. He had to hide somehow in the back seat to make it past the roadblock that was bound to be up ahead. The cops were bound to be fucking armed to the teeth. He'd need to be ready for that. The dope in the back tray presented another bloody problem. The shit was worth a hundred and fifty grand dry. How could he get it past a fucking roadblock?

Meanwhile the ambulance had just arrived at the Ormond checkpoint to pick up Officer Jim Kelly. It had only taken them six minutes since the call-out. The outer screen of officers was now only minutes way from getting their weapons and bullet-proof jacket issues. Senior-Sergeant Williams had also put the chopper back into the battle. He had raced back to the hospital to grab it and see how bad his men were hurt. He needed eyes in the sky. At this moment he was heading up the valley at 300 metres elevation. He thought Hasler would be easy to spot in the big black ATV.

Two minutes of flying time brought them straight over Marlin's blue Subaru at the Waihirere Domain turn-off. He ordered the pilot to put it down. The body of a man was clearly visible in the ditch. With the rotors still on full revs, he ran towards the ditch to see if the man was still alive. He forced himself not to spew. The guy was missing the back half of his head. It was just a huge hole with only half a brain. Next he ran over to the car to see if there were any more surprises. He didn't try to open any doors. It could be booby-trapped. But it looked like there was nobody in it. So he ran back to the chopper and they were off again, heading up the valley. Smoke from the torched Range Rover was clearly visible on their left but they thought nothing of it. Fire season was over and local farmers were always burning old stumps and stuff this time of year. Instead he got on his radio, directing a bomb squad unit to the Subaru, and another team from town to secure the site.

Then he realised that with both officers from Te Karaka already engaged, there was nothing between Hasler and Opotiki. So he headed towards the gorge, expecting to confirm if Marlin was headed that way in the next 10 minutes.

With nothing confirmed, he kept all his units in place and alerted them that the vehicle Hasler was driving was now a black Range Rover. And that he was wanted for murder. "Use extreme caution, he is armed and extremely dangerous," he broadcasted.

Marlin still reckoned he could get himself out of the mess but he knew that all the dope he was carrying could cause more complications. In a split second, he told Julie to turn right on McFarlane Road and head for the lake, Repongaere. Halfway there, he spotted an old shed next to the road. No houses around. He ordered her to stop and hand over the keys to the Ute. "Get out, bitch." Julie noticed that he was getting more paranoid and nastier by the minute. "OK, no need to call me names."

"Grab the fadge and we'll shift it into the shed." She did as she was told. Marlin held the shotgun in his left hand and gripped the fadge with his right. Julie pulled with both hands. They dragged it along and into the shed.

"OK, take the stuff out and spread it around on the floor." It didn't take a rocket scientist to figure out what he was up to. To get the wet stuff dry before it started to rot inside the fadge and turn into silage. The shift and spread was done in a few minutes. Then he ordered her to run back to the Ute. They were both panting from the exercise when he threw her the keys and ordered, "OK, take your top off."

Julie couldn't believe her ears. "What?"

"I said, take your fucking top off." For emphasis Marlin put the barrel of the revolver right in front of her eyes. She was literally starring down the barrel. "OK, OK, take it easy, I'll take my top off." She put her arms crosswise at the bottom of her pullover and, in one quick move, pulled it over her head. Julie went three shades of red. She was shaking her head from side to side. Tears began to well up in her eyes. What was going to happen now? Am I going to be raped?

"Why are you doing this?"

Marlin decided to play along with her. He knew she didn't want to expose herself to a man she didn't know. To a man with a gun, high on P.

"Look, relax, everything is cool. Are you married?" She nodded meekly, sniffing. "Well, just imagine you are down at the beach getting a suntan. Don't worry I'm not going to hurt you." Julie was now looking at him straight in the eyes. The gun was no longer pointed straight at her. He was smiling. It exposed his crooked yellow teeth.

"Look, I'm in a spot of bother with the police. I didn't pay my parking fines and they are trying to catch me. I am expecting a roadblock up ahead. I want to use you as a distraction," said Marlin.

"What do you mean?"

"Well if you are half-topless going through the roadblock and I am in the back lying low, then the cops will be looking at you. You can give them a smile and say you were just working on your tan, and they won't be looking at me in the

back, and they will let you through the roadblock. After that, I let you go and you can walk home. Understand?" Julie nodded.

"OK lady, you're OK. But I want you to understand two more things. One, if you tell anyone where my dope is I'll come after you and your family. You got that? Shut up or your family gets it, understand?"

"Yes. I understand."

"The next thing is the cops. You're in the front seat, I'm in the back. If you try to alert the cops I will blow you're brains out. Just smile and drive through the roadblock and then I'll let you go, understand?" Julie took it all in, nodding as he spoke. It was horrible but she had no choice. So she started the Ute and put her best foot forward.

"OK mister, where to?"

"Patutahi, then left to the main junction by the bridge. That's where I think the cops will be waiting." Marlin lay down on the back seat. He wondered for a moment if he was mad, but quickly dismissed it. He pulled the revolver out of his bag, pulled out the clip, checked the action and reloaded it. He did the same with the shotgun. Both weapons had shells in the chamber and safety's off. Then he lay down on the floor in the back. There was a beach towel in the back and he used it to cover himself.

As Julie was heading for the roadblock it suddenly came to her. She knew who this nutcase, this pervert was. Marlin Hasler, the divorced husband of her friend Kate Black. She had heard the stories about his dope-affected behaviour, how he was violent with Kate. She figured he was high on P, capable of anything. Her mind was racing. She was coming up to the roadblock. Two officers were on the road. One was armed with an assault rifle. The other, a shotgun. Both were wearing bullet-proof vests.

Constable Glen Matthews waved her over to the side of the road. He could clearly see that she was wearing a bra only. It was strange. He was on his guard. Her window was down when he approached the vehicle. "Excuse me, miss. Please cover yourself up and get out of the vehicle. I'll need to see your licence."

As he was saying this, Julie's eyes were darting to the left continuously. She was frantically trying to signal to the officer that something wasn't right. He

caught on immediately. He could see a shape beneath the towel in the back of the cab.

"OK miss, exit the vehicle now," he said, opening the door to let her out.

Then Marlin made his move. He lifted the barrel of the shotgun level to the right-hand window and fired. The nine large BB rounds blew the window to pieces and missed Constable Matthews by a few centimetres.

He instinctively crouched low, yanked Julie from the truck and dragged her around to the front of the vehicle, the whole time keeping his eyes on the barrel of the shotgun.

Fellow officer Constable Gavin Massey saw the whole thing unfolding from less than three metres away. He had been on the other side of the vehicle, trying hard not to gaze at the driver wearing the bra. He too saw her eyes darting to the left and instinctively knew something wasn't right. Then he saw the barrel of the shotgun rise up from the back of the cab. When the shotgun blast shattered the air, he shifted his own shotgun to the back seat of the vehicle and fired. The buckshot ripped a solid pattern in the side of the vehicle but, unbelievably, missed Marlin. He was lying to the left of the shot, on the floor of the Ute. Had he been on the seat, it would have half-blown his head off. But it was definitely enough to stun him.

Constable Massey was pumped. He opened the front left door and rammed his shotgun straight in the face of Marlin. "Drop the weapon now. Drop it."

Marlin knew he was caught. Constable Matthews completed the capture by grabbing the barrel of Marlin's shotgun from the other side of the vehicle and throwing it to the ground. Julie was on her hands and knees, crawling to safety behind the nearest police cruiser.

They yanked Marlin out of the car, shoved him face first to the ground and cuffed him. Within 10 seconds, they bundled him into the back of the nearest police car.

Constable Matthews found Julie's top on the front seat of the Ute and tossed it behind the cruiser where she was crouched down, crying. After she had put it on, he escorted her over to his car and put her in the back seat. He was saying it

was all over but Julie was just too cut up to listen. She was in a state of shock.

He went back to the white Ute where Constable Massey had pulled the rucksack out of the back seat. They looked inside and saw a handgun, ammunition, a roll of bills, a passport and four large zip-lock bags of white powder.

"It looks like P to me and he fits the description. Why don't you whistle it in? I'll secure the site and stay here with the young lady until reinforcements arrive," John Massey said to his partner.

"Yeah, I'm on to it right now. Boy, I've never seen anything like this before. You do nice work. Thanks for the backup. It could have been much worse" smiled Glen Matthews. He went back to his cruiser, the one with Marlin in the back seat, and got on the radio.

"Command, this is Constable Glen Matthews. We have secured Marlin Hasler at the Waipaoa River roundabout. He was carrying two firearms and what looks to be a couple of bags of methamphetamine. There was a hostage with him who is in shock. Shots were fired but no one is hurt. Can you send backup and an ambulance for the lady? It looks like she may have been sexually violated. You got all that?"

Senior-Sergeant Williams responded instantly. "Roger that, Matthews. Very good work. Backup is about six minutes away. Bring Hasler in when they arrive. Take him straight downtown. I'll ring up for his reception and the ambulance. Nice work, guys." Williams was still in the chopper heading towards the gorge but, on hearing the good news, ordered the pilot back to the Makaraka command post. When he got there and knew Hasler was safely in the cells down at the station, he would stand his crews down.

Marlin's mind was racing. What was right, what was wrong, what should he do? He stalled for time. "I'm sorry for what happened."

"You're sorry you got caught," Constable Matthews said. "Maybe you should just sit and smell your own cooking for a while."

Marlin knew he could escape. He was so stoned that he felt like Superman. He could think fast and act fast. This cop was meat in the path of the tiger. He knew if he could bend his body out of shape and get his cuffed hands out in front of him, then he could choke him and escape to freedom.

He did it in three seconds flat. Only a guy so high on P could pull this off. To do it, he had to dislocate his left shoulder. Constable Matthews saw what was happening in his rear-view mirror but, before he could even reach for the radio, Marlin had his cuffed hands around his neck. Marlin was trying to choke his captor but instantly saw it wasn't going to work. The officer reached for his neck to try and release the vice like grip that was cutting off his wind pipe. He wanted to push the horn to alert his partner or grab his shoulder mike to signal, but the grip on his neck came first. In a nanosecond, Marlin made his move. He released his grip around the neck and grabbed the officer by the head. One hand in front, the other behind. It was all he could do with the cuffs on. He twisted his head a bit to the right and then snapped it back hard and fast to the left. There was a loud cracking noise and the constable slumped down on the seat. His neck was broken. He died instantly.

Marlin wriggled into the front seat, ripped the keys off the dead officer's belt and unlocked the cuffs. He pushed the dead officer out of the car, ran over to where the shotgun was lying on the road and picked it up.

Constable Massey was totally unaware of these events. He had Julie in the backseat of his car and was writing down notes of her ordeal. The bag with the pistol and the P were still in the middle of the road. So too was the shotgun, last time he had looked. He left them there for the incident team to photograph and measure. It was standard procedure when police weapons were fired to leave things where they lay, if the scene was secure. As they had Marlin in cuffs now, leaving the gear lying around was not a problem. Or so he thought.

Julie had her head down and was telling her side of the story when Marlin ripped open the front door, pointed the shotgun at the officer and fired. It blew Massey's right arm clean off at the shoulder. Blood spurted everywhere.

Julie screamed. She had blood and bits of flesh and bone in her face and hair. Not wanting to be next, she grabbed the door handle, wrenched it open, jumped out and sprinted down the road in the direction of the bridge.

Marlin stumbled back from the front door, staring at the crippled officer. He didn't hear Julie's screams, didn't see her running for the bridge. He just stared at the fatally-wounded officer lying in a pool of blood on the front seat. He wasn't moving but his heart was still pumping blood out of the stump where his arm had been. The detached arm was on the floor of the cruiser.

Then Marlin came to. He spun around and saw Julie approaching the bridge. He didn't think about killing her. She'd done nothing wrong. He quickly ran over to pick up his rucksack and jumped in the other cruiser and headed south towards Wairoa.

"That'll teach you bastards to mess with me," he yelled.

Senior-Sergeant Williams was on the radio again, calling up the roundabout roadblock crew to let them know how far away the backup was.

"Gavin Massey, this is command. Respond immediately," he said for the third time. He tried Matthews but again no response. A wave of fear swept over him. His stomach was winding up into a big knot as he directed the response crews to expect the worst and to step on it. Then he directed the chopper to divert to the roundabout across the river.

Marlin could hear all the chatter on the police radio as he raced south.

Julie was on the bridge now. She realised her cellphone was still clipped to her belt. Fumbling, shaking, she dialled 111 then ran back to the injured officer. Marlin was long gone. She knew she had to stop the bleeding if the officer was to have any chance of survival at all.

CHAPTER 19

Kate and Roy were still out on the water, towing *Matrix* back to the ramp in town. After two full days on patrol, they were exhausted but it sure didn't look that way. On the face of it, they looked like a team of two scullers who had just won gold at the Olympics.

Cruising past Makorori beach, they could see a pod of surfers working the long break at the bottom end. "Look at that, Zip. Surfers. Not a care in the world. Doesn't it make you wonder?" mused Kate.

"Wonder about what? About which wave to catch?"

"No, silly," she laughed. "About what people do every day. I mean some people go through life without ever having lived it."

"You mean some people don't know how to surf?" replied Roy.

"Well that's a start but I don't think you're really that thick. No, what I mean is people just seem to put limits on themselves and then cruise along. They never seem to realise their potential."

"You've lost me this time. What does that have to do with what we've been through in the last few days?"

"Everything. If Dave didn't push himself to the limit, he would not have made it out of that mess alive. If you and I never stopped believing that Dave was still alive, he would probably be dead by now. If we attack life, to live, I mean like you only get one shot at it, then you sort of create your own luck. You set yourself up to do more in life."

"OK, does that mean that the surfers have more fun?"

"Blondes have more fun, baby," she laughed. Roy laughed too. It was good they could laugh now. Now that the whole sorry affair was over. "Yeah I reckon surfers do get more out of life. I mean have you ever met a bummed-out surfer? Well, maybe you get the odd one but they're pretty few and far between. It's all about how you look at things. Surfers get in the water and mix it up with the waves. They try to read which wave is a good one. Then they hit it and, for 10

or 20 seconds, they're on top of the world. They are living life. They're not just going through the motions, shopping on Tuesday, washing on Wednesday, watching Coronation Street on Thursday. All that mundane shit is useless. Boring. It doesn't push people to expose themselves, to challenge themselves to live life."

"You sound like an advertisement for an Adventure Tourism Company. Life is for living. Come to New Zealand and surf."

"Look, I'll give you another example. People sit glued to TV sets all over this town every night. Like I know some people watch it four or five hours every night. These are the same people that say Gizzy is cut off. But to go anywhere is a two-hour drive. How can they say that when they spend so much time in front of a vacuum tube? It's just another limitation people put on themselves. I think it makes sense. Tell me the happiest moment of your life and we'll see if I'm right," challenged Kate.

"OK, ah ... it was when ... you may think I'm a bit crazy here. When I was in Northern Pakistan, three years ago. I was with two Belgian nurses and a Dutch schoolteacher. We were travelling by jeep from Gilgit to Chitral and, when we reached the top of the pass, there was a family of peasants harvesting barley with hand sickles, you know like in the old days. Bent over, cutting and stacking the stuff in sheaves. They hadn't even figured out to put a long handle on the sickle. It was amazing. The field was between two huge sets of rocky mountains. The whole place was a rock pile. On the fringes of it were apricot trees. The rocks at the foot of the hills looked like they were covered with orange paint. But it was apricots drying in the sun. So here was this group of people in the middle of nowhere. No electricity, wearing homespun clothes. And we stopped to take a picture. Us, rich western people, who just for a moment, caught the sweetest truth of life. They stood up from their labours and waved out to us. It was just amazing. These people had nothing but they were happy. We had everything, yet we were still searching for something. I found it on that trip Kate, at that moment. Those peasants didn't need an American Express Card or a big bank account to be happy. All they needed, all they had, was what was in front of them at that moment in life. They were just so happy, maybe because they were so isolated, so innocent."

"But they would never have had a chance to challenge themselves, to push the limits. Were they really exposing themselves to life? Were they living or just going through the motions, with barley harvesting being a mundane event?"

"Yup, they had a hard life. You could see it in their faces. Life was a struggle. That was the challenge. If they didn't get the crop of barley in, then they starved. No welfare state in that neck of the woods. Maybe your theory is based too much on what is happening here in the western world. Not everybody can go to find the meaning of life if they're spending every day just surviving. I think the trick is to just enjoy whatever you're doing. People get hung up on outcomes but nobody controls them. People should just focus on the effort. The effort is the success. But what about you? What's the happiest day of your life?" countered Roy.

"Well, I'm sure there's more to come but I think today is the best day of my life. And yesterday was probably the worst. I mean, finding Dave would never have happened if we hadn't made it happen. It makes sense. You get so depressed when things don't go your way but if you keep at it, if you trust your instincts, follow your heart, good things can and do happen."

"You can't say that about Marlin," challenged Roy.

"Why not? He's been up and down. He's made a real meal of it this time. But maybe he will learn from this after he gets out of jail. Maybe he will understand that he should change his approach to life. He just needs to be positive to get positive results. Instead of all the dope shit he was in to, and is obviously still in to. Nothing about dope is positive. It's just an illusion. He has yet to figure that out. When he does push himself to change his life and understand that he is more than a victim, then maybe he could be happy."

"You really think he can change?" Roy prodded.

"I think it's sink or swim time for him. He used to be a real neat guy. It's dope that screwed him. If he quits the dope, it's a big step in the right direction. He's been living in a fog, in denial. If he wants to, he can get back into the real world and start all over again. He'll have to learn again how to enjoy things. To accept that he is responsible for his life, not anyone else."

"You still have a soft spot in your heart for him, don't you?"

"No, it's just a memory of what he used to be. Of what he could have been."

By now they were approaching the end of the run. The sun was dead ahead, low in the sky at the head of the valley. There was only about an hour's worth of daylight left.

As they pulled into the harbour, Dave Anderson was being released from the hospital. The Emergency Department doctor advised Dave to get some sleep and drink plenty of fluids. Before he left, Dave went up to the ward to check on Ed. But the Sergeant was not to be found. He was in intensive care, sitting beside the two officers who had suffered horrific trauma from the bomb blast at Marlin's shack on Harper Road.

Dave took a taxi home. He was looking forward to having a bit of a celebration when Kate and Roy pulled in. He had no idea that Marlin was still at large or that he had killed or maimed six people in the past hour. Neither did Kate nor Roy.

It was at this time that the ambulance pulled up at the scene of the roadblock at the roundabout across the Waipaoa River. Backup officers and the chopper arrived within minutes of each other. Julie was sitting in the middle of the road in a state of severe shock. That was the original reason for the ambulance heading there. To pick up a woman in shock who may have been sexually violated. But it was worse than that. Both officers were dead. Julie had not been able to staunch the flow of blood from Constable Gavin Massey's wound. No one could have done any better. In two minutes he'd lost six litres of blood.

Senior-Sergeant Williams decided to shift his highly-mobile command post back to the Gisborne Police Station. It was almost dark now and the helicopter was no longer useful in the search for Marlin Hasler. It had proved more useful in ferrying wounded officers to the hospital. The toll in human misery piling up from this incident was sickening.

He had never ever seen so much carnage in all his years on the force. Even though he was trained to expect the worst, when it happened, it was too much for even a veteran professional to bear. No one knew what death and disaster were like until they faced it themselves. No amount of police seminars and role-playing could have prepared anyone else for these events. It seemed like every time he'd made a decision, it went wrong. He was feeling burdened with the

responsibility of his actions. He believed he'd failed his command and his men. But being the trooper that he was, he carried on.

Dave Anderson, the focus of so much hate, was now safe and sound at home. Sergeant Malecki was in the hospital for the next week or so, recuperating from surgery on his shoulder wound. Alf Donovan from the *Cassino* had suffered a serious stomach wound and it looked like his spleen would need to be removed.

Constables David Brown and Roger Drummond were in intensive care. They were both in stable condition but it would be many operations and many hours of rehabilitation before they would be fit for active duty again. They might not even go back to the force, and who could blame them? Constable Jim Kelly was also in for observation overnight. He had superficial stomach wounds but showed signs of internal bleeding. He was extremely stressed. The doctors expected he could get worse later on.

Three others were in the hospital but they wouldn't be walking back out through the front door. An innocent civilian, John Foster, would not be making any more business deals. Constable Glen Matthews, a veteran of 14 years and father of four, had been killed at the Patutahi roadblock, his neck broken. Constable Gavin Massey had his arm blown off at the same location, and had bled to death before help arrived. And finally Julie Davies, another completely innocent civilian, had been kidnapped and possibly sexually violated.

Senior-Sergeant Williams was now hunched over the map table trying to come to grips with the whereabouts of Marlin Hasler. Just 10 minutes beforehand, Marlin was seen travelling south on State Highway 2 headed for who knows where. There were a heap of side roads he could have diverted on to. He could have even doubled back towards Patutahi. Williams decided to use the Waipaoa River as his line in the sand. If Marlin came across, then he was dead meat.

He radioed the crew stationed at the junction of State Highway 2 and Awapuni Road and directed them south towards Muriwai. Then he mobilised the crew at the golf course checkpoint to check out the back roads between Patutahi and Muriwai. Next he redirected the officers at the hospital checkpoint to Ormond, and shifted the four officers from the Cameron/Nelson roads checkpoint to Makaraka.

Ten more armed officers were activated from HQ. Four were sent to Ormond and instructed to search the back roads on the other side of the river. And three

other units were sent to block any move Marlin might make to cross the river, on farm roads breaking left between the river and State Highway 2.

He also called up the Wairoa and Opotiki commands, briefed them and blocked everything else. They deployed roadblocks at Tiniroto, Morere and Matawai. All units were briefed on the severity of the situation. They all had a photo ID of the suspect. They all wore protective vests. All were well-armed and all units had a minimum of three officers per car. The instructions on engagement were clear. If sighted, call for backup. If any threat to life was likely, shoot fast and shoot to immobilise him.

Senior-Sergeant Williams was sitting down having a coffee, still poring over the maps, when he was relieved of his command. The Gisborne District Commander, in consultation with Wellington, had called in the head of the Rotorua armed offenders squad, Inspector Dentice, to assume command immediately.

Williams took it in his stride. Stranger things had happened to him with the force and he was almost happy to be relieved. Maybe this new commander could bring Marlin in. After all, nobody had a monopoly on doing things right in this business. Besides, with all the carnage that had piled up during the day, maybe the new guy, a fresh pair of legs, an officer who had not experienced the day's events would make better decisions. That was what it was all about, making good decisions.

He briefed Dentice on the events to date. He explained his strategy to flush Hasler out if he tried to cross the river and to stop him if he tried to escape south and north.

"The next hour is critical. He has switched vehicles a number of times and he may do it again. We are not able to cover all the roads. He could be heading for Ngatapa. That road doubles back just north of Matawai. He could also have turned off at Manutuke and taken the Te Arai River road to double back to the Whareratas. He knows the back roads around here as good as anyone."

"What about communications?" enquired Dentice.

"We are on normal emergency channels," replied Williams.

"That means Hasler can also hear what we're saying then? I assume the police car he stole was on normal emergency channels?" asked Dentice.

Williams nodded the affirmative, realising he had made another mistake. If Marlin was listening. And why wouldn't he? He would have heard the instructions going out from HQ. He would know where the police were and plan his escape to fit.

But Dentice was equal to the task. He decided to use this information to his advantage. He switched over to new channels to direct his communications without Marlin knowing. Then, thinking like the outlaw, he planned his strategy. He simply looked where the holes were on the map and called in extra units to position them in the holes. Then he would wait, certain he would bag this crook.

Williams wandered off to fill out his report while it was still fresh in his head.

Marlin had listened to the police radio in the stolen cruiser. To him, it was a bonus round. He was almost at Muriwai when Williams had issued his redeployment on the radio. Marlin knew he could make it past the roadblock being set up at Morere. He knew the logging roads in the Whareratas like the back of his hand. He had worked on many of them when he was contracting. But then what would he do?

His mind was racing. He knew police were only minutes behind him now. Then it came to him. He could use the railway bridge that crossed the Waipaoa to sneak back into town. He turned his cruiser around and raced back to Sadler Road and turned right towards the river. When he hit the tracks, he swung left and bumped along on the ties at a steady 25 kilometres an hour. In seven minutes he was across the river and back on the tarseal of Dunstan Road.

Gisborne was now just minutes away. He knew from the earlier radio conversations that the police had abandoned their checkpoint at the golf course. This meant he could drive straight into town undetected.

Perfect. Then he could head for the airport and steal one of the planes at the flight school. He knew how to fly. He had taken lessons three years ago, when he was flush, but never got his wings. He figured if he could fly out of Gisborne, then he could land somewhere in the Waikato, and maybe hitchhike his way north to Auckland.

But he wanted to deal to Dave first. Dave could be home by now. Maybe Kate would be there also. He'd kill them both then steal the plane. They deserved to die,

the little lovebirds. Then with the help of his friends in Auckland, he would head over to Oz. That would work. He'd just blend in over there, change his ID and get some surgery done. The P was still providing the answers for him. He seemed to rationalise everything. To help him think of all the options and come out on top of everything. Even murder.

CHAPTER 20

Dave Anderson arrived back home just as it was getting dark. He got out of the cab, went over to the fishpond and picked up his spare key from under a special rock. The taxi driver waited while Dave went inside to get some cash to pay for the trip from hospital. He'd lost his wallet when the boat blew up and Roy had his house keys in the truck.

The house was a nice big new one. He'd bought an old dunger four years ago, ripped it down and built the new one. It was a two-storey affair, with views looking straight out across the water. There was no road out front, just tussock, sand and water. The view opened straight on to the main beach, Waikanae.

Looking around inside the house, it wasn't hard to see that Kate had moved in. There were a couple of unopened boxes stacked in the corner of the main bedroom. The kitchen bench was loaded with empty wine bottles and pizza boxes. It looked like none of the dishes had been washed. It was actually a bit of a disaster zone but Dave took it in with a smile on his face. It wasn't that Kate was untidy or he was a compulsive cleaner. It was just the result of the last few days of chaos. He laughed. It truly was great to be back home again.

Dave wandered into the garage through the side door from the kitchen and saw that the majority of Kate's gear was stacked waiting to be unpacked. Plenty of time for that later, he thought. It's time for a shower."

The shorts and shirt he'd left in three days ago were totally stiff and salty from the past few days' exertions. He walked into the bathroom and turned on the shower. Still feeling bright and breezy, he ripped his old gear off and eased under the spray of twin shower nozzles. Dave closed his eyes tight and grinned. This is probably the best shower I've ever had. The pulsating hot water warmed him from the outside in. He shampooed his hair and soaped himself all over. The water was very hot. He liked the way it turned his skin pink, like a cooked shrimp. He spent a good 20 minutes in the shower. Just enjoying the waves of heat washing over his body. Enjoying being safe and sound at home. Thinking about how lucky he was to have made it home at all.

After hauling himself out of the hot water, he shaved off three days of stubble and brushed his hair. The tiled bathroom was hot and steamy, even with the exhaust fan on full. Dave folded his towel on the rack and strode naked into the master bedroom. On the wall opposite the bedroom door was a full-length mirror. He flicked on the lights and looked at himself, pink and squeaky clean. His body would take some time to recover. The welts from the blue bottles showed as bumpy red ridges. The insides of his thighs were red and inflamed, from the run he had made on his first attempted escape. At the hospital, they had redone the stitches on his leg. It was going to leave a big scar. It was covered by a waterproof bandage, one of those new-age skins that cover the wound and allow healing while keeping air and infections out. He could see he'd lost a bit of weight. His face had thinned out and he had black bags under his eyes. "Not too bad, all things considered," he said aloud. Then he grabbed some antibiotic cream for the cabinet, and spread it over the red welts and the inside of his thighs.

From the tallboy in the master bedroom, Dave pulled on a thick weave wool sweater, his oldest jeans and a pair of heavy wool socks. He wanted to stay warm. He had never felt so good about being home. He whistled along into the living room and turned on the stereo. Classical music filled the room. Dave always found it inspirational. He believed it stimulated brain waves. Then he pushed the remote control on the gas heating system, and the fire burst into life. It looked and felt warm instantly and, for just a moment, he remembered what it was like down on the beach. The fire had saved his life. He really did have a lot to be thankful for.

He switched on some more lights and strolled into the kitchen to make himself a coffee. Great, it had been a while. He just loved his coffee. He wasn't one bit hungry. Strange, he thought. Maybe it was the stress he'd been under. My body is living on reserves.

He found his stash of cigars in the kitchen drawer and fired one up. He never smoked in the house so, so with a cup of coffee in hand, he headed out the front door to soak up the end of the day. The waves were rolling in. Beautiful. It was weird, incredible even, that such a peaceful ocean had almost killed me. I have never been so close to death. It gave him a shiver. He finished his coffee, stubbed out the cigar and went back into the house.

Dave then made a few phone calls to let everyone know he was all right. The police had already informed his parents he was safe but it was still good to connect with them. He also phoned his brother Brian in Sydney. Brian didn't know he'd been found and was just about to leave work for the airport to fly over. His sister in Dunedin listened to his story with amazement. Who wouldn't? She said it sounded like an action movie.

Then he phoned Kate. "Where are you? When are you going to get home? I'm here waiting for you."

"We're just about to drop off the boat at Zip's place and we'll be right over, maybe 10 minutes. Can you wait that long?"

"Yes I can," he was smiling. "Anything I can pull out for tea? I still owe you a cray dinner."

"Well, today is your lucky day. We unloaded your pots and there are six beauties waiting to be cooked up. Why don't you make a salad to go with them? I know you've got some lettuce in the fridge and I can pick up some hot bread on the way home."

"Sounds great. OK, I'll get busy with that. See you soon. Love you babe."

But he didn't start work on the salad right away. He still had one more phone call to make. To his other brother, Eric. The one who had been living in Singapore for the past five years. But there was no answer. Unknown to Dave, his brother had boarded a plane and was headed home to be with his parents, still expecting the worst. His mother had forgotten to tell him that.

He checked out the greens in the fridge. They looked a bit wilted, so he sauntered out to the garden to pick some fresh lettuce.

The birds had just finished their nightly chorus. They were roosting and ruffling among the branches of the big jacaranda.

Kate and Roy were driving down Gladstone Road on the way to the bakers before it closed when Kate's cellphone went off again. It was Julie. It was hard to understand what she was saying at first. She was sobbing so uncontrollably that it was hard to get any sense out of her. But Kate did get the main point. Marlin was still on the loose. He had killed two policemen right before her eyes. In fact he had killed another man before that. Kate couldn't understand it. Three

murders. What gave him the right to murder people who were actually trying to help him? None of it made any sense. No matter how hard she tried to understand. Kate was still shaking her head in disbelief when she realised Dave could be in trouble again. "Zip, Marlin is still on the loose. He's murdered three people. We've got to get to Dave's right now. Fast." Then she spoke to Julie one more time.

"OK, Julz. You phone the police. Get them to come over to Dave's right now, he needs protection. We're just four minutes away from his place right now. Can you do that? I need you to be strong for me."

Kate didn't wait for Julie to respond. She immediately phoned Dave to alert him to the danger. But he didn't answer the phone, he was outside. "Hurry Zip, he could be in trouble." Roy was on to it. He'd turned left on to Cobden and was heading straight for Dave's. He couldn't go really fast though. He was still towing the bloody boat.

Dave was in the middle of his vegetable garden picking lettuce, leaf by leaf. He had a superb selection of lettuce. More than he could eat. He never heard the phone ringing. But he looked up when he heard a car pull in the drive, thinking it would be Kate and Roy. But it was a police cruiser. What do they want now? He put the bowl of fresh lettuce down on the ground and walked over to the driveway.

Before he got within three metres of the cruiser, he tensed up. It didn't look right. The car had steam rising from the hood. Clumps of grass were stuck in the front bumper. And the guy behind the wheel wasn't wearing a uniform. Then he recognised the driver. Christ, it's Marlin!

The car door flew open and Marlin popped his head out of the opening. "Hello partner, its Show Time." Marlin sprang out of the car with the shotgun in his right hand and the pistol in his left. Dave Anderson could not believe his eyes. Death was again staring him in the face. He had a split second to decide what to do and then do it. On his left was a garden pitchfork. It was stuck in the soil where the last of the potatoes had been dug. He grabbed it and rushed towards Marlin. They were only two metres apart.

Marlin could see Dave reach for the pitchfork and swing it towards him. He instinctively brought the pistol up level with his shoulder and fired. But his left arm was the one he had dislocated in the back of the police cruiser. At the

exact moment he pulled the trigger, the muscles in his body tensed and his shoulder lost part of its rigidity. The round missed Dave and ploughed into the lawn.

Marlin dropped the pistol and put all his effort into using the shotgun to deflect the pitchfork that was now about to plunge into his stomach. As he swung the shotgun up to meet his left hand, the pitchfork tines made contact with the shotgun and it was ripped from Marlin's hand.

In an instant, they were rolling around on the lawn. Marlin forced himself on top but Dave kned him in the crotch and heaved him off to the side. As he was getting to his knees, Marlin pulled Dave's arm and lunged at his neck with his face. And then it came. Marlin was biting on his neck. It was like a hyena's bite or crocodile lockjaw was all he could think. Marlin was trying to bite clear through his main artery. But before Marlin could make contact with his upper and lower teeth, to sever the vein, Dave stuck his right hand big finger into Marlin's left eye as far as he could and twisted it. It immediately stopped the bite from closing. Marlin reeled back with both hands on his eye. Dave jumped up looked around and spied his long-handled shovel next to the compost heap. He grabbed it and smashed it on top of Marlin's head. Then he wound up for a second shot. A full roundhouse straight into the face. Marlin fell back in a bleeding heap. But Dave had seen this before. He dropped the shovel and jumped on Marlin's chest. He grabbed Marlin's hair with his left hand and began raining blows into his face with his right fist. Bits of teeth flew out of his mouth. Blood splattered out of his nose, eyes and ears. Teeth were bent out of shape. But Dave didn't stop. He continued pummelling Marlin's face until, gasping for air, and finally realising it was over, he got up and stumbled into the house to phone the police.

The first units arrived two minutes after Dave's call. They could see the stolen cruiser in the driveway. Their station house was only just down the road but, apart from Inspector Dentice, all of the officers had been on patrol in town. Only they were all armed. All police in Gisborne had been issued firearms and protective jackets 10 minutes after Dentice took over. He wanted no more violence to descend upon the command. Four cruisers were at the scene within three minutes. Eleven Gisborne police, armed to the teeth and mad as hornets. Two of their own had been killed by this nutcase, two others were near death. They all knew the men and the families of their fallen and wounded comrades. It was probably the worst part of the job. Sure, the stress of all the normal day-

to-day violence with families and gangs was painful. But this was any police officer's worst nightmare. They were going to bring this killer in, dead or alive. It was his choice, but none of them wanted to give Marlin the time to make his mind up. They all reckoned Marlin deserved to die. Right here, right now.

Inspector Dentice immediately set up a control zone. He directed incoming officers to clear the neighbouring houses of people who could fall into the line of fire. Two qualified marksmen, armed with sniper rifles, set up their weapons. One over the bonnet of the lead vehicle, the other on the beach in front of the house. They did not have a clear line of site on Marlin. The stolen police cruiser was clearly visible in the driveway but the overhanging jacaranda tree blocked the view from the street. To complicate matters further, it was now dark. The nearest street light was 20 metres down the road, and no outside house lights were on.

Kate and Roy pulled in behind the inspector's vehicle and were immediately challenged by an officer. They managed to explain who and what they were. Still, the inspector wanted them to pull back 50 metres.

"OK, I understand your concerns but you need to stand back now so that we can do our job. Things could get nasty here and we don't need any more people hurt. So please, don't argue, just get back in your car and reverse away from here."

But Kate didn't buy a bar of it.

"What are you fucking doing? Why are you just standing around? Dave could be dead by now for all you know. Why don't you go in and get him?" she demanded.

Roy tried the co-operative line. "Look, I know these people. Both Dave and that sonofabitch Marlin. I can help you. I can talk to Marlin and distract him for you. At least let me try!"

Just when the police were about to shepherd them away, the lead officer with a rifle and night-scope whispered over the radio. "I have the suspect in view. He is kneeling three metres to the right of the cruiser. I do not have a clear shot."

Now all of them could see the shape of Marlin on the front lawn. The weak street light illuminated him. He stumbled to stand up and wiped the blood from his eyes. Squinting, dazed, he could see police cars and lights flashing.

It seemed this guy just couldn't be put down like a normal human being. He was some kind of sub-human. All of the officers aimed their carbines, shotguns and pistols straight at him. "Stop, armed Police. Get down on the ground."

Marlin didn't listen. He didn't even look at the weapons pointed straight at him. He began shuffling, staggering towards them. Then came the second warning. "Stop, Police. Get down on the ground. Now. Or we will shoot." And they were just about to do it when Dave burst out from the front door, made a flying leap and tackled Marlin to the ground.

The police moved at the same time. Marlin was finally finished. He was instantly shoved face down with three officers on top of him. They twisted his arms back and cuffed him. Another ground his head into the lawn. And the third officer kneeled on his chest, to knock the wind out of him. There was a lot of yelling and shouting from all the police.

Finally, they brought him up to a standing position. Two officers patted him down for weapons. Another assisted Dave to his feet. It was all over.

They put Marlin into a secure vehicle this time. One with a cage between the driver and the back passengers. The car contained three officers. One in the front and two in the back. They were taking absolutely no chances.

Kate ran over to hug Dave. She was crying and he was trying to calm her down. Stroking her hair and holding her tight to his chest. A day out fishing had turned into a nightmare. They had overcome Marlin and his P depravity. "I can't believe what happened," Kate sobbed, hanging on to Dave.

"I can. It's over and we're together now and that's all that matters," said Dave as he held her tight. "Why did he kill all those people?" sobbed Kate.

"What do you mean, what are you talking about?" Dave had no idea of Marlin's path of madness over the previous two hours. "He killed three people."

"Get outta here." He pulled back to look into her eyes. She had a look of pain on her face. Like she had something to do with it. Like somehow part of what had happened was her responsibility. "Kate, let's get you inside the house."

Dave could see Roy talking with one of the officers. He whistled and Roy looked up. "Hey Zip, come on inside. We've got those crays to deal with."

"Too right, mate. I'm with you."

It seemed strange after so much terror and pain that anyone could just walk into the house and start cooking. They didn't. No one was hungry. They spent the rest of the night talking to each other and dealing with the press mob. It seemed to be a way out of the evil. To talk it out.

EPILOGUE

The innocent victims of Marlin's drug-addicted behaviour continue to suffer. The families of Constables Glen Matthews and Gavin Massey mourn their loss every day. Nothing can bring them back. Justice would never still their anguish.

Nola Foster went into severe depression with the loss of her husband and partner of 29 years. She ended up requiring 24 hour nursing care at home. She spent her days sedated, staring vacantly out to sea. Brianna set up a trust with some of her father's estate. To help victims of crime in Gisborne. The first recipients were the families of the fallen police officers. Then, after graduating, she came home to run her father's business interests and to be with her mother.

Constables David Brown, Roger Drummond and Jim Kelly eventually recovered from their mental and physical wounds and returned to active duty.

The pigs in the forest had a bit of a reprieve for the next few months. Jamie, Sunny and Happi were all brought in for questioning. They didn't have the answers and they couldn't avoid the responsibilities that went along with their actions. They were all brought up on charges and convicted. Later, Happi's conviction was quashed on appeal. A technicality. Dave helped him secure one of the best barristers in the country. It cost Happi half his stash of cash. His whanau supported him during the whole process. He went back truck-driving for a while but later worked with young offenders, in town and up the coast, Maori and Pakeha. He also got involved in both local and tribal politics. But he never gave up his love of the bush. He continued to hunt pigs and trap possums whenever he could find the time.

Marlin's dope, drying out in the old barn across the Waipaoa River, was retrieved and burned. The farmer who owned the land had no idea his building had a couple of hundred grand worth of home-grown stashed in it.

Montana had a great vintage. The unoaked late botrytis Chardonnay won a gold medal in London.

The cray resource on the coast continued to dwindle and not much of anything was done to slow the overfishing.

Inspector Dentice was promoted to district commander in the South Island, and Senior-Sergeant Williams took early retirement, and bought a motel just out of town.

Julie Davies recovered from her trauma but needed a lot of counselling. Nothing in her past had prepared her for the events of that day. She ended up taking food handling and preparation courses at the Polytech. Then she started her own jam and relish making business. Her husband Jack got his class 5 licence and now drives a logging rig around the coast. With the extra money he pulled in, they got to do things that they used to only dream about.

Young Joel Rodgers got off with a suspended sentence on the dope charges. But it didn't work out. He was busted for burglary three months later. When he did come out of jail, he picked up his full gang colours and patch.

Alf Donovan carried on as he always did. Pottering around the coast on the *Cassino*. But only on the good days.

Bob, the buyer from Auckland, made a clean break of it. He sold the 75 pounds of East Coast primo skunk within a week and doubled his money. He had excellent distribution channels. The pounds were wholesaled at four grand each. No one apart from Marlin knew who he was. He never bothered to come back and get the Zodiac.

Roy went back to building houses and running his orchard. He's still looking for the ideal woman to settle down with and start a family.

Dave and Kate got married three months later and went to Fiji for the honeymoon. Nine months later, Andrew Charles Anderson arrived at Gisborne Hospital.

And Marlin Hasler was sent up the river for life. But he was eligible for parole in 20 years, when he would be 57 years old. It took him a while to come down from the P. It was a real crash landing. Neither the police nor the medical staff attending him in the Gisborne cells wanted to make it any easier for him. After the first week of cold turkey, his hair turned completely grey. Eventually he realised it was the dope that made him so strange. He accepted that his behaviour was his responsibility. And, in that respect, he did learn his lesson. He no longer used his choices as an excuse. He finally understood that dope does harm than good.

