

BIRTHRIGHT-MATAMUATANGA

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MCW**

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of
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Department of Communication Studies**

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Abstract

Set on a farm on the Kaipara Harbour of Northland, New Zealand, this novel traces the lives of a family over a six year period near the end of the twentieth century.

Themes include: Scottish and Croatian-Dalmatian immigration, Māori spiritual and cultural values, the weaving and assimilation of diverse cultures into a vibrant new culture, the economics of farming on marginal lands, father-son relationships, sibling rivalry, marijuana cultivation and the disparities between urban and rural lifestyles and expectations. The plotline follows the frustrations and subsequent actions of the eldest son as he seeks a future, which he realises is dependent on his acquiring the family farm. His impulsive behaviour leads to the climax of the story and puts himself and other members of the family in jeopardy and risks the family losing the farm altogether.

PART 1
EXIGESIS

Exegesis for the novel ‘Birthright-Matamuatanga’

In this novel, I have endeavoured to describe what it means to be a New Zealander by creating a word portrait of the characters, their environment and their culture. This country’s bi-cultural heritage is based on the Treaty of Waitangi, whereby one people, the tangata-whenua or tangata-māori agreed to allow another people, the tangata-tiriti the right to settle in this land. At the time, the tangat-tiriti were mostly British, however with time, many other nationalities have been added to the mix. The early settlers’ religion, written word and laws soon destroyed much of the Māoris’ traditional social structure. This, together with British greed for land soon saw the Māori at a disadvantage. Despite society’s failings in this regard, at a human level the two cultures have blended to a large degree through inter-marriage and close association and this is reflected by the characters in the novel.

The title: ‘Birthright-Matamuatanga,’ refers to a son’s entitlement to the family farm through patrimony or primogeniture. It also alludes to the various interpretations given to property, and to land in particular. In pre-European Māori society land was treated as a taonga, with various whanau, hapu or iwi having rights over the land. These rights could be overlapping, giving no one entity absolute right over the land. This concept is at variance with British concepts of land ownership, wherein an individual or a group of individuals have title, or right of ownership to the land. In recent years many New Zealanders, including the author, have begun to view the ownership of land as merely a stewardship, whereby the owner does not own the land but is conferred with rights to use and develop the land. This idea is common in many indigenous cultures. The ancient American Indian proverb ‘Treat

the Earth well: it was not given to you by your parents, it was loaned to you by your children’ encapsulates this concept of the stewardship of land.

Prior to the Second World War Pākeha and Māori New Zealanders for the most part lived apart. Pākeha New Zealanders considered they were British citizens with Britain often alluded to Britain as ‘Home.’ The sun never set on the British Empire and Pākeha New Zealanders were proud to be a part of this heritage. After the Second World War this separation of cultures began to break down when Māori youth began to move from the country into the cities. Each group was then brought face to face with the questions: ‘Who are we,’ and ‘Who are they?’ Many urban Māori reclaimed their heritage through iwi affiliations but many Pākeha, with no links to Europe, struggled for an identity. The historian Michael King made a claim for the status of ‘Pākehatanga’ for those Pākeha New Zealander families that went back several generations in this country, on the basis that they comprise a distinctive white New Zealand culture different from their European roots.(King, 1985, 1999). As I have an ancestry with lineages varying between three and five generations in this country and having lived in both New Zealand and England, I support this premise. This issue is addressed in this novel in the meal scene following the whakanoa ceremony. The wariness of the Māori kaumatua in the Pākeha household and the slight bewilderment of the Pākeha present demonstrates that we maybe one nation but not one people. The problem of identity for mixed blood New Zealanders (Webber, 2008) is demonstrated through the relationships of the sons to the marriage of the two races.

The objectives of writing this novel have been manifold. Margaret Atwood (2000) gave a list of the reasons why a writer might write a book. From her list I selected the following applicable to this novel:

- To record the world as it is.
- To set down the past, before it is forgotten.
- To delight and to instruct.
- To paint a portrait of society and its ills.
- To defend the human spirit, and human integrity and honour.
- To create a National consciousness.
- To spin a tale.
- To amuse and please the reader.
- To fulfil the requirements for a thesis for a Master of Creative Writing.

A general outline for the novel was submitted with the Form-PG1 at the start of the programme in February 2009. The main premise for the novel then, was to be a story of a farming family having a father with Scottish heritage and the mother with part-Māori heritage. Her point of view was to be important to the story in that she was to view the various conflicts and issues facing the family from both a Māori and a Pākehā point of view. The original crisis was a police investigation into a plane crash near the property and the consequences this might have on the family.

Themes to be used in the novel included:

- The marginal economics of farming poor hill country,
- Family tensions,
- Father-son relationships,
- Sibling rivalry,
- The stoic male arch-type,
- The weakening of Pākehā dominance in the face of a Māori renaissance,
- The weaving of cultural and ethnic strands to form a new tapestry to society,
- The widespread cultivation and use of marijuana,

- The grudging acceptance by Pākehā of Māori values through the implementation of the Resource Management Act, Māori land claims and disputes before the Waitangi Tribunal.

The third draft of the novel, as submitted with this Exegesis, has not deviated significantly from the original concept given in the Form-PG1. It is set on a farm in the Puketotara Peninsular on the Kaipara Harbour near Kaiwaka. The reason for this location was that it be set within the region of the Diaspora of the Highland Scot immigrants who arrived in New Zealand from Nova Scotia during the period 1852 to 1860. They landed first in Auckland before establishing a Gaelic settlement at Waipu. From there they spread north to Whangarei Harbour and south to Mangawhai Harbour. Those not interested in the sea turned inland and spread over most of Northland between lines roughly though Helensville and Dargaville. The setting of the farm on the Puketotara Peninsular is perfectly in keeping with this distribution (McKenzie, 1935), (Robinson, 1952, (McLeod, 1991). In this novel, the father, Graham Sutherland is a direct descendant of these settlers, while his wife, Jacinta has a mixed heritage resulting from: an Englishman who deserted from a whaling ship at Kororareka in the 1830s, a Dalmatian grandfather and Māori heritage through several northern iwi. She was brought up with the Ngati Wai on the East Coast, north of Whangarei but can also claim iwi affiliations with the Te Arawa through her grandmother, Riripeti and with the Ngāpuhi through her great-great grandmother, Puihi. Each character thus serves as a stereotype of the people living in the Kaipara region. People's bloodlines or whakapapa represent the rich tapestry resulting from human migration, racial mixing and settlement. This novel sets the scene for the sewing together of two of these tapestries, those of the Graham Sutherland and his wife Jacinta's to make a whole. The 'whole' is a representation of a lower Northland

community in New Zealand during the period 1989/1990. It is not an attempt to represent other New Zealand communities, which may have different mixtures of ethnicities. The time period selected is also quite specific, as outlined below.

The main events in the novel occur during a two-year time period covering 1989 and 1990. This was intended to capture a snapshot of Northland and possibly New Zealand society at the end of the twentieth century. At that time, many Māori grievances were being debated and redress was being sought through the Waitangi Tribunal established in 1975. Marijuana cultivation and its use were also widespread throughout Northland at the time. Shortly after this, the impact of the methamphetamine or P epidemic, the Internet and widespread use of cell phone texting changed society further. The period 1989-1990 was therefore chosen as a cusp point for New Zealand society. The 1825 battles between the Ngāpuhi and the Ngāti Whatua near Kaiwaka and at Marohemo (Smith, 1895), (West, 1952), (Butler, 1963), (Ballara, 2003) were only discovered by the author after the novel was well advanced and were used to provide the back story for the spirits trapped in the old house.

The dramatic structure of the novel follows the traditional Freytag Pyramid concept for a drama, as defined by Gustav Freytag in 1863 from his analysis of ancient Greek drama (MacEwan, 1984). The crises in the narrative include:

- The plane crash,
- The subsequent police investigation into the crash,
- The dispute between William and Tamati Shepherd,
- The dispute between William and Andy,
- The dispute between William and his father,
- The scuffle between William and his father,

- The police investigation into Graham's death,
- The arrest of the main characters,
- The subsequent court trial of the defendants.
- Specialised information used in the text includes:
 - Police investigation procedures,
 - Forensic medicine methods,
 - Medical terminology, and
 - Court procedure.

The accident causing Graham's death is woven into the story as a consequence of William's frustration at his general lack of prospects. The second son, Andy, does not appear in the story much, as he is for the most part studying down in Auckland as the drama unfolds. The denouement to the story follows the mother, Jacinta's attempts to rebuild her life and William's redemption.

Both of the main characters in this novel follow a character arc based on the Hero's Journey as defined by Joseph Campbell (Campbell, 1949, Volger, 2008). Using this framework, the Protagonist for the story is the mother, Jacinta, and the unsuspecting Antagonist is her eldest son, William. It is the actions of William that drive the plotline for the story and which affect all the other characters to varying degrees. The youngest son, Jaimie, although not a principal character in the novel, also begins a journey of his own following the aftermath of the court verdicts.

The inciting incident for the plot is in chapter 7 when William is challenged by Tame about his future. William faces his first test when his friend, Tamati Shepherd, attempts to cross him. His greatest test occurs soon after when his father is severely injured. In order to save his mother and younger brother from complicity in

his father's death William allows himself to become the sacrificial lamb to the slaughter. His redemption begins at this point.

In chapter 8, the Protagonist, Jacinta is challenged by her brother to return to her Māori side. Her first steps of her journey take place during the organising of the whakanoa ceremony. During the ensuing meal she is brought face to face with her Māori side. Her first test is when she challenges the goddess of death for Graham's life. Her final test is the courtroom trial. Her journey takes her to Croatia, where she finds the turangawaewae of her Dalmatian tipuna, and is completed when she returns to Ngunguru to reclaim her New Zealand turangawaewae.

A late inclusion into the text was the incorporation of the age old themes of dealing with the dead and journeys into the underworld. These themes are described by Margaret Atwood (2002). The first of these is given in chapter 9 when food is left out to satisfy the dead and also in chapter 10 in Sam Kereti's lyrics to Sam freedman's well known song of welcome, 'Haere Mai.' In this song, the line 'Kia tangihia e tatou' translates as 'That the Dead may be satisfied.' The second of these themes is that of a hero journeying to the Underworld to rescue a loved one. This can be illustrated by the Greek myth of Orpheus and Eurydice (Bullfinch, 1979), or by the Akkadian myth of Innana (MacKenzie, 1915; Wolkstein et al, 1983), or the Japanese myth of Izanagi-no-Mikito (Reader, 2008). This theme is incorporated into the text in chapter 24 when Jacinta goes into a trance in which she makes a pact with Hine-nui-te-Po, the goddess of Death, to take her instead of her husband. The arrival of Will and the ambulance officer rouses her from her trance and breaks her connection with the goddess of death, thus saving Jacinta but forever dooming Graham. The last symbolic theme of this nature is in chapter 40 when Jacinta journeys to Croatia. This is a symbolic journey, with Croatia representing the past,

and by analogy, the Underworld. There she meets an aged man named Goran, who represents Pir-Napishtim from the Epic of Gilgamesh (Sanders, 1960, MacKenzie, 1915, Shabandar, 1994, Mitchell, 2006).

In terms of style, the limited and subjective 3rd-Person Points of View used for the majority of the text in this novel place it firmly in the post-modernist style of literature. Alan Kirby (2009) defined post-modernism as a movement ‘conceived of contemporary culture as a spectacle before which the individuals sit powerless, and within which questions of the real are problematised.’ Within that style, the majority of the text is written in a blend of both the American Realist and Naturalist literary mode. These modes are succinctly described in the Sychoi Course Handout (2009) as: ‘being concerned with the affairs of the middle and lower classes’ and treats ‘economic, social and technical matters, such as in agriculture and industry alongside the traditional literary themes of love and gallantry, using ‘the vernacular of daily life.’

The sections of the text dealing with Māori spiritualism and their beliefs relating to the dead fall within the Magical Realist mode of Post-Modernist style. Magical Realism is defined by Naomi Lindstrom (1994) as: ‘A narrative technique that blurs the distinction between fantasy and reality. It is characterised by an equal acceptance of the ordinary and the extraordinary. To her magic realism fused:

- (1) Lyrical and, at times, fantastic writing with,
- (2) An examination of the character of human existence and,
- (3) An implicit criticism of society: particularly, the elite.’

Emory University’s ‘Introduction to Postcolonial Studies’ defines the ‘Characteristics of Magical Realism’ by:

(1) ‘Hybridity’ that deals with inharmonious arenas of such opposites as; Urban and Rural, and Western and Indigenous. The plots of magical realist works involve issues of borders, mixing and change.

(2) ‘Irony Regarding Author’s Perspective,’ requires the author to have ironic distance from the magical world view for the realism not to be compromised. At the same time the author must strongly respect the magic to prevent it being seen as purely folk belief or complete fantasy.

(3) Authorial Reticence’ refers to the lack of clear opinions about the accuracy of events and the credibility of the world views expressed by the characters in the text.

(4) ‘The Supernatural and the Natural’ requires that the supernatural is not displayed as questionable. The supernatural must be integrated within the norms of perception of the narrator and the characters in this fictional world.

Item (1) was satisfied by: (a) the relationship between the small rural communities surrounding the Kaipara Harbour, centred on Kaiwaka and the nearby city of Auckland, and (b) by the relationships and cultural differences between the European settlers and the indigenous Māori communities. The Māori communities have to a large part been absorbed, with the young migrating towards the urban areas of Auckland and Whangarei. Jacinta’s return to her marae is symbolic of the recent Māori cultural renaissance.

Item (2) was satisfied by clearly illustrating the collision between the Māori holistic view of the world and the less spiritual view of the European. This collision occurred for Europeans long ago when the Judeo-Christian religion sought to replace their ancient pagan-animalist beliefs. Under these beliefs every tree, spring, stream, stone and hill had its own guardian spirit. The European world then was as spiritual as that of the Māori. The early Church did as much as it could to denigrate this pagan

spirituality, calling it primitive superstition. Where this could not be done they absorbed it into their own teachings under different guises. There is little doubt that the quotation from the Old Testament that man has ‘dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the Earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth’ (Exodus 1:26) gave many early European settlers a seemingly valid excuse to rape the natural world without having to placate the spirits of that world in any way. Conflict between early the early Europeans and Māori was often caused by Pākehā transgressions of Māori tapu sites, whether done in ignorance or deliberately. This is not a clear cut issue however as Christianity does have a spiritual basis, something which early Māori were quick to see. In this novel I have striven to portray both the Pākehā and Māori point of view in regard to the spiritual world.

Item (3) was satisfied by both the historic and the legendary events having equal status.

Item (4) was accomplished by the integration into the story of: the spirits of the dead (kehua) in the old house, the need for a ceremony (whakanoa) to free them and lift the tapu, the inclusion of the liefmotif of a moth to represent the wairua of Graham in the ambulance and in the hospital. Many mythical creatures and beings were also interspersed throughout the text as though they formed part of the natural environment. These include the legendary creatures that were purported to cut the waves to the front and rear of the legendary voyaging canoe, Takitimu (Orbell, 1998), the reference to Hape (Orbell, 1998), the legendary priest left behind in Hawaiki by the Takitimu canoe (Orbell, 1998) and who voyaged to Aotearoa on the back of a giant stingray, the mythical gods of the Māori pantheon (Wikipedia, 2009), the reference to Andy being like the sprite, Peter Pan (Barrie, 1904), as he flits in and

out of the story, never settling to be fully observed, like the legendary Whanawhana of the Māori fairy people, the Pare Pairehi (Cowan, 1925) or the Irish legendary people, the Tuatha dé Danaan (Wikipedia, 2009), Mackillop, 2005).

In terms of structure, the third draft of this novel has the Prologue written in the 3rd Person-Omniscient Point of View, Chapter 1 written in the 3rd Person-Limited (Remote) Point of View and with subsequent chapters written in either 3rd-Person-Limited or Subjective Points of View. Generally where it is given in William's Point of View it is written in 3rd-Person Limited POV on the basis that William doesn't give a great deal of thought to his actions and his actions are what moves the plot forward. Other people's Points of View are in the subjective POV as they are the ones considering the impact of his actions. All chapters are written in a chronological sequence.

In summary, this novel uses the various themes of migration, bloodlines, property rights, inter-marriage, race relationships, the Māori renaissance, spirituality and identity issues as background to a plotline featuring parents from different cultural backgrounds, agricultural practices, father-son relations, sibling rivalry, cultivation and sale of marijuana, violence, police investigations and courtroom drama. The spirituality of Māori culture is brought into the novel by the use of the Magical-Realist mode of literature. This acts as a counter-point to the less spiritual and more pragmatic culture of the Pākehā as represented by a more Naturalist mode of literature. Returning to the title of the work and what it means, we find in chapter 39, amid the last vestiges of the British Empire at the Officer's Club, Graham's brother Angus deciding the fate of the farm. He decides to retain the farm in Trust for future generations of the Sutherland family. This still retains the land as a Fee Simple Title but the ownership is held by a Family Trust. This is not dissimilar to the way

Māori lands are held, with an Iwi Trust being the owner. We see here a concept of collective ownership of land that would have been quite unknown to the early Pākeha settlers of the 1800s. This novel has now had three drafts, the last draft of which has had many edits prior to submission as a thesis for a MCW.

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Zodiac Personality Traits, Sun Sign Descriptions and Astrological Traits

PART 2
BIRTHRIGHT-MATAMUATANGA
NOVEL

Prologue

To begin this tale, we must go back in time to when a fragment of primeval continent split off its host. It glided, undisturbed, on a bed of magma through the seas until, in the immensity of time, it reached the edge of one of the great plates that form the shell of this planet. This was a place ruled by Ruaumoko, the god of earthquakes and volcanoes. Here our continental fragment became stranded, as surely as a ship cast upon a reef. Ruaumoko gathered this new land into his embrace. Some parts were thrust high above the sea, while other parts were driven deep under the Earth's crust. Those parts driven deep under the Earth's crust were burnt by the hot magma, changing their texture and hardening it forever. The hot magma escaped through cracks and fissures formed by these upheavals, spewing lava high into the air and covering the land in lava and ash.

Out of this chaos a mountain range rose, spreading northward into the sea. Rain washed over the land, softening its jagged outline. Tane-mahuta, the god of forests, cast his mantle over the land, cloaking the lacerated surface with greenery and providing a salve for its wounds. Over eons the land eroded back into the surrounding sea. Silt build up, stratum on stratum, each stratum defining a point in

time. Only the highest mountain tops now rose above the sea, forming a string of islands spread across the ocean, like dew drops on a spider's web.

Ruaumoko, however, had only paused in his endeavours. He now caused great earthquakes, which shook the land and lifted the sediments from the ocean floor. These uplifted sediments became the lime, sand and siltstones we now know. Tane-mahuta again spread his mantle over this new uplifted land. The ever present rains washed over the land creating new rivers and valleys. The sea carved out bays and inlets in these weak sedimentary rocks. And so, the land so familiar to us emerged, morphed out of an older land, a process repeated time and again. Like the Phoenix, it had to die each time, in order to be reborn.

The land lay in tranquillity for millions of years until the coming of man. Early Polynesian voyagers discovered the land and returned to their homelands to relate wondrous stories of giant islands to the southwest, where huge birds roamed and where the seas brimmed with fish. Others came in double hulled sailing canoes, the names of which are still recalled, to create settlements around the coast. The voyagers used the stars to guide them and made use of the trade winds and the ocean currents. Some were guided by spiritual beasts cavorting in front of the canoe to cut a path through the waves. They were followed by the great fleet migrations of canoes, whose names and commanders are also remembered and revered. These people settled around the coast, where there was a plentiful supply of food from the sea.

Hundreds of years later, other strange canoes were driven ashore in storms. These were the ill-fated Chinese, Portuguese or Spanish ships, whose crews would never see their homelands again. Dutch, English and French explorers followed in their canoes with white wings floating over the oceans. The names of these vessels and their commanders are also celebrated and admired. Within forty years of these

visits, whaling ships arrived around the coast, from Nantucket, New Bedford, Newport, Le Havre, London, Sydney and Hobart. The names of these ships and those of their commanders are now but feebly recalled. The pale skinned people from these ships also established settlements around the coast. Among the deserters from one of the whaling ships visiting Kororarereka was a man named Nicholas Shaw. His people migrated from England to America during the eighteenth century. They became rovers of the sea with no fixed abode. Nicholas Shaw's home was whatever ship he was sailing on. After deserting, he took a Māori girl as wife and established a family lineage whose members in turn partnered with other Māori and later with olive skinned men from a land of islands far to the north, called Dalmatia.

The sailors from the whaling ships were joined by escaped convicts and sealing gangs from Australia, missionaries from England, Scotland and France, gold miners from California and settlers from many lands. Among these were some Highland Scots from Nova Scotia. These Scots had settled in Pictou and then Prince Edward Island after being evicted from their hereditary lands in Scotland but life had not been easy in their new home. Their leader had a vision about a better land and ordered a fleet of ships built in which they would sail to this land on the far side of the world. Here they found a people with a social structure much like their own back in the Highlands. The Māori lived in hapu and iwi as did their families and clans. Each iwi was part of a tribal federation similar to their own clan federations. Both people related their lineage for many generations back to a great leader through their genealogy or whakapapa. The Highland Scots settled along the east coast from Auckland to the Bay of Islands in much the same way as the early Māori had. Many built small ships in order to transport their produce to larger settlements and for trading. Captain James Sutherland and Kenneth McDonald featured among these

migrants. James Sutherland traded a coastal property on the Kaipara Harbour from a local Māori chief and built a house by a beach. He then built a cutter on the beach and a jetty at the end of the bay. Two generations later, Graham Gordon Sutherland was born, the son of Lachie Sutherland and Catherine McDonald. He married Jacinta Shaw, the great-great granddaughter of Nicholas Shaw, and so our story about their descendants begins.

1

A reef heron glides along the shore to land on a mud bank. It wades into the shallows, its long legs barely rippling the water, ready to spear its prey, when it pauses, as a gentle breeze ruffles the water. Beyond this lone fisher, the small settlement of Batley turns crimson in the last bleeding gasps of the day. It is hard to imagine the bustling activity on this waterway a mere hundred years ago. Gone are the tall ships and the wooden hulled steamers James Sutherland was familiar with when he built his house by the beach. The remains of these ships now rot under land fills, rust away in isolated bays or lie in watery graves, covered by corals and sponges. A pied shag perches on the top of a broken pile with its wings outstretched, like a Standard from a Roman Legion. These broken piles and a few rusting bolts are all that remain of the jetty Captain James Sutherland built.

His first house was built with the help of some of the local Māori. It was a rudimentary whare with tree fern trunk walls and roofed using nikau palm fronds and raupo leaves over Ti-tree rafters. This lasted long enough for James to break in some land for cultivation, build the cutter and jetty and start construction of his permanent home. This was built from pit-sawn timber, which was in plentiful supply. The floors

were bare boards and the walls covered in hessian and newspaper. A wood burning range was used for cooking and lighting was by candle or hurricane lamp. The only innovation was the use of corrugated iron, a new material imported from California, for the roofing. The house was plain and functional, sturdy and practical, fit for a Scot. A veranda was added later, as were the finials to the gables and the fretwork around the veranda.

This second house now sits alone by the beach, like a sentry waiting for the changing of the guard. Loose roofing iron and flashings flap in the evening breeze. It is streaked where the brown topcoat has peeled away, exposing the underlying coat of beige. The colourful sunset is encapsulated by the various hues of the rusting corrugated iron roof. Where gutters were, only the support brackets remain, reaching out in plaintive entreaty, like supplicants seeking alms. Where there was once a front door, there is now a gaping hole; the door used to make a raft. Within the shell of the house there is a smell of disuse, mildew, mould and things long dead. It is now deserted, apart from the spiders, cockroaches and field mice. Cobwebs hang from the ceiling and droppings from sheep, mice, possums and birds litter the floor. There is the hint of decay from the desiccated remains of a rat or bird somewhere unseen. The sweet smell of the hay stored in the old living room serves to counter the smells of disuse and decay. Around the house, sheep keep the grass manicured, as it once had been.

When he comes to the run-off to check on the stock, Graham sits on his farm bike staring down at the house nestled in the arc of the bay. He thinks back to the stories he was told as a child about his grandfather's life. He nurses a secret desire to one day restore the house, perhaps as a wedding present for his son, William. It would need a new driveway out to the road. He mulls over the possibility of using

the driveway as a farm race and claiming the cost as a tax expense, but William is showing no sign of settling down for a while. It can wait.

His wife, Jacinta has always disliked the old house. On one visit, she recalled how a sudden gust lifted the roof causing the house to creak and groan. The wind blowing through the empty rooms sounded like the tones of many hushed voices conferring in whispers. Graham laughs as he remembers that. She always did have an imaginative mind.

For the boys, the house had always been their secret hideaway from which to launch their many adventures. These included swimming, rafting, canoeing, flounder fishing, netting for mullet or fishing from the aluminium dinghy they stored against the back of the house. The oars for the dinghy were tucked beneath the thwarts of the dinghy or stored in the washhouse along with the mullet net. The boys' adventures changed as they grew older. It was necessary for their parents to accompany them when swimming, as the tidal currents on the ebb tide could soon carry a person well out into the harbour. When William was sixteen and Jaimie reached twelve years of age, they were allowed to go rafting. Their parents judged them old enough to play by themselves at that stage, so long as they kept their activities to the hour each side of slack tide. That was when the front door to the old house had been taken off its hinges and lashed the two 200 litre drums. Their first raft had not been a success due to the drums being too deep for the shallow waters. Their second raft used the front door as the platform and twelve plastic containers, once containing cattle drench, for buoyancy. With a draught of a mere 300mm, this raft proved far more successful than the former. They graduated to '*tinnies*' after the raft. Each '*tinnie*' was made from two pieces of four by two and a sheet of corrugated iron. When their parents discovered them paddling these frail craft in mid

channel one day, they resolved to buy them fibreglass kayaks. After the kayaks arrived, the '*tinnies*' and the raft were abandoned; left to wash away in storms and drift where they might, or to founder like so many craft before them.

They soon sold their kayaks and pooled their money to buy the mullet net and the dinghy. A little help was required from Graham for the dinghy but he reasoned so long as there was a regular supply of fresh fish, it was a good investment. On an incoming tide they would row to midstream and drop an anchor overboard to fish the main channel for schnapper. The mullet net was set across the bay by unravelling it over the stern as one of them rowed around the bay in an arc. William was the only one of the three bold enough to wade into the shallows to pull in the net with the surface of the water seething with fish struggling to get free. The others were scared of standing on a stingray or encountering a shark snared in the net. William often drove down to the house of an evening when the tide was right to set the net across the bay. He returned the next morning to haul in the net and gut and scale the fish on the beach before bringing them back up to the main house. As they grew older, Andrew and then Jaimie grew more confident at wading into the water to haul in the net, with the surface seething with struggling lives around them. The three of them and sometimes a mate, or two, would sit on the old veranda watching the setting sun, talking, drinking or smoking a joint. As the sun set over the horizon the chirruping of crickets would take over from the cicada chorus of the day.

2

The air felt warm for the first time in months. There was a sparkly quality to it from the thunderstorm during the night. Even the westerly wind was gentler, carrying with it the pungent smell of mangroves and uncovered mud banks; giving a hint of the unseen life dwelling in the inter-tidal zone. The worst of winter looked as though it might be behind them. Things were improving on the economic front as well. The Crash was now two years ago now and fading into history. Graham had reason to feel optimistic about the future, as he changed up a gear on his tractor.

Up ahead, Jaimie staggered out of a gully. He was covered from top to tail in mud. His skinny legs stuck out below his dark blue chequered *Swandri* jacket like the legs of one of those pipe cleaner figures Graham used to make as a kid. Graham glided the tractor to a stop beside him.

‘What happened to you?’

‘A pregnant ewe got stuck in the creek. I can’t believe the stupidity of these animals!’ shouted Jaimie, his face flushed from his exertions.

‘They may be stupid but we depend on them for our livelihood,’ replied Graham.

‘It doesn’t mean I have to respect them. Any brains they had have long since been bred out of them.’

‘That’s why they need us to look after them.’

‘That’s a circular argument, if ever I heard one,’ said Jaimie.

Graham was left wondering at the thought processes that went on in his son’s head. It had never occurred to him that sheep might not have been stupid in their wild state. Perhaps, Jaimie was right.

Jaimie trudged off back towards the house, the tail of his *Swandri* jacket hanging down to the backs of his knees. How Jaimie could wear a thick *Swandri* on such a warm day was beyond Graham’s comprehension. He was hot just wearing the free polo shirt; he had been given with his last batch of sheep drench, and a pair of shorts. Of all of his sons, Graham felt most affinity with Jaimie. He not only looked like him but he played the pipes. Graham had been over the moon when Jaimie asked if he could learn to play the bagpipes. It was something Graham would have liked to have done but never had been given the opportunity. Jamie had gone about as far as he could go with the recorder and the clarinet and was looking for something more challenging. At the time, Graham had wondered whether a lad of fifteen had the patience to master the bagpipes but he had quickly been put at ease on that score. Graham arranged for Jaimie to have an interview with an instructor with the Waipu Highland Pipe Band. Jaimie was accepted for tuition and given a practice chanter and instruction book from the College of Piping. After Jaime completed all the lessons in the book, Graham arranged the hire of a set of Great Highland Bagpipes from the Pipe Major, who knew of several sets around Northland belonging to men getting on in years. One proviso the family made was that Jaimie had to practice the pipes outside, as far from the house as possible. They had listened to Jaimie playing the

recorder and the clarinet in his room for years and everyone in the family knew the tunes off by heart. The idea of the bagpipes played in the house was more than anyone could take. Jaimie set himself up in the implement shed in the winter and went out into the paddocks to stand on a hill during the warmer months. There was something ethereal about hearing a lone piper on a hill. Graham took himself outside to listen whenever he heard Jamie winding up to play. Everyone used to joss Jamie about scaring the stock but the cattle seemed to like it, creeping nearer whenever he played. Needless to say, the sheep showed no emotion, whatsoever. By last Easter, Jaimie could play all the well-known Highland airs.

By the time Graham came out of his musings, Jaimie had vanished over the hill. He put the tractor into gear and let off the brake. All around him there were signs of new grass growth. The topdressing they gave the farm during the winter had had the desired effect. Calving had also gone well. A feeling of rebirth pervaded the countryside. As Graham drove the tractor back towards the implement shed, he soon came up behind Jaimie trudging along and offered him a lift, only to be waved off. He probably wouldn't have been good company, anyway.

As he neared the farmhouse, Jacinta came out of the yard riding her horse, *Star*. She was wearing a sleeveless red vest over a pink camisole; at least, that's what he thought it was called. Her oilskin drover's hat cast a shadow over her face making her look more seductive than usual. He still felt the same magnetic attraction he had felt when he first met her. He knew then she was different from the other girls at the dance. She had been standing with her friend, another Māori girl, whose name he had long forgotten. Jacinta was the taller of the two by about four inches. Her complexion had been darker, in a funny sort of way, as well. A kind of olive overlay to her brown skin. Her eyes were dark and her nose was fine and straight, ending in a

slight snub. When she smiled, you realised she had a beautiful mouth. It hadn't been her physical appearance that had speared Graham through the heart that day, even if her looks had been enough to capture any young red-blooded male. It was the aura surrounding her. She exuded a calmness of being. He had seen it only once before, in some Irish nuns. They had radiated a quiet serenity though their opalescent skins, much like saints were depicted in Sunday school. Perhaps the Irish got it from the fairy folk, the Tuatha dé Danaan. Both the Irish and the Māori could claim links back to a past where myth and reality merged. Some invisible force made Graham hobble across the room and ask her for a dance. He smiled now as he remembered how he towered over her and how clumsy he felt holding her in his arms. His legs had been bandaged from top to toe, at the time. He had wondered what she thought of him. He pictured her looking at this giant with a bean pole body, ruddy complexion, angular face and leg all bandaged up. It had to have been his personality that won her over; it couldn't possibly have been his looks.

All of this passed through Graham's mind in a flash. His thoughts returned to Jacinta sitting astride her faithful old hack. She sat straight in the saddle with her hands holding the reins loosely over the pommel. Even the horse seemed pleased to be getting out on such a nice day. A wisp hair blew across Jacinta's face as he approached her. She flicked it back behind her ear as he drew alongside. Her horse was now as old as Jaimie, making him sixty in human years. Jacinta and her brother, Stephen had ridden to and from school each day on a horse. It was in her blood to have horses around. She looked up and waved at Graham as he approached her. She was wearing her '*I am happy*' smile.' Her obvious pleasure at riding the horse made her look young again.

'Out for a ride?'

‘I thought I might ride down to the run-off and see how Will is getting and then ride out to the end of the peninsula.’

‘Honey, it’s a beautiful day; make the most of it.’

3

Will and Temara Anich had been seeing each other for over three weeks now and wanted to take their relationship to the next level. The problem was they both lived at home with their parents. Will's solution to this was to use the old house for their trysts. In anticipation to the first of these, Will bought a king size duvet in Maungaturoto and stashed it in the boot of his car. The Charger represented Will's only possession of any value. It was a 1974 two-door, 203 horsepower Hemi-6 automatic VH model. It was already twelve years old when he bought it two years ago for \$6,000. It had been in a few prangs then and still had the grey undercoat it had on when it came out of the panel beater's shop. Apart from a bit of rust under the rear windscreen, which he was keeping an eye on, the rest of the car was remarkably rust-free. It helped that he could house it in the old tractor shed. He had heard you could get as much as \$12,000 for a similar model in good condition. Unfortunately, removing the rust and painting the car were beyond his means for now.

A few nights later, he told his family he was going out for a while. He then drove the Charger around to The Landing and parked under an overhanging bough of a pohutukawa tree festooned with pendulous aerial roots. When he turned off the

headlights, he was enveloped by total darkness. He waited for his eyes to adjust to the gloom before getting out. A bank of low cloud covered the sky, obliterating the stars and the moon. Will opened the boot and took out the duvet, in its plastic zipped case. He hoisted it on his shoulder and set out along the path, which wended its way around the foreshore. A morepork called from over the water, to be answered by one nearby. Something moved in front of him and he stopped. Two large luminous eyes stared back at him for a second, before vanishing, as though a light switch had been turned off. He had the fleeting image of a fuzzy shape scampering away towards some trees. The raucous screech of another morepork overhead made him jump.

While looking up into the dark outline of the tree overhead, his foot landed on nothing, toppling him forward into a ditch. His boots sunk into the ooze in the bottom of the ditch and his hands slithered around, trying to get traction. When he was finally able to stand again, he felt down his leg to see if he was injured. Satisfied he was not injured; he climbed out of the ditch and cast about for the duvet. The cold slippery surface of the plastic case sent a shiver of revulsion through him and he had to force himself to take a hold of it and toss it back over his shoulder. Once more, he groped his way forward, testing the ground with the toe of his boot. Something sinuous wrapped itself around his leg. Will stood stock-still listening. While balancing the duvet on his shoulder, he was able to bend down and investigate what it was. He slid his leg forward again, hoping to dislodge whatever it was around his leg. His progress was brought to a standstill as it wrapped itself tighter around his leg. In desperation, he leaned to one side to run his free hand down the side of his leg. With the first touch of the barbs from a coil of barbed wire, he pulled his hand away. The sudden movement made him lose his balance and he stood swaying for

several seconds, before there was a loud tearing sound, after which he managed to regain his balance.

Will paused to catch his breath and allow his wildly beating heart to still. He felt around the frayed edges of the tear in his jeans. His fingers came away sticky. When he licked his fingers, he tasted blood. Better see about that when he got home. Tetanus and lockjaw were never far from one's mind in the country. He moved forward more cautiously this time, groping around in a circle, until his hands touched the clammy surface of the plastic case. A break in the cloud allowed moonlight to light up the landscape. The house was there with only one more fence and another paddock to cross.

By the time he reached the old house, Will was his old self again. As he placed his foot on the step leading up to the veranda, the black outlines of two ewes came charging through the door, their feet sliding on the floorboards. The first one darted to one side and vanished into the night. The second ewe careened into Will knocking him off balance. Once again, the duvet went flying. Will tottered for a moment, before striking his head with a sickening thud on a veranda post. The floor board he was standing on at that moment chose to give way, grazing his shin and his leg disappeared through the floor. Both ends of him hurt as he sank into a sitting position. While he waited for the throbbing in his head to subside he massaged his sore shin. Another morepork called nearby. Will looked about him and took in the beauty of the night with the gentle sound of waves lapping the shore, the sound of shore birds flying over and the moonlight on the water. The funny side of his antics welled up inside him causing him to laugh. It was a full belly laugh. Tears streamed from his eyes and down his cheeks.

He found the duvet again and took it into the house, where he placed it on top of a hay bale. With arms outstretched before him he groped his way through to the laundry, where he opened the wooden cover on the copper and pulled out his hurricane lamp. With light to see by, he set about tidying the place up, sweeping the debris on the floor out the door. When he looked at his watch it showed midnight. He made a quick tour of the house, before putting the broom back in the kitchen and returning the hurricane lamp to its place inside the copper. As he walked back to the car through a landscape bathed in moonlight, his face creased into a smile.

4

The next afternoon, Will backed the Charger into the kerb, turned off the engine and waited for Temara's bank to close. A glance at his watch showed it was five to four, five minutes to go. His fingers drummed out a tattoo on the steering wheel while he stared through the windscreen. After a while, he turned the key in the ignition a quarter of a turn, causing the oil light on the dashboard to gleam red and the radio to burst into life. Radio Hauraki was playing The Four Season's '*Oh What a Night.*' A smart looking girl came out of the door to the bank and looked around, before walking down the street to the fish shop. It was Cushla Davies, a friend of Temara's. He watched her walking down the street, appreciative of her tight skirt and long legs. Just as Cushla vanished into the fish shop, Temara stepped out onto the footpath, right in his viewing line to where Cushla's legs had been, seconds before. Temara's shoulder length hair glinted in the sun. Will honked the horn as she looked up and down the line of cars parked against the kerb. Her face lit up and she gave him a wave. Will leaned over to open the passenger door and she slid in, giving him a kiss on the cheek, before turning around to fasten her seat belt. After the usual greetings had been exchanged, Will sensed that something was wrong.

‘You don’t look too happy.’

‘Well, I could be losing my job.’

‘What?’

‘Head office has told everyone they have to reapply for their jobs.’

‘You should be all right, shouldn’t you?’

‘I don’t know.’

‘When do you have to reapply?’

‘In a month’s time. No one’s happy about it.’

‘It’s just the bank’s way of getting rid of dead wood. You wait. I bet you’ll be all right.’

‘I hope so.’

‘Let’s get you home, so you can change out of your uniform. Then we’ll go out somewhere.’

Temara turned to him and gave him a smile. He liked it when she smiled. Her face lit up, showing off her eyes and her sensuous mouth. A man had to count himself lucky sometimes in life.

‘That okay with you?’

‘You bet.’

Will started the engine and listened to the six-cylinder engine with hemispherical heads and twin barrelled Weber carburettors burst into life before settling into a gentle throb, just like the heartbeat of a living thing. There was a break in the traffic and he slid the car out from the kerb. They drove north through Te Hana back to Kaiwaka, where they passed Oneriro Road and turned right onto the Mangawhai road. Temara lived with her parents about two kilometres along the road, beyond the Kaiwaka Primary School.

As the house came into view, Will slowed down to turn into the driveway. The tubular steel gate hung permanently open like an old man's jaw. Their house was typical of those built during the sixties, with its red painted corrugated iron roof, asbestos cement sidings and timber joinery. Mould and dust covered the original mustard colour of the asbestos-cement sidings turning them greyish-brown. Adjacent to the house stood a lichen streaked ferro-cement water tank that when new was white. An old shed stood at the end of the lime-rock driveway. In it was an old white caravan, sans wheels, resting on blocks. Will brought the car to a stop and cut the engine.

'Doesn't look like anyone's home,' he opined.

'Mum should be home by now. Her friend, Cherie took her to work. Dad has Mum's car is in the garage getting a new clutch.'

'Yeah, well it's a wonder she's still going at all.'

'That's no way to talk about my mother.'

Will looked across at Temara and caught her mischievous grin.

'You know I was talking about her car!'

'Just kidding.'

Temara's mother came out on the porch to greet them.

'Hey Will. How are you?'

'I'm sweet. How about yourself?'

'Oh, nothing a body transplant wouldn't fix, eh?'

'You look pretty good to me.'

'Oh, he's a smoothy, isn't he? You better watch out girl!'

Temara let her mother's ribbing slide by as she gave her a peck on the cheek.

'Will's taking me out tonight.'

‘Will you be having dinner here?’

Temara gave Will a glance.

‘No, we’ll eat out,’ he said. ‘Thanks anyway.’

‘Well, I’d better get our meal prepared. There’s beer in the fridge, Will. You know your way around by now.’

‘Thanks Mrs Anich’

‘Call me Hana.’

‘Okay Mrs Anich.’

Will sauntered into the kitchen, where he took a Speights out of the fridge and flicked the cap off, using the opener fastened to the end of the bench. Back in the living room, he slumped down on the couch and took his first swig of his cold beer. It immediately assuaged his dry throat and he let out a little sigh of contentment. He placed the bottle on the table and then leant back and shut his eyes. After a minute or so, he reopened his eyes to make a visual inspection of the room. The ceiling paint had yellowed from years of cigarette smokers and open wood fires. The wallpaper was faded and starting to peel from the cornice here and there. The slats on the Venetian blinds were covered in a fine dust with the ends of the slats bent at all angles. A wall-to-wall Axminster carpet in a dated floral pattern covered the floor. The house was nothing flash, yet it had a homely quality that he appreciated. He took another swig from his bottle before getting up and walking around the room a couple of times, looking at photos of the family and rummaging through a pile of magazines in the corner. When he sat down again he drained what was left in his bottle.

‘There’s a Hot Rod magazine under there somewhere,’ said Hana, from the doorway.

‘Sweet,’ said Will, wondering how long she had been watching him. He went to the magazine rack and rummaged through the *Womens’ Days* and *Marie Claires* to find the *Hot Rod* magazine. He had barely opened the cover when Temara came back out, dressed in a skimpy black dress and with a greenstone pendant hanging around her neck.

‘Well, look at you. Anyone would think you were going to a party!’

‘You said you were taking me out.’

‘I don’t know whether I want anyone else to see you looking like that.’

‘What’s wrong with it?’

‘Nothing, you look stunning.’

‘Thanks, oh here’s Dad home.’

Will followed Temara’s gaze through the ranch slider door, to see Tame driving through the gate in his metallic blue *Nissan Skyline*. It was an old ’84 model but could still give a good account of itself.

The banging of a car door preceded Tame climbing the front steps onto the porch, where he took off his boots.

‘Hey Will. You got a beer?’

‘Just had one thanks.’

‘Well, there’s always another in the fridge. How about getting us one as well?’

‘No problem.’

Tame entered the room in his work socks, as Will went back out to the kitchen.

‘Hi sweetie. You going out on the town, eh?’

‘Yeah, Will’s taking me,’ said Temara, giving her Dad a hug and kiss.

‘Good on you, girl. You’re only young once. Make the most of it. I’ll just go and clean up and then I’ll join you for a drink.’

By the time Will had retrieved another two beers, opened them and set them on the table, Tame had reappeared, wearing a new T-shirt.

‘Well,’ said Tame, letting his tired frame settle into his favourite armchair, ‘If you are going to take my daughter out, then I suppose I have to ask what you plan to do with your life.’

Tame had a twinkle in his eye. Will knew he was only having him on but the question struck a core in him. What the hell was he going to do with the rest of his life?

‘I suppose, I’ll be a farmer.’

‘Have you a farm?’

‘No, I work on my Dad’s farm over on Oneriri Road.’

‘How old is your Dad, then?’

Will realised where Tame was heading. The answer had always niggled away at his subconscious but he had managed to keep his doubts submerged, so as not to face them. Now he was being forced to do just that in front of his possible future father-in-law.

‘Dad’s fifty-three.’

‘Is he in good health?’

‘Yeah, not bad for an old fella.’

‘Hey, watch out who you call an old fella. Fifty-three isn’t old.’

‘Well, it seems old to me.’

‘Have you discussed what will happen to the farm when your Dad decides to call it quits?’

‘Not really. I always supposed it would be left to me, being the eldest son and all but I guess there’s no guarantee the farm won’t be sold before then.’

‘That’s right. You need to talk this over with your parents sometime.’

‘You’re right. I hadn’t given it much thought before now.’

‘Yeah, well you need to always have one eye on the future. Ya gotta remember that you have to rely on yourself in this life. No-one else is gonna help you. How’s your beer?’

‘Fine. I better taihoa, if I’m going to drive.’

‘Fair enough, where are you off to tonight then?’

‘I don’t know. We’ll just see where we end up. We might go down to Auckland for a meal and then go clubbing.’

‘Yeah, well you enjoy yourselves and you look after my little girl, eh?’

‘No worries on that account.’

‘Good.’

Tame’s eyes settled on Will and Will wondered what he saw. He had only met Temara’s old man about three times but he always came away feeling he could read him like a book. It was bloody unnerving for a young man.

As they were leaving, Will whispered to Temara to get her gumboots. She gave him a baleful look before taking them off the porch and throwing them on the back seat of the car. She waited until the car doors were closed and he had started the engine before saying anything.

‘What the hell do I need gumboots for? I thought we were going out somewhere half decent.’

‘We are. It’s just that I thought you might like us to go somewhere nice and quiet afterwards.’

‘That might depend on where it is.’

‘It’s just that we’ll have to walk over a couple of paddocks in the dark. I thought gumboots might be a good idea.’

‘Well, you sure know how to sweet talk a lady.’

All Will could do was grin, as he concentrated on the road ahead. It took an hour and a half to reach Auckland. Will drove the Charger under the porte-cochere of the Hyatt-Kingsgate Hotel and they climbed out. Will handed over the keys to the valet who looked first at the keys and then back at the car. The look on his face made Will laugh.

‘She’ll out-drag any of those poncy BMWs,’ he said.

The boy’s face lit up at the realisation it wasn’t as big a pile of rubbish as he had first thought. Will escorted Temara through the front doors of the lobby and over towards the lifts. It was going to be an expensive night for Will but it was worth it to see Temara’s eyes bulging out of her head and for what the night might hold.

It was about half past two before Will brought Temara to the old house. Both were in a good mood after a night on the town. Will told her to put on her gumboots and was gallant enough to have brought a torch for their overland trek around the foreshore. A full moon was shining and the tide was in. What a great night for floundering. Thoughts of fishing were quickly extinguished as Temara’s hand clamped around his. The illicit nature of their liaison spurred them on. Will’s heart was pumping loudly in his ears, pulsating through his body and out into the still night air. His rushing blood felt as though it might consume him. Was this what it felt like just before a heart attack?

They rounded the point and there was the old house bathed in moonlight.

Temara stopped and stared about her. Will could wait no longer and pulled her arm.

With some hesitation she followed. His own tumescence affected his eyes. Things were becoming all fuzzy. When they reached the front door, Temara stopped.

‘Come on, I’ve got a duvet. We can roll it out on the floor or on top of some hay bales, whatever you like?’

The whites of Temara’s eyes glowed in the dark as she stared about her.

“What’s the matter,’ cried Will.

By now his heart and other things throbbed like the Charger on idle.

Temara pulled her hand away from his and stood stock-still. Will looked bewildered. A minute ago she had been as keen as him.

‘We shouldn’t be here. There are spirits and it’s after midnight.’

‘Come on, you don’t believe in all that mumbo jumbo, do you? Jeez don’t do this to me now.’

‘I can hear them whispering amongst themselves.’

‘Don’t be daft. It’s just the wind.’

‘No. I tell you they’re everywhere.’

‘Who?’ asked Will, his red blood surge now abating at an alarming rate. This sudden ebbing of desire scared him. A sense of loss began to permeate through him, like water dousing a fire. He set up the hurricane lamp on the floor and then climbed up into the hay bales and darkness above.

Temara leant on the door post looking into the light. A shadow flitted between her and the light. Something else moved at the edge of her vision. Soon there were dozens of shadows crossing the space between the light and her. Giant shadows of moths fluttered, pitched and dipped across the walls in an endless procession, round and round, as the moths flitted, this way and that. A feeling of

intense cold gripped her, freezing her to the spot and damping out any desire. The wind moaned through the openings. Outside, everything remained peaceful and calm. Fear took her in its grasp. The shadows on the walls coalesced and broke up again, forming shapes that disappeared as soon as they formed. A shiver ran down her spine and her hands began to tremble. Death was here. Long arms with long fingers reached out towards her. Anguished faces came and went before her, spinning round and round. She stood on the edge of a vortex leading to Te Po, the underworld. Temara sensed that the long fingers reaching out towards her were the fingers of Hine-nui-te Po, the goddess of death. She was uncertain as to whether it was her, or the vortex spinning. There was the overpowering sense of falling down into the darkness at its centre. The idea fixated into her mind she was being sucked into the vagina of the goddess of death. That, which is given, can be taken away. Who said that?

When the duvet tumbled down beside her, she jumped with fright and stood trembling as Will slid down beside her.

‘What’s the matter? You look like you’ve seen a ghost,’ he said, laughing.

‘Not just one. There are dozens of them.’

‘Come on. Don’t be a plonker. There’s nobody here, except you and me.’

‘Can’t you hear the moaning?’

Will stood still, listening for any strange sounds. Crickets chirruped outside. He thought he heard the scurrying of mice but that was nothing out of the ordinary. There were a lot of moths flying around the room though. Attracted by the light, he supposed.

‘I don’t hear anything. Come on, where do you want the duvet, on the floor or on some hay bales?’

‘I can’t do it here. There are people watching.’

Temara’s words hit him like a sledgehammer. His revitalised desire began to ebb, like a slow leak in a tyre. This worried Will more than Temara bleating on about ghosts. He would have gone off like a starter’s gun a few seconds ago. He could see the stars exploding before his eyes. Now, something had changed. With the ebbing of his desire, he became more aware of his surroundings. There was a distinct chill in the air and just maybe that was something fleeting by in his peripheral vision. God, she’s got me going now.

‘What did you see?’ he asked.

‘Warriors, women and children, canoes pulled up on the beach, fighting, men trying to protect their families, people being bludgeoned to death. There’s blood everywhere. The dead are calling out to me in anguish to free them.’

Will reached for Temara to comfort her but she shrugged out of his enclosing arms and flicked them away with surprising strength. He was dumbfounded.

‘They’re talking to me. It’s a babble of pleading and whining. What shall I do?’

‘I don’t know,’ said Will, totally out of his depth and knowing any chance of a shag that night had evaporated into thin air.

‘We must come back with a kaumatua to cleanse the house to free the spirits.’

Will emitted a groan of frustration and bewilderment louder than any of the ghosts heard by Temara.

5

‘Hi Mum,’ said Will, walking straight past to the fridge and taking out a beer. He uncapped it and threw the cap into the bin before slumping down on a kitchen chair.

‘Had a good day’ asked Jacinta.

‘Yeah, I guess so,’ answered Will, looking around and listening for any other sounds in the house. ‘Is Jaimie around?’

‘He and your father are over in the shearing shed. Manu and Ted turned up to do the crutching.’

‘They weren’t due until tomorrow.’

‘They got ahead of schedule somehow.’

‘Well, they hardly need me there. I was hoping to catch you by yourself, anyway. I’ve got something I wanted to bounce off you.’

‘As long as it isn’t too big or hard.’

‘Wha! Oh, ha ha!’

‘Well, what is it?’

‘The other day I took Temara Anich down to the old house to show her around.’ Will stopped, waiting for the expected response from his mother. When she made no comment, he continued. ‘She said there are spirits in the house. She called them wairua.’ Will looked at his mother wondering how she would take this

‘Go on!’

‘I thought she was taking the piss but she was really insistent about it. The last thing I want to do is rubbish her beliefs or anything like that. Anyway, she reckoned there had been big battle with lots of people killed.’

‘Māori believe when a person is killed suddenly their wairua can be caught between this world and the next. These spirits are called kehua. The only way they can be released is through a cleansing ceremony by a tohunga or a kaumatua.’

‘That’s what she was on about. I know the house could do with a clean but cleaning it of spirits sounds pretty way out to me. I don’t want us to become the laughing stock of the community. What do you think about it all?’

‘It isn’t really all that way out, if you believe in such things. Most Māori would understand. I think Temara may be right about the house,’ said Jacinta. She went quiet for a few minutes, as though thinking about something. Will watched her, wondering what it was she was thinking about. When she snapped out of it, she looked at William with a strange look. Was it guilt?

‘Ugh! Sorry! I was just recalling the few times I have been in the house. I can now see that Temara could be right. Look, let’s keep this to ourselves for the minute and I’ll speak to your Uncle Stephen about it. He’s still kept his Māori roots at their marae up at Ngunguru.’

‘Are you going to tell Dad?’

‘Not until I’ve spoken to Stephen, and given it some more thought.’

‘I’m not sure how he would take it.’

‘Your father is not quite as insensitive as you think. He’s read widely on religion and spiritual matters.’

‘Yeah right! He’s kept that quiet.’

Will’s mother went quiet. He seemed to have put his foot into it, again. Perhaps, he didn’t know his father as well as he thought.

‘Did Temara say anything else that I might be able to pass on to Stephen.’

‘Yeah. She said that many of the wairua were wounded and maimed.’

‘Could she see them, then?’

‘Yeah, I think so. She was pretty freaked out.’

‘Okay, leave it with me, for now.’

‘Thanks Mum.’

‘By the way, does your father know about you and Temara?’

‘There’s nothing to tell yet. We’ve only been going out for three weeks.’

‘Do you think it might get serious?’

‘Who knows?’

His mother’s gaze fell on him. A smile crept across her face and Will found the scrutiny unsettling.

‘Well, we don’t need to tell him just yet. He’s still hoping you’ll find a girl from one of the Scottish settler families.’

‘Christ! That’s ridiculous. I know he’s proud of his ancestry but the Scots came here a hundred and fifty years ago. We’re all New Zealanders now, not Scots, or Irish, or Poms, or anything else. People are going to say he’s a racist, if he goes around saying stuff like that.’

‘I know! I’ve lived with it a lot longer than you but it has nothing to do with racism. To him it’s about heritage. He has nothing against other races. It’s just that if you get serious about your relationship with Temara, it might be better if you leave it to me to break it to him.’

‘Well, what about you and Dad? You don’t have any Scottish ancestry. He can hardly say anything about Temara, when he did the same thing.’

Jacinta allowed herself a wistful smile.

‘You’re right. I’ll remind him of the day he went chasing after a dusky maiden when I tell him you are going out with Temara.’

‘Thanks Mum.’

Their eyes met and when Jacinta smiled it transformed her face, giving a glimpse of her younger self. In that instant, she looked a lot like Temara. Perhaps it was true what they said. He had heard of girls unconsciously seeking partners looking like their fathers. Had he unconsciously found someone like his mother?

‘I’m not so old that I don’t remember what it was like at your age.’

‘I know, Mum.’

6

Jacinta turned in from the road to see a strange was car parked beside the house. It appeared to be two-toned in grey and lemon but she quickly realised the grey was just road splatter and dust. A woman was sitting in the driver's seat. Thoughts of evangelical missionaries ran through Jacinta's head but then they didn't go round in cars, as a general rule. An insurance agent was always a possibility but they were usually men. As Jacinta got out of her car, the other woman got out of hers. They were about the same age. The woman was part-Māori, like herself. She was wearing a full length black dress and a pair of white and pink sneakers. The one didn't go with the other. Jacinta assumed she used the sneakers for driving. At the sight of Jacinta, her face positively beamed.

'You must be Jacinta.'

'That's right,' replied Jacinta, as she retrieved her groceries from the back seat.

'I'm Hana Anich, Temara's mum.'

'Oh, Hi! Nice to meet you.'

'Can I give you a hand with the groceries?'

‘No, that’s okay.’

‘I had some time to spare, so I thought I may as well take a chance and call in.’

‘I’m glad you did. I have been meaning to contact you too. Come on in and have a cup of tea.’

Jacinta juggled a couple of armfuls of groceries while opening the screen door to the porch. She backed her way through the doorway, clutching the bags of groceries while Hana, who was following, grabbed the door. Jacinta put the bags down on the floor of the porch to pull open the door to the kitchen and slid a wedge under it.

‘Excuse me for a minute. I’m busting to have a pee.’

‘I’ll put the kettle on.’

When Jacinta came back into the kitchen, the kettle was just starting to boil. She took two cups from the cupboard and placed them on the bench, before turning to the pantry to get some tea.

Jacinta poured the hot water into the cups before going to the pantry to take out a Tupperware container full of biscuits. She placed this in the centre of the table and both women sat down.

‘I take it from your surname that there is Ngati Tarara blood somewhere.’

‘My husband’s grandfather was a Dally and his grandmother Ngāpuhi. I’m Te Aupouri.’

‘Yeah, well as you have probably worked out, I’m also Ngati Tarara. My grandfather on my mother’s side was a Dally named Mattie Ilich. He married my grandmother, Rena from the Ngati Wai.’

‘What about your father’s side of the family?’

‘That’s even more complicated. My great-great-grandfather was an English sailor by the name of Nicholas Shaw. He married a Ngāpuhi woman named Puihi. They had lots of children, one of whom was my great grandfather, Ben Shaw. He married a widow named Louise Cox and they had a single son named Martin. Martin married my grandmother, Riripeti from Te Arawa. As you probably know, a lot of Te Arawa worked in Northland on the gumfields at the time. Their son was John Hemi Shaw, my father. He married Mum, Miriama who was Ngati Wai. Miriama’s dad was Mate Illich.’

‘We have a quite lot in common then. I’ve heard there’s a woman up north trying to put together a tour to Dalmatia. I’m not in a position to be able to afford anything like that but I thought you might be interested.’

Jacinta looked at Hana trying to discern if this was an oblique way of finding out how wealthy they were.

‘It sounds interesting but there’s no way I can go traipsing off over there. We’re in the middle of shearing and then it’ll be lambing. There are always a million and one things to do around here. It’s not as if I could afford it, either; not with the present low prices for beef and wool. We’re really just keeping our heads above water.’

‘Yeah, well join the club. I just thought you might like to know.’

‘Thanks for letting me know. You never know, we might win Lotto or something, eh.’

‘Yeah, and pigs might fly, eh? Heh, Heh!’

‘Your husband isn’t the Graham Sutherland who played for the Northland Taniwhas, is he?’

‘You’ve got a good memory. Yes, he is.’

‘I remember him playing for the Otamatea Senior Reserve team. I had a cousin playing for them at the time.’

‘Is that right? What was his name?’

‘Matua Reid.’

‘I’ll ask Graham if he remembers him.’

‘He was called the ‘*Kaiwaka Kid*,’ back then, wasn’t he?’

‘The papers called him that.’

‘Pretty cool, eh?’ We all thought he would be an All Black back then.’

‘Gray made it to the All Black trials, only to be carried off the field after twenty minutes with a knee injury. He wasn’t able to run for nine months after that. He missed the rest of that season and was unfit to play the next. He never did get his old form back after that.’

‘Was that when you met?’

‘Yeah, there was a club dance at the Tikipunga Rugby Club. I was with my friend, Marie when he came hobbling across the dance floor to ask for a dance. Of course, I knew who he was. I was blown away that he might ask little old me from Whareora. I’ll never forget how he struggled around the dance floor with his leg all bandaged up and stiff. I took pity on him after the first dance and suggested we stop for a drink. That’s when we went out on the deck and talked about ourselves. I remember it all as though it was yesterday; talking about my family and its Ngati Tarara roots and him talking about his family with its Scottish connections. After that, he used to drive up to Whareora every Saturday to take me out to the coast.’

‘What did your Mum and Dad think of you going out with a Scot?’

‘Dad thought Gray was wonderful, being a rugby rep and all. Mum just wanted me to be happy and let our relationship take whatever path it was going to

take. My brother, Stephen called him '*Spider*' because looked all arms and legs. Round about then Gray's mother was diagnosed with breast cancer. She had had it for a while without knowing, so it was all over within six months. Gray's father, Lachie took her death hard. He set up a Family Trust to administer the farm and then retired to Waipu. After that, everything seemed to fall into place for us as though it was meant to be. Gray took over the running of the farm and the run-off further out on the peninsula that used to belong to his grandfather. It was too small to be commercially viable by itself but served as a useful run-off for Lachie's farm. As soon as Gray took over the farm he proposed to me. Not a bad catch for a little part-Māori girl, eh! The rest is history really.

'Does his knee injury still affect him?'

'He gets arthritis in his knee during cold weather but most of the time it's okay.'

'You don't have any problems, having such different backgrounds, I mean?'

Jacinta looked at Hana, wondering whether to tell her all her family secrets or not. She had only just met Hana but there was something about her that struck a chord with Jacinta. She had never had a lot of female friends in the area, so decided to take the plunge and take Hana into her confidence.

'That's something I have often asked myself. I guess we are a lot different. After all, he's tall and gangly and I'm short. He has pale freckly Scottish skin and I'm a blend of Mediterranean olive and Māori colouring. His hair is ginger and mine is black. His eyes are blue and mine are brown. We couldn't be more different, if we tried. It never was a matter of our physical attributes, though we must have appreciated each other's in our own way. It was more a meeting of the minds. We just think the same about most things and get on so well.'

‘Forgive me, I’m not trying to pry, tell me to butt out if I get too nosey but I thought that you would be Catholic, being Tarara and all?’

‘I was brought up as a Catholic. Now I guess I’m what’s called a lapsed Catholic. It wasn’t easy marrying into a Presbyterian family. My Dad thought Gray would convert when we became engaged. When Gray told him there was no way he was going to convert, I was given the ultimatum by both Dad and our priest. Either he converted, or I would be cast out of the family. I couldn’t believe it at the time. I was pretty scared of being disowned but nothing much can deflect a girl in love. We married in a Presbyterian church and I had nothing to do with my family for a long time. It hurt. Relations have only been renewed since Dad died a couple of years ago.’

‘You must have been lonely?’

‘Yeah, I was. I moved away from where I had been brought up. I had no friends down here and had to fit in with Gray’s family. Gray was good to me though. I’m sure he shielded me from his family quite a bit. Once the boys came on the scene, I had plenty to keep busy with and the wounds faded into the background but never really went away. The only thing that riled me was Gray rabbiting on about his whakapapa. It was fair enough that he could trace his ancestors back to the murky depths of the Highlands but I mean they were hardly rangatira were they? They were just crofters, fisherman and part-time warriors, no better or worse than my Māori side. I guess the thing that bugged me was that he could pinpoint a particular place on the planet where his people came from. I had no idea where I came from. I could say a bit of me came from here and a bit came from there but with Māori, English, Dally and probably a bit of Irish blood in me, I had an identity problem.’

‘You wouldn’t be the only one there.’

‘Perhaps, the only way to really know who I am is to write down my whakapapa and add it to the Sutherlands.’

‘Well then girl, that’s what you have to do then.’

‘I guess so. I owe it to the boys to put all that in order, I suppose.’

‘Have you missed your Māori side of things?’ asked Hana.

‘I did initially but Gray was always very supportive of me keeping my Māori heritage. I suppose he felt the loss of his own language. Scottish Gaelic only lasted a couple of generations here before it withered and died. I don’t need to tell you Māori almost went the same way.’

‘Even now they reckon the number of speakers is still falling.’

Jacinta reached across the table and held Hana’s hands in hers. She hadn’t had a heart to heart with another woman for years. ‘Thanks Hana. It’s not often I have anyone to talk to like this.’

‘You come and visit us sometime. Tame and I just live on the other side of Kaiwaka on the Mangawhai Road.’

‘I thought you lived in Wellsford.’

‘Temara works in the National Bank in Wellsford. Tame and I have lived in Kaiwaka for over twenty years now. Our house is starting to look as worn as me.’

‘I know what you mean. This house belonged to Gray’s father. We’ve been in it for twenty-five years now.’

‘Yeah, well the reason I came over was to meet you and to ask you if you thought that William was ready for a relationship.’

‘Hah! That’s a million dollar question. Will has always been a bit of a firebrand, always charging bull at a gate at everything. I must say though, he seems to be taking his time with this relationship. Perhaps, this is serious but I would still

like him to have a few more years under his belt before he got married. I know he spoke to Gray recently about the farm and whether it would be passed on to him. Apparently he became quite agitated when Gray told him he wasn't ready to retire. He went off in a huff. Now what does that tell you?'

'Aue! I think that must have been as a result of the talk he had with Tame. Tame asked him what his prospects were. He was only joshing him, putting on the father of the girl routine.'

'Perhaps it is serious.'

'Well, it's comforting to know. I just don't want Temara to be let down.'

'Young people have to find their own way and suffer a few knocks in the process.'

'I know that but if they do get serious it would be nice to try and smooth the path for them a little.'

'Let's just see what happens. If we push it too much they'll only blame us if it all turns sour.'

'You're right. Let nature take its course, as they say. I hear you have two other sons?'

'Yes, Will's our eldest. There's also Andy and Jaimie. Andy's studying architecture down at Auckland now. We only see him during the holidays and on the odd long weekend.'

'Do you miss him?'

'I dunno. I've got used to not having him around, I guess.'

'What about Jaimie?'

‘He’s still at high school. He looks just like Gray with the same lop-sided grin, except on poor Jaimie it looks slightly maniacal, as though he might be plotting to murder you and planning to enjoy the event at the same time.’

‘My God, you make him sound terrible.’

‘It’s just a look he has sometimes.’

‘I would like to meet them sometime. Oh, look at the time; I guess it’s time I got going.’

‘Yeah, I’d better get my A into G as well. The shearing gang will be expecting their lunch soon. I have enjoyed our little chat.’

‘It’s been lovely to meet you. I’ll pop in sometime, when you are not working.’

‘I have Wednesday afternoons off.’

‘Fine. Which house are you?’

‘There’s a group of poplars on the road on the left about two kilometres past the school.’

‘I know them. There’s a drive down off the road isn’t there.’

‘Yes, that’s the one.’

After Hana left, Jacinta prepared a batch of scones and pikelets and filled two tea-urns. She took the pile of sandwiches she had prepared before breakfast, and placed these on the tray, with the teapots, crockery, milk jug, sugar bowl and teaspoons. When she had everything ready, she covered the food with a tea towel and carried it across to the shearing shed. Inside, it was a hive of activity, resonating with the buzz of the electric shears, the sound of ewes being dragged across the floor on their backs, the skittering sound of shorn ewes making their escapes down the ramps

and the short gruff commands from one man to another. The sweet smell of lanolin from the fleeces pervaded the air. The men all looked up as she entered the shed. There were six shearers in the gang, three of whom were Māori men. These gave Jacinta big smiles of recognition of one of their own when she walked in. The roustie was a young Māori boy aged about sixteen. A girl, looking like his younger sister, was busy sweeping the floor and collecting the skirtings and other loose bits of fleece. An aged Māori woman tossed each fleece onto the sorting table, before expertly trimming any loose pieces from the edges. An older man then classified each fleece before it was folded, rolled and placed inside the bale inside the bag-press. Gray was standing by the press watching the fleeces mount up. After each shearer finished his ewe and gave it a helping shove down the ramp, he hung up his shears and straightened up before walking across to have lunch. Often, the shearing gang would be composed of a single Māori family. Nowadays, that was becoming rarer, and it was more common to find mixed gangs. Jacinta liked being around a gang at work. She enjoyed listening to their repartee. When they had all stopped to have lunch and she had poured them all their tea, Jacinta walked across the floor to help Gray sew up another bale still in the bag-press.

‘I’m okay. You go and talk to the gang. I know you miss that sort of thing,’ said Gray.

‘Are you sure?’

‘Yeah, Hon, I’m fine. I’ve really got bugger all to do, anyway. Leave me with a little dignity’

Jacinta went back to the shearing gang sitting around the lunch table and picked up a tea-urn to refill everyone’s cup.

‘Everything going okay?’ she asked.

‘Yeah, pretty good, eh?’ replied the mother and apparent boss of the crew.

‘Whereabouts do you all come from then?’ asked Jacinta.

It was the mother who replied, possibly sensing Jacinta’s wish to become part of their world, however briefly.

‘We come from Okaihau. I’ll introduce everyone. I’m Ngaire Cooper. This is my brother-in-law, Pita Thompson and these are my boys, Hemi, Eruera and Maaka.’ Jacinta leaned forward to shake hands. Each in turn each gave her a hearty ‘Giddyay’ The sons were too bashful to shake hands with the boss’s wife and held back a little until their mother gave them a nod and the eye. Jacinta was taken aback a little by this reticence to have anything to do with Pākeha, after all she was only a Pākeha’s wife. It didn’t mean she was one.

‘This little scallywag is my grandson, Buddy and this is my granddaughter, Crystal. Both are Hemi’s kids.’

Jacinta could almost feel the childrens’ squirming not to have to shake hands and just gave each a friendly smile, before saying, ‘Hi!’ She then turned to the three Pākeha shearers. One of them leaned across the table and introduced himself.

‘Giddyay, I’m Jack Vaughan.’

‘How are you?’

‘Pretty good after those pikelets. These two jokers are Simon Carter and Murray Crump.’

‘It’s good to have you all here. It’s a shame wool prices aren’t doing better.’

‘Yeah, well everyone’s feeling the pinch. Perhaps you need to grow some Vicuna. I hear they are getting good prices for their fleeces.’

‘Hah! You’ll need to talk to Gray over there about that.’

‘Well, said Ngaire, ‘we can’t sit on our bums all day like them city fellas, eh?
It’s time to get back to work.’

While the granddaughter was still eating her lunch, Jacinta took the
opportunity to pick up the broom and sweep the floor, before the shearers brought in
the first ewes of the afternoon.

7

Will was having trouble keeping his eyes open. The whole family had all been up early once again with the lambing. All the early mornings and long days were starting to take their toll. Usually, he looked forward to training but tonight it had taken an effort of will to come at all. With the car park full he was forced to park on the grass verge with the Charger's bonnet hanging precariously out over a clay bank. As he got out of the car something hard hit him on the back of the head. He rode forward with the blow, dropping into a crouch before springing back and turning to face his assailant. His team mate Tamati Shepherd grinned back at him.

'Hey, bro, ya s'posed to catch it, not head it.'

'Jeez Tamati, if you do that too much more you might find your ball stuffed somewhere the sun don't shine.'

'Oogh, I should be scared, the big strong man has spoken.'

'Always the joker, aren't you?'

'Life's too short to get serious about things.'

'Come on, ya silly bastard, we're late.'

Tamati retrieved his ball and kicked it ahead of him through the metalled car park and over the grass bank. They were met by coach, Bill McManus, dressed in an Adidas track suit with a whistle hanging around his neck. There were pictures of him in the club house when he was about their age. The photos must have been taken during the sixties and early seventies. That meant Bill was in his forties now. He had been a strapping young guy then with a glint in his eye, which said he was ready to take anyone on. Now the glint had faded to a dull reflection of his own mortality. Over the years he had developed a stoop, making him appear shorter than he was. He had also put on weight but not too much for a guy his age. For all that, he wasn't a bad bloke, just an old fella trying to hang onto a fragment of his youth.

'Where have you girls been? Practice started at five thirty.'

'Sorry, we'll be ready in a minute or so.'

'Well, hurry it up.'

Will and Tamati jogged across to the changing rooms where they were enveloped by a miasma of smells. They threw their bags on the bench seat and pulled out their gear. Both men changed into the practice gear as fast as they could, all the time breathing in the foul combination of stale clothes, sweaty jock straps, body odour, liniment and body functions of generations of players before them. Mechanical ventilation was what it needed but the club couldn't afford the capital cost, or the maintenance. They were both doing up their boot laces when Tamati spoke again.

'I hear that you're going out with Temara Anich.'

'What's it to you?'

'Just interested.'

'How come you know her?'

‘She’s a cuzzie of sorts.’

‘Oh yeah. She’s never mentioned it.’

‘Jeez, you know what we’re like. Cuzzies all over the place.’

‘Right. So what sort of cousin is she to you then?’

‘Gee, I dunno, a third cousin or something like that. Her grandmother was my Dad’s cousin.’

‘Hardly a cousin at all then.’

‘Ya can’t say that. She’s still a cuzz, bro.’

‘Okay, come on; coach will have us running around the field all night if we don’t hurry up.’

It was a cool night. The players formed silhouettes against the harsh glare of the floodlights. Vapour rose into the air from their breathing. Golden auras covered their heads and shoulders and penumbral shadows radiated out from their feet making the whole scene look surreal. The dull thud of boot to ball caused Will to turn and watch a ball climb upward on its trajectory past the floodlights. It reached the apex of its flight in total darkness before descending again through the blaze of the lights. To reach your goal when there was no one to witness it was something that haunted Will. It was another reason he needed Temara, a fellow traveller, to celebrate his success, one day. The kicker ran to retrieve the ball and then ran back towards them. When he passed through a patch of light, Will recognised him as Scottie Matheson, their fullback. Everyone was dressed in different practice jerseys making a patchwork montage of colours and stripes. In this twilight world the colours became various shades of grey. Bill McManus stood on the sideline trying to count heads and see who was there and who wasn’t. There were always two or three

each week that missed training. It was one of the handicaps of running a country team.

‘Right then, I want the forwards to do ten circuits while the backs grab a couple of balls and practice passing up and down the field.’

There was a groan from the forwards as they split away muttering as usual that the backs always had it easy. Tamati grabbed a ball and passed it to Will who passed it on.

‘What do you do to get a bit of money together around here?’ asked Will, as he took in the ball back again from Tamati.

‘Oh, a bit of this and a bit of that, eh, heh heh,’ replied Tamati.

‘No seriously, I need to get some serious dosh together.’

‘Well, the easy way is to grow a bit of weed and flog it off. Pretty easy money, though it takes a while to get your first return.’

‘Nah, I could never do that. My old man would blow his boiler if he knew I was using the farm to grow pot,’

‘Then don’t tell him.’

The returning ball hit Will in the chest and rebounded in front of him. The line broke down and came to a stop as Will picked up the ball and sheepishly passed it on.

The whistle meant the first stage of their training had ended and they jogged back towards the coach. The forwards were sent over to train on the scrum machine while the backs were drilled in set manoeuvres for Saturday’s game.

After practice, Will hung back as the others trudged off the field towards the changing rooms. Bill was busy collecting practice balls and putting them in a net bag.

‘Can I have a word,’ said Will.

‘Sure, is it about the practice?’

‘Nah, it’s sort of personal. I was hoping you might give me some pointers.’

‘Ah! Well why don’t you come around to my place in half an hour or so. We can discuss it over a beer.’

‘Sounds good to me. See you then.’

Since his wife died of breast cancer ten years ago Bill had lived alone. He lived in a kitset home he moved onto a section in Moir Road. On several occasions Will and some of the other members of the team had been out fishing around the Hen and Chicks with Bill in his aluminium fizz-boat. The headlights of the Charger lit up the property as Will pulled into the driveway. The lawn was manicured like a bowling green with the edges to the driveway and paths neatly trimmed. His fizz boat was parked on its trailer by the side of the house. Some oystercatchers called to each other overhead as he climbed out of the car and walked up the steps to the door. The door swung open as soon as he pressed the bell as if Bill had been waiting behind the door. It was the first time Will had been inside the house. On the fishing trips they always met at the launching ramp. An orange and brown wall-to-wall Axminster spread out before him. The colour of the carpet and the faded prints in dark stained wooden frames on the embossed wallpapered walls said all there was to say about the age of the house. Despite that, everything was clean and tidy. Two tall cans of

cold beer had been placed on the chocolate coloured tile top of the occasional table in the lounge.

‘Take a seat, Will. It’s not often I have company.’

‘Thanks Bill.’

Bill picked up his can and took a leisurely drink from it waiting for Will to make the first move. Will took his cue and started the conversation.

‘I’m having a spot of bother at the moment and need an older head to give me some advice.’

‘Why not talk to your parents?’

‘They’re part of the problem really. You see, I’m going out with a girl and the other day I went around to her house when her parents home. Anyway to cut to the chase, her old man began asking me what my future prospects might be. I think he was doing it just to give me a hard time but it made me realise they weren’t that great.’

‘In what way?’

‘Well, I’m twenty three and I’ve been working on my old man’s farm since leaving school. I always considered myself pretty handy around the farm and was expecting to take over the farm when the time came.’

‘I guess your problem is when that time might be?’

‘Is it that obvious?’

‘Look, I see a lot of boys like you around. You aren’t the first by any stretch of the imagination.’

‘Well, what would be your advice?’

‘It’s not up to me but I can give you some options, I suppose. How old is your father, by the way?’

‘Forty-three.’

‘That makes him a year older than me. I can’t see him retiring for a while.

My recommendation is you look at doing something else in the meantime.’

‘Like what?’

‘There’s always professional rugby.’

‘You don’t think I’m good enough for that, do you?’

‘Maybe not in New Zealand but there is a lot of clubs in the UK that would be keen to have you for a season. You would get a place to live and a job while you were there.’

‘It could be worth thinking about, I suppose. What else?’

‘Well, you could do a course at a technical institute or a farm course at Lincoln or Massey.’

‘Nah, I can’t see myself doing that. School bored me shitless.’

‘Christ, you don’t have a lot of ambition, do you? That only leaves labouring, truck driving or commercial fishing. You can always find work in them.’

‘I’ll give it some thought and talk to Temara about it.’

‘Suit yourself. I still think you need to talk to your parents first.’

‘Mum’s okay to talk to but Dad’s hard going.’

‘It seems to me you are not giving him much of a chance. I’m sure he’ll be more than ready to talk about it if you would give him the opportunity.’

‘Maybe.’

‘There’s no maybe about it. It’s you who doesn’t want to talk to him.’

Will looked up at Bill and once more the eyes of an older man bored into him. He felt his worth as a human being was being weighed up in these situations.

‘Yeah, well maybe you’re right. Thanks for the beer.’

‘Let us know how you get on.’

8

Jacinta smiled as Jaimie rushed out to climb into the back seat of the Charger. He wouldn't want to miss any of the action. Will was driving Andy back to his flat in Auckland after one of his rare spells at home. Ever since he was a kid and seen '*The Dukes of Hazzard*' on TV Will had wanted a Valiant Charger. His not getting around to painting the Charger like the General Lee was more due to his lack of money than to any maturing in his personality.

Gray, dressed in his wet weather gear and gumboots, was siphoning petrol from a 200-litre drum into his quad bike in the implement shed behind the Charger. He took one hand off the siphon tube to lean down and scratch his ankle. Something was aggravating the skin on his legs. Just that morning Jacinta had to change their sheets due to the blood on them from his constant scratching. Perhaps, it was those new woollen socks she had bought him; though he'd worn woollen socks most of his life. Perhaps he should see a doctor about it but she knew it was useless saying anything along those lines. Gray never went to the doctor.

The Charger burst into life with a roar and sped up the drive with the car's air-horn trumpeting '*Diddle dum dum, diddle diddle dum dum.*' After stopping at the

gate, it disappeared in a cloud of dust over the rose just as the quad bike burst into life and Gray drove it out of the yard with the dogs cavorting alongside.

A few minutes later, Jacinta made a tour of the house looking through the windows to make sure Gray was well gone before sitting down on the stool by the telephone in the kitchen. She set her diary down beside the phone and adjusted her reading glasses to read the number before pressing the buttons to dial. Stephen answered her call.

‘Hi Stephen, its Jacinta.’

‘Hey Girl, long time no hear, how are you?’

‘I’m fine,’ replied Jacinta, wondering why she could never call him Tipene, his adopted Māori version of his given name. ‘I’m so pleased we have made up, at last.’

‘All that stuff is under the bridge now. We’ve all become older and wiser, as they say.’

‘Thanks, anyway. Why I am calling is that I need your expertise in things Māori.’

‘I’m your man, Sis. What’s the problem?’

‘Do you remember the old house down by the beach on our farm that Gray’s grandfather built?’

‘I’ve never seen it for myself but I’ve heard you talk about it.’

‘Well, it’s an old house with a wrap around veranda on three sides and a steep double gable roof. It’s abandoned now.’

‘I’ve got the picture. What about it?’

‘Well, Will took a Tarara girl down there the other night but from what I understand he didn’t get what he wanted because she saw spirits.’

‘Hah! The young dog. Must be that Māori blood in him, eh? Heh heh!’

‘Yeah, you’re probably right. Well, anyway she told Will the spirits spoke to her about a battle there and how many of the spirits were caught between the two worlds. Will reckons they asked Temara to release them. From what I remember Gran Rena telling us, only a tohunga or a rangatira can do that, is that right?’

‘Nah, any kaumatua can do that.’

‘What do you think? Should we have the place cleansed, or not?’

‘We’ll need to check that out first.’

‘What do you propose?’

‘A friend of mine is a kaumatua over at Horahora. I’ll ask him to come over and take a look. If he agrees then we can arrange a blessing.’

‘That’s a whakanoa, isn’t it?’

‘Yeah, it removes the tapu and frees things that have become tapu. If a person is killed his wairua automatically becomes tapu. Trapped spirits like the kehua can be freed by the ceremony. Hey girl, you need to come back and get to know your own heritage. Bring the boys as well. Young Wiremu needs to be reminded of his responsibilities.’

‘I should but it’s not easy to get the time.’

‘That’s not much of an excuse, you know. I tell you what! I’ll make you a bargain. If I organise the whakanoa to remove your kehua then I would like you and your family come up to stay on the marae for a weekend. How does that sound?’

‘I’ll ask Gray and the boys.’

‘Good, I’ll give you a call when I’ve tee’d up Mattie and arranged a time for our visit.’

‘Okay, thanks for that. It’ll be a good chance for the boys to experience their Māori heritage. It’ll make a change from hearing about their Scottish ancestors all the time.’

‘That’s the girl. About time they learned where they came from.’

‘I know. It’s just they don’t seem to be interested in all that stuff. I feel each of them will come to their own realisation about their Māori heritage when the time comes.’

‘Yeah, well it can be a big help getting scholarships to Uni.’

Jacinta sensed Tipene was about to get onto one of his hobby horses with regard to iwi. It was time to divert him.

‘How are Hiria and the children these days?’

‘Yeah, Hiria’s good. She’s still working at the Council. Naida’s still down in Auckland training to be a teacher. She really enjoys that. Aroha and young Niko are still at Kamo High. Neither knows what they want to do yet. It’s been a while since you’ve seen them, isn’t it.’

His comment gave Jacinta a twinge of conscience. She hadn’t made time to see any of them since her Dad’s tangi.

‘You’re right. If we don’t see you at the whakanoa, I’ll make certain we come up to see you soon.’

‘Yeah, that would be sweet, Sis.’

‘Okay, keep in touch.’

‘You too.’

Jacinta replaced the telephone and stood staring at it for some time. Bloody Hell!

Why did she always feel guilty whenever she talked about her Māori side? Still, she should keep in touch more. She would have to make more of an effort.

9

Graham and the boys would be docking the new born lambs all day, so Jacinta knew she had the house to herself. She lifted a bundle of shopping bags out of the boot and turned towards the house, the plastic handles biting into her fingers. With her free hand she pulled open the screen door just as the phone rang. When she reached it and picked up the receiver it was to hear Stephen on the line.

‘Hey, Sis. You doing aerobics or something?’

‘Oh! Hi, Steven. No, I just rushed in through the back door when I heard the phone.’

‘It’s Tipene these days.’

‘Sorry, it’s hard to change the name I’ve always known.’

‘Yeah, well I’d appreciate it if you tried. I rang to tell you I’ve found out something that might explain Temara’s kehua.’

‘Oh, what’s that?’

‘Well, there was a battle down your way between the Ngāpuhi and the Ngati Whatua in February of 1825. There had been a battle before that back in 1807 or thereabouts further up north when the Ngāpuhi used muskets for the first time against

the Ngati Whatua. They thought they had the drop on the Ngati Whatua but didn't allow for the time it took to reload a musket. After the first fusillade, the Ngati Whatua counter attacked and knocked the hell out of them in hand to hand combat. As you can imagine the Ngāpuhi were pretty pissed about this and swore utu against the Ngati Whatua. Eighteen years later Hongi Hika led a big fleet of waka taua down to Mangawhai. It's said that he had five hundred warriors with him, so you can imagine how many canoes it took to carry them all. Anyway, they hauled the canoes overland to the Kaipara and attacked the Ngati Whatua.'

Jacinta was distracted by the sound of a car pulling up outside causing her to look out the window. She recognised it as belonging to Alistair Fairbrother, the local AMP agent.

'Sorry, Tipene, I've got a visitor. Can you hang on for a minute and I'll get rid of him?'

'Sure Sis.'

Jacinta put down the phone and went out to greet the insurance agent. He called in about every six weeks. She gave him ten points for trying but he was the last person she wanted to see just now.

'Morning, Mrs Sutherland. I was hoping to catch Graham. Is he around?'

'They're all over in the shearing shed docking lambs. Do you know the way?'

'Yes, that's fine.'

'Good, I've got someone on the phone otherwise I would take you over.'

'It's no bother.'

'Thank you,' said Jacinta, turning back to the house.

'Are you there, Tipene?'

'Yeah, where was I?'

‘You were talking about a battle near here.’

‘That’s right. There were two actually. The first occurred at a place called Te Ika-a-Ranganui. I’m told that’s pretty much where Kaiwaka now stands. Some of the Ngati Whatua tried to escape by canoe down the Otamatea River but were trapped by waka taua blocking their path. All they could do was to go ashore in an attempt to flee through the bush, or make a last stand. Now perhaps all this took place where your old house stands. It would be an obvious place to land with its little beach.’

‘It all sounds plausible, doesn’t it?’

‘Yeah, I reckon.’

‘That’s not the end of the story though. After the battle, the Ngati Whatua retreated to their Pa at Marohemo. They thought they would be pretty safe there but just in case, their chief, Tuwhare brought all their canoes into Arapaoa Bay in case they had to flee again. The siege was called the Battle of Puke Tapu. Anyway, the palisades were breached and Tuwhare and his people were forced to flee to their canoes, only to find they had already been captured. They were then forced to take off through the bush to Whakapirau, where they were slaughtered. The bodies were left to rot along the shoreline. That’s how Whakapirau got its name. It means stinking place.’

‘There must be kehua all along the shore, not just down at the house.’

‘They reckon there were over a thousand slain.’

‘That means the dead are all Ngati Whatua then?’

‘Not all but mostly, I guess.’

‘Shouldn’t elders from Ngati Whatua to perform the whakanoa?’

‘I’ve spoken to Mattie about that and he says it doesn’t matter who performs the blessing.’

‘Is he Ngati Wai?’

‘Yeah, that and Ngāpuhi.’

‘I sort of feel the Ngati Whatua should be represented.’

‘I’ll see what can be arranged. Now, you remember our deal?’

‘Yeah, go on!’

‘There’s a Hui on our marae in Ngunguru next month. Representatives from the Māori Affairs are coming to discuss building residential accommodation for our elders. We’re calling all of the hapu of the Ngati-Taka to attend. I don’t need to remind you that you and your sons are part of the hapu through our mother.’

‘Okay, I’ll talk to Gray and the boys and try to talk them into coming.’

‘It’s an important occasion for the hapu.’

‘I will. Is there anything we can do in the meantime?’

‘What do you mean?’

‘I mean for the kehua.’

‘Well, they say the Dead always need food.’

‘Why?’

‘I don’t know. It’s something I remember our Olds saying once. It can’t do any harm, can it?’

‘No, I don’t suppose so. What do you suggest?’

‘What do you think I am? A nutritionist or something!’

‘Of course not, I just wondered what I should put out for them.’

‘Try some loaves of bread. If the kehua don’t eat it then at least it will provide a meal for the mice and the birds.’

‘I thought you of all people would show more concern.’

‘They’ve all been dead a long time now.’

10

It was now high tide with a gentle westerly breeze on the river, ruffling the water and causing small waves to break along the beach. A motley collection of small craft in the river bobbed about on their moorings accompanied by an occasional groan and squeak from anchor chains rubbing against their guides. Tipene closed his eyes and breathed in the smell of the harbour and of the sea. Across the water the rolling green hills of the farm rose above the shoreline of the river. Where slumping had occurred, patches of white limestone or yellow clay scarred the green swathe. Pohutukawa trees and flax bushes lined the headlands. The beach formed a crescent between two of the headlands. Graham had planted native trees along the shoreline bluffs and fenced them off. Trust the Pākehā, who did so much to destroy the forests during the last century now to become so ardent in trying to restore it. It gave him hope for his people, even so. The boat was now in the water and the others were summoning Tipene to get aboard.

His feet crunched over the red shingle, sea worn glass from broken beer bottles, shells and seaweed that formed the narrow beach. There weren't a lot of beaches left on the Kaipara now. The steady march of mangroves had silted up the

harbour and covered most of the old strands. Mattie helped him aboard and he sat on the central thwart looking forward as Albie started the motor. The motor burst into life filling the still estuary with unwelcome sound and polluting the air with a cloud of petrol fumes. Albie kept the revs low as the boat cruised across the river.

‘Take her up the river first so we can see the lay of the land,’ said Tipene.

The bow turned upstream and they cruised along the shoreline past the old pohutukawa trees with their boughs stretching out over the water. A rope swing hung from one. Tipene smiled as he remembered swinging out and dropping into the welcoming water on a swing like that as a child. Flax bushes splattered the faces of the cliffs. The muddy bays between the headlands were now filled with mangroves. A lone heron rose in languid flight ahead of them as they came round a headland. The river ahead of them split into many tributaries lined with mangroves.

‘Plenty of places to hide,’ said Tipene, more to himself than to anyone in particular.

‘Is that far enough?’ asked Albie.

‘Yeah, that’ll do,’ replied Tipene.’ The boat performed a slow arc through the waters leaving a silver wake behind. A fish jumped a couple of metres away creating a circle of ripples to radiate out from where it had jumped. The tide was just starting to ebb and with the added impetus they now cruised faster downstream. Albie headed the boat in towards the strand. The bow rode up on the stones and shell with a soft crunch and Albie leapt over the stern to hold the boat steady for Mattie and Tipene to get out. Jacinta and her family were standing in front of the old house, which was exactly as Jacinta had described.

Now was the time for the blessing. He climbed over the gunwale and assumed the manner and mana of an elder. As they were about to move forward together, they were halted by the plaintive cry of a woman, yet unseen.

‘Aue, aue, aue!’

Tipene had not expected a karanga. A young woman walked out into the open and began chanting a song of welcome.

‘Haere Mai (*Welcome*),

Te manuhiri e (*Visitor*),

Kua tae mai koe (*You have arrived*),

Ki te tautoko e (*To give support*)

Ha-ere Mai! (*Welcome!*),

Tena ra koe e hoa (*You are here friend*),

Ka nui te koa (*Great is the happiness*),

Te kitenga i a koe (*At seeing you*)

Mauria mai te aroha (*Bring love in these troubled times*),

Me nga aitua e (*We are all weeping*),

Kia tangihia e tatau (*That the Dead may be satisfied*)

Kia ea ai nga mate (*That the dead may be satisfied*)

Ha-ere Mai! (*Welcome!*),

E manaaki ne e (*You have bestowed prestige on us*),

Matou I a koe (*We say to you*),

No reira kia ora (*One again good health*)

Ha-ere Mai! (*Welcome!*),

When the karanga ended, the girl walked towards the three men. Jacinta was also coming forward with a Māori woman he did not know, Graham and the boys in a tight group. They knew the elders had no kai whakautu to chant a karanga in response. Old Nana must have trained her well, eh! As the two parties stopped to face each other, Graham stepped forward to shake hands with each man in turn and welcome them. Mattie took his hand and drew him forward into a hongī. That set the precedent and everyone came forward to greet the Māori contingent. With the hongis completed the three elders walked up from the beach and over the grassy bank onto the flat area in front of the old house. From what Tipene knew, Graham's forefather had purchased the property legally and was a God-fearing man who had treated Māori and Pākehā alike. Tipene respected his memory for that. If only all Pākehā were as honest. They reached the balcony at the front of the house and mounted the steps. At the open doorway to the house the elders stopped and turned to face the sun. Everyone else had followed them up the rise and they too stopped. Mattie, the kaumatua from Horahora, put down a kete and extracted a kumara tuber, which he held up. From his throat he emitted a chant, which sent shivers down the spines of those in attendance. The three elders then walked into the house, while the others remained outside. The elders continued chanting as they moved from room to room. One splashed water from a drink bottle around each room. They returned to the veranda and carried on around the veranda before stopping at the point they had started.

Mattie leaned on his carved walking stick and nodded to Tipene who looked drained by the experience.

‘It is done,’ said Tipene. ‘Hine-nui-Te-Po has taken the kehua into her embrace. It is she who will guide them through the underworld Te Po, and on to the portal at Te Rerenga Wairua and over the sea to their final resting place in Hawaiki-nui.’

They all stood around after the ceremony, each to their own thoughts. Jacinta held Temara in her arms as the younger woman openly wept. Graham and the boys stood uneasily to one side. Tipene was pleased to see the boys had treated the wakened with the reverence it was due. Graham stepped forward to shake hands with the men once again.

‘Thank you once again. The ladies have prepared a meal up at the farmhouse and we’d be pleased if you would come back with us to share it with us. We could double you up on the back of the farm bikes but that is not very dignified. Perhaps the best way is for you to motor your dinghy around to The Landing and we can drive you back to the house from there.’

‘The Landing it is then,’ replied Tipene.

‘Right, we’ll meet you down there,’ said Graham.

Back at the farmhouse the men arranged themselves around the living room with the three elders sitting on the sofa, Graham settling into his well worn armchair, Will leaning against the door jamb and Jaimie perched on the arm of the other armchair. There was a pregnant silence at first as each party took stock of the other. Jacinta retreated to the kitchen to help Temara and the other Māori woman serve up the meal. Tipene took in the faded pictures on the wall. They were well known, the one with the castle on the promontory poking out into the lake and the other of the magnificent stag standing on a mountain top. ‘*Monarch of the Glen*’- that was the

name. He couldn't remember the name of the castle by the lake. It must have some significance for the family, he supposed. Then again, he had to admit he did not know a helluva lot about Scottish clans and all that. Perhaps he should, after all he expected Pākeha to know about Māori culture. But hey, he wasn't living in Scotland, they were living in Aotearoa.

The only books in the room were stacked in a bookcase by the door next to Will. It included the usual collection of dog-eared novels by Alistair McLean and Hammond Innes and some Reader's Digest Condensed Books. It looked as though none had been moved for twenty or thirty years. It was a while since Tipene had seen Will and Jaimie up close. There was more than a hint of Māori blood in Will's swarthy skin and stocky body. He'd make a good warrior for any chief. Not much of that in Jaimie though. He looked like old Porritt's son, Geordie, with his red hair and freckly skin. Not a helluva lot of condition on him. He was still gangly like a new borne lamb. Tipene smiled at Jaimie's growing discomfort at being in a room full of men and how he now gravitated back out to the kitchen. The only recent publications in the room were some farming magazines on the coffee table. Any other reading material must have been in their bedrooms. Jacinta looked well on it; farming life seemed to suit her. Poor old Graham looked anything but healthy. He was flushed in the face and he had red blotches on his face and arms. On the way back to the house there was a moment when Graham had coughed a deep seated cough, which went on and on. It had obviously caused him some pain. If there was anything wrong, it was hardly his place to say anything. The awkward silence had gone on long enough.

'Thanks for the karanga,' said Tipene. 'None of us expected that.'

'Yeah, Temara organised that.'

'I presume Temara is Will's girl, then?'

‘Yeah,’ said Graham. ‘Will and Temara have been going out with each other for a while now.’

‘Could be a rejoining of the Ngati Tarara strains, eh!’

‘Wha’, oh, I suppose so. You can never tell, can you?’

‘I don’t suppose you’re very impressed with the market at the moment,’ ventured Tipene. Graham looked across at Tipene, clearly surprised.

‘You follow the markets?’

‘A bit. You can’t help it when you live in the country and our Iwi run several farms up and down the coast.’

‘Is that right? I didn’t know the Iwi had much land.’

‘No thanks to you Pākehā but we’ve managed to cobble together some properties over the years.’

‘I’m glad to hear it. What have you got?’

‘Cattle mostly.’

‘Well, I guess you’re lucky then. Beef prices are pretty good right now.’

Jacinta and Hana brought out the roast meal on two platters while Temara brought out the vegetables. These were placed on the dining table. Jacinta disappeared again to retrieve the condiments, mint and apple sauces.

‘Right, gentlemen, lunch is served,’ she said, on her return.

The women stood in a line, while the men stood up and shuffled hesitantly towards the table.

‘Mattie, you take the head of the table; Albie and Tipene can sit either side. Hana, Temara and Will, you can sit on that side of the table, while Jaimie and I will sit this side. Graham, you can be at the end.’

Once everyone was seated Jacinta suggested Mattie might like to bless the food. This was done and then everyone helped themselves.

‘Hey, this looks a pretty good spread, Sis,’ said Tipene, passing the bowl of roast potato and kumara on to Mattie and Albie, who had until now sat silently taking everything in. They seldom ventured into Pākeha houses and were probably feeling out of place. Having the Māori woman sitting next to Albie had been an inspired piece of planning. Trust Jacinta to have divined their unease.

The first course was eaten in silence and it was only after they had been served a dessert of apple pie and ice-cream that everyone relaxed.

‘Do you think the whakanoa was enough?’ asked Jacinta.

‘How do you mean?’ replied Tipene.’

‘I mean there seems to have been so many people killed around the coast here.’

‘We found out there was a ceremony at Whakapirau and another at Marohemo years back. Your property was overlooked because no one was aware anything happened here.’

‘I’d hate to think there might be other kehua trapped in this world.’

‘If there are, they’ll be discovered when the time is right.’

‘I hope so, replied Jacinta. ‘I can’t tell you how much better I feel about it now.’

‘It’s something we do a lot,’ replied Tipene, eyeing William who was standing with his back to the wall. ‘What did you think of it, Will?’

‘Uh, oh I thought it was very moving.’

‘We could teach you about it if you came back to the marae.’

‘That would be good but I find it hard enough to fit everything into a day as it is.’

‘That’s because you Pākeha fellas don’t get your priorities right.’

‘How’s that,’ asked Graham. Tipene turned to look at Graham, weighing in his mind whether Graham was in a confrontational mood or not.

‘There’s a saying the best things in life are free. Māori believe that. Chasing the almighty dollar all the time doesn’t make you happy.’

‘I’ll tell my bank manager that when he wants his mortgage payment,’ said Graham.

‘It’s a philosophy of life I’m talking about.’

‘I know. You’re our guests and we are grateful you came today. I’m fully aware of the differences in how we each think.’

‘Yeah, well one day we may all think the same way.’

‘Let’s hope so.’

‘I’ve heard the Irish have a saying about immigration. They say if a person stays in Ireland long enough he becomes an Irishman. I’d like to think the same applies here. The longer you stay in Aotearoa the more Māori customs you will absorb until one day you wake up thinking like a Māori.’

‘Well, I’d say that’s happening,’ said Will.

‘That’s why Winnie is so hot about immigration issues.’

Graham let out a groan at the mention of the controversial politician.

‘Do we have to bring him into it?’

‘Hey! He’s part of our Iwi. We all think the same on these issues.’

‘Fair enough but don’t you think we need more people to keep the economy going?’

‘No! That’s the problem with you Pākeha fellas. Everything is measured in terms of the dollar. There’s a helluva lot more to life than the dollar.’

At this point Hana brought in a coffee jug and a pot of tea and placed them on the dining table before joining the conversation.

‘There’s tea and coffee. Help yourselves.’

‘Thanks, we haven’t met,’ said Tipene.

‘Oh, sorry, I’m Hana, Temara’s mum.

‘Do you live locally?’

‘Yeah, we live over on the Mangawhai Road.’

‘We appreciate your helping Jacinta and Graham out.’

‘Hey, it’s our way. When I heard some kaumatua were coming I felt obliged to help.’

‘Good on you girl. Where’re you from?’

‘Oh my people are from all over the place.’

‘Yeah but where specifically?’

‘My people are Ngāpuhi, Te Aupouri, Ngati Tarara and Ngati Kahu.’

‘Aue! You were right when you said all over the place! Which iwi do you feel you mostly belong to?’

‘My family’s Ngati Kahu.’

‘Right. Good on you. I was just explaining to Graham and the boys here our philosophy on what constitutes a good life.’

‘Ah! I can guess this might be new to some.’

‘Not really,’ said Graham. We enjoy what nature offers us here as much as you do. It’s just we still have to make a living on a day to day basis and that involves making money unfortunately.’

‘I guess it’s just a matter of emphasis, eh?’

‘Pretty much,’ agreed Graham.

After they had finished their meal, Tipene and the other elders rose to thank their hosts. At the door, Tipene pulled Jacinta to one side.

‘I’m sorry if I got on my hobby horse a bit. I didn’t mean to.’

‘No problem. Gray and I understand where you are coming from. In a way, this is the Sutherland family marae. As such, anything can be aired with impunity, isn’t that right?’

‘That’s a good way of looking at it.’

‘Anyway we’re all family. It’s only right we should be able to express our views freely to each other. It’s been good.’

Jacinta took her brother in her arms. He responded by putting his arms around her.

She was in good shape. Farming life must suit her.

‘Bye Sis. Don’t forget to come and visit.’

11

Will took in the empty beer bottle on the table in front of the TV, the watermarks on its polished wood and the morning's newspaper scattered all over the floor. Bits of brown fluff and dried mud from his father's work socks formed a trail across the worn carpet to the kitchen. Wednesday nights were always like this. This was the night his mother took Jaimie up to Waipu for his bagpipe lessons. Will was amazed how quickly the house became a tip site but then he wasn't any tidier than his old man. He walked across to the kitchen where his father was clattering around.

'What's for dinner?' he asked.

'Your mother left us a lasagne in the oven. Are you ready to eat?'

'Yeah, I'm starving.'

'Okay, grab a plate.'

They loaded their plates and set them down on the dining table. A heavy silence descended as the pair ate their meal. When Graham finished, he sat back in his chair looking replete.

'Things are pretty bad over in Czechoslovakia,' he said.

‘Is that right? Do you want some more lasagne?’ said Will, getting up to walk back into the kitchen to cut another piece.

‘No, I’m okay.’

Will helped himself to another helping. A little bout of conscience made him leave enough for his mother and Jaimie when they got home. He re-entered the dining room and sat down again.

‘It hardly affects us, does it?’ said Will.

‘What’s that?’

‘What’s happening in Europe.’

‘It’s always hard to say how something like that might affect us.’

‘Nah! It’s time we forgot Europe. It’s had its day in the sun and so has America. Asia’s where it’s at now. You just have to look at the numbers to see where our future lies.’

‘That’s all very well but can the Asian countries afford to pay the prices we’ve come to expect?’

‘I dunno. Time will tell, I suppose.’

‘Well I hope their force of numbers doesn’t end up controlling the commodity market.’

‘That’s always the risk of a free market, isn’t it?’

‘Yeah, you might be right. Prices couldn’t get much lower than they are right now. I’ve been thinking we may soon have to look at ways of supplementing our income.’

‘Have you got something in mind?’

‘Actually, I was thinking of dollying up the old house and renting it out.’

Will was speechless. This had never been discussed before. For all that, doing up the old house could solve a few of his own problems.

‘It’ll need a fair bit of work.’

‘The way I see it, we can do it in stages. Everything should be tax deductible, of course.’

‘It’ll need access from the road.’

‘I’ve pretty well sorted out the route for that. You know the little hollow up on the road where the big willow is?’

‘Yeah.’

‘Well, I was thinking of putting in the main gate there and bringing the road down that gully.’

‘There’s still a big drop off at the end of that gully.’

‘I was proposing to wind the drive around the side of the hill at that point.’

‘It’ll need a fair bit of earthworks.’

‘Probably but I was thinking of just fencing it for now and leaving the earthworks till later.’

‘We should be able to put in the fences between lambing and topdressing.’

‘Nah, we don’t want to do it ourselves. I’ll get Bob Hanna in. He’s got all the gear and can do it in half the time.’

Will had been trying for several months to get enough money together to buy an engagement ring but what little money he earned frittered away on this and that until once again he ended up with two thirds of five eighths of fuck all.

‘If time wasn’t a consideration, I’d like to have a go at it myself.’

‘You’ve never done a big length of fencing like that. It’s a lot of work.’

‘So? I can learn.’

‘You’ve no money. How would you buy the materials?’

Will stared at his father, as if he had spoken a universal truth. Under his father’s scrutiny, it took him some time to come up with a suitable response.

‘What if I did it on a labour only basis.’

‘It could work but you don’t know anything about building a fence.’

‘I’ve repaired plenty of fences around the place. I’m sure if you gave me some advice I could manage.’

‘Okay, I’ll tell you what I’ll do. I’ll get a quote from Bob Hanna. You put together your own quote. I want you to itemise all of the material needed, your labour, any subcontracting costs, sundries, profit and overheads. I can use the schedule in your quote to pay you as you go, say a top up at the end of each week. How does that sound?’

‘Okay,’ said Will.

‘I’ll need to meet Hana on the site and show him the proposed route. You can come along too, so that both of you get the same information. I’m not guaranteeing I’ll give you the job. You’ll have to quote for the work the same way Bob Hanna does. A contractor takes the risk that he can do it for a fixed price and make a bit of profit along the way. The corollary of that is if things go wrong and he has added costs, he has to wear those costs. With a fixed quote you can’t pass on any extra costs to your client. Do you understand that?’

‘Yeah, I understand all of that.’

‘I hope so. It’s no fun to working for dwindling returns, believe me!’

Graham leaned on the top wire of the fence chewing a stem of paspallum while Will paced back and forth along the verge looking for ripe blackberries. Spring

was in the air with skylarks trilling, the lone willow now cloaked in new leaf and the stand of cabbage trees down the gully in full bloom.

‘The grass growth is good this year, observed Graham.

Will didn’t bother answering, thinking his old man was just talking to himself as usual. The growl of tyres on gravel made them both look up. A battered looking Landcruiser was approaching them, throwing up a cloud of dust behind it.

‘That’s Bob - bang on time as usual,’ said Will’s father, as if Bob came along every day. Will couldn’t remember ever having met this bloke before. The Landcruiser slowed as it approached the two men standing by the side of the road. It veered off the road and drove right over the patch of blackberries Will had just been in. When it stopped the door opened and sandy haired man jumped out. He was about five foot eight in height and wore a red singlet and a pair of tattered denim shorts. His face broke into a smile, as though he was meeting a long lost friend. Both men greeted each other with a strong shake of the hand, a ‘giddy Bob’ and a ‘giddy Graham.’ Each asked about wives and family before Will’s old man stopped his diatribe to introduce Will.

Bob Hanna seemed to take a step back as he looked at Will.

‘Blow me down. The last time I saw you, you were only knee high to a grasshopper. How are you William?’

‘I’m fine.’

‘I should think so. Isn’t it a cracker of a day?’

‘Certainly is,’ agreed Graham. ‘This is where we thought we would start a new farm race. We’ll convert it later into a proper driveway down to the old house my father used to live in.’

‘Righto! You lead the way.’

The three men scrambled over the fence, one at a time, by the strainer post and stood looking down the small gully.

‘I was thinking of a five metre wide race going straight down the middle of this gully,’ said Graham.

They walked down to the end of the gully to survey the drop off. Hanna stopped to look at the options for proceeding from there.

‘I was thinking of winding it along the side of the hill over there until we came out on that little spur over there. From there we can get down to the flats by the house.’

‘We’ll need to get in a bulldozer to bench out the side of the hill,’ said Hanna. ‘The cross slope is too steep to allow any fill batters until we get nearer the flats. That means we’ll have to cut about an eight metre wide cut with near vertical cuts into the side of the hill. It’ll need continual maintenance to keep it open during wet weather.’

The men looked at the hill trying to envisage how high the cut batters would be.

‘Do you see any alternatives?’ asked Graham.

‘If it was me, I’d cut the top of the ridge and use the material to build up a fill batter from here around the slope until you reached that spur you were talking about.’

‘Jeeze, we’re not building a bloody motorway. Our budget won’t stand that!’ exclaimed Graham. ‘How about we walk down to the house and see if we can come up with another route.’

‘Sure, I’ve scheduled to spend the next couple of hours here anyway.’

Down at the house the three men looked back up towards the road for alternative routes.

‘What about bringing a road in around the harbour from The Landing,’ ventured Will, who now had an intimate knowledge of that route.

‘It could be worth a shot,’ said Graham. ‘Let’s walk around and have a look.’

‘Those spurs running down to the water’s edge could be a problem,’ said Graham, as they surveyed the route from the top of the first hill.

‘Why not cut inland a bit and wind up the side of the hill there to cross over the ends of the spurs where they join the hillside,’ offered Hanna.

‘It could work. The grade should be all right,’ agreed Graham.

‘All right, let’s walk through to the road and see if there are any other problems,’ said Graham.

At the road edge a cut was needed for the driveway but only a couple of metres in height.

‘Right, that looks like it’ll work. That was a good call, Will. Can you give us a quote to put in a race through there then, Bob?’

‘I’ll bring one of the boys back to survey it. I should be able to give you a quote in a week. Is that all right?’

‘Yeah, that’ll be great. Thanks Bob.’

‘No problems.’

Tradesmen’s vans and trucks crammed every bit of spare space in front of the pub. Inside the main bar a bass speaker boomed subsonic pulses across the room. A four piece band, composed of a lead guitar, rhythm guitar, drummer and a female vocalist was in full cry in the corner. The vocalist looked pretty tasty in her clingy little black number, showing off a pair of slender and finely shaped legs. Will was forced to look away when he heard his name called out. He looked to his left to see

Tamati waving at him. He was seated with two other guys Will hadn't seen before. One was Māori and the other Pākeha. The Māori guy had closely cropped hair and tattoos extending from inside his shirt collar up to under his ears. His brown eyes looked at Will questioningly. The Pākeha bloke wore a muscle shirt and jeans. His elbows rested on the table supporting his biceps, a bull neck and a bald head. A silver crucifix hung from one ear and he had intertwined dragons tattooed up his forearms. Tamati rose from his seat as Will approached. He looked just the same as usual, with a grin from ear to ear, the eternal joker. They shook hands and Tamati introduced his mates.

'Hey Will, good to see ya. This here is Hemi and this is Brian.'

Will shook hands with them and sank down onto the burgundy coloured vinyl bench seat. Brian seemed a wholly inappropriate name for the great bear of a man sitting opposite him but he decided to not voice his opinion.

'Are you guys on Tamati's fencing crew?' asked Will.

'Nah. We're drivers.'

'Oh yeah, who for?'

'We drive stock trucks for Quinn's'

'That could be handy,' said Will.

'Will's old man has a farm over on Oneriro road,' said Tamati, when the others looked at Will quizzically.

'Are you fellas okay for drinks. I'm goin' to get myself a handle.'

'We're sweet for now. Next time.'

Will got up and joined the crowd at the bar. The guy in front turned around in a narrow pirouette, balancing four drinks high in the air. Will stepped aside to let him out before deftly sliding into the gap to reach the counter.

‘What’re you having then,’ asked the barman.

‘A Speights, thanks.’

‘Coming up.’

Will supped from the glass as he walked back to the others and then sank down on the seat, careful not to spill a precious drop of his drink.

‘Is it okay if we talk shop?’

‘Go ahead,’ replied Tamati.

‘I’ve got this fencing job on my old man’s farm and need someone to come in and drill the post holes. I figured since you work part time on a fencing crew you might be able to help us out find someone to do it.’

‘Have you tried hiring a posthole borer?’ asked Brian.

‘Nah! You need something heavier. The substrate to the whole peninsula is limestone. It’s hard as!’

‘How much topsoil is there?’

‘Bugger all. I reckon we’ll need to drill through a good 500 mill of limestone for each pole.’

‘I know a guy with a little track mounted drill that could manage that,’ said Tamati.

‘Could you hire it off him?’

‘I’ll talk to him and see. How many holes do you reckon there are?’

‘Two hundred and twelve.’

‘Bloody hell, at twenty holes a day, that’ll take’

‘Eleven days,’ said Hemi with a grin.

‘Whatever it takes,’ said Will.

‘Okay, I suppose you want a price to drill the holes. Is that right?’

‘That’s it.’

‘I’ll let you know. What’s your phone number?’

When Will had given him his number he finished his drink and stood up.

‘Thanks for that. I’ll be getting along. See ya.’

A fortnight later, his father had accepted Will’s quote and he had begun to dig by hand the holes for the strainer posts and angles by hand. Sweat glistened from Will’s body and face as he drove the spade once more into the hard ground. Each time he plunged the trenching spade into the broken limestone, shock waves surged up his arm. Bit by bit, he broke out the crumbly material and enlarged the hole. The dozen holes needed took two days of hard labour to dig. He pulled out the spade and let it fall onto the grass before bending down to scoop out the bottom of the last hole. His mother’s gardening trowel proved to be the most appropriate tool for this. With a final grunt he threw out the last dregs from the bottom of the hole and straightened up. Just then, the sun went behind a cloud sending a slight shiver through him as the temperature dropped. The sun was now well down in the west. About five o’clock already. Just time to bring in the poles and stand them in the holes. Then he’d head back to the house for a nice cold one.

It was another four days before he could get Tamati in to drill the rest of the holes. In the meantime, Will concreted in the strainer and angle posts and rigged the guide wires and spaced the posts. At each post position he marked the grass with dazzle paint. Tamati arrived in a truck with ‘*Pivac Contractors*’ emblazoned on the doors. He leapt out and unclipped the steel ramps from the side of the tray and fixed these to the back of the tray before driving the track mounted drilling rig down onto

the ground. Will had made a temporary Taranaki gate through the fence. Tamati drove the machine through this and Will wired up the gate behind him.

‘Boy you owe me big time over this,’ said Tamati.

‘How’s that?’

‘I’ve had to go on leave from Quinn’s and old Franko’s a bit pissed we need this machine for so long. He thought we only wanted it for a weekend job.’

A twinge of doubt struck Will about Tamati. Surely he wasn’t trying one on already. Christ they had agreed a price and he’d only just got here.

‘Well, the sooner we get the job done the sooner he can have it back.’

‘Right, lead on, where do you want the first hole?’

‘I’ve marked all the hole positions.’

‘That’s good. Can you give us a hand to get down the auger and we’ll get stuck into it.’

‘Yeah sure,’ replied Will, wondering what he was paying him for.

Three hours later they were still only drilling the fourth hole.

‘I thought you said you would drill twenty holes a day?’ said Will.

Tamati looked up at him and lifted his ear muffs.

‘What’d you say?’

‘I said you told me in the pub you could drill twenty holes a day. At this rate you’ll only drill eight or nine.’

‘Yeah, well I hadn’t counted on this limestone being this hard. We can do twenty or so a day easily on clay.’

‘I told you in the pub it was hard limestone. If we had clay I’d have driven the posts myself.’

‘I don’t recall you mentioning that. Where does it say that in the contract?’

‘I told you at the pub. Everyone knows we have limestone out here and anyway, what’s all this about a contract. We had a gentleman’s agreement. We shook hands on it.’

Tamati looked at Will and grinned. It wasn’t a grin of amusement, more of having got the better of someone and that someone was Will.

‘What can you do to speed up the drilling process?’

‘Not a lot. It takes what it takes.’

‘Can’t you sharpen the auger or something?’

‘I’ll take it back to Pivac’s tonight and see what they can do.’

‘Good, I’d like that. We’ll be here forever at this rate.’

The next morning there was no sign of Tamati. Will paced up and down the fence lines, with his shovel, bricklayer’s level and a ram over his shoulder, looking at his handiwork of the previous day with a critical eye. Where the hell was he? Christ, I’m paying good money to the bloody good-for-nothing. He threw his tools down next to the next post requiring ramming and shovelled the loose spoil back into the hole around the post before picking up the level to check it for plumb. After waggling the post back and forward until it was plumb, he traded the level for the rounded headed ram. He then thumped away at the loose earth. Thud, thud thud. With each successive thud, his frustrations died away and his headache grew. Will was on his fifth post of the morning when he heard a toot from up at the road. He muttered under his breath before picking up his tools and walking to the next post. Bugged if he was going to help Tamati! He was being paid to do a job and he could bloody well do it himself!’

Will stopped what he was doing to look up when he heard Tamati stomping down. Tamati was carrying the auger on his shoulder. Will knew how heavy it was. He should have helped him with it but something kept him rooted to the spot.

‘What’s the story then,’ asked Will.

Tamati rolled his shoulder and let the auger fall to the ground. When it hit, it bounced slightly and then threatened to roll down the hill. It spun around in a half circle before Will managed to stop it with his boot.

‘It’s been sharpened but Franko reckons this limestone will blunt it in no time. These augers cost 2,000 bucks a piece.’

‘What’s that got to do with me? I’m paying for the use of the machine.’

‘Franko wants another 500 dollars to cover the wear and tear to his gear.’

Will’s lips set in a tight line and the vein in his neck stood out. As his grip on the ram tightened, his knuckles turned white. ‘No bloody way! We agreed a price and that’s it!’

‘My price was for my time only. The cost of hiring the gear is always a reimbursable charge.’

‘No way! You gave me a single quote to do the work. That covered labour and all other charges. If your mate Franko wants to shaft you for the gear, that’s your problem, not mine.’

Tamati’s usual jovial look changed to one of concern. Will’s heart hardened as he looked at Tamati. Christ, the bastard is trying to turn it around and make me feel bad.

‘Let’s see if the sharpened auger will make a difference. I’ll talk to my old man about an extra payment tonight,’ said Will, trying to coax Tamati to start work and not walk off the job.

Tamati shrugged his shoulders, as if he didn't care, and rolled the auger down to the drilling rig where he lifted it into place and slid in the bolt to hold it in place. That day they managed twelve holes, which was a slight improvement.

When Will arrived the next morning he was surprised to see Tamati there before him. He walked up behind him and tapped him on the shoulder. Tamati raised the drill from the hole before turning to face Will and at the same time taking off his ear muffs.

'I've talked to my old man about Franko wanting another five hundred bucks.'

'Yeah, what have you decided then?'

'He agrees with me that you gave me a fixed quote even if it wasn't in writing. A man's word should stand.'

'That's not going to satisfy Franko!'

'I've been thinking of a compromise that might solve the impasse.'

'What's that then?'

'We still have those posts to put in around the house. I thought I could delete them from your contract and I'll drive them. How does that sound?'

'Franko'll be pleased to get his rig back earlier but it doesn't solve the problem of the wear on the drill bit. It's not as if there would be much wear drilling through clay.'

'Well, that's my offer. You talk it over with Franko and get back to me.'

'Brian is a good mate of Franko's.'

Will understood the implicit threat to this statement but continued to eyeball Tamati, not wishing to show any weakness.

‘Yeah, well if Franko wants his machine back we’d better get on with it, I suppose,’ said Tamati.

Will got back on his quad bike with a sense of relief and drove it and the trailer back up to the road to collect the last posts in the pile. A new truckload was due that morning. He stacked the last ten posts on the trailer and took them back down the fence line to where Tamati was drilling.

12

When Graham drove up on his farm bike to see how Will was progressing, Will was ramming earth around a post and Tamati had almost reached the tidal flats, drilling the last few holes.

‘How’re ya goin’, son?’ asked Graham, pulling up alongside.

‘Not as good as we might. We’re over a week behind programme.’

‘Well that doesn’t really matter.’

‘It does to me. My quote was based on so many hours. The longer it takes, the less I earn an hour.’

‘Look, you’ve done well, so far. Would you like me to give you a hand?’

‘That would be great. The new posts are due this morning.’

‘Yeah, I know.’

‘How d’ya know that?’

‘I was in at Wrightsons today talking to the dispatch manager.’

Will gave Graham a quizzical look but he let it pass.

‘It’d save me time if you could lay them out next to the holes.’

‘Okay, I’ll keep a watch out for the truck.’

Graham let go the brake and freewheeled down the slope to watch Tamati for a few moments. Tamati looked up from the auger and nodded his head in acknowledgement. He would need to turn off the machine and remove his ear muffs to have a conversation, so Graham just gave him a wave before engaging gear and turning the throttle to roar back up the hill. He gave Will a wave as he sped past. The race had been flared out to about nine metres wide where it joined the boundary fence. The two metre high bank still had to be dug out where the drive joined the road. Graham tried to envisage what the three metre wide cut with its batters each side would look like. It all looked good. Will seemed to have thought everything through. A cloud of dust in the distance caught Graham's eye and he waited until whatever it was crested the next rise in the road. It was a large truck, painted green. Perfect timing. He steered his bike outside of the post line and got off it to scramble down the side of the bank and stand in the middle of the road. The truck drew to a halt and the driver leaned out of the window.

'Is this the Sutherland's run-off?'

'Indeed it is. Have you a load of fence posts?'

'Yeah, where do you want them?'

'Can you put them on top of the bank there?'

The driver looked to where Graham was pointing before replying, 'We can give it a go.' He reversed the rig back up the road before driving forward again as close to the bottom of the bank as he could. The driver then climbed out the passenger door and swung himself up on the tray to operate the hoist. The hoist arm swung over the posts and the driver climbed across the load to hook on the ends of the slings before climbing back to operate the hoist. The first load of posts lifted off the truck and swung out over the bank before lowering gently to the ground.

‘I’ll climb up and take off the slings,’ said Graham, already half way up the bank. At the top he kicked and rolled the poles out of the way to reach and unhook the slings. He then stood back as the hoist swung back for the next load. It was obvious the hoist couldn’t reach any further and that this load would have to end up on top of the last. As the load came down, Graham climbed over the loose posts to release the sling. The posts from the new load disgorged from the sling like a river in spate. Graham stepped back under the onslaught, only to get his foot caught between some posts and fall backwards. An avalanche of tumbling posts crashed into his legs causing a series of tearing pains to shoot up his legs. It took all of his effort to suppress a cry of pain. He looked down to see his legs half buried under the poles.

‘Are you all right?’ asked the driver.

‘Yeah, I think so. I caught my foot,’ said Graham. ‘Give us a hand to clear away some of these posts.’

Between them they cleared away the posts and the driver helped Graham to his feet. Graham was relieved nothing was broken. His skin was rubbed raw, with red bruising over both legs. Thin plasma seeped out through his skin in places. When he tried to walk he bit his lip as a sharp stabbing pain shot up his leg.

‘You should watch out for that. That *Tanalith* is pretty nasty stuff. I’d get that cleaned up if I were you.’

‘She’ll be right. Just a few grazes really.’

‘I’ll need you to sign for the load.’

‘I don’t think I can climb back down the bank. I’ll have to drive around on my bike. Give us a few minutes.’

‘Right you are then.’

Damn, he thought as he hobbled across to his bike. The idea of a green fracture flashed though his mind but he didn't want to think about that. It was good to sit down on the seat and take the load off his leg. In no time he had driven along the boundary fence to the next gate, out onto the road and back again to the truck. The driver was standing by his cab as he pulled up beside him. He looked straight at Graham's leg before looking him in the eye.

'You took a bit of a pounding there. You sure you're okay?'

'Yeah, I'll be right. Where do I sign?'

The driver gave Graham his clipboard and showed him where to sign. Graham signed it and handed it back to the driver who ripped off the top sheet and handed it back to Graham.

'Right, I'll be off then,' said the driver, swinging himself back up into his cab. The engine fired and the driver put the truck through a three point turn before grinding his way back up the hill. Graham needed to pick up the trailer from Will's bike. As he was driving up the road he decided to go back to the house first and bathe his leg and put some antiseptic cream on it, just in case.

Jacinta didn't like the look of his abrasions at all. She took firm control, firstly bathing his legs in warm water and then putting on an antiseptic ointment before bandaging them up. Graham's protest about the need for bandages was swept aside as she wound them round his legs and clipped the ends together with a couple of alligator clips.

'God, it's only a scrape. Now it looks like I've done something serious.'

'The skins scraped raw. You could get an infection in it.'

'Yeah, I suppose so, thanks love.'

‘Why don’t you stay in and rest for a while?’

‘I promised Will I would give him a hand with the posts.’

Jacinta said nothing to this. It was the first time he had relented in his desire to make Will learn the hard lessons of contracting so she wasn’t going to stop him now. Anyway, once he had an idea in his head she wouldn’t be able to sway him away from what had to be done. He could be pig-headed when he wanted to be.

Graham unloaded the posts for Will within a couple of hours and was glad to return home early. His leg was throbbing like the drums at an Auckland Warriors match. Enough was enough. Back at the farmhouse, he decided a hot bath might be in order. In the bath his leg looked redder than ever. The skin over his leg bones was tissue thin. There was no way he could scrub it without bringing the blood racing to the surface. When he climbed out of the bath, he gently dabbed his leg, instead of rubbing it as he usually did. He put more ointment on the wound and rewound the bandages gently back over, before putting on his bathrobe.

‘How is it?’ asked Jacinta, as soon as he walked out of the bathroom.

‘A bit raw but it’ll come right.’

‘Do you think Will will be late tonight?’

‘No, he should be in about six. Tamati had just finished the drilling when I left. Will had about another dozen posts to place, so he should be well through them by now.’

Two hours later Will’s farm bike drove by the house and into the shed. Jacinta promptly placed the tray of lamb chops under the grill. The vegetables, almost cooked, had been placed on a slow simmer. Will stomped into the kitchen a few minutes later.

‘Hi Mum.’

‘Hi Will. You’ve got time for a shower if you like. Dinner will be ready in twenty minutes.’

‘Okay.’

‘Did you get it all done, son,’ asked Graham.

‘Yeah all done. I must say I’m glad to see the back of Tamati.’

‘I thought you were mates?’

‘Well, you learn a lot about your mates when you go into a business venture, don’t you.’

‘It’s all a learning experience son, take it from me.’

Graham and Jaimie were already seated at the table and Jacinta was putting the food on the table when Will walked back into the room.

‘That feels better. All that thumping was doing in my back. I’ll be glad to get on to the wiring.’

‘Help yourselves,’ said Jacinta, as she took her seat and waited for the men in her life to demolish her cooking.

‘You haven’t forgotten Jaimie and I are going up to Ngunguru on Saturday and won’t be back until Sunday, have you?’

Graham looked up; unsure to whom she was addressing this remark. Was she talking to him or everyone at the table? Was it an address to the male psyche that didn’t take note of anything. There was a hint of the accusative in her statement. A sharp edge to it. He looked up and gave her a beaming smile.

‘No love, we know that,’ he replied.

‘It’s important for me and it will be good for Jaimie. You know I miss my family and the North.’

‘That’s fine. You and Jaimie enjoy yourselves. We’ll be fine, won’t we Will?’

‘Yeah, sure, I’m going out with Temara on Saturday night anyway. Dad’ll have to knock up a meal by himself.’

‘I can manage fine,’ said Graham, a bit miffed at being left alone.

‘Well, I’ve baked an apple pie. You can have that for dessert.’

‘Great!’ said Graham.

‘You can heat it up or have it cold.’

‘We’ll manage, truly,’ said Graham, deciding it was time to deflect Jacinta’s veiled accusation that he could not manage by himself and turned to Will.

‘What did Tamati say when you told him you weren’t going to pay him the extra cash?’

‘He wasn’t too happy about it.’

‘Well you did the right thing. Who did you say owned the drilling rig?’

‘I didn’t but it’s a guy called Franko Pivac.’

‘Never heard of him but I’ll ask around. There’s a good chance he never asked for the extra five hundred dollars at all. I’ll see if I can sort that out with him directly.’

‘Thanks Dad. I don’t like anyone saying I don’t pay my dues.’

‘I can understand that. No man does,’ said Graham.

Will was counting down the number of days needed to finish the fencing. It would take a couple of days at the most to drive the posts around the old house and a

couple of weeks to wire up the fences. That left the battening. The idea of doing all of that himself was a daunting prospect. There were a heck of a lot of battens to staple and the wires needed tensioning at the same time. He had no idea how it would all take. He looked across at his brother draped across the sofa engrossed in a detective drama.

‘Hey Jaimie, do you want to earn some cash?’

‘I’m always open to suggestions.’

‘Do you want to help me batten the new fences?’

‘How much are you offering?’

‘What about brotherly love?’

‘What about it?’

‘Oh, all right. I’ll give you a dollar a batten in place.’

‘Make it five.’

‘Bloody hell! I’m being shafted by my own brother now!’

‘A dollar fifty is my final offer.’

‘Make it two and we’ve got a deal.’

‘Nah, I’ve given you my highest offer already. Take it or leave it.’

Jaimie looked at his brother for a long time, as though deliberating whether to accept or not. He then gave Will a lop-sided grin and got up to go to bed. Will watched him walk down the hall.

Shit! As usual, I’ll have to do it all myself.

13

A sense of foreboding struck Jacinta as she put down the phone. She tossed up whether to ring Gray on his mobile or not to tell him the news but then; she saw he had left it on the kitchen counter. When he arrived for lunch and to listen to the Rural News, he looked tired.

‘They’re really getting stuck in over at the neighbours,’ he said, moulding himself into his favourite armchair.

‘Is that right?’

‘Yeah, there are trucks and earthmoving gear all over the show.’

‘I still think they’re mad. Whoever heard of a winery on the Kaipara?’

‘Apparently some of your Dally mates started one here years ago. Hang on, here’s the news.’

Jacinta decided the news of the oncologist’s appointment could wait until after lunch when his energy levels might have recovered. She kept an eye on him as she sorted the laundry. Once again his hands kept straying down to the region of his socks to scratch at his ankles. He didn’t seem to be able to get comfortable either, constantly changing his position and fidgeting. She finished folding and sorting the

laundry then went into the kitchen to prepare some toasted sandwiches and tea for lunch.

‘Christ, what with the prices, we’ll have to have a roadside stall to sell our lamb soon,’ cried Graham, for her benefit. ‘At least beef prices are still holding’

‘That’s good, lunch is ready. Better wash your hands.’

‘I did when I came in.’

‘You’ve been scratching your leg again.’

‘Have I?’

‘You have, I’ve been watching you.’

When Gray came back from the bathroom Jacinta had their lunch set out on the table and they sat down to eat. As Gray started into his first sandwich Jacinta decided it was time to inform him about the appointment with the oncologist.

‘The nurse from Dr Fisher’s rang this morning.’

‘Oh?’

‘They’ve got your test results back and want you to see a Doctor Prasad.’

‘Who’s he?’

‘An oncologist.’

‘Oh, shit! What did she say about the tests?’

‘Only that they have them. We arranged an appointment for this Friday.’

‘What.....this week? I was going to meet a stock agent then.’

‘Well, this is more important. You’ll have to meet him some other time.’

‘So, I’m not going back to Doctor Fisher then?’

‘Not for this.’

‘Right! It doesn’t good, does it?’

‘Let’s not go jumping to conclusions.’

‘It’s hard not to, isn’t it?’

Graham sat bent over in his chair with his elbows resting on his thighs. He had always been strong physically and now Jacinta could tell his confidence had taken a dent.

‘Perhaps you should have a rest this afternoon.’

‘Yeah, I might do that. I feel pretty crap.’

Friday morning started out with a beautiful blue sky, only to cloud over. Around midday towering black thunderclouds had formed. Jacinta decided she would drive and was surprised when Gray made no objection to this. A huge deluge caught them as they joined the motorway at Orewa. The windscreen wipers smacked back and forth clearing the water from the windscreen long enough to see where they were going before it was again covered in rain and road spray. The rain became heavier the further south they went forcing Jacinta to keep their speed down to about 80k the whole way into town. They left the motorway at Union St and drove along Karangahape Road, named after the priest, left behind by the canoe *‘Takitimu.’* Jacinta had always loved the story how he had followed the canoe by riding on the back of a giant stingray. After crossing Grafton Bridge, Jacinta turned right into Grafton Road. Painted across the wall of the grey building on the corner was the statement: *‘Unemployment isn’t working.’*

‘Nice touch of irony,’ remarked Graham.

Jacinta smiled, glad not all his feelings revolved around the impending appointment. Gray pointed out the building housing the surgeries of both his specialist Doctor Fisher and his new oncologist, Doctor Prasad. Parking was at a

premium in the area and Jacinta drove up and down the street a couple of times before a car pulled out of the car park in front of the building.

The oncologist was running late and his receptionist pointed them to the waiting area, where Jacinta sat down to scan through the usual collection of outdated magazines. Gray rummaged through the magazines and finding nothing to his taste, sat down to stare at the medical posters on the walls. They were still waiting half an hour later and Jacinta could see Gray was becoming more and more anxious as he paced back and forth.

‘Can’t you relax?’

‘No, I can’t.’

‘Well, just try. Take some deep breaths or something. Come and sit next to me.’

When Graham slumped down next to her she took his hand in hers. His hand felt so big. She clutched it tightly as much to help allay his fears as her own. She too had thought his problems were related to the accident with the fence posts. Cancer was not something she had contemplated until the oncologist had been mentioned over the phone. For the last few days she had been as brittle as glass but tried to maintain a composed manner for his sake. God knows what was going on in his head. It all seemed so unfair. He might not grow old enough to see his grandchildren.

At that moment, the door to the surgery opened and there was a murmur of voices before a woman walked past them and out the door. The oncologist then appeared in the door way and looked at them expectantly.

‘Mr Sutherland?’

‘Yes, I’m Graham Sutherland. This is my wife, Jacinta.’

‘Pleased to meet you. Won’t you both come in?’

The wall behind the doctor's desk was covered by a built-in book case, the kind with glass doors covering it to prevent dust settling over the books. To the side of his desk was a bench with a computer and a printer on it. When they sat down the doctor opened a file on the computer before facing them.

'Thank you for coming in at short notice. I thought it best to let you know the results of your tests as soon as possible.'

'What's the score, doc,' asked Gray.

'Well, just to recap, your GP originally saw you when you were complaining about skin rashes and itchiness. When nothing he prescribed did anything to clear up your rashes he referred you to my colleague, Dr Fisher, who is a skin specialist. His notes state that you were sweating a lot and were feeling unduly fatigued just going about your normal farm duties. They also state you were experiencing coughing spells and dizziness. On both occasions he examined you, he detected swollen glands. As a result of your accident with the timber poles, Dr Fisher thought you might have some organophosphate poisoning that may have caused you to contract MCS or Multiple Chemical Sensitivity. The chemicals in these posts could have acted as a trigger. With organophosphate poisoning patients often experience a temporary swelling of their glands. Organophosphate poisoning would also explain your skin rashes and blotches. However, on your second visit, Dr Fisher noted that your glands had become larger, not smaller. This rang alarm bells and more blood tests were then requested. When Doctor Fisher received the blood test results he forwarded them on to me for an opinion. I have now reviewed the case notes from your GP and from Doctor Fisher as well as looked at the results of your blood tests. From this I think you may have NHL or Non-Hodgkin's Lymphoma.'

'That's cancer, isn't it?' asked Gray.

‘Yes, it’s a form of cancer that attacks a person’s lymph system but we don’t want to get ahead of ourselves at this stage. To make sure, we need to take a biopsy from one of your lymph glands.’

‘What’s involved with that?’

‘It is a relatively simple procedure that can be carried out at a day-surgery clinic. There are several of these around the city. You’ll be in and out in less than a couple of hours.’

‘Right.’

‘If you agree, I’ll book you in for next week.’

Graham looked sideways at Jacinta, seeking her approval. Doubt was written all over his face. She knew how he hated the idea of hospitals.

‘It needs to be done,’ she said, once again taking his hand in hers.

‘Okay,’ said Graham, turning back towards Dr Prasad.

‘If the biopsy shows that Graham does have Non-Hodgkin’s disease,’ asked Jacinta, ‘what happens next?’

‘We may have caught this early, so there’s a good chance it can be treated.’ replied Dr Prasad.

‘What’s a good chance?’ asked Graham.

‘If we have caught it early enough there is a 50-50 chance of curing it.’

‘Great!’ uttered Graham. ‘Not brilliant odds are they.’

‘We prefer not to get into the odds game. A large part of getting over cancer is to have the right attitude towards it. If you are determined to survive, then the chances are you will beat it. If you have a negative attitude, you most likely won’t.’

‘Don’t worry on that score. I’m pretty determined when I want to be.’

‘I’m glad to hear it.’

‘Assuming the biopsy shows that Graham has NHL, asked Jacinta, what form does the treatment take?’

‘The usual form of treatment is to use chemotherapy.’

‘Christ! All that stuff where your hair falls out, you mean!’

‘Some patients suffer from hair loss as a result of the treatment but it is usually temporary and their hair grows back after the treatment has been discontinued.’

Jacinta gripped Graham’s hand. She had known of no one who had been through chemotherapy who had survived. They all went through hell, losing their hair, wasting away, sick as dogs, only to die a few months later. She couldn’t voice these thoughts but the idea of him dying so young filled her with dread. How would she cope without him?

‘The treatment we propose has been successful in most cases like yours. You should then live a normal lifespan. There have been recorded cases where the disease returns after a period of remission. In these cases further chemotherapy may not be effective. Should this happen, you may need a bone-marrow transplant. Needless to say, the risks then increase quite dramatically.’

‘By God, you know how to scare the hell out of someone, don’t you Doc? One minute, I thought I was going to die a horrible death and then you tell me I can be cured. If you can cure this thing, I’ll be eternally grateful. Graham turned to Jacinta and winked. She couldn’t believe he was taking this on the chin. Was he handling it better than she?

‘As I said, it is best in these situations to take it a step at a time. We’ll first do a biopsy to check whether you have NHL, or not. When we have the results, I’ll make you another appointment and then we can discuss further treatment.’

‘Okay doc. You make the appointment for the biopsy and let’s get this thing over with.’

Two weeks later, Graham and Jacinta were sitting back in Dr Prasad’s office. The doctor was a good looking man, still youthful in appearance, even though he must be in his late forties or early fifties. His skin, still as smooth as a baby’s, was that beautiful honey-brown Jacinta associated with Bollywood film stars. He had lush black velvety hair and black eyes to die for. He looked up, first at Jacinta to lock eyes for an instant, before looking at his patient. Jacinta wondered what the message was that was passed on to her in that fleeting second.

‘Well, I sorry to have to report that you have Stage 1 NHL. I’m going to start you on your chemotherapy regimen immediately. This involves four drugs, three of which need to be taken intravenously and the fourth as a tablet. I’ll need you to come in once a week for the IV infusion. It takes about half an hour each time. The tablet is to be taken daily.

‘It’s almost Christmas. Do you want me to come in over the break?’ asked Graham.

‘We are closed on the statutory holidays only, so you can come in between Christmas and New Year.’

‘Right.’

‘There may be side effects, such as nausea and diarrhoea as well as hair loss in some patients. I’ve prescribed for you what we believe should be the correct combination of the drugs to start with. I want you to come back in mid-January, so we can monitor any side effects and adjust the dosages, if necessary. I’ll also book you in for a CT scan in January.’

‘Am I starting my IV today or in January?’

‘We’ll start today. If you both go back out to the waiting room I’ll get one of my nurses to set it up. I’ve made out a prescription for your tablets. This is a steroid, so one of the side effects of this is sometimes a slight puffing up of your skin tissue.’

‘I’ll put up with anything so long as you beat this thing. Is there a dispensary around here?’

‘There’s one just down the road in Park Road. It is just around the corner by the bridge.’

‘All right, well, have a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.’

‘Thank you. The same to both of you. If you see my receptionist on the way out, she can pencil you in for an appointment sometime mid January.’

‘Thanks a lot. It’s funny; I should feel bad about having this NHL but just knowing what the problem seems to be a huge relief.’

‘That’s often the way.’

14

After Jacinta's wedding, there had never been any question of her parents or of Tipene's family coming down from Ngunguru for Christmas or of Jacinta going up there. The estrangement from her family had left a hunger in her for her family and for her culture. Instead, she found herself a stranger in a close-knit Pākehā family. With the recent thawing of relations she now resolved to invite Tipene and his family down to join them at the farm for Christmas but this year it was Angus and Margaret's turn at their home in Hahei and there was little she could do about that. She liked Angus and Margaret. They were easy enough to get on with, though Angus could be a bit stuffy at times. Jacinta had always appreciated how they had accepted her into the family from the start.

Jacinta also had huge respect for Angus as a person. He had mana. Angus had joined the army as soon as he was seventeen and after basic training had applied for officer's training school. He passed through Duntroon Military Academy just as the Malayan Emergency broke out. After two years in the jungle in Malaya, he returned home as an instructor in jungle warfare. When the Malaysian Federation was formed and Indonesia tried to snatch East Malaysia to add it to Kalimantan, Angus was sent

over to counter this new Indonesian threat. He retired from the army in 1965 with the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel. Jacinta's boys all regarded Angus with a sense of awe. Naturally, Gray had always been a bit put out by this adulation. There wasn't much a man could do on a farm to prove his courage fighting some dastardly foe, unless the enemy was the tax department or an old ewe with PMT.

The night before their departure, Will put the roof rack on the Charger and loaded it up with surfboards. They started out in the morning as a two car convoy but Jacinta and Graham soon lost sight of the boys near Warkworth. On their arrival at Hahei they found the boys had already gone surfing with their cousins. Will and Andy took great delight in razzing Rod and Alex over their toy boogie boards and their flippers. With the mass exodus of the young ones, the parents were left with the house to themselves. As was his custom, Angus offered the others a wee dram. It might have only been two in the afternoon but no one declined.

'Well, here's to everyone's health,' said Angus raising his glass. The others touched glasses together to celebrate their annual reunion.

'How are things up at the farm?' asked Angus.'

'Much the same,' replied Graham. 'We've decided to put in an access to the old house with a view to doing it up and renting it,' said Graham.

'Good idea. I always thought it was a shame to leave it derelict,' said Angus.

'Will did all of the fencing for the driveway himself.'

'Had he done anything like that before?'

'Not a lot. I figured it would be good experience for him.'

'More likely he was a lot cheaper than Bob Hanna.' put in Jacinta.

‘That’s not right. There wasn’t much between them in the end,’ responded Graham, taking umbrage at the comment. ‘I gave the job to Will so he could learn about contracts and what it meant to work for a fixed price.’

‘Fair enough,’ said Angus. ‘Has he finished it then?’

‘Yes but he’s learned some hard lessons along the way. Like all young blokes he relied on a mate to do some of the work for him. Needless to say his mate tried to rip him off. Then when he asked Jamie to give him a hand, Jamie held out for more money than Will was hoping to pay him. Probably just as well. Things like that have a habit of going sour.’

‘If Will needed a hand why didn’t he get that sharemilker over the road to help him out? He’s always looking for casual work, isn’t he?’

‘God, after that debacle getting his sow in his shed I wouldn’t have anything to do with him. I’ve too much respect for the farm for that. The guy’s a menace to society. I saw him just the other day driving along in his family sedan with a bloody great pig taking up the whole of the back seat. Its head was hanging out the window like a dog’s. I just hope he cleaned the back seat before the family used it again.’

‘Hah! I can just picture it. Wonderful!’ said Angus.

‘Anyway the fencing was a big job and I have to give Will credit for sticking it out,’ said Graham.

‘You could have helped out a bit more when it came to the money,’ said Jacinta. ‘You know he barely came out with any profit; and Tamati is still badgering him for the other five hundred dollars.’

‘He has to learn what life’s all about and anyway that Shepherd chap was just a rogue. I told Will what to do about him.’

‘Yes but it didn’t stop him going around bad mouthing Will about not paying him.’

‘Well, he’ll just have to get used to that sort of thing.’

‘You know why he wanted to do the job in the first place, don’t you?’

‘To earn some money, I suppose.’

‘He did it so he could buy Temara an engagement ring.’

‘Oh! I didn’t know.’

‘Well, you can see now why I think you should give him some more money.’

‘An offer and an acceptance is a legal contract. It can’t be changed just for the sake of it.’

‘You’re a hard man at times, Graham Sutherland.’

‘The whole point of the exercise was for him to learn. We talked about the job after it was finished, going through everything that had happened. I pointed out where the pitfalls in anything like that were. He didn’t need a lot of convincing you must provide a well specified scope of work and to always get your quotes in writing.’

. ‘Oh well, it sounds as though he learned a lesson, all right. Have you and the boys managed to get out fishing much lately.’

‘The boys still set the mullet net down by the old house. It’s been a while since I was out in the boat. I suppose the last time was when the Cruising Club had their fishing competition.’

‘Have they still got that rumpety collection of boats?’

‘Yeah, you could say that, though we can hardly talk. I told you what happened at the fishing competition, didn’t I?’

‘No, I don’t think you did.’

‘Well, the Commodore’s got this launch; it’s about 25-feet in length, carvel hulled and all that. She’s a heavy old girl, built like a brick shithouse really, if you’ll excuse the French. Anyway, she’s a big launch for up there. He used to have a Fordson petrol engine in it but she was underpowered for anything other than cruising. Last summer he had a hankering to take his kids waterskiing, so he took out the old engine and put in a new 150 horsepower diesel. Well, at our last fishing day, we were fishing off the old house in our plywood fourteen footer when up comes the Commodore’s launch, throwing out a great wake. He must have thought we had a special fishing spot so he stopped and anchored alongside us. He never was a patient sort of bloke and will never make a good fisherman. After about quarter of an hour he started his engine and up-anchored. A great burst of black smoke erupted from his exhaust before he opened the throttle. The old girl rode up on her bow and took off only to stop cold. They had only gone a couple of hundred metres after about 200 metres by then. Everyone on board came aft to look over the stern. It turned out his propeller had come clean off the shaft. We had to go tow her back up to Whakapirau with our little five horsepower outboard. He’ll never live the sight of that down. There’s a framed photograph of it up in the clubhouse.’

‘So life’s not too bad up there then?’

‘Well, we could do with better commodity prices but apart from that I wouldn’t swap the life for quids,’ said Graham, looking across at Jacinta. ‘What d’ya reckon love. Life on the farm, I mean?’

‘It’s okay. I certainly couldn’t live in a city,’ said Jacinta.

‘My thoughts exactly,’ said Angus. ‘Hahei suits Margaret and me.’

As they sat there listening to the surf hitting the shore and watching the sun sink lower in the sky, Jacinta realised how much she had missed the sound of waves.

There were no waves of any significance among the estuaries of the Kaipara. Around eight, a cool sea breeze drove Margaret and Jacinta inside while Angus and Gray remained outside to fire up the barbeque. As soon as the sausages were cooking the boys miraculously appeared.

Christmas Day dawned without a cloud in the sky. By mid-morning the temperature was into the mid twenties and it had turned humid. Margaret opened every window and door in the house to try and catch a breeze. At eleven, they opened their presents. Graham had used his visits to the oncologist in Auckland to buy Jacinta a red leather handbag. Inside, he had put a book of short stories by Patricia Grace. Jacinta was surprised at how in tune he was with her inner self. By comparison her present for him, the latest All Black biography seemed pretty lame but he seemed pleased. He wasn't the type of man to put much stock on material things and perhaps, he was more than a little too preoccupied to care. The boys got the usual array of sporting equipment and play station games. After the wrapping paper had been cleared away Jacinta helped Margaret served the roast turkey and vegetables for Christmas dinner. Perspiration was running down their foreheads by the time they finished their first course and Jacinta kept dabbing her head with a paper napkin. It was mutually decided to have a break before they tackled the dessert. One of the boys managed to find a football match on the tele and they sat around the lounge while the boys cast aspersions at the competency of the referee. At half time Margaret and Jacinta served the dessert. The adults then retired to their bedrooms to have a sleep or read a book while the boys competed against each other on video games and play station games. There was plenty of shouting and laughter coming from the living room, enough to keep Jacinta awake at least.

Later in the afternoon, everyone walked across to the school tennis courts for the bi-annual tennis tournament between the families. The adults were happy to let the boys start and Jacinta perched herself in the umpire's chair to deliberate on the game and keep the peace. Each year the boys competed in every endeavour, putting a great deal of family honour on the outcome. Angus and Gray always called from the sidelines encouraging the worst of behaviour from both sides. Margaret and Jacinta regarded their place as conciliators to make sure things didn't get out of hand. Rod and Alex were up six games to three in the third set, each side having taken a set each. Rod delivered one of his smash serves again. Will got to it and smashed it straight at Alex who had no time to get out of the way or get his racquet in place. The ball struck him on the arm raising a red weal. Jacinta called 'deuce.' The next serve was returned by Andy and they began a rally. Andy struck the ball straight towards Alex, whose arm was still stinging. He parried the ball over the net to land midway between Will and Andy. Both of them made lunges towards the ball but both missed.

'Advantage to server.'

For the last service Will stood well back from the base line, expecting another smash serve. Instead, Rod lobbed the ball just over the net. Will ran forward but the ball double bounced in front of him.

'What sort of serve d'ya call that?' he cried.

'A winning serve, I believe,' called Rod.

'Game and Set,' cried Jacinta.

'Is that what they teach you at private schools? To win, any way you can?'

'Something like that. Do you want another game?'

'Nah, this is like prancing around with a pack of ballerinas,' said Will.'

‘It’s usual to shake hands after a match,’ Jacinta reminded them.

Will begrudgingly came up to the net to shake hands with Rod and Alex.

On Boxing Day morning Angus and his boys put on a barbeque breakfast of bacon, tomatoes, eggs and toast. During breakfast, Andy received a text message from a friend wanting to meet up over the holidays. A little while later he announced he and Will were going to head up the coast to Waipu Cove for a spot of serious surfing. No-one missed the inference the surf at Hahei and the surfers there weren’t up to their standards. They all let it go for the sake of harmony of the group. If it had been Jacinta’s family up north, a lot more would have been said on the matter. Jacinta could tell Gray was not happy with their comments, or in their leaving so soon.

‘If you are intent on leaving us, then perhaps you could call in at the farm and feed the dogs,’ said Graham.

‘No problem,’ answered Will.

‘At least that means we can stay for another night,’ said Graham, turning to Angus. ‘I presume that will be all right with you?’

‘No, that’s fine,’ replied Angus.

‘Good,’ said Graham. ‘We can have a leisurely drive back the next afternoon,’ said Graham, smiling at Jacinta.

After Will and Andy left, around midday, everyone was happy to loll around on the beach or on deckchairs at the house reading books. Gray was wearing a pair of faded old slacks instead of shorts. Jacinta had the impression he was embarrassed to show of his legs, which he had rubbed raw over the previous weeks. At least his hair

hadn't started to fall out yet. He certainly made no sign of going for a swim and was content to sit in the shade by the house for the afternoon.

That night Gray shouted everyone out to a restaurant in Whitianga. They trundled down to the Ferry Landing in two cars to catch the passenger ferry across to Whitianga. Restaurants were few and far between in Whitianga and Gray had taken the precaution of booking a table at the seafood restaurant on the corner of the main street. It was just as well he had done so as the town was packed with young people looking for somewhere to eat. After returning to Hahei, Gray and Jacinta took a stroll along the beach after the rest went to bed. There was a full moon and a clear sky. Oystercatchers flew overhead calling to each other with the urgent *pip-pips*. Grey held Jacinta's hand as they walked along with the moonlight on the water. Jacinta sensed Gray was feeling glad to be alive. She certainly was. Just to prove it, she gave his hand a squeeze.

15

The dogs put up a helluva din when the boys got home, straining at their chains, leaping about, barking and wagging their tails. Andy unchained them and took them for a run behind a quad bike while Will cut up a side of hogget for them. The dogs ate this ravenously after Andy bought them back to the kennels. Both Will and Andy filled their water bowls before chaining them up again. The dogs showed their appreciation by licking them and wagging their tails.

‘When is your mate due?’ asked Will

‘He said he would be here in the morning.’

‘What time do you reckon the olds will get back?’

‘Once we offered to look after the dogs, I don’t reckon they’ll be back until tomorrow night.’

‘What’s your mate coming here for anyway?’

‘He said he wanted to see the farm.’

‘Why?’

‘I suppose he’s never been to a farm.’

The next morning, a beige Ford Transit drove through the gate. Andy shot out the door to welcome them while Will continued to watch them through the window. The van pulled to a stop beside the house and the doors opened. The driver was an Islander and the other guy Chinese. Andy had only spoken in the singular about his mate visiting. Even so, they made a pretty incongruous pair. They were also older than Will was expecting. They didn't look much like uni types. If anything, they looked like a couple of religos. That's all he needed! Surely Andy hadn't joined some happy clappy outfit.

His brother seemed to know the driver and shook his hand like an old mate. Perhaps he was the one who texted him. Andy was then introduced to the Chinese chap, so it appeared he had not met him before. An uneasy feeling crept over Will. He wasn't sure why but he wasn't happy with them being at the farm. It was time to find out what was going on. Will got up from the table and walked though to the fly screen door on the porch where he put on his boots, without lacing them up, and walked out to the van.

The visitors looked up as soon as Will came through the door and stood in silence looking at him. Will sensed they were as nervous of him, as he was of them. Andy looked over his shoulder to see what they were looking at.

'Hey guys, you can relax. This is my brother, Will. Will, this is my friend Malosi and his business partner, Leo.'

Will stepped forward and put out his hand. It was enveloped in a great paw and almost crushed by Malosi. 'Hey man!' said Malosi, finishing the sentence with a little Polynesian; 'Heh, Heh, Heh!' Will didn't see there was much to laugh about. He then offered his bruised hand to Leo who accepted it, to find his fine oriental

bones suffering the same fate Will's had recently suffered. Will gave a grim smile while Leo looked as though he could kill him on the spot.

'Are you guys doing architecture as well?' asked Will.

Malosi and Leo burst into laughter and Will's hackles rose. The one thing he didn't like was being made the butt of someone's joke. Even Andy suppressed a smirk. Will didn't miss that either and resolved to get even with him later.

'Me, no I suppose you could say I'm doing economics, eh?' said Malosi, once again ending his sentence with a little, 'Heh, Heh, Heh.' It seemed like everything was a joke to this guy.

'What about you Leo?' asked Will.

'Me, oh I'm doing business studies.' replied Leo. He looked around the group, defying anyone to question this. Will figured out what he meant by that straight away. He was the boss of the operation whatever that was, probably a gang of some sort. Will had quickly discounted the possibility of their being religos. There was a hardness to these guys that was impossible to miss. A bit like the fellas Tamati had in tow at the pub. Maybe they were in one of those Chinese triads he had heard about. Jesus, what the hell had Andy got involved with?

'Will, can you hitch up the calf trailer to one of the farm bikes and bring it out?' asked Andy.

'What for?'

'I've told Malosi and Leo here they can borrow our farm bikes and a calf trailer.'

'Jeezus! Have you asked the old man about this?' whispered Will.

'I wasn't intending to tell him about it.'

‘I’m not happy about this. What guarantee have we we’ll ever see them again?’

‘They’re just taking them down to the end of the peninsular.’

It didn’t take much imagination for Will to figure out they were going to the Bush Reserve. That was all there was down there, apart from farmland. Once that connection was made the next leap of imagination was their using the Reserve for a pot plantation.

‘I’ll see if I can get the calf trailer out. I think it’s at the back of the shed,’ said Will, intentionally loud. He took his time ambling to the shed. He needed time to think. Will knew the trailer was wedged into the corner. He needed an excuse to get Andy by himself. Once inside, he counted to ten before returning to the door opening.

‘Can you give us a hand to pull the tiller out of the way?’

Andy looked perplexed but recovered quickly to give his apologies to his guests and walk towards the shed. As soon as he was inside, Will grabbed him and pulled him out of sight of the others.

‘What the hell have you got us mixed up in?’ demanded Will. ‘These guys are growing weed aren’t they?’

‘Yeah, you know how it is. They grow it and process it. I get to sell it at uni parties and things.’

‘Are they a triad or something like that?’

‘I don’t think so. I didn’t ask if you must know. Sometimes it’s better not to ask things like that.’

‘Jeeze, you’re in this way over your head, aren’t you.’

‘I’m still in control of the situation.’

‘Like hell you are! These guys are heavy stuff.’

There’s no risk, as long as we play along.’

You stupid little shit. If Dad finds out he’ll go mental.’

‘I wasn’t going to tell him. Were you?’

‘Of course not but he’s sure to find out sooner or later.’

‘I can’t chicken out now.’

‘Okay, this is what we’re going to do. After we’ve moved the tiller, you go back out there and tell them I told you our parents are due back about midday and you can’t lend them any of the farm equipment. See if you can buy them off somehow. Ask if you can buy some seed or seedlings off them. Just get rid of them.’

‘All right, keep your shirt on. Lift up the tow bar and push from your end and I’ll push from the other side.’

As soon as the tiller was moved, Will manhandled the trailer out to the door of the shed while Andy walked back to where Malosi and Leo were standing. Leo let out a plume of smoke from the side of his mouth as he watched Andy through narrow eyes. Malosi wore a grin. Will had the uneasy feeling he had heard everything they had said.

‘Change of plan guys. I thought we had the whole day to ourselves but Will has just found out our parents are due back about midday. I’m sorry we’re going to have to make ourselves scarce. They think we’re up north. You’ll have to harvest the crop yourselves.’

‘That’s not what we arranged. We can do it ourselves but we’ll be deducting our time as a legitimate business expense,’ said Leo.’

‘Fair enough. Is there any chance we can buy some seed off you?’

‘How much do you need?’

‘I dunno, maybe enough for a hundred plants.’

‘Okay but no more. We don’t want you and your brother starting up in opposition to us.’

‘No, this is just for us.’

‘All right then. That’ll cost you two hundred.’

‘Okay but I haven’t that sort of money on me at the moment. See me when I get back to Auckland the week after next.’

‘All right but tell your brother to keep his mouth shut about our little operation.’

‘Don’t worry, he knows the scene.’

‘He’d better and the same to you.’

‘I’m a partner in the operation. I’m hardly going to blab about that, am I?’

‘See you don’t.’

Leo walked around the van and hopped into the passenger seat. Malosi stood staring at Andy, trying to stare him down. Malosi was obviously the heavy in the operation. Will hoped they hadn’t made an enemy of him. When Malosi turned, he put out an arm, the one with the tattooed band around it, to give Andy a push on the shoulder. Andy rode the blow and grinned back. It was a sickly looking grin but it served him right.

‘See you in a week or so then.’

Malosi stepped into the driver’s seat and gunned the engine before reversing up the drive at speed. Will came out of the shed to stand next to his younger brother.

‘Let’s lock the shed and get out of here. The sooner I put some distance between me and those dudes the better.’

‘Fine, I’ll go and get my gear and we can go straight away.’

16

The rolling hills formed a washed out landscape of shimmering pale greens and golds. Splodges of dark green here and there made a contrast against these washed out hues. These dabs of deeper colour hinted of a time past, a primeval world of clinging vines, creepers, smooth trunks thrusting upwards from a forest floor of mosses, ferns, saplings and scurrying creatures, while birdsong and the noise of insects filled the air. These were the last remnants of native bush clinging to hillsides or gullies too steep to farm. The last patches of the forest god, Tane-mahutas's threadbare cloak. Jacinta too wept over his loss but only in her soul, never overtly. "*Life must go on*" was the modern day mantra and excuse for all of man's excesses.

'If this weather keeps up we could be in big trouble,' Gray said. 'Last year was bad enough but this year it's dry already.'

Jacinta roused herself from her reveries, not really caring one way or another about the possibility of a drought. She liked the warm weather. It was a change from the cold and damp of the winter.

'There's sure to be a tropical storm or two coming through. There always is when we have an early summer,' she replied.

‘Let’s hope so,’ said Gray, focussing again on the road ahead. The gravel road ahead wound through a deep cut up to a ridge. The sides of the cutting were festooned with hanging tutu and kiokio fern, all covered in dust. At the top, the road swung sharply to the left. Once on the ridge they expected to see a magnificent panorama of the Kaipara Harbour. Instead, they were greeted by the unlikely sight of a policeman standing in the middle of the road. He was holding his right arm up in the air and waving his left one up and down, signalling them to slow down and stop.

Gray brought the car to a sliding halt in the gravel as the constable stepped forward with his right arm still raised. Dust billowed into the air and then drifted slowly down, enveloping the car and the constable. Gray wound down his window to speak to the policeman.

‘Giddy, constable. What’s the problem?’

‘Morning, sir. I’m afraid a light aircraft has come down. We’ve closed the road while the ambulance and recovery vehicles are here.’

‘How long do you think they’ll be?’

‘Probably another half an hour’

‘Right you are. We may as well get out and take a look see.’

‘That’ll be fine but stay on the road. I’ve instructions not to let anyone into the field.’

The air was still, as though the world was holding its breath. The only noise was the frantic buzzing of cicadas and the trill of skylarks. Jacinta rested against the side of the car shielding her eyes against the glare while Jaimie and Gray walked along the road to where someone had taken down a section of the fence to allow the recovery vehicles into the field. After a while, Jacinta roused herself and followed them, to stand alongside and look down into the valley. The fields were a sea of

brown seed heads blowing in the gentle breeze, undulating like the sea. On the far side of the valley could be seen a black smudge and some wreckage on the side of the hill. A cluster of policemen and men in white overalls were rummaging through the wreckage and making measurements, now a grass fire had been put out. A harrier hawk soared overhead on the hunt for prey. On seeing all the people it beat its wings lethargically and turned to glide down into an adjoining valley. A staccato call in the bush gully to their right signalled a kingfisher calling for a mate.

‘It’s time this guy cut his hay,’ said Gray.

‘Don’t you feel anything for the pilot?’ asked Jacinta, amazed at Gray’s insensitivity.

‘Not much anyone can do for the poor sod now.’

Comments like this infuriated her. How could he think about hay when someone’s loved one had just died? Gray had always been like that though, always matter of fact. What had happened had happened, time to move on. Never look back. How was it he was always on about his forebears? As usual, she bit her tongue and said nothing. She studied him now as he stared indifferently down towards the crash scene. He was tall and lean still. He didn’t drink a lot and had not developed the usual spare tyre most men of his age had. His strong arms, veined on the insides and covered with a red down on the outside, rested on the top wire of the fence. Age had stooped his back slightly and the crow’s feet around his eyes had formed deep valleys from squinting into harsh sunlight but he was still the man she had married all those years ago. Jaimie leaning on the fence beside him was just a younger version of Gray with the same angular frame and freckled skin.

‘They’ve got some stretchers laid out now,’ said Gray.

Jacinta craned forward to see. Men in the white overalls were covering the stretchers with white sheets. A sled had been brought down to the crash scene and the wreckage was now being manoeuvred onto the sled. At a signal, the tow truck began winching the sled up to the road while the stretcher bearers, acting more like pall bearers, trudged slowly towards them, keeping pace with the sled.

‘Must have been two people on board,’ said Jaimie.

Jacinta turned away and walked back to the car so as not to look at the victims as they were loaded into the ambulance. She lit a cigarette and leaned against the side of the car again. Gray, as usual, would want to know all the sordid details. It was rare for Jacinta to smoke but she always kept some around. The incident had filled her with foreboding. Right then it seemed a perfect time to have a smoke. She stared into the distance to watch the white puffy clouds drift across the blue sky, like galleons sailing the ocean blue, while the squeaks and groans from the winch and the sled being loaded aboard the flat bed trailer reached her. The scraping of metal on metal always set her nerves on end. Voices were raised and doors slammed. The ambulance was the first to leave the scene, which it did in sombre fashion, without its siren wailing for the dead. It was followed by the tow truck and then by the truck and low loader carrying the remnants of what had been someone’s aircraft. With the dying away of the engines and the settling once more of the dust cloud, she turned to see two police cars were still parked beside the fence. Gray was striding back towards the car with Jaimie in his wake.

‘We’re allowed to go now. Hop aboard.’

She dropped her cigarette into the gravel of the road and ground it in with the tip of her shoe before opening the door of the car and climbing in.

‘Did you find out anything more?’

‘No. The cops were pretty tight-lipped.’

‘Oh well, it’ll all be in the papers in the next few days.’

17

Every New Year's Day, the Sutherlands drove up to Waipu for the Highland Games. Nothing stirred Will's old man more than the first skirl of a piper starting up or the massed pipe bands parading around the field. This year the old man was bouncing out of his skin in anticipation. Whatever the doctor had given him had cleaned up his skin rashes and he seemed to be back to his old self. Will drove over to Temara's place early to pick her up. The plan was to meet up with the rest of the family up at the Games later in the day.

The pipe band competition began at midday. It was bigger than ever this year with bands from New Zealand, Australia, Scotland, Canada, Oregon and of all places, Albania. Rapturous applause from the crowd showed it was undoubtedly the highlight for anyone with Scottish blood in their veins. At two in the afternoon the main arena was turned over to the Highland Games proper, with the tossing of the caber, the hammer throw and the strongman competitions. The latter was always a huge draw card with the usual Scandinavians, American, Canadian and Australian strongmen competing against the local champions. It was a hot day and the intensity of the sun soon drove many into the beer tents. As the afternoon wore on, more and

more of the men became vociferous and many of the women a bit tipsy and giggly. It was in this volatile atmosphere Will and Temara found the rest of the family among the crowd watching the tug of war.

‘We’ve been looking for you for ages,’ said Will.

Jacinta turned around at his voice.

‘Hi Will. How are you Temara?’ asked Jacinta.

‘Kapai, eh!’ laughed Temara, having already imbibed at a beer tent or two.

‘Where’s Dad?’ asked Will.

‘He’d hardly arrived before he met one of his old cronies. Some stock agent from Elders he had met at a cattle fair somewhere or other. We left him to it. It’s always like this. For someone usually so taciturn, your father can natter on about the price of beef and characters he has met for hours, provided he is with the right sort of company.’

‘Oh well, I’m sure we’ll catch up with him before long. Temara and I were just about to go for a drink. Do you want to join us?’

‘We had better round up your father on the way.’

‘Yeah, well, he shouldn’t be too hard to find. He’ll be in one of the beer tents jawing away,’ said Will.

Edging their way back through the crowd they stood on a few toes and earned a few muttered oaths on the way. The beer tents were doing a roaring trade with the general hubbub making it hard to hear what the person next to you said. There was every colour under the rainbow represented by Hawaiian shirts, black singlets, tartans of many hues, T-shirts advertising many brands of beer, halter tops in every pastel shade and boob tubes for the girls, blue jeans and board shorts for the guys and tight fitting shorts and sarongs for the girls.

‘Let’s spread out and try and find your father. We’ll meet back here in quarter of an hour.’

There were three beer tents pretty much all in a row but trying to thread your way through the patrons inside them, all of whom were in a very convivial mood, took some doing. Will and Temara had beer spilt over them a dozen times by the time they had negotiated their way through the throng and emerged out the other end to reach their rendezvous point. Jacinta and Jaimie were arrived before them.

‘How did you get on?’ asked Jacinta.

‘I had to drag Temara out of mine,’ replied Will. ‘I think she was enjoying herself to much. I just about had to punch the lights out on a couple of blokes.’

‘I know. I felt like a young girl in there myself.’ said Jacinta, grinning at Temara.

‘Bunch of pissheads!’ exclaimed Will

‘Hey, don’t knock my admirers,’ said Jacinta ‘They might have been men of discernment.’

‘Yeah, sure,’ he replied.

‘Here comes Andy.’

‘I’ve found Dad,’ called Andy. He was smiling as he waved at them to follow him. They all followed him in single file through the heaving crowd. Will and his brothers put Jacinta and Temara in the middle of the file to protect them from the more physical attention a woman was likely to get in such a place. The air was a sweet and sour confusion of aromas from spilt beer, sweat, suntan lotion, cigarette smoke and pot. The latter seemed to drift above the other smells like a transcendental cloud. It was getting high all by itself. Will looked around trying to see who was smoking it but it was impossible to tell. Obviously, no one was bothered by it. Even

the non-partakers were getting a fair bit, just breathing. Andy did a good job leading the way and parting the waters to allow them to pass through. They heard Graham well before they were able to see him. His rendition of '*Donald, Where's Your Troosers*' rose above the general hubbub. The words were slurred but were sung with gusto. They emerged to find him staggering around in circles attempting to do a Highland Fling. Watching on, the bleary eyed men and slough-eyed women were obviously enjoying the spectacle of a man making a fool of himself. The silly bastard looked pretty pathetic really. Andy and Jaimie grinned at the sight. Even Temara was amused. Will's mum pulled a face before quickly stepping forward to take Graham in her arms. Graham turned his head and recognised her.

'Hello, dear, ha' ya come for a dance?'

'No, I think it's time we got you home.'

'Home, wha' for? I'm haffin' a wonnerfuul time.'

'You're drunk.'

'Jus' a little. C'mon, gi'e us a dance then.'

'Come on you great lump, lean on me and we'll get you back to the car.'

Loud boos and cat-calls emanated from the crowd as Will and Andy grabbed an elbow each, while Jacinta extracted herself from Graham's embrace and they half carried him out through the crowd. Once outside the tent, the fresher air and the hot sun of the late afternoon had its effect and Graham slouched down semi-conscious in their arms.

'Christ, he's passed out,' said Will. 'He's no light weight, is he? What'll we do?'

'There's a St John's station over there past the last beer tent. Jaimie, see if you can get a stretcher or something,' said Jacinta.

The rest slumped down on the grass among the discarded food cartons and bottles, to form a barrier around Graham while Jaimie trudged off to find the St John's. He reappeared after about quarter of an hour with an ambulance officer and a cadet carrying a collapsible stretcher between them. The officer bent down next to Graham to make a rudimentary examination of Graham, checking his pulse and lifting his eyelid.

'Is he on any medication?'

'He's on a course of chemotherapy,' said Jacinta.

'What for?'

'NHL,' replied Jacinta.

The words 'chemotherapy' and 'NHL' hit Will like a sledgehammer. He was stunned for several seconds before retaliating like a punch drunk fighter in the ring.

'What the hell is NHL?'

'Non-Hodgkin's Lymphoma.'

'I've heard of Hodgkin's Disease. What's Non-Hodgkins Lymphwhatever?'

'It's a cancer that attacks the lymph system.'

Christ Mum! I thought he just had a skin rash from those fence posts and now you're telling us he's on chemotherapy for cancer?' said Will.

'I'll tell you all about it when we get him back to the car.'

'If he was on medication like that he shouldn't have been drinking,' said the Officer.

'He was feeling so well this morning,' said Jacinta.

'Yes, well the medication he's on and alcohol obviously don't mix. Where's your car?'

'In Carpark 3, over that way,' said Will.

‘Okay, we’ll put him on the stretcher and get him to your car. He’ll have to sleep this one off. Don’t expect him to wake up any time soon.’

The ambulance men carried Graham back to the car where they managed to get him into a semi-reclined position on the front passenger seat once they had wound the back of the seat down as far as it would go.

‘Thank you Officer, we can take it from here,’ said Jacinta.

As soon as the ambulance officer and cadet walked off and they were out of earshot, everyone turned to Jacinta for an explanation.

‘I should have told you. It’s just your father didn’t want you to know. It was pride, I suppose. He didn’t want to show any weakness to you, his sons. Typical male bullshit but I guess you understand what that means. His oncologist said it was curable and we’ve both been hoping this to be true. It’s possible the accident with the fence posts acted as the catalyst somehow causing the cancer to activate. No one really knows? Anyway, after the usual treatments for skin complaints had failed to work and our doctor found that his lymph glands were swollen he was referred to an oncologist in Auckland. He had a series of test during November and has been on his medication since the middle of December.’

‘Is this NHL thing hereditary?’ asked Jamie.

Everyone turned to stare at Jamie. He had uttered what each person had at the back of their minds.

‘I don’t know. Perhaps we should find out,’ said Jacinta.

‘Bloody oath,’ exclaimed Will.

‘C’mon, we’d better get moving. Dad’s going to boil if we leave him in the hot car much longer,’ suggested Andy.

With no more to be said, they climbed into their cars. Andy joined Will and Temara in the Charger to give them more room in Jacinta's Mitsi. Jacinta drove out of the car park and reached the main highway where she waited for Will to appear in the Charger. They drove in convoy all the way home. The drive was made in virtual silence with each of them immersed in his or her own thoughts.

Graham slept all that night and all the next day. When Jacinta went into the bedroom to go to bed she found Gray standing by the bed fully dressed.

'What are you doing?'

'There are things to do.' The 'do' came out as 'do-ooo.'

'It's night time, you silly bugger. You've been asleep for more than twenty-four hours. The rest of us are about to go to bed.'

'I thought it was morning!' said Graham, looking out the window at the dusk and confusing it for the dawn.

Jacinta took him in her arms and gave him a hug. 'You scared me, don't do that again.'

'What?'

'Singing *'Donald Where's Your Trousers'* while doing the Highland Fling in front of hundreds of people inside a beer tent.'

'I didn't, did I?'

'You did.'

'No one's going to let me live that down, are they?'

'You can expect people to start doing a jig everytime they see you from now on. Davie Sinclair rang to say he had a video of it and asked how much you would pay him for it.'

'He didn't?'

‘No. Just kidding!’

‘It’s a shame though.’

‘What’s that?’

‘We’d been invited to a Hogmanay bash at Murdoch McInnes’ place at Lang’s Beach.’

‘Well, Hogmanay’s past now and you can drop the Billy Connelly routine and all. Now get back into bed. As a result of your little escapade I had to tell the boys all about your NHL.’

‘How did they take it?’

‘All a bit shocked really. Jaimie asked an interesting question.’

‘What was that?’

‘Whether the disease is hereditary?’

‘Christ! Why didn’t I think of that?’

18

Several months had slipped by since Hana had called in and Jacinta still hadn't been around to see her. Jacinta remembered her saying she normally had Wednesday afternoon off and was hoping today she could reciprocate. Gray was in the porch putting on his gumboots, ready to rejoin the boys topdressing the run-off. She decided to wait until after one before ringing and filled in the time hanging out the washing. It was ten past one when she walked back into the kitchen. When she phoned it was Hana who answered.

'Kia ora, Hana. This is Jacinta. I was wondering if I could call around.'

'That would be wonderful, I've just got home. Come around for some lunch.'

'No, I've just had lunch with Gray but a cuppa would be fine.'

'Sure, I'll have it ready. See you soon.'

Twenty minutes later she parked beside Hana's car and turned off the engine. It was another hot day and Jacinta wore a light halter top, cotton skirt and sandals. Hana came out to the door in her work smock to meet her.

'That was quick. I've only just tidied the place up.'

'At least you don't have three boys, make that four.'

‘I’ll just take off my work gear and change into something more respectable. Make yourself at home.’

It was a typical family home showing all the wear and tear a family can give it. It wasn’t lost on Jacinta her home was in much the same condition. Hana came back into the room wearing an oversize Greenpeace T-shirt hanging over a pair of navy blue shorts.

‘That feels better.’

‘I’ve been meaning to come around and visit you for ages but something always seemed to come up.’

‘Hey, don’t fret about it, girl. It’s no big thing. It’s good to see you anytime.’

‘Thanks Hana. It’s truly is good to see you too,’ said Jacinta taking Hana into an embrace. Hana patted her back like a child before withdrawing to lead her inside. Jacinta allowed herself a smile.

‘Come into the kitchen. I’ve made a cup of tea.’

They sat on opposite sides of the *Formica* topped kitchen table. Cups and a plate of biscuits were already laid out on the table. Hana poured the tea. She had strong hands with stubby fingers. Jacinta was acutely aware of her own long fingers. She had her Dalmatian grandfather to thank for those. There were so many similarities between Hana and herself, yet there were differences as well. They had much the same temperament and outlook on life, yet Hana’s facial features were more Māori than hers.

‘Will says your husband is a mechanic.’

‘Tame? Yeah, he works on the school bus fleet for the Education Department.’

‘A good job?’

‘Yeah, it pays the bills.’

‘How’s Temara? We haven’t seen much of her since the whakanoa.’

‘She’s good. We see Will over here a lot.’

Jacinta was silent for a time, as she considered losing Will and not receiving the reciprocal gift of Temara in her house.

‘Have you seen the January edition of *Women’s World* yet?’

‘No, I don’t get that, why?’ said Jacinta, somewhat surprised Hana would be enthusiastic about something in a woman’s magazine. She didn’t seem like someone interested in gossip about celebrities.

‘There’s a really good astrology section giving a person’s character based on the star signs and also on the Chinese zodiac. They’re incredibly accurate.’

‘Oh, I don’t read horoscopes. I always think they’re a sham.’

‘All right, when was your birthday then?’

‘Oh, really!’

‘No go on. You’ll be amazed. I was.’

‘All right, I was born on the thirtieth of September, 1950.’

‘A Libran, eh?’ It says here Librans love beauty, creativity and balance.’

‘I like it so far, go on!’

‘Librans are born to flirt, are analytical thinkers, sometimes spending too much time thinking for their own good. It says Librans are often writers and communicators because of their wit and way with words. Apart from that, they are friendly, lovable, social, sensual, intellectual and dramatic.’

‘Well, I don’t know about that. I wouldn’t have thought I was dramatic or a writer. Maybe I used to flirt a little in my younger days but then, who didn’t?’

‘Okay, let’s see what the Chinese zodiac says about you then. It says you were born you were born in the year of the Tiger.’

‘Reaow!’ said Jacinta.

‘Tigers are born leaders. They are brave and courageous and females take pride in their appearance by buying expensive clothes.’

‘Yeah right! That’s a laugh.’

‘You’re always well turned out when I see you. I don’t see you wearing T-shirts when you go into town.’

‘I’ve never did like T-shirts.’

‘Hey, if you are looking for good clothes at reasonable prices you should get down to those new factory shops in Silverdale.’

‘Are they any good?’

‘Yeah. I get nearly all my clothes there. There’s one that’s really good for bras and stuff.’

‘I could do with some new ones. Mine are falling apart.’

‘Well, you should go. It only takes forty minutes from here.’

‘I might do that.’

‘Have I managed to convince you about the horoscopes? It’s sometimes hard to see yourself as others see you. Let’s do Will and then you can see how accurate they can be. When was he born?’

‘On the sixth of April 1969. I remember it was at three o’clock in the morning. I’d been in labour since four the previous afternoon.’

‘Yeah, you always remember the little details with your first, don’t you?’

‘Okay, that makes him an Arian. Ooh, watch out! Arians are strongly independent, aggressive, competitive, original, adventurous and enjoy a good

argument so they can just enjoy the debate. They will always say what's on their mind, can be outspoken, will take on danger, get bored easily, require respect from others, always want to be in charge and sometimes challenge authority.'

'Oh, that's so Will. That bit about wanting to be in charge and challenging authority describes his relationship with Gray perfectly. Will is always arguing with Gray on how to do things around the farm. Gray gets really upset by it at times.'

'Yeah, well he's just acting to form. Let's see what the Chinese have to say about him. Ooh! You're going to like this. He was born in the year of the Monkey.'

'Hah! I always called him a cheeky monkey when he was little, go on!'

Monkeys are supposed to be clever, creative and are often the centre of attention. The male monkey is never boring although he can easily become bored. In love he enjoys playing the field but once he decides on a mate he is passionate and an intense mate. The best mates for a monkey are people born in the year of the monkey, rat or dragon.'

'Okay, I'll give you it is pretty accurate for Will.'

'Pretty good prospect for Temara, eh?'

'What year is she?'

'She was born in 1966. That makes her a Horse. Monkeys are supposed to beware of Horses.'

'Well, they seem well suited to me.'

'Yeah, it would be good if they got together, wouldn't it?'

'At least the in-laws would be okay.'

'Hah, hah! You'se fellas aren't too bad yourselves. Well then, are you convinced about the horoscopes then?'

'Not for me but I must admit they were pretty accurate for Will.'

‘All right, what about Graham?’

Suddenly, Jacinta didn’t want to talk about Gray. It didn’t seem right to be talking about him behind his back, even if it was just horoscopes. She had the uncanny feeling the horoscope might say something she didn’t want to hear.

‘Oh, I can’t sit here gas bagging all day about silly things like that. I must be on my way soon. May I borrow it? I’ll make sure you get it back.’

‘No, you keep it. I’m done with it now.’

‘Thanks. Anyway, I agree it would be good if Will and Temara got together but we shall just have to see how it goes.’

When Jacinta turned into her driveway, a police car was parked beside the house. A constable came around the corner as she pulled to a stop. He must have been around the house looking in the windows to see if anyone was home. It was about the plane crash. She related how Gray, Jaimie and she had been stopped on the road while the plane was being recovered. The police wanted to know where everyone in the neighbourhood was at the time. When they asked where Will and Andy were that day she said they were at Waipu Cove. A feeling of dread settled over Jacinta when they told her they needed to interview Will and Andy. She had no idea why.

That night at dinner, Jacinta mentioned the police visit. Gray hardly looked up from his meal, merely grunting an acknowledgement. William though, looked up like a startled stag and stared at her with wide eyes. Their eyes locked for an instant and Jacinta sensed his inner turmoil at the news. Possibly sensing the vulnerability of his emotions, Will looked back down at his meal leaving Jacinta wondering if he could possibly have had anything to do with the crash. Will had always had a

penchant for getting into trouble but this one seemed too far-fetched even for him.

Jacinta dismissed it as a possibility on two counts. Firstly, he and Andy had been surfing up the coast at the time and secondly; what could he have had to do with a plane crash? She tried to put it out of her mind but a little worm of doubt entered her sub-consciousness.

19

William stomped into the living room in his work socks, jeans and *Swandri* and collapsed into an arm chair. As the chair took his weight he let out a sigh. He couldn't say he had enjoyed himself at the pub. His future had become a heavy burden to tote around on a day by day basis. Jaimie lay sprawled along the sofa on his side with his feet dangling over the end. The sports news was just starting.

'Where have the olds gone?' asked Will, as soon as the bulletin about the rugby had finished.

'They're up the road at the Stedmans.'

'They never go there. Do you know why they went?'

'I dunno.'

'Christ, you're not much use, are you? You have to keep your eyes and ears open in this world, otherwise it will pass you by. Someone had once told him that and it seemed good advice. Right! I'm off to bed. Some of us around here have to work for a living.'

'Suit yourself,' replied Jaimie, flicking channels to catch Letterman, as Will shuffled out of the room, only to slam the bathroom door.

The next morning Will woke to the sound of a car starting. The driver turned the ignition twice causing the starter motor to whine. The engine then settled into a soft purr and then the sound receded up the driveway. Will leapt out of bed and raced into the lounge to stare out the window, just as his father's *Holden* vanished out through the main gate. Bugger, where the hell's the old man going now! As soon as it vanished over the rise, Will climbed back into his bed. It seemed as if he would never get a chance to talk to his old man without the rest of the family being on hand. He switched on the table lamp and picked up the magazine he had been reading. After the lines on the page swam in front of him, he threw it across the room. It hit the opposite wall like a startled chicken, only to fall in a flutter of loose pages to the floor.

Stuff it, may as well get up. He dressed in the same clothes he had discarded the night before walking into the hall to the open doorway to his parent's room. His mother was still lying on her side with the covers wrapped around her as though she were a cocoon.

'Are you awake?'

'Mmm! What is it?'

'Where's Dad's gone?'

'Down to Auckland to see his oncologist.'

'When's he due back?'

'Probably late. He's arranged to meet Angus afterwards.'

'What's he seeing him for?'

'He is his brother!'

‘Yeah but Angus wouldn’t drive all the way up to Auckland just for a social visit.’

‘I think they’re seeing the lawyers about the farm.’

‘What about the farm?’

‘Something to do with his Will, I think. Leave me alone, I’m trying to sleep.’

‘Right, I’m out for the day too. I’m taking Temara to Lang’s Cove.’

‘You were out together yesterday.’

‘Yeah, we’re allowed to. We went down to Auckland, if you must know.’

‘Okay, I don’t need to know everything you get up to. Just have a nice day.’

‘You too Mum.’

Will woke flat on his back and in total darkness. For a minute he couldn’t recall what day it was. Memories of being with Temara the day before came back to him. He smiled for a minute and then remembered their argument. He had taken it hard when she accused him of being morose. Rolling over on his side, he closed his eyes and allowed a long sigh to escape into the darkness. Birds were scratching around in the gutter above. It must be near dawn. Further sleep eluded him though. His concerns about his future hung about him like magpies in a tree. As soon as they sensed he was awake, they opened their wings and lifted off their branch, like a well drilled squadron they glided through the ether to alight on his shoulder. Here they warbled and jostled with each other to whisper in his ear. The first magpie questioned his feeling of self worth. The second magpie ridiculed his lack of qualifications. The third magpie reminded him of Andy becoming a professional man. The fourth magpie laughed and warbled to say that even young Jamie had better prospects. The fifth magpie sowed the scenario of Temara going off with

another man better able to support her. He rolled over onto his stomach and pulled the pillow over his head preventing the birds from further mischief but they had already achieved their goal. After wriggling around trying to drown out the noises in his head, he suddenly threw off the pillow and flung himself onto his back. The phantom magpies lifted into the air, to retreat to a safe distance. Phantom feathers fluttered down in the darkness.

The first hint of dawn showed as a faint line of light around the edge of the curtain. Inside, it was still a monochrome world. His bedside clock showed it was six o'clock. Will swung himself upright to sit on the edge of the bed. He groped around the floor until his fingers touched the rough texture of his woollen socks. When he lifted them to his nose he recoiled away and threw them back to the floor. Today, he and his father were going to round up some stock for the sale. Perhaps, this would be his best chance to catch his father alone. He stood up to pull open his top drawer and pulled out a new pair of socks and some grounds. As an afterthought, he opened the second drawer and took out a clean T-shirt. These, he carried to the bathroom, where he dumped them in the corner before going to the toilet. After a quick shower Will returned to his bedroom where he pulled on his faded blue jeans and donned his *Swandri* jacket.

As he was rattling around in the kitchen preparing his breakfast, the other occupants of the house began to stir. The first to appear was his father, who to Will's surprise, was fully dressed. Will sensed something was amiss. His father was ruddy faced as though he was running a fever.

'Are you all right? I mean, you look like shit.'

'I've felt better, I must admit.'

'What did your oncologist say?'

‘I had a side effect to my pills. He’s changed my dosage. It’ll take a few days to take effect.’

‘Are you up to rounding up the steers then?’

‘Yeah, I’ll be right. Just need an energy-fix with some breakfast and I’ll be right as rain.’

His father’s forehead glistened with perspiration beads. Now wasn’t a good time to raise the issue of his inheritance. Perhaps he would get the chance to discuss it after the stock had been loaded. It seemed the best course was to be patient, something he was learning.

A little over an hour and a half later Will’s farm bike hurtled into the air to come crashing down again with a sickening thud. The shock wave travelled up and down his spine. He struggled to control the runaway machine as it bounded down the slope. For an instant, he thought it was going to roll. His knuckles turned white as he clenched the handlebar to keep it from veering down hill on the cross-slope. He pumped the brake pedal several times in an attempt to regain control of the machine. His initial gut-wrenching fear gave way to an adrenalin rush and he broke into a grin from ear to ear. He suppressed an urge to cry out. The ground was flattening out as he neared the valley. The black polls were now bunching together as the dogs herded them together. The air was alive with the lowing of cattle, the barking of the dogs and the angry buzz of the farm bikes. Shrill whistles rang through the air directing the huntaways back and forth, preventing any of the steers breaking free of the bunch. The ground trembled from the hooves pounding into the dry soil. Dust and clods of earth flew into the air throwing a brown haze over the herd. The herd was now heading up the valley towards the road and the stockyard with its cattle race.

The lead steer hesitated when he reached the open gate to the stockyard but the impetus of those behind him pushed him through. With the first steers through the gate, the rest soon followed. The old man drove up the fence line and swung the gate closed behind the last of the beasts. The dogs continued running back and forth barking in their excitement until his old man yelled 'Quiet!' The dogs stopped their barking and slunk away with their tails between their legs, still grinning at their antics. Will liked that about the farm dogs. There was always a hint of larrikinism in them. Kindred spirits!

'Well, that's that done then.' said his father. 'Thanks for the help.'

Will was a bit taken aback at being thanked. He couldn't remember the last time he had been thanked for doing anything around the farm. The effort of rounding up the cattle had just about done the old man in. His chest heaved as he gasped for breath. Will waited for his breathing to come under control. A hint of concern for his old man peeked its nose under his own frustrations.

'What time is the truck coming?'

'About eleven,' said his father.'

'What are you going to do till then?'

'Nothing in particular.'

'I was hoping for a chance to talk. That's if you're up to it.'

'I'm okay. What's on your mind?'

'You know I'm going out with Temara. Well, I think we might be getting serious and it's made me think more about where I'm headed.'

'Go on!'

'Well, it's about the farm. I'm twenty-three now and all I have is the farm.

Andy is training to be an architect and Jaimie has plenty of options open to him after

school. That leaves me. I'm not trained for anything else but farming. I guess what I'm trying to say is, where am I with regards to the farm?'

'Ah! Well, that's a problem isn't it? I wasn't planning on retiring or croaking for a good while yet,' said his father, leaning forward, as a cough rattled through his lungs, to spit a globule of sputum out onto the grass.

'Well, from where I'm sitting, you look pretty crook.'

'Jeezus! Don't go putting your hopes on me croaking just yet. I'm not ready for that.'

'I wasn't inferring you were.'

'Look, you're useful around the farm but there's a hell of a lot more to running a farm than rounding up a few head of cattle and fixing a broken fence here and there. I've already said you did a good job putting in the fences for the race but you have to face facts; you don't know a feed conversion efficiency rate from your left elbow or a tax credit from your right'

'Perhaps you should teach me then.'

'Ah, that's the point isn't it? You could have been learning all this since you left school but you were always too busy hooning around with your mates, playing rugby and getting pissed.'

Will looked down at the ground to hide his disappointment. The fact that it was all true made it harder to bear. His mind became a grey fog. He struggled to come up with a rational response to his father's outburst. Above all, he must control his temper otherwise any chance of sorting this out would be lost. He wished he were as articulate as Rod. Perhaps there was something to be said about going to one of those posh schools in town. Just as he was about to reply, his father spoke.

‘Look, I’m sorry to go off half baked like that. I’ve got other problems on my mind at the moment. If and when you and Temara decide to become an item, I’m sure we can sort out something then. You can be paid a proper wage and we can provide a relocatable house for you or even do up the old house on the run-off.’

‘Temara says she wouldn’t want to move into that even if it was done up.’

‘Well, maybe Andy would like it. He once told me he thought he could make a go of turning the run-off into a vineyard.’

‘You’re joking! He’s never said anything like that to me. When did he say that?’

‘It was after you came back from up north. It was just an idle musing at the time but I thought it worthwhile to look into.’

‘It hardly seems a fair go with you already paying his university fees and board. What the hell am I getting?’

‘You’re getting your food and keep, plus a bit more on the side, in exchange for the odd bit of farm work.’

‘The odd bit! Christ, I do just about everything around here.’

‘You do your share but don’t go thinking you’re indispensable, because you’re not. If you don’t have the patience to wait until I retire or cark it, then maybe you should look for employment elsewhere. There are plenty of farm manager jobs about.’

‘Yeah right! I can just see them employing me, when there are a whole lot of Lincoln graduates out there to pick from.’

‘Well, do you want to go to Lincoln then?’

‘Nah. I’m past all that book stuff.’

‘Well, it’s up to you. You know your mother and I will support you, whatever you decide.’

‘Ta.’

‘Look. Don’t get bitter about this. You’re still young. Relationships at your age are pretty fragile things. In a few months everything might be different.’

‘We’re pretty cool.’

‘That’s great. I hope it does work out for you both. If the farm is becoming a big bogey for you then perhaps it would be better for you to go away so you can focus on your life.’

‘Yeah, perhaps I should.’

‘Give it some thought. You know I’m not trying to drive you away.’

‘Aren’t you?’

‘God! I’ve said all there is to say on the subject. It’s your life. You sort it out. Oh, good, here’s the truck, it’s early.’

Will looked around to see the red truck and trailer speeding down the road leaving a great cloud of dust behind it. The truck drifted to a stop past the cattle race. The cloud of dust enveloped the rig as the driver backed it up to the race. Will’s old man got down off his bike and walked around the yard to speak to the driver. Will took the opportunity to gun his bike and drive back up the paddock. Stuff the old man, he can load the bloody cattle himself. Black clouds of frustration fogged his vision as he gunned the throttle and headed for the gate to the road. After shutting the gate behind him, Will drove down to the old house on the run-off and parked the bike by the front veranda. He got off and walked down to the beach and sat on the grass bank above it. He stared at the water without seeing it. His eyes glazed over with anger and frustration as he recalled every word of his conversation with his father.

Tears lined his eyes. Perhaps he should go away. There were plenty of jobs driving trucks but they didn't offer much of a future. What he really needed was some money - a little nest egg. Money was the key. There must be a way to get some money together. That was when he had an epiphany.

20

Graham heaved himself out of the chair to answer the phone. He grimaced as a sharp pain shot up his leg. Bloody arthritis! He held the handset tight against his ear listening to his caller. A set expression crossed his face before he took the hand piece from his ear and covered the mouthpiece with his hand.

‘It’s the police about that plane crash. They want you to go to the police station and make a statement.’

‘What about?’ asked Will.

‘About your whereabouts when that plane crashed just after Christmas.’

‘We don’t know anything about that,’ said Will.

‘They’ve specifically asked for you and Andy to call in. I’m going into town around midday anyway, so we could call in then.’

‘I suppose so,’ answered Will.

‘What about you, Andy?’

‘Whatever,’ replied Andy, taking a sudden interest in the design in his cereal bowl.

‘Are you there?’ asked Graham into the handset, ‘Right, we can be down there around midday. Okay we’ll see you then.’

Graham returned to the table to finish his coffee and read the paper but sensed the atmosphere in the room had changed to that brittle state just before a storm. The wrong word could shatter it into a thousand pieces. Graham put down the paper to look at Will and Andy in turn.

‘Is there something you’re not telling me?’

‘No!’ said William.

Graham looked Will in the eye as he said this, challenging him. They continued to stare at each other in a silent battle of the wills. It served to remind Graham Will was a now man. He wasn’t going to take lightly any accusation of misdeeds. He purposefully broke his gaze and turned it on Andy.

‘What about you, Andy? Have you anything you want to say to me before the interview?’

Andy gave a quick glance at William as though seeking his approval to speak, before answering. Will showed no sign of acknowledging his brother’s plea.

‘No, everything’s sweet,’ replied Andy.

‘Okay,’ said Graham. ‘I know what it means to be loyal to each other but I should remind you both of the loyalty you owe your mother and me. It seems to me you been up to some kind of monkey business. It may be harmless fun, or it might be something more serious. If it is harmless then I probably don’t need to know, however if it is more serious then you should be open with me, so I can help.’

‘Thanks, I know you mean well but there’s nothing to worry about,’ said Will.

‘I hope so,’ replied Graham, feeling a sense of relief in Will’s forthright answer. He finished reading the sports page, sensing the boys were becoming impatient to get away. He eventually stood up, folded the paper and placed it on the table, before walking to the back door. When his hand was on the handle, he stopped and turned.

‘I’m going to take a ride around the farm to check on the stock. I’ll be back well before ten. Make sure you’re ready.’

‘We’ll be ready,’ replied William.

It was eleven thirty before Graham parked in one of the visitor’s spaces next to the police station. Nobody moved as the engine noise died away. He leant forward with his hands still grasping the steering wheel, unable to make the next move. A white police car with a crazy pavement design of orange and blue bands drove in and parked directly in front of them. A uniformed cop got out of the car and walked into the building. Christ! He looked so young! In his youth, there would have been a bloody great Irish sergeant at the station, whom everyone in the district would have known and respected. Now the police came and went before anyone could get to know them.

‘Right then! May as well get it over with, I suppose.’

They all clambered out of the car and stood beside it, seemingly reluctant to go any further. Graham took the lead and set off towards the door. He didn’t look back but sensed the boys were following. A duty sergeant aged in his late twenties, or early thirties was working at the front desk.

‘Can I assist you,’ he asked.

‘Yes, my name is Graham Sutherland. A couple of constables came up to our farm to interview us about a plane crash up by Nathan Road. My sons were away at the time and you phoned to say you wanted to get a statement from them.’

‘Can I have your son’s names?’

‘William and Andrew,’ said Graham, watching the officer write down the names, then adding Sutherland on a piece of paper.

Right, if you and your sons would like to take a seat, we shall get someone in as soon as we can.’

There were five tubular steel chairs lined up against the wall. The black vinyl upholstery on the backs and the seats looked like it had seen better days. Graham sat down on the nearest seat and Andy sat beside him. William remained standing to peer out the door into the car park.

The wall clock behind the duty sergeant ticked and tocked its way slowly around its rim. The sergeant seemed to have an endless supply of paper requiring collating, pinning, stapling and filing. Every so often he would vanish through the door behind his counter, only to emerge with more paper. Half an hour went by before he emerged once more from the rear office and looked towards them.

‘Sorry about the delay. The detective handling the case is on the phone to Auckland. He shouldn’t be much longer. Would you like a cup of tea?’

Graham looked inquiringly at Andy and then at William, both of whom shook their heads.

‘No, that’s all right,’ he answered. He leaned forward, resting his elbows on his knees and watched a cockroach scurrying around the skirting board. Andy closed his eyes, giving a good impression of being asleep. William gave up leaning on the door frame and slumped down in a huff on the end chair, separated by two others

from his brother. Graham wondered if that was significant. The cockroach had just slid underneath the skirting board when the door at the end of the counter opened and a plainclothes policeman came out.

‘Mr Sutherland?’

‘Yes, I’m Graham Sutherland. These are my two sons, William and Andrew.’

‘If you will all follow me to the interview room.’

‘Right oh,’ replied Graham. They were ushered into an interior room with no windows. A steel table stood in the middle of the room with six chairs around it. These were cousins to those out in the reception area. A government stores bulk purchase, no doubt. The black lens of a closed circuit TV camera watched them benignly from the far corner of the room. Graham pulled out a chair and sat down. Andy again sat next to him, while William sat at the end of the table. The detective vanished for a minute before reappearing with a policewoman who stood by the door while the detective sat down opposite Graham.

‘Now then, this is a formal interview of William Hector Sutherland and Andrew Duncan Sutherland. The interview will be recorded by CCTV and audio tape. Do either of you have any objection to this?’

Both William and Andy shook their heads signifying they did not.

‘Can you please state a clear yes or no to the question.’

‘No,’ they chorused.

‘Hang on a minute,’ said Graham. ‘I thought you just wanted statements as to their whereabouts when the plane came down.’

‘We are interviewing anyone who might have been in the vicinity at the time.

‘But my boys were away surfing when the plane crashed.’

‘That’s for us to ascertain. We would like to interview each of you in turn, so if you and Andrew would leave the room, we would like to interview William alone first. We will then interview Andrew.’

Graham was somewhat taken aback by this move. He had regarded the whole exercise as a fairly informal affair but apparently the police had other ideas. His sons were being treated as suspects, though in what respect, he couldn’t imagine. Not being able to think of a worthy objection, he pushed back his chair and pulled Andrew up by his elbow.’

‘Come on Andy, the sooner this is over the sooner we can return home.’

The policewoman held open the door for them and then closed it firmly after they passed through. Graham had this crazy feeling things were getting out of his control. The horizon had tilted slightly. Not everything was as it seemed.

Out in the waiting area he and Andy sat down again in the identical chairs they had sat on before. The duty sergeant looked up at them before returning to his endless paper shuffling. Graham looked about for the cockroach but it must have found its way inside the wall framing by now. There was now nothing to keep him entertained. Traffic roared past on the nearby highway. The dull murmur of voices penetrated the wall, like a gentle murmuring of spirits or the susurrant of waves. Through the open door a gust of wind caused the yellowing poplar trees to rustle. The wind god was running his hands over the land, preparing it for the cold blasts of winter to come. The clock on the wall kept up its interminable tick-tocking.

The door opened and the policewoman came out followed by William.

‘Andrew Sutherland, can you come in now,’ she said, in a quiet sibilant voice, stressing the ‘s’ at the beginning of his family name. Andy stood up and he and Will gave each other a silent nod before the door closed on Andy. Was Graham

imagining things, or did they actually know something about this plane crash? It all seemed too bizarre. They weren't even in the area at the time and what on earth could they have to do with a plane crash anyway? William sat down heavily on the same seat had had previously used. He was looking out through the door at the trees again when his father spoke to him.

'How did it go in there?'

'Okay, I suppose. Just routine really,' said William, who then stood and went outside, where he paced up and down in the car park.

Graham wondered if something was making him anxious, or was it just his restless spirit not wanting to be stuck indoors.

Twenty minutes later the door opened again and Andy appeared, looking slightly shaken but managing a smile.

'Are we all done, then?' asked Graham.

'Yeah, we're done.'

'Good, let's go. I need to stop off at Wrightson's and get some fencing wire. Do you need anything in town?'

'No, we're sweet.'

They drove to the other end of town and Graham bought what he needed before heading back to the farm.

'Just for the record, what did you say to the cops?'

'We just told them where we were.'

'And where was that?'

'At Waipu Cove; we stayed with a mate in his old man's bach. The cop's have got all of the details. It'll check out.'

‘That’s okay then. I wonder why the cops are questioning the locals about a plane crash anyway. I would have thought it was mechanical failure or pilot error. How could we add anything to what the air accident people might come up with?’

‘Stuffed if I know! I guess it keeps them employed,’ replied William.

‘Nah. There must be something they are not letting on about.’

21

Now the farm and the run-off had been topdressed, there was nothing major to do on the farm until the shearing gang came in for the summer shearing. That gave Will three weeks of much needed free time. His first task was to stop up all of the openings around the eaves of the old house with wire netting and filler foam to prevent starlings and mynahs getting into the roof space. He then prized off some roof sheeting to enable him to haul out the starling nests, which over the years had filled the entire roof space. Everyone regarded the nest as a fire hazard and Will had generously offered to remove it. After Will pulled out each bundle of straw, he let it blow away in the breeze or threw it down on the ground from where the wind scattered it over the paddocks. The nest was full of bird shit, broken eggs and mummified hatchlings. At one stage, Will, covered in dust and with sweat running down his forehead into his eyes, was tugging out an especially large bundle of straw when he became aware of a large rat by his hand. Its large beady eyes stared into his as its head waved side to side sniffing the air. Will leapt back, almost falling off the roof in the process. The rat scurried away over Will's boots and over the roof, dragging its long tail behind it. When it leapt down onto the water tank and vanished

from view, Will sighed with relief. It took several minutes to still his wildly beating heart before he was able to resume his task. After removing as much of the nest as he could reach, Will replaced the roofing iron and climbed down the ladder.

The next day, Will climbed through the ceiling hatch above the laundry into the roof space to staple pieces of green twine from the rafters. The warm roof space under the iron roof provided a cheap means of drying the cannabis heads. An approach to Andy had resulted in his obtaining enough seedlings to plant here and there around the farm. It was hot under the tin roof and he was forced to lie on his back or sides as he edged his way closer and closer to the eaves. The air was full of dust and spores. Sweat ran down his face and the ceiling joists dug into his back. After a couple of hours he had to get out and straighten up. At these times he sat on the front porch and allowed the breeze to dry off his sweat before climbing back and resuming the installation of the twine. It took the best part of two days like this to finish fixing up all of the hangers.

On the third day he began tying the plant stems, complete with seed heads, to each piece of twine. Will figured they could remain there for months, allowing him to take out whatever he needed for his own use or to sell to a friend. Originally, it had been his intention to grow just sufficient for recreational use and to make a bit of pocket money on the side. But like everything in life, small things have a habit of growing, especially where money is involved.

Jaimie was the first to stumble on some of the marijuana plants while he was looking for a lamb bleating from a stand of scrub. It was caught in a briar patch and it was when Jamie entered the patch he found the little grove of marijuana plants. His natural impulse was to tell his parents but some last minute sense told him it could be to his advantage to confront Will first. Andy, having supplied the plants in the first

place was in a position to have a hold over his older brother. The result was the boys taking up a rekindled interest in flounder fishing at night. On these evenings the boys put a net out and then sat on the front veranda drinking beer, yarning and smoking pot into the wee hours of the morning. As long as they had a good bag of fish in the morning there were never any questions. Will made it abundantly clear no one smoked inside the house.

22

Graham, sitting astride his quad-bike on the ridge above the old house, was revelling in the conditions. It was August, the wettest and coldest month of the year. Banks of roiling clouds streamed in from two thousand kilometres of the Tasman Sea to break their waters over the land, saturating the soil and turning gentle streams into roaring torrents. Wind gusts reached eighty kilometres an hour. The big Black Poll bull, they named Kenny, was standing on the top of another hill, much like himself, with his head into the wind enjoying the sheer energy of the wild weather. The ewes had clustered together down on the flats. The rain cascaded off Graham's oilskin hat and down his face. He liked the taste of rainwater running over his face. He had been feeling surprisingly good in the last few days. Perhaps, it was the cooler weather. His lymph glands had started to go down, at last. That was a good sign. No need for bone marrow transplants or any of that nonsense. Pity about not being able to have a snort or two after dinner though!

He felt snug, dressed in his heavyweight oilskin riding coat with several layers of clothing underneath and in his oilskin hat and work boots. It could blow as much as it liked, no wind was going to get through that lot. Apart from his face, the

only parts of him exposed to the weather were his hands. The whites of his knuckles showed through his red skin as he kept his tight grip on the handle bar. The stock on the main farm was all accounted for, may as well see how Will's getting on down at the run-off.

Will's quad-bike was parked in the front of the old house. Graham put his own bike into gear and coasted down the hill, parking the bike in the lee of the side wall. He sat there for a minute or two listening for sounds over the wind and rain before easing himself off the bike and edging his way around the house to the front entrance.

'Anyone there?'

Silence - then he heard a faint scratching sound from out the back.

'Will, are you there?'

'I'm in the kitchen.'

Graham stomped over the boards, leaving puddles of water with each footstep.

'What are you doing in there?' His question hung in the air, unanswered.

Graham reached the door to the kitchen and took in the scene. A hurricane lamp sat in the centre of the bench, lighting the room. Puddles of water on the floorboards bore testament to where Will had been. The largest puddle was by the kitchen bench but trails of water led into the laundry and back out through the door, past where Graham was now standing. Will was just getting up, having been crouched down over the sink bench. The doors to the cabinet under the sink were closed. Will straightened up and turned to face his father.

'What's in there?' asked Graham, pointing towards the laundry.

‘Just the mullet net. I was just checking it for holes and giving it a quick patch up.’

‘Right,’ said Graham, peering around the kitchen and looking at the darkness beyond the open door to the laundry. ‘I’ll see you later then.’ He turned around and retraced the trail of puddles out through the door. When he reached his bike he started it up and deliberately drove past the kitchen window and up over the ridge, before letting it freewheel down a valley to the shoreline, where he could get a view of the old house. The light in the window had already been extinguished and Will came out of the building to get on his bike. Graham waited until it vanished over a hill, heading back towards the road, before he put his own bike into gear again.

He eased his bike to a stop where Will’s had recently been parked and then walked back into the house to have a good look around. There was no sign of the hurricane lamp. He began opening every door, only to find dead flies and mouse droppings. The doorway to the laundry beckoned him and he stepped through it to look at the concrete tub and the copper. A pair of oars and the mullet net rolled up around a pair of fence battens leaned against the wall in the corner. He lifted the wooden cover on the copper to find the hurricane lamp. Graham took it out and set it on the kitchen bench, only to realise he had no matches. With a sigh, he looked around for anything of interest. Something had not seemed quite right before. Now nothing seemed unusual. Perhaps he had been imaging things. High above him the ceiling hatch caught his eye. How he could reach it without a ladder?

When Will was in there, there was a ladder leaning against the wall. Graham walked back into the living room where the hay bales were stacked up to the ceiling. He stared at piled bales for a while before climbing up them. That was when his hand touched the cold surface of the plastic container containing the duvet. A smile crept

across his face as he realised what it was. The bales had been stacked in a manner to leave a long trough. It was in this trough he found the duvet. Next to it was the ladder. The stiles were made from a couple of rimu 4 x 2 timber studs and the rungs from fence battens. Fencing wire and staples had been used to fix the rungs in place. The whole thing looked pretty dodgy, not something to be proud of. Graham pulled it out and let it slide down to the floor. With an intake of breath he followed it, landing in a heap on the floor. He brushed the excess hay off his clothes, picked up the ladder and lugged it through the doorway into the kitchen where he stood it up against the wall. The studs forming the stiles had not been long enough to reach the ceiling so a fence batten had been nailed to the side of each one. Graham lifted himself up onto the first rung to test it and then the second. He was surprised when it held his weight. With more confidence in the ladder, he climbed high enough to reach across and push open the ceiling hatch. He then climbed back down and manoeuvred the top of the ladder into the opening. Climbing back up, Graham poked his head through into the ceiling space. The rain drumming on the iron roof was deafening. A strange sweet bouquet emanated from the roof space. It seemed familiar. Apart from a few pencils of light coming through some old nail holes, the space was in total darkness. He remembered the torch under the seat in the quad bike and climbed down to retrieve it.

On his return he lifted the torch up through the opening ahead of him. When he turned on the torch there was a forest of green twine hanging down from the rafters. It must have taken ages to staple them in place. On each piece of twine was tied a stem of plant with a seed head attached, hanging upside down. Graham was not slow in recognizing the serrated edges and palmate leaves of marijuana plant

drooping down over the large flower heads. He had heard enough about the subject to realise these plants were in the first stage of processing.

The sound of boots on bare boards below told him he was no longer alone. He looked down through the hatch to see Will standing at the bottom of the ladder. Graham climbed down two rungs so his head was below the ceiling hatch. Father and son stared at each other. The whites of their eyes and of their teeth provided the only contrast to the blacks and greys in the room.

‘What’s all this about then?’ demanded Graham.

‘It’s just a means of making a bit of pocket money. It’s not a big deal. Everyone around here’s doing it.’

‘I don’t give a rat’s arse if other people around here are growing pot or not. I don’t want anyone growing it here.’

‘You tell me how I’m supposed to support myself then?’

‘You get paid.’

‘Christ, what you pay me is hardly enough to buy a round of beer for my mates.’

‘Then stop spending it on beer.’

‘I’m 23 years old and still have to rely on handouts from you.’

‘Then get a farm job somewhere else.’

‘You told me I’m a useless bastard not smart enough to run a farm.’

‘I never said that.’

‘That’s how it came across.’

‘This isn’t the time to talk about that.’

‘Tell me a better time then?’

Will stood rock solid at the bottom of the ladder. He showed no sign of moving. This didn't seem the time to show weakness.

'All this stuff in the roof has to go now!'

'It's worth about three grand. Are you going to reimburse us for the loss?'

'Don't treat me like a fool. That would make me an accomplice.'

'If you won't reimburse us for our losses, then it all stays here until we can get it packaged and ready to send down to Auckland.'

'Who's 'us'. I thought this was your little operation?'

'We're all in on it.'

'Jeeze, I don't believe this. If you won't rip this stuff out, I will,' said Graham, climbing up the ladder again. Instantly, his leg was seized in an iron grip. When he looked down, William was hanging on to his leg to prevent him climbing any higher.

'Let go.'

'No.'

The batten extensions to the stiles were bending ominously. The ladder was a sorry piece of handiwork and now, like the Grand Old Duke of York, he was neither up nor down. The ladder gave a lurch and slid along the side of the hatch. The batten extensions only just reached the sides of the hatch. It wouldn't take much for them to fall out of the hatch altogether. He considered letting go of the ladder to grasp the sides of the hatch. Just then, it lurched once more and his hands clamped tighter around the four by two studs. Survival instincts forced Graham to lash out with his boot to get free.

23

The harsh side of his father's boot tore into Will's skin. Blood welled up and ran down his face into his eyes. Blinded by the blood, Will lashed out. His mentor, Tumatauenga lent him strength as he charged into the ladder lifting it bodily into the air. It balanced precariously for a few seconds before the ladder before overbalancing back over Will's shoulders. Once it started to go there was nothing Will could do. Everything happened in slow motion. Will fell flat on his back and a second later his father landed on top of him, driving the air out of his lungs. They were a tangle of arms, legs and flailing coats. Will's face was buried in the folds of his father's oilskin coat as he struggled to free himself enough to breathe. He was aware of his father's hot breath on his face. It smelt of old pipe tobacco. His father didn't even smoke. A flailing boot kicked him in the shin. Will opened his eyes to see the ladder clatter back against the wall. There it pivoted around on one leg and fell with a resounding *crack* on top of them. The *crack* sounded like a stock whip. Will lay there waiting for his father to get off him. When there was no movement above him, he cried out:

'You okay, Dad?'

With no answer forthcoming, he wriggled out from under his father. He was unconscious and the hair on the back of his head was matted with blood. It was still running down his neck to drip, drip, drip onto the floorboards. A puddle of rainwater mixed with blood was forming there.

‘Shit! Shit! Shit!’ What a bloody shambles! Will knelt down to feel his father’s pulse. There was a faint palpitation under his fingertip. Will dropped down in a crouch and leaned back against the wall staring at his father, hoping he would come around. The minutes ticked by and his father made no sign of movement. Christ, he needs medical help. He needed carrying back up to the road. There was no way he could manage that alone. He had no means of summoning help without leaving him. He couldn’t risk anyone discovering the crop. The only option seemed to be to take him back to the farmhouse on his farm bike.

Once his initial panic had subsided a steely resolve settled over Will. He stood up and carried the ladder back into the living room where he stashed it in the hay bales. When he returned to the kitchen he once more felt the carotid artery to establish his father was still alive before rolling him over on his back and dragging him out to his quad bike. The old man’s size twelve boots banged woodenly down the three steps to the grass. He was certainly a heavy bastard. Will hoisted him onto the seat before climbing on behind and cradling him between his arms while he turned the ignition and drove forward slowly. He managed to steer by crossing over his arms in front of his father thereby holding him firmly between his arms. When they reached the top gate Will drove up to the latch to open it, before reversing slowly holding on to the gate chain. After driving through, he realised he would have to get off the bike in order to clip the latch shut. His father’s weight was like a dead weight now and he could see no way of getting off the bike without laying his father

on the ground first. Bugger it! The gate would have to stay open until he could get back to shut it properly. Most if the stock was hunkered down and it was a risk he would have to take. He gunned the bike up the road hoping he wouldn't meet anybody before he reached the farm. Luck was with him and no one else was on the road. The gateway to the drive was open, allowing him to drive down the drive and straight into the implement shed. After turning off the engine, he slid off the bike and gently lowered his father to the floor.

His old man was still out to it. More blood formed in a puddle on the floor below his head. Will knelt down to feel his father's pulse again. Where was it? There was nothing from the artery. He picked up a wrist and felt for a pulse. Again nothing. He leaned forward and placed his ear beside his father's nose, seeing if there was any breathing. Shit! Shit! Shit! A chill passed through Will.

24

The image of soldiers abseiling down from a helicopter shrank to the upper half of the screen allowing an image of another soldier firing a rocket propelled grenade to appear. This image faded out to morph into an image of men and women in maroon sports gear working out in a giant gymnasium, followed by a message to join the Royal New Zealand Army. Jacinta glanced up from reading to see the Māori name for the New Zealand Army, *Ngati Tumutauenga* appear under the caption. It meant the sons of the god of war. If it applied to anyone, it should have applied to Will. He was the one born under one of the war god's star signs. Jaimie looked across at her after the ad finished and surprised her by asking:

‘What would you think if I joined the army?’

‘Don’t you need to be seventeen to enlist?’

‘It’s only six months away.’

‘We’ll talk to your father about it when he gets in.’

The fly screen door crashed open with a bang and rattle followed by the kitchen door crashing against the wall. Jacinta and Jaimie looked up as Will stalked into the room. It looked as though his blood had been drained from him. He stood there, white

faced, staring, with mouth agape, water dripping on the floor. He hadn't even taken his gumboots off. Jacinta jumped off the sofa and rushed to him.

'What's the matter?'

'Dad's had a fall.'

'Where?'

'In the implement shed.'

'What happened?'

'I don't know. He was lying unconscious on the floor of the shed when I came in. He must have slipped on the wet floor or something.'

'Ring for an ambulance! I'm going over to see.'

In the back porch Jacinta paused long enough to throw on a parka and slide her feet into her gumboots before running through the rain to the implement shed. She stopped dead at the sight of Gray lay on the floor. He was lying on his back beside the hay baler. She ran over and knelt beside him, noting the blood on the edge of the machine and pooled under his head. She felt carefully around the back of his head. Her hand came away coated in matted hair in a matrix of blood. The blood had thickened to a reddy-brown colour. Something in the back of her mind tried to identify the exact colour from when she was a little girl with a box of water colours. 'Russet' – that's what it was. She lifted his wrist and felt for a pulse. Something inside her snapped. Tears ran down her face to mingle with the puddles on the floor. She wanted nothing more than to hold him in her arms yet she knew it might be dangerous to move his head. Instead she took off her parka and draped it over his inert form.

Will came running back as she finished this.

'The ambulance is on its way.'

‘Okay, go and get me some blankets and send Jaimie up to the gate to wave down the ambulance when it arrives. It won’t be easy for the driver to find us in this weather. You had better stay by the phone then. I’ll stay here.’

‘Okay.’

After Will had gone, Jacinta held Graham’s hand in hers. She was aware of the rain of the iron roof and the wind in the trees outside. The barracuda faced Hine-nui-te-Po swam into her vision. There was a knowing smile on her shimmering face, all silver and blue. Jacinta nodded her head in acceptance and felt the long claw nails of the goddess of Death fasten around her in exchange for Graham. The Dead came to claim their due by drinking her blood. Her world swirled around and around and down and down into the abyss. She fell forever downward, spiralling in slow motion in a choreographed dance. Everything became dark as she tumbled in a seemingly endless motion. Suddenly, the air around her began to vibrate as if she had hit an air pocket. She became aware of a tiny red light, her mind struggling to understand why it was not white. It grew larger. She could see it even though her eyes were shut. The red was from the blood vessels in her eyelids. She opened her eyes to see a stranger shining a bright light into her eye. The light blinded her and she shut her eyes again.

‘She’s fainted, that’s all,’ said a voice. ‘Lay her down on the floor.’

Everything began to swim. She had a vision of Hine-nui-te-Po’s globous fish eye looking back over her shoulder, as she vanished back down to her lair. A shiver racked Jacinta’s body as she was wrenched back to the land of the living by a bitter smell.

‘Are you all right, Mum?’

She opened her eyes again to see Will staring down at her. He was cradling her head and his face came and went for a minute, before settling down in the here and now. She managed a thin smile.

‘You’re as white as a sheet. We thought we had lost you both,’ he said.

She remembered then the pact she had made with Hine-nui-te-Po.

‘How’s Graham?’

‘We’ll find out in a minute,’ said an ambulance officer as he knelt beside Graham to check his vital signs before feeling gently around his skull. His hand came away with dried blood on it.

‘Has he been moved?’

Jacinta rolled onto her side and looked across at the inert form of Graham lying beside her.

‘No. He hasn’t been moved.’

‘You did the right thing. It doesn’t look good though. There are no vital signs. We can try to resuscitate him but there is the risk he has sustained brain damage.’

‘What are you saying?’

‘I’m sorry but he’s dead. If we try to resuscitate him, he could be impaired as a result of brain damage.’

Jacinta stared with wild eyes at the Officer. He was watching her, waiting for her to reply.

‘You are his wife, aren’t you?’ he asked.

‘Yes’

‘Then it’s your call.’

‘You must try everything you can.’

‘All we can do is put a brace around his neck and try mouth to mouth.’

‘Do it! Will, help me up!’

While Jacinta was helped upright, the Officer went to the ambulance and came back with a neck brace, which he placed around Gray’s neck then clicked it together. The sound of that click was a noise that stayed with Jacinta for the rest of her life. With the head was braced, he bent down and started mouth to mouth resuscitation. After several minutes with no sign of his recovery, he stood up and went back to the ambulance and retrieved a gurney. He then turning to Jaimie, whom Jacinta hadn’t even known was there, and said;

‘Can you give us a hand to get him on the gurney. I’ll take his shoulders and you take his feet. Okay?’

Jaimie bent down to take hold of his father’s feet.

‘Okay, he’ll feel heavier than you think, so be ready. Gently, on the count of three. One, two three...’

Once he was on the gurney, the Officer tied him in with a belt across his chest and covered him with a blanket. He then wheeled the gurney to the back of the ambulance and tilted it so it rode over the rear sill of the ambulance. Once the gurney was aboard, the officer hopped aboard to connect the ventilator and place the mask over Gray’s mouth.

‘Righto! We’re ready to go. Do any of you want to ride in the back?’

‘I’ll go,’ said Jacinta. ‘Where are you taking him?’

‘North Shore Hospital.’

‘All right, Jaimie, you and Will follow in the Mitsi. Where is Will anyway?’

‘He said he left the gate open down at the run-off and has gone back to shut it.’

‘Okay, follow along as soon as you can.’

‘Okay,’ replied Jaimie.

Just before the door to the ambulance closed a cabbage tree moth flew in, seeking shelter from the rain. It fluttered around below the roof before settling down on the wall opposite her.

‘Hello, Gray. Are you trapped between the worlds?’

As soon as she had asked this, the moth lifted off the surface and flew around her head before returning to where it had been before.

‘We know what to do. Hang in there.’

The ambulance slewed over the loose gravel as it went around a corner forcing Jacinta to put out her hands to steady the gurney. They crossed some corrugations in the road shaking the whole vehicle, before they bumped onto the tar seal up by the school bus stop. It’s time the council did something about this road!

25

The hospital staff kept them waiting in a whanau room for what seemed like an eternity. Jaimie stood up and paced around like a caged lion, until Jacinta got fed up and told him to sit down or go outside. It was only when Jaimie sat down she realised Will wasn't there.

‘Where’s Will. I thought he came with you?’

‘He said he would follow in the Charger.’

‘Well, he’s taking his time about it.’

‘He’ll be here soon, I guess.’

‘I don’t suppose it matters.’

The door opened and a young Māori woman entered the room. Jaimie stood up to silently appraise her. What is it with Sutherland boys lusting after Māori girls? Jacinta hadn’t thought of Jamie lusting after anything before now. Perhaps he was growing up.

‘Mrs Sutherland?’

‘Yes.’

‘I’m Teria Hurst. I’m a grief counsellor working for the hospital. We’re waiting for a neurologist to carry out tests on your husband but we don’t want you to get your hopes up. He has sustained a crushed skull and even if he was to recover there may be some brain damage.’

Jacinta nodded her head in agreement, not able to speak.

‘If you want to talk, you can call me anytime. Here’s my card. I’ll be somewhere about the hospital. We are here to try and make the path a little smoother for you.’

‘Thank you,’ muttered Jacinta, trying to bring a smile to her drawn face.

‘Another time, perhaps.’

‘That’s fine. I’ll pop back and forth to see how you are getting on. If you need me my mobile number is on the card, or you can ask at the nurse’s station for them to contact me.’

‘Thank you.’

An hour went by before the grief counsellor came back.

‘The neurologist has carried out his tests,’ she said. ‘I’m afraid your husband showed no response to any of the tests. We think it’s time to turn off the ventilator but that has to be your decision. Would you like to come through and see him?’

Jacinta automatically stood up to follow her through the door.

She held the door opened and Jacinta walked through to see Will coming towards them. They exchanged glances, neither saying a word. Will joined Jaimie as they walked along the corridor to Graham’s room.

Graham looked strangely calm. He was lying on his back as though fast asleep. Someone had closed his eyelids. Jacinta resented someone else being the one to have carried out this intimate act. They stood around the bed looking down at him,

not knowing what to say. A feeling of intense cold overwhelmed Jacinta causing her to shake. Tears welled up in her eyes and she began to sob. Will took her in his arms. If she hadn't had those strong arms about her she knew she would have fallen.

'Someone should say something,' said Will.

'I know the words to Amazing Grace,' said Jaimie.

Jacinta stopped crying and looked at her youngest son. He seemed to have matured in front of her eyes. He was the one who was always there for her.

'Go ahead, son. I'd like that.'

Jaimie lowered his head and began reciting the words of the tune he remembered from his sheet music. His voice lost all of its previous hesitancy to settle into the well modulated voice of a man, as he half sang and half recited the psalm.

'Amazing grace, how sweet the sound

That sav'd a wretch like me!

I once was lost but now am found,

Was blind but now I see.

'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,

And grace my fears reliev'd;

How precious did that grace appear,

The hour I first believ'd!

Thro' many dangers, toils and snares,

I have already come;

'Tis grace has brought me safe thus far,

And grace will lead me home.

The Lord has promis'd good to me,
His word my hope secures;
He will my shield and portion be,
As long as life endures.'

Jaimie stopped and looked up at his mother. 'I don't know any more of the words,' he mumbled, as though it was a crime to forget.

'Never mind, that was very nice. I was thinking of reciting Haere Ra anyway.'

Jacinta stared, unseeing, at Graham's impassive face as she recited Haere Ra. She realised she was saying her farewell.

'Po atarau (On a moonlit night),
E moea iho nei (I see you in a dream),
E haere ana (You going away),
Koe ki pamamao (To a distant land),

Haere Ra (Farewell),
Ka hoki mai ano (But return again),
Ki i te tau (To your loved one),
E tangi atu nei (Weeping here),

Jacinta's voice crackled like a fire during the last verse but she got through it. He didn't die of old age but the loving was there. The shadow of a moth fluttered across the wall behind Gray during her recital. She waited for the moth, and its

shadow, to settle on the wall. It was then she gave a nod to the young doctor to pull the plug.

That wasn't the end, though. Another woman arrived to inform them she was the bereavement officer. How many people did the hospital have for these tasks? Jacinta knew she was being hard on them - they were just doing their jobs and they had been very respectful. More forms needing signing. She was asked if she wanted to take home Gray's personal effects. When Jacinta nodded in the affirmative the woman pulled a curtain around the inert form of Gray. Jacinta and the boys retired to the next room where there were some chairs to sit on. A few minutes later the woman reappeared to present Jacinta with Gray's belongings inside a clip-top plastic bag. Jacinta looked at the bag and the items it contained; his wedding ring, some coins and notes from his pockets. It seemed so little in exchange for a life. Tears ran down her face again and she had to sit down. The bereavement officer had barely left the room when the grief counsellor returned to inform them the police wanted to take statements from each of them before they went home.

Jacinta nodded her head and stood up to follow the counsellor into yet another room. It was amazing how many empty rooms a hospital had in such a situation. Two uniformed constables, looking like they had just left school, were waiting for them. One was Pākeha and the other Samoan. Jacinta recited her version of the events leading up to Gray ending up in the hospital. After she had finished, each of the boys was asked to make a statement. When they had finished, they were forced to hang around until their sergeant arrived. Apparently, he was needed to make an examination of the body. Something about seniority or experience, she supposed.

When they got home Jacinta made a cup of tea and sat at the kitchen table cradling the warm cup in my hands, savouring its warmth. She didn't remember drinking the tea but she remembered looking at the empty cup and thinking it made a good metaphor for her.

Even though she was exhausted she found it hard to sleep that night. Normally she loved having the whole bed to herself, so she could spread her arms and legs wide but that was when she knew it was a treat. Now the big empty bed was hers every night. Fractured images floated past as she tried to summon up an image of Gray. Images of clothing and the shape of a person came and went but his face eluded her. It seemed a betrayal not being able to summon him up in her mind. She would put up with all of those nights of him snoring just to have him back. A cold shivering took hold of her and she drew herself into foetal position on her side. She wanted a sign from him he was still there. No phantom weight on the bed or breath on her face came. The only thing that did come was a tear, which ran down her face.

26

Until the coroner released a death certificate the date for the funeral could not be set. Jacinta thought in some ways the waiting helped them all to come to terms with Graham no longer being there. For her, there was a huge empty hole in her life, a rent in the fabric of her being. It took all of her composure to hold the tattered edges of her existence together. She kept expecting him to be there and had to stop herself talking to him when she thought he was with her. She was sure he was there sometimes, watching her dressing or cleaning her teeth. When she was alone she spoke softly to him, hoping he could hear her or watch her lip movements. For Māori, the path after death was known. Where does a Pākehā Scot go? Perhaps they go to Te Po as well. The ancient Greeks called it Hades but it is the same place. Wasn't the goddess of death Hine-nui te-Po just Persephone by another name? Nothing really changed for any of Man's tribes. They were all subject to the will of the gods.

On Wednesday, the Funeral Director came around with a copy of the death certificate and the funeral was scheduled for the following Tuesday. Notices were sent out in the various papers and the necessary phone calls made. Friends and family

came every day to offer their sympathy. The house was full of new spring flowers from one end of it to the other. The scent from some of the lilies became so cloying they had to take these out to the implement shed, where Gray had lain. This seemed appropriate somehow. The weekend was the worst. People from all over the district, as well as friends and family, came to pay their respects and had to be entertained. There was not a moment she could be alone. She wanted to shout out loud for everyone to bugger off and go home but she didn't. Will took himself off when it got too crowded, on the pretence of checking the stock. He was taking the loss of his father hard. She wished she could just hop on a farm bike and go out with him – to get away from all the people and to comfort him.

Monday night was the first night they had the house to themselves again. Jaimie was going through all the bits of paper they had received, when he noted the death certificate was provisional.

'Don't be ridiculous,' replied Jacinta. 'Death can't be provisional. It's as final as it gets.'

'No,' he replied. 'There's a sentence at the bottom saying this death certificate is provisional waiting on the Coroner's final report.'

'But the Coroner's report must have been issued, otherwise the death certificate wouldn't have been issued?' said Jacinta.

'I guess they know the cause of death but not how he died.'

No one said a word after that. The implication was the police investigations were not yet finished. They did not want to contemplate this and decided to go to bed where they could be with their own thoughts. Will and Jaimie bid their mother good night and Jacinta went to her own cold bed where the events of the last week finally

overwhelmed her. Despite a thousand thoughts rushing around inside her head she slept soundly for the first time since the accident.

The next day, the church was packed for the funeral. Angus and Margaret had come up from the Coromandel to arrange everything. Jacinta had offered them a room at the farm house but they stayed with friends at Mangawhai. Jacinta felt both resentful at their not coming to stay, as well as relieved at not having to play the hostess for them. The funeral took place in the Waipu Presbyterian Church as the options were the Kaiwaka Family Church run by the happy-clappy AOGs or the local Catholic Church. Gray would not have wanted to be farewelled by the happy clappies or by the Catholics. To him the Reformation took place only yesterday. Anyway, Angus had arranged the venue along with everything else. Jacinta thanked God for Angus and Margaret as she knew there was no way she would have coped.

Two constables, a WPC and a plain clothes detective were conspicuous by their presence outside the church. The plain clothes man couldn't have been anything other than a cop. He had all of the attributes that go with the job: Big frame, bull neck, broad face, hands like sides of meat and size 12 shoes. Their presence only reinforced the family's fears they were still under investigation. Jacinta could see no reason for their interest. After all, it had been an accident. What did they want from them? When she and the boys walked down the central aisle to the front of the church the eyes of the congregation followed them. She couldn't tell whether she was the object of their pity or their loathing. She held her head high and acted with what dignity she could muster. In the front row, Angus, Margaret, Rod and Alex as well as Tipene, Hiria, Naida, Aroha and Niko were waiting for them. Hugs and hand shakes were given all around. The men were solemn with just a nod of acknowledgment, as though they feared they would betray their emotions if they

spoke. Jacinta was particularly pleased Margaret was so warm. The gulf between them since the accident had deeply affected her. It must have also been a shock for them. People don't act rationally in such circumstances, a fact she knew only too well. She was overcome with emotion as they all hugged her. Both sides of her family had rallied around. Tears streamed down her cheeks and sobs convulsed her. The others huddled around her to screen her from prying eyes. When she had recovered and dabbed her eyes it was to see many of the congregation that had stared at her a few minutes before were now looking away in embarrassment. As she sat down in the front row, there was a small sense of relief and even a return of a little of her self-respect.

The coffin was resting on its chromium plated trolley directly in front of them. A Nova Scotia tartan was draped over it. The Reverend McLeod or perhaps Angus had probably organised that to show Gray was a descendant from the first Scottish settlers from Nova Scotia. As she stared at the coffin she could not prevent herself tracing the outline of Graham's body inside it. The Reverend McLeod stood to address the congregation. He looked at Jacinta and the boys as he spoke of their loss and the tragic circumstances of Gray's death. He made no accusations, merely reminding the congregation of the huge loss the family must be feeling. After his address they all stood to sing '*Abide with Me.*' God, she hated that hymn, so bloody morbid! Why did Angus choose that?

After the opening hymn William stepped up to the lectern to read the eulogy. Jacinta was blown away by it. She knew he had had a falling out with Gray over the farm but he showed no malice at all in his eulogy. He covered the whole nine yards from the Sutherlands being evicted from their homeland, their migration to Canada and joining up with the Reverend Norman McLeod in his settlement on Cape Breton

Island. The cold winters and the arrival of the potato blight. Their hardships struggling to survive before the Reverend McLeod instructed his followers to build a fleet of ships to transport them to a new life in the Pacific. She had never heard William so eloquent, or to have spoken so long. He went on to how the Sutherlands, McKenzies, McLeods, McDonalds and Stewarts had arrived in New Zealand on board the *Breadalbane*, how they stayed in Auckland waiting for the land grant from the Governor that would allow them to start the settlement at Waipu. How they sailed up the coast in several cutters, built their new houses, churches and established their farms. When Will spoke of his great-grandfather, Captain James MacKenzie marrying Mary McLeod and buying the land on the Kaipara and of his building a house, a cutter and a jetty, he spoke with pride. There were tears in Jacinta's eyes when he got to Lachie marrying Catherine McDonald and then Gray and herself. The Sutherlands were a family to be proud of. They had kept their Highland bloodline pure right down to Angus and Gray. When he finished, she realised why he had gone off on his farm bike so often instead of being hospitable to all of the guests and sympathisers. He wanted to be alone to compose his eulogy as a means of coming to terms with his father's death. When he finished he went to the coffin and placed a Scottish thistle on the tartan. He walked back towards them with his head held high and jaw set in defiance of any detractors there.

Even so, there was a barb in the eulogy for her. When Graham had married her, he had gone against family convention and sullied their Highland blood. It made her question her own bloodlines. Who was she? She was tangata whenua through her grandmother on her mother's side who was Te Arawa. She was also Ngati Tarara through her grandfather on her mother's side who was a Dalmatian. She was also English through her grandfather on her father's side and was tangata whenua through

her grandmother on her father's side who was Ngati Wai. She then thought of her sons who were blessed with all these strands of heritage. They were neither English nor Scots, nor Dalmatian, nor Te Arawa, nor Ngati Wai. They were born in this land and could be rightly called tangata whenua, people of this land. Graham Sutherland had left his mark and his blood in this land. Let his descendants remember his name and their whakapapa. She stood up to hug William as he reached the front row of seats. Never had she been as proud of him as in that moment. Everything else that had happened diminished in significance. He had summed up Graham perfectly.

They stood to sing the twenty-third psalm before the pall bearers stepped forward to stand by the coffin. William and Angus led, followed by Andy and Jaimie on one side and Angus' boys, Roderick and Alex on the other. Margaret took her hand as they stood up and walked behind the coffin. Temara also stood beside her, ready to support her should she need it. When the coffin reached the main doors of the church, the skirling of a piper started. She recognized the Pipe Major from Jamie's Pipe Band as he played *Amazing Grace*. A shiver ran through her, despite her having no Scottish blood in her veins. As the coffin reached the hearse the boys from Will's rugby team lined up along the road broke out into a spirited Haka. That broke all of her resolve and she broke down again. Tears streamed down her face, this time with pride. Temara held her tight. It was then that she felt a special bond with Temara. When she was more composed, she looked at the sea of faces around her. So many came towards her offering their sympathies, they became a blur. She was sure Gray would have been proud of his send-off. When the hearse began to drive off, the first spots of rain hit her. She looked up to see a shower cloud hanging in an otherwise blue sky. Was it Rangi, the sky father, weeping for Graham, or was he weeping for her, one of his own? Rod drove up and opened a door for her. She

climbed in to find Alex in the car as well. The cortege followed the hearse to the cemetery down by the river. She was surprised to see Jaimie had got there before them. He had his pipes with him and she could tell he was going to play either before or after the interment. She hoped he would play before. The Reverend McLeod was standing beside the open grave, a descendant of the original reverend no doubt. She supposed he had arrived with the hearse. It was all over quickly. The minister read the committal and then the coffin was lowered into the grave. At that moment Jaimie started to play *The Cock of the North*, aue! She knew them all by now. She was so proud of Jaimie. He was giving a final salute to the last full blooded Scot in the family line.

27

The sounds of doors opening and closing, the murmur of voices and the heavy crunching of feet walking across the gravel were heard from inside the house. There followed loud knocking on the door. Jacinta opened the door to be confronted by a plain clothes detective and a uniformed policewoman. In the background several other officers stood about awaiting their orders.

‘Mrs Jacinta Sutherland?’

‘Yes.’

‘I’m Detective Sergeant Anderson and this is WPC Gardner. We are making investigations into the death of your husband as a result of certain anomalies raised in the coroner’s report.’

‘What anomalies? The coroner has already issued a death certificate. We had to have that before we could have the funeral.’

‘If you check, madam, you’ll find it was a provisional certificate issued to allow the funeral to take place. It is provisional awaiting a full coroner’s report.’

‘Couldn’t all this have been sorted out at the time? This is all very upsetting, as you can imagine.’

‘I’m sure it is madam but we are only doing our duty.’

‘How can I help then?’

‘I understand you were the person who called the ambulance regarding your husband’s accident.’

‘No, that was my son, William.’

The detective looked the policewoman who made a note in her notepad. Surely they’ve read our previous statements.

‘We would like to look at the scene of the accident. Could you show it to us?’

‘Yes, it’s over in the shed. I’ll just turn off the oven and be with you.’

Jacinta walked slowly back to the kitchen where she turned off the stove and took off her apron to hang on a hook. She surprised herself at her composure. When she was ready, she walked back to the front door.

‘If you will follow me.’

The heavy crunching of gravel followed Jacinta across to the implement shed. They entered the shed and Jacinta walked over to the hay baler.

‘We found him here,’ she said pointing to the exact spot she had found Graham. The detective bent down to look at the sides of the hay baler and the dark stain ingrained into the concrete slab before making a general inspection of everything.

‘Have any of these machines been moved since the accident?’

‘No, I don’t think so. The rain has hardly let up for a month now, so I’m pretty sure my boys haven’t taken anything out.’

‘Right. We’ll let the forensic team give the place a going over while we have a chat back in the kitchen.’

Jacinta was escorted back to the house by the detective and the policewoman. After having led the way out to the shed, a subtle change had occurred in their relationship on the return journey. In the kitchen they sat around the kitchen table, where the policewoman once again took out her notebook.

‘Right, we won’t beat about the bush, Mrs Sutherland. We now have the coroner’s report and there are some anomalies we would like to sort out. This is an interview and anything you say may be used as evidence against you. You have the right to remain silent.’

‘Am I being charged with his death?’

‘No, madam. We are obliged to say that whenever we are interviewing people when there is the possibility of a crime having been committed.’

‘Has a crime been committed?’

‘That’s for us to determine. Can you relate the events leading up to finding your husband?’

Jacinta looked down at her trainers for some time getting her thoughts together before answering.

‘You’ll have to bear with me. It’s all been a bit emotional the last couple of weeks. It was a wet day. I remember I was in the house watching TV with Jamie. Leastways Jamie was watching the TV and I was sitting with him reading a book. Gray and Will were out somewhere or other on the farm, checking on the stock from memory.’

‘Can you tell us where they were specifically?’

‘Not really, they were always out and about.’

‘Go on then.’

She related how Will had burst into the room to tell them Gray had had a fall and how she had rushed to him. 'It's all a bit of a blur now. I must have fainted as the next thing I remember was the ambulance officer being there with Will.

'Did your husband regain consciousness during this time?'

'No, he just lay there.'

'Was it your impression he had fallen where you found him?'

'Yes. Will thought he must have hit his head on the side of the hay baler when he fell. There was nothing to make me think otherwise. I remember there was water around him as though he had come in from the rain. It was what you would expect in the circumstances.'

'What happened then?'

'Well, the ambulance officer examined him. He said Gray was dead. Naturally, I was upset. The Officer tried to revive him. He took him to North Shore Hospital where there was a slim chance they might be able to revive him. I travelled in the back of the ambulance to the hospital. The boys were to follow in my car.'

'Right, we have the notes made by the two constables who interviewed you at the hospital. We would like to interview Jamie and William. Are they here?'

'Jamie's at school. Will's out on his farm bike somewhere. He usually comes back in at lunchtime.'

The detective looked at his watch before looking up at Jacinta.

'I presume Will has a mobile on him?'

'No, he doesn't have one.'

'So, he didn't have one on the day of the accident, then?'

'No. Only Gray had a cell phone then.'

'Did your husband call home with it on the day of the accident?'

‘Not that I can remember. Can’t you check that sort of thing through Telecom?’

‘Yes, madam. Do you know where his phone is now?’

‘I think it’s in the bag of his effects the hospital gave back to me.’

‘Can you get it please?’

Jacinta got up and walked though to the bedroom. She had trouble finding it at first. It was then she remembered she had put the bag in the drawer of the telephone table in the hall. She brought the phone and the plastic bag back to the lounge. The detective placed the phone in an evidence bag before examining Graham’s personal possessions through the side of the plastic bag.

‘There was no mention of a mobile phone with your husband’s possessions when he was brought back from the hospital.’

‘I know. You know how things sometimes go round and round in your head when you lie awake in bed at night? It was like that the night after we came home from the hospital. It occurred to me then that his phone should have been with him when he was found. The next morning I got up early and checked all the usual places he might have left it. With no sign of it in the house or utility shed I sent the boys out to look for it. It was Jaimie who found it by the road gate to the run-off.’

‘Right, we’ll need to take it as evidence. We’ll also take his personal effects. I’ll make sure that you get back his wedding ring once forensics has looked at it. I’ll leave you with WPC Gardner her while I go and check up on the forensic team.’ He stood up and strode across the floor and out through the door. Jacinta and WPC Gardner exchanged glances then settled into a silent wait. Not knowing what else to do, Jacinta made a cup of tea to fill in the time.

Will returned to the house at ten past twelve. Jacinta was well aware of the time as she had been watching the clock the whole time. He walked into the kitchen in his socks to look around at the WPC and the detective who had by then returned to the kitchen. Jacinta was surprised by his calmness. It was almost as if he had been expecting them. She supposed she had as well ever since Jamie read the note on the death certificate. But why were the police taking such an interest in the case? How could there be anomalies when Gray had simply slipped or fallen over and hit his head

‘What’s going on?’ asked Will.

‘Are you William Hector Sutherland?’ asked the detective.

‘Yes.’

‘As I have said to your mother we are carrying out further investigations as to how your father died. The coroner’s report has found there are some anomalies, which need investigating.’

‘Oh, what anomalies are those?’

‘We’ll get to those in a minute. This is an official interview and I must warn you anything you say may be used as evidence against you. You have the right to remain silent.’

‘Fair enough, what do you want to know?’

‘In your statement you said you found your father in the implement shed, is that correct?’

‘Yeah, there was heavy rain that day and Dad and I both went out together to check the stock were okay. When I drove back into the implement shed Dad was lying on the floor unconscious. It appeared he had fallen and cracked his head on the side of the hay baler.’

‘What did you do then?’

‘I bent down to see if he was still breathing. I couldn’t be sure, as his breathing was very shallow, if at all. I then raced in here to get Mum.’

‘The post-mortem found fungal spores from starling droppings in your father’s lungs. Do you know of anywhere on your property when you have starlings nesting?’

‘I suppose there might be starlings nesting in any of the farm buildings. Did it say whether it was starlings or mynahs?’

‘Why do you ask?’

‘It’s just that there are more mynahs around here than starlings?’

‘Can you think of any building in particular where there might be starlings or mynahs nesting then?’

‘Not really.’

‘Lachie’s house had starlings nesting in the roof,’ blurted Jacinta.

The detective turned to look at her, having been focussed on how Will answered his question.

‘Oh! And where would we find Lachie’s house?’

‘Down on the run-off - further out on the peninsular. It’s derelict now,’ replied Jacinta.

The detective looked back at Will as though asking a silent question. Will looked at the policewoman writing everything down in her notebook. Jacinta wondered if this was to avoid looking the detective in the eye.

‘How far is it from Lachie’s house to the implement shed then?’

‘I suppose it’s about a kilometre and a half,’ said Jacinta.

‘Do you think it’s possible he had an accident elsewhere but managed to get back to the shed on his bike before collapsing there?’

The detective addressed this question at William. Will looked back from watching the policewoman, who Jacinta had to admit was quite comely, to look the detective in the eye.

‘It’s possible, I suppose. It would make sense. We never could figure out why he fell in the first place. We thought it might have been something to do with the medication he was taking.’

‘The post-mortem found two blows to his head. Both were to the back of the head. Don’t you think it strange he would fall twice and hit his head in virtually identical places?’

‘As I said I have no idea what happened to him?’

‘The post mortem also found marijuana seed spores and dust in your father’s lungs and dust residues on his hands and the sleeves of his jacket. How do you account for that?’

‘That can’t be right! There’s no marijuana around here and anyway, Graham detested the stuff.’

‘It was found during the post-mortem, there is no mistake, madam. You do realise what the implications of this is, don’t you?’

‘I guess you are going to tell me.’

‘If, as we suspect, our forensic team find no sign of starling nests, marijuana seeds or residue from plants in the implement shed, it means the deceased may have received his injuries elsewhere and either got back to the implement shed under his own steam before collapsing there, or he was dumped in the implement shed by others.’

‘What are you saying?’

‘I’m saying there is evidence your father’s death may not have been an accident.’

‘That’s ridiculous!’

‘We don’t think so. We shall be examining every inch of this farm. When we find the place where there are starling nests and signs of marijuana, we will know where your father was when he was struck on the head.’

‘Are you now saying someone deliberately hit him on the head?’

‘We have to look into that possibility. Who is the beneficiary of his Estate?’

‘Oh, this is getting more ridiculous by the minute. If you must know, the farm is held in Trust by Graham and his brother Angus,’ said Jacinta. ‘On Graham’s death I receive a quarter of the value of the farm and the boys each receive a sixth share each.’

‘How much is the farm valued at?’

‘I don’t know. It’s never been valued, as far as I know.’

‘I would have thought most farms in the area would be worth at least a million.’

‘Surely you’re not suggesting we all conspired to kill him just to get our hands on the money? That’s absurd!’

‘I’ve heard of crimes carried out for a lot less.’

At that point the detective’s cellphone rang and he picked it off the table to listen. He told the caller to stay there. When he turned off the phone he stood, followed by the others making moves to go.

‘We’re just going back over to the shed for a few minutes. I want you both to stay here in the meantime.’ With that, the detective and WPC Gardner got up and

walked out the door, leaving both Jacinta and William wondering what was going to happen next. Will jumped up and peered out of the window. Nothing was said until Will called out they were coming back out. Jacinta stood up to stand beside him. The police leaving the shed were all dressed in white plastic overalls, gloves and close fitting caps. They looked slightly macabre, like something out of a movie involving extra-terrestials. The police climbed into their vehicles and drove away. Jacinta and Will looked at each other, neither knowing what to say. It all was too bizarre for words.

28

Apart from the flowers on the counter, nothing had changed in their lawyer's office since Will had last visited. Will's mother pressed the bell on the counter and the receptionist appeared from a file room at the rear. She informed them Jim Morrow had been called away on urgent business and asked if it would be all right if his partner Sean Duthie stood in for him.

'Of course, we have met Mr Duthie before,' said Will's mother.

'Mr Duthie will be with you soon,' replied the receptionist.

They sat down on the pink velour covered squabs lining two walls of the waiting room. Will's eyes wandered over the surfaces of the room taking in the cracked plaster in the corner of the ceiling and the darkened square on the faded wall paper where a picture had once hung. The edges of the paint around the doors were chipped revealing dark varnish underneath. Nothing had been done to these offices for many a year. It merely served its purpose.

A door opened down the corridor and the sound of footsteps advanced down the hallway towards them. Sean Duthie appeared at the end of the corridor and arranged his dour face into an attempt at a welcoming smile. It was the first time Will

had met Jim Morrow's business partner who was a small worried looking man, not the sort of bloke to inspire confidence.

'Mrs Sutherland, it's so good to see you again. Please accept my condolences on your recent loss.'

They all stood up and Will's Mum shook his proffered hand. He then shook hands with each of the boys as their mother introduced them. His hand felt like a wet fish, repellent to the touch. Will wondered if he had just washed his hands or whether it was damp all the time. He surreptitiously wiped his hand on the back of his jeans.

'I hope you don't mind me standing in for Jim. It's a straight forward matter.'

'No, that's fine,' replied Jacinta.

'Good, please come to my office.'

Will followed his mother through to an office at the rear of the building. Sean Duthie had obviously been informed of how many they were as four stacker chairs had been placed in front of his desk.

'Please sit down,' said Sean, seating himself behind his desk.

Will waited for his mother to sit down on the chair closest to the wall before he sat next to her. Andy and Jaimie took the other seats. Will, as was his habit sunk down into the chair with his legs extended and feet crossed. Andy sat with his back straight while Jaimie had lounged back and stretched his long legs partly under Mr Duthie's desk.

'This must have been a trying time for you all. You all have my deepest sympathy for your tragic loss,' said Mr. Duthie.

'Thank you, it hasn't been easy,' replied Jacinta.

'Well, we now come to the reading of the Will. Graham's last Will was prepared in 1992. I take it you know of no later will than this?'

After receiving no response he opened the envelope of an A5 sized brown envelope and pulled out some folded papers.

‘Right then, this is the last Will and Testament of Graham Gordon Sutherland. I understand you are familiar with the contents of the Will, Mrs Sutherland. In essence, Graham left his portion of the Trust that owns the farm at Oneriro Road and the run-off, which I understand was his grandfather’s to you.’

‘Can you explain how the Trust works?’ asked Jacinta.

‘Yes. The Trust had Graham, Graham’s brother, Angus and you as Trustees. It is now up to the Trustees to appoint another Trustee to replace Graham but we can come to that later. Under Graham’s Will, half of the assets of the Trust will now be assigned to the beneficiaries of his Will. These are you and your sons, William Andrew and James. The farm is administered by the Trust and the beneficiaries are paid a dividend at the discretion of the Trustees, depending on how much the property may have earned in a set time. Trusts of this nature last up to 70 years upon which time they are terminated.’

‘That doesn’t seem a very good arrangement,’ stated Will.

‘How do you mean?’ asked Sean, turning to face Will.

‘Well, It’ll be me who does most of the work to keep the farm productive, yet if Angus or Mum or my brothers object to anything I might want to do, then I have to lump it.’

‘That’s the way the Will is set up, however, there’s nothing to prevent the Trustees from adopting new Rules, or changing the Trustees or the Beneficiaries, should they wish.’

‘Yeah, well we might just have to do that,’ replied Will.

‘What about Andy and me?’ piped up Jamie.

‘As I’ve said, you are both beneficiaries of the Trust and will receive a share of any profits at the discretion of the Trustees.’

‘Is that all?’

‘What else is there?’

‘I dunno,’ said Jaimie, looking disappointed.

‘You and I will benefit from Mum’s Will, when the time comes,’ said Andy.

‘Ri-ight,’ said Jaimie.

‘If you would like to alter the terms of the Trust Deed set up by Graham, I would be more than happy to assist you. I would recommend however you have a family meeting, with Angus present, so you can look at where you all stand first.’

‘Thank you, Mr. Duthie. We shall act on your advice and get back to you,’ said Jacinta, standing to leave. Sean Duthie leapt to his feet to come around the desk and open the door. He shook hands with each in turn as they left. To Will his handshake was just as damp the second time.

29

A week after the police visit to the farm, the Sutherlands received another visit by the police resulting in Jacinta and Will being taken to Maungaturoto Police Station to ‘assist the police’ in their inquiries.’ Jacinta was ushered into the Interview Room first. The room was bare, apart from the white vinyl table and four chairs in the centre of the room, a CCTV camera mounted high on the wall in the corner of the room and a full length mirror along one wall. Jacinta supposed this was a two-way mirror like you see on TV. She envisaged a group of people sitting behind the glass studying every reaction she made to the questions then dismissed the notion, knowing how few police there were. The detective who had visited the farm the previous week was seated at the end of the table. She had forgotten his name already. The detective motioned for her to take a seat at the end of the table before pressing the record button on a tape machine and speaking into a microphone.

‘Commencement of interview of Jacinta Rena Sutherland on Wednesday the 3rd of March 1889. The time is ten o’clock with Detective-Sergeant Anderson and WPC Stanaway present.’

‘Now Mrs Sutherland, we have your previous statements about how your son William first alerted you to something wrong and how you then found your husband in an unconscious state in the implement shed. At the time was your husband’s farm bike in the shed?’

‘I can’t say. I have an image of at least one bike being there but I can’t be certain. It wasn’t my main focus at the time.’

‘You’ve stated that you did not check for vital signs when you found your husband. Isn’t that a bit strange? Normally that would be the first thing anyone would do.’

‘He was unconscious. I was afraid to move him in case he was in a coma.’

‘You told us before you had done a First Aid course?’

‘Yes. Several years back.’

‘Who was that with?’

‘The St John’s Ambulance Association in Whangarei. Gray and I did the course together. It was an-all day course.’

‘Right, we can check that. Now, you said you believed your husband must have fallen where you found him?’

‘That’s right. There was blood pooled under his head and on the side of the hay baler. There were also pools of water under him, indicating he had come in from outside and then collapsed.’

‘Couldn’t someone have smeared his blood on the hay baler?’

‘I suppose anything’s possible but I took things at face value. Anyway, why would anyone want to do that?’

‘That is what we are trying to determine. Now, can you tell us what your husband would have had for breakfast on the day he died?’

‘He always had a half glass of milk with his pills then he had four slices of toast with butter and jam. He used to read the paper while eating his toast and finished his breakfast with a cup of coffee.’

‘It appears your husband’s last meal was his breakfast. Your phone call to the ambulance was recorded at 2:13 in the afternoon. Was he in the habit of coming back to the house for lunch?’

‘Most of the time he did but if something came up, like a steer getting stuck in the mud down by the harbour, or something like that, he could get delayed.’

‘So you didn’t think it unusual he hadn’t come back to the house for lunch on the day he died?’

‘Not especially. I was expecting him at any time when Will came in.’

‘Did your husband and William share their duties on the farm, or did one look after the farm and the other the run-off?’

‘They shared it generally but I suppose Will tended to look after the run-off more.’

‘So, on the day your husband died, there was a storm and both of them went out to look over the stock. Is that correct?’

‘Not really a storm as such but the weather was pretty wild from what I recall.’

‘Do you remember if your husband gave any orders about which area they would check out?’

‘Yes, Gray was going to check out the main farm and Will was going to go down to the run-off. At least that’s how they set out. Goodness knows what happened after they left.’

‘Do you know if your husband had his mobile phone with him when he went out that morning?’

‘He usually took it with him, but he was forgetful at times. He sometimes left it on the kitchen counter or on the floor of the porch after putting on his boots.’

‘So you can’t say with any certainty whether he had his phone or not?’

‘Not then, no.’

‘You mentioned in our last interview you thought there were starlings in the house down on the run-off. How did you know that?’

‘We had often discussed the large starling nest under the roof. Gray was worried it posed a fire risk. Anyway, I think Will recently removed it.’

‘Were there any other buildings on either of the farm blocks where starlings had nests?’

‘That’s hard to say. Every spring the birds try and make nests in the roofs. We get sparrows and mynahs making nests in the farmhouse and swallows building nests in the outbuildings. There could be starlings anywhere really.’

‘Has your husband ever mentioned marijuana growing on the farm?’

‘Goodness, no! He would never tolerate that.’

‘So, you know of no building on the farm where marijuana might have been present?’

‘No!’

‘We understand your husband was undergoing chemotherapy, is that right?’

‘Yes.’

‘Did your husband show any side effects to this chemotherapy treatment?’

‘He came up in a horrible rash at the start but the doctor changed the dosages and that seemed to come right.’

‘He never displayed any sign of dizziness then?’

‘Only the once, when we went to the Highland Games and he got a bit lala mixing alcohol and his medication. He stayed off alcohol after that.’

‘Would there have been any other cause which might have made him stumble?’

‘Well, he had arthritis in his knees from playing rugby when he was younger.’

‘Enough to cause his knees to give way on him?’

‘I’m not sure. I know they caused him pain at times but he did his best to hide things like that.’

Anderson had been leaning forward and staring hard into Jacinta’s face as he asked his questions. His chair was higher than hers as well. If he was trying to intimidate her, he was doing a good job of it.

‘How much would you do for your sons, Mrs Sutherland?’

‘How do you mean?’

‘I mean would you protect a son if he broke the law?’

‘I don’t know. The situation has never arisen.’

‘Right, that’ll do for now. If you will wait here with WPC Stanaway, we will get the statement written up and you can sign it. Interview ceased at 11:21am.’

After Detective Anderson left the room, Jacinta was left staring at the blank wall opposite her. Presently a constable came in with a tray with a cup of tea, sugar bowl and milk jug. She was parched after the interview and grateful for the tea. It must have been another hour before Anderson came back with a typed statement. Jacinta smiled to herself despite everything as she pictured a young constable stabbing at a word processor with his forefingers transcribing the words from the tape. She read

through the statement, taking delight in correcting some typos, before signing the bottom and initially each page. She was then escorted back out to the waiting room where Will was waiting his turn. The clock on the wall showed 12:30.

Anderson called Will in to the Interview Room. She knew Will was dying to know what they had asked her but like a confessional she could not bring herself to tell him.

‘I’m going to get a taxi back to the farm. Ring me when you are finished and I’ll come around and pick you up.’

‘Okay,’ replied Will.

‘Are you all right?’

‘Yeah, just bored shitless! I don’t see why they have to interview us separately. At this rate we’ll be here all day.’

‘That’s why I’m going back now.’

‘Lucky you!’

Back at the farm Jacinta went into her bedroom to see if anything had been disturbed. Satisfied that nothing had been moved, she went around every other room in the house and then out to the implement shed. She had a nagging feeling they had been through the house and shed while they were away.

Will rang her just after three and Jacinta drove into Maungturoto to pick him up. They drove home in silence. At the turnoff she pulled in behind a school bus making a right hand turn. They followed behind the bus until it reached the end of the run where Jaimie, the last passenger got off. He didn’t see them initially and began walking along the road with his socks down around his ankles and the tail of his shorts hanging out. When Jacinta tooted the horn he turned to see them just as the

bus made a 360 turn to head back to its depot. He broke into one of his lop-sided grins and gave them a wave. After everything that had happened, that lop-sided grin made Jacinta's day. She pulled along side and Jaimie jumped into the back seat.

'Where've you been?' he asked.

'In Maungaturoto at the cop shop,' answered Will.

'What for this time?'

'Oh, the cops have some fanciful notion one of us killed Dad,' replied Will.

'Fair go?'

'I don't know. Who knows what they think.'

'I don't see how they can have anything on us. It was just an accident, wasn't it?'

'Jeeze, where have you been?' said Will 'If they think a crime has been committed, the cops will stitch up anyone for it, so long as it clears their precious books. None of us can feel comfortable once they get a notion like that in their heads.'

For once, Jacinta agreed with Will but couldn't bring herself to say so aloud.

They had barely got into the kitchen when the phone rang. They all stood there staring at it, none willing to pick it up. Finally Jacinta walked across the room and picked up the receiver.

'Hello, the Sutherland residence.'

A deep male voice asked if Jaimie was at home.

'Yes, hang on.'

Jacinta passed the handset to Jaimie. 'It's for you.'

'Who is it?'

'I don't know.'

Jaimie took it and answered:

‘Jaimie Sutherland here.’

‘Oh yeah..... Yeah I suppose so..... What?I suppose so. I’ll ask my Mum.’

Jaimie looked up and covered the receiver with his hand.

‘It’s the cops. They want me to go into the station tomorrow to make a statement.’

‘You too, God this is the limit,’ said Will.

‘Tell them I’ll take you round there after school. Tell them to expect us about four.’

Jaimie said he’d be there at four and hung up.

‘How long will it take?’ he asked.

‘I was in there for about two and half hours all up,’ said Jacinta.

‘I’ve got an assignment due tomorrow,’ said Jaimie.

‘Can I help you with it tonight?’

‘Nah, I’ll just have to do it tonight.’

‘I don’t know about you but I’m starting to get a bad feeling about all of this.’

‘Same here,’ said Will.

30

Will's uncle and aunt agreed to come up for a family meeting in Jim Morrow's office to look at changing the Trust Deed. Andy borrowed a car from someone in his flat and drove up the night before the meeting. They all met Angus and Margaret in the car park outside Jim's office. After advising the receptionist of their appointment, they were made to wait for twenty minutes before they were ushered into Jim's office. Will was prepared to wait longer, if necessary, so long as it meant they were to meet Jim and not Sean Duthie. He had taken a strong dislike to Sean after their last meeting. Jim was all warm handshakes and bonhomie with Angus and Margaret but almost flippant with Will's Mum and the boys, merely motioning them to take a seat. With Will's Dad no longer there, it seemed as though the rest of the family had less relevance. Will had already picked up an undercurrent of disapproval whenever he had gone into town, or spoken with their neighbours. His old man had been well respected in the area and he sensed there were people out there who blamed them for his death. Six chairs had been placed in a row facing Jim's desk making the room more cramped than it usually was. They sat down on the hard stacker chairs, while Jim sank down into his leather bound swivel chair from

which to conduct the meeting. He leant forward with his elbows on his desk and fingers steepled before his face. At first Jim was at a loss for words. This was surprising, as Will's old man had always said Jim was a born salesman with a ready patter.

‘Right, this is a meeting of the Graham Gordon Sutherland Family Trust. I will take the minutes and offer advice when asked. Apart from that, I declare the meeting open and perhaps Angus, you can start proceedings.’

‘Thank you Jim. We all know the terms of Graham's Will. The biggest problem, as far as William sees it, is that he is now responsible for all of the farm work, yet he does not get a proportionate return for his efforts. Also, the fact that the run-off historically has been held as a separate Title complicates matters. By itself, the run-off is too small to be a productive unit and therefore cannot stand alone in its present use, however as they are not adjoining they will have to remain as separate Titles. There is the possibility it may be able to be sold off as a horticultural unit some time in the future, or we may develop it along those lines ourselves. In this meeting we can vote for changes to the Rules of the Trust to improve the situation, as we see it. Perhaps William should now put his case.’

‘Yeah, right. The way I see it, the farm and the run-off are both owned by the Trust, yet I seem to be the mug doing all the work. If Mum, Andy and Jaimie are to benefit, then they should do their share of the work. Alternatively, any dividends produced by the farm should reflect the amount of effort put into the farm by each of the beneficiaries.’

‘If I may butt in here,’ said Jim Morrow, ‘I think you are confusing the benefits received as dividends and the shareholding should the farm be realised. At present if the farm and run-off were to be sold then Angus would receive 50%, Mrs

Sutherland would receive 25% of the value of the sale and William, Andy and James would receive the other 25% in equal shares. With regard to giving you a return for your efforts, there is nothing to stop the Trust granting William a salary commensurate with that of a farm manager for the work he does on the farm. This would be a liability that must be discharged prior to any dividend being paid. Dividends must be paid in proportion to that of the shareholding. Would that satisfy you William?’

‘Yeah, I suppose so. How large a salary had you in mind?’

‘That’s not up to me. You will need to decide that amongst yourselves,’ said Jim.

‘I’ve already carried out some research into this,’ said Angus.

Everyone turned to look at Angus as he pulled some papers from a folder he had with him.

‘From what I’ve found out, salaries for farm managers depend on his experience and the level of his responsibility. At the moment, salaries vary between \$24,000.00 and \$37,000.00 per annum. This might not seem much at first glance but there are a lot of extra benefits farm managers receive, which make the total package look a lot better. They include; free accommodation, free or subsidised power supply and telephone, free or subsidised meat and other food produced on the farm or free meals and transport or petrol allowances. These might boost the basic salary by between \$3,000.00 and \$7,800.00 per year giving a total package somewhere between \$ 27,000.00 and \$ 44,800.00 per year.’

‘That sounds fine,’ said Andy but William is hardly qualified to be a farm manager. I mean, what does he know about farm and business management, let alone things like animal husbandry?’

‘Not a hell of a lot about business management, I admit but I do know a fair bit about animal husbandry, pest control, spraying techniques, stock and pasture control, fencing and all that stuff,’ answered William, somewhat peeved at receiving a broadside from his younger brother, whom he expected would support him.

‘I guess, the rest of the Trustees need to know whether, in order to be appointed as the farm manager, you are prepared to take courses to make up for your deficiencies in training.’ said Angus.

‘What, go back to school?’

‘There are papers you can do extramurally. We are not asking you to do everything at once. Just do a single paper to start with and see how you go.’

‘I suppose I could give it a go,’ answered Will.

‘Right, well I move we appoint William as farm manager on a base salary of \$30,000.00 per annum to start with. On top of that he has free access to all farm equipment and all farm costs will be borne by the Trust. It is tacitly accepted that William will improve his knowledge of farm management by enrolling in some extramural courses. All those in favour say Aye.’ A ragged volley of ‘Ayes’ bounded around the tiny office.

‘What about Mum?’ asked Andy.

‘Mum and Jaimie can stay in the house,’ said William.

‘Yeah but what would happen if William got married?’ asked Jaimie.

‘Mum could stay in the house. I don’t see a problem with that,’ said Will.

‘And Jaimie?’ asked Angus.

‘Jaimie could stay until he was ready to leave. My only stipulation would be that he earned his keep,’ said Will.

‘If it’s good enough for Will to get paid doing farm work then I should get paid as well,’ protested Jaimie.

‘Fair enough,’ said Angus. ‘I propose Jaimie gets paid \$12.00 an hour for any farm work he does.

‘Jeez, he’s not worth that much, make it ten,’ said William.

‘Are you happy with ten, Jaimie?’

‘It’s ten more than I get now, I accept.’

‘All right. We seem to have agreed on the provisions of the Trust,’ said Jim. ‘I propose we appoint William to replace Graham as Trustee. The beneficiaries of the Trust shall remain as Angus, Mrs. Sutherland, William, Andrew and James. Does anyone have any problems with that?’

‘In keeping with my family’s fifty percent stake in the property, I would like to put forward Roderick, my elder son as a Trustee also,’ said Angus.

‘Does anyone have any objection to this,’ asked Jim.

When no one said anything, he said, ‘Right, I shall draw up a revised Trust Deed on that basis and issue the first minutes for the revised Trust as we have discussed,’ said Jim. ‘Now onto other matters, as instructed by Angus, I have made preliminary assessment of the value of the properties. Bear in mind I have not called in a valuer at this stage, as I understand you didn’t want the public at large to have any inkling you might be looking at selling the property. I consider this is a wise course in view of recent events. Based on recent sales in the region, the going rate is between \$5,000 and \$6,000 per hectare. That would put the total land owned by the Trust in the range of 1.3 to 1.7 million dollars.’

Will had not realised Angus had instructed Jim to do this. The shock at hearing the value of the property, which was a lot more than he would have predicted caused him to break into a grin. Even his mother looked shocked, yet happy at the news. Their excitement at hearing this news was soon dashed when both Jim Morrow and Angus turned to stare at them. He didn't look too pleased. Will wondered whether he should make some comment to explain his grin but decided it might only aggravate a bad situation. It seemed Jim Morrow and Angus had some doubts about their innocence. Well, fuck them, thought Will. It was an accident, regrettable for sure but they'll just have to get used to the idea.

31

Everyone was still in bed when they arrived. It was a Sunday, the day everyone had a lie-in. Will heard the sound of tyres on the gravel in the yard but was too sleepy to take much notice at first. The subsequent heavy knocking on the front door resounded through the silent house making him leap out of bed and stand there, disorientated. His mother was already out of bed and peering through the side of the curtain in the lounge.

‘Who is it?’

‘The police.’

‘What do they want now?’

Before she answered there was more knocking on the door. Jacinta tied the chord of her dressing gown before opening the door. Will stood behind, looking over her shoulder. A sergeant, a police woman and two young constables stood there. They all wore bullet-proof over-vests with all sorts of gear hanging from them.

‘Are you Jacinta Rena Sutherland?’ said the sergeant.

‘Yes.’

‘Can you tell us if William Hector and James Robert Sutherland are also at home?’

‘Yes, this is Will. Jaimie’s still in bed.’

‘If you don’t mind, we will come in while you tell James to come into the living room.’

‘Can you tell us what all this is all about?’

‘Just get your son, madam.’

‘All right, wipe your feet as you come in. I’ll go and get him.’

Will stood by the door as the policemen marched into the house. The sergeant and the policewoman went straight into the living room. The two constables took station by the front and back door. Will’s Mum returned with Jaimie in tow, hair dishevelled and half awake, still struggling to get an arm into the sleeve of his dressing gown. He looked around the room, before sidling up to his older brother, as though seeking his protection from these intruders.

‘What’s happening?’ he whispered.

‘Dunno! The cops want us all in here.’

‘What for?’

‘I suppose they’re going to tell us.’

The sergeant stepped up to Will and stared him in the face.

‘Are you William Hector Sutherland?’

‘Yeah.’

‘And are you James Robert Sutherland?’

‘Ye..ye..yes, what’s this all about?’

‘You’ll find out in due course. William Hector Sutherland, you are hereby charged with the murder of Graham Gordon Sutherland on the 31st day of May in the

year of 1989. You are also charged with conspiring with others to defeat the course of justice. Anything you say will be taken down in evidence against you. Have you anything to say?’

‘No.’

‘Jacinta Rena Sutherland, you are hereby charged with being a party to an offence, namely the homicide of Graham Gordon Sutherland on the 31st day of May in the year 1989. You are also charged with failing to provide the necessities of life to one Graham Gordon Sutherland on the same date and to being an accessory after the fact. Anything you say may be taken down in evidence against you. Have you anything to say?’

‘Other than this is ridiculous, no.’

‘James Robert Sutherland, you are hereby charged with charged with being a party to an offence, namely the homicide of Graham Gordon Sutherland on the 31st day of May in the year 1989. You are also charged with failing to provide the necessities of life to one Graham Gordon Sutherland on the same date and to being an accessory after the fact. Anything you say may be taken down in evidence against you. Have you anything to say?’

‘This is crazy. It was an accident.’

‘We are just doing our duty. You will have the opportunity to state your case in court. You are all to be taken into custody and transferred to a place of detention. We appreciate you have just woken up so we will allow you to wash and breakfast before escorting you off the property. You have the right to ring a lawyer and we will allow you to make whatever arrangements you need for the care of your stock.’

‘We’ve got a shearing gang coming in a couple of days. We need to be here for that,’ said Will.

‘That won’t be possible. You will have to arrange for others to look after them,’ said the sergeant.

‘Don’t worry, I’ll take care of that,’ said Jacinta, walking to the phone in the kitchen and picking it up. She dialled a number from memory and everyone watched her as she waited for the call to be answered. Finally someone answered and she spoke into the telephone.

‘Margaret, Hi, it’s Jacinta. Sorry to wake you so early but is Angus there?’ There was a delay before Jacinta spoke again.

‘No, everything’s not all right. The police are here and we have all been arrested..... Of course, it’s all a big mistake.....God knows where they got the idea we had anything to do with Gray’s death. What oh, Angus, thank God. Yes, it’s true. The police have arrested me and the boys over Gray’s death. I’m sure it will all blow over but we need someone to look after the farm for a bit. Can you or one of the boys come up and look after things until we get back. We’ve got a shearing gang arriving on Tuesday.....You can? Oh fantastic. I’ll phone our neighbour Jock McKenzie to keep an eye on things until you get here. Thanks for that. I’m sure everything will work out in the end. Bye!’

Jacinta hung up the phone and turned, only to topple forward. The policewoman caught her under the elbows and assisted her back into the living room where she placed her in an armchair.

‘Are you all right?’ asked the policewoman.

‘Yes, I think so. It just came over me like a wave. I’ll be all right in a minute.’

‘Shall I make a cup of tea while you make your phone calls?’

‘Yes, I’d like that. I have to go back into the kitchen with you anyway. All the numbers I need are by the phone.’

The eyes of six other people watched every move Jacinta made. No one, apart from the policewoman, moved. Jacinta stood up and walked into the kitchen where she sat down on the stool beside the phone. The policewoman was busy filling the kettle when Jacinta picked up the phone again.

‘Jock, hello, it’s Jacinta Sutherland here.’

‘Wha’ yes, I’m fine. Look me and the boys have been called away urgently on family business. I’ve arranged for Gray’s brother, Angus to come up and look after the farm in the meantime but there might be a couple of days before he can get here. Can you come over and feed the dogs and check up on the stock until he gets here? You can? Oh, wonderful. I can’t say how much we appreciate that. We must have you and Peggy over for dinner when we get back. Yes, thanks for that, goodbye.’

Jacinta hung up the phone and took the proffered cup of tea from the policewoman. She cradled the cup in her hands, letting the warmth run into her before looking at Will.

‘Will, can you give Jim Morrow a call and tell him what’s happened. I don’t feel up to it for the minute. You’ll have to look up the phone book for his home number. He lives in Mangawhai.’

‘Sure Mum,’ said Will, picking up the phone book and flicking through it to find the Mangawhai pages. When he found the number, he couldn’t help thinking back to their meeting in Jim’s office and how he had distanced himself from them. Had he known about the arrests in advance? That would have explained his attitude. What would he say now? The policewoman was sitting behind the breakfast bar

watching everything he did. No doubt, she will write down everything she hears into her notebook as soon as she can. Will found it all unnerving but knew he could not put off the inevitable. He picked up the phone and dialled the number. Fortunately, Jim answered and not one of his kids.

‘Mr. Morrow, this is William Sutherland. I’m sorry to call you at home but we have an emergency. Yes, everything at the farm’s okay. It’s the police. They are here and have just arrested Mum, myself and Jamie. What?Oh, Jaimie and Mum have been arrested for failing to provide the necessities of life and being accessories after the fact, whatever that might mean. I’ve been charged with murder and conspiring with others to defeat justice. I suppose the others mean Mum and Jaimie. Wha?..... No, they’ve given us time to get things in order and to clean up before we go. You will? Great! You know where the farm is, don’t you? Great, see you soon.’ Will hung up and looked at the policewoman.

‘That was our lawyer, Jim Morrow. He said he’s on the way over.’

‘Thank you, I’ll advise my sergeant.’

As soon as Will sat down, his mother got up to use the phone again. She punched in the number and the others waited to see who it was she had phoned. At least the colour had come back to her cheeks. She looked as though she was going to faint before.

‘Steven, thank God you are there.....What? Sorry, this is Jacinta. No, I’m feeling a bit brittle, that’s all. The police have just arrested me and the boys over Gray’s death. Of course it’s a load of rubbish but you know what the justice system is like. I’ve arranged for Angus to come up and look after the farm and for our neighbour to keep an eye on things in the meantime. We might need bailing out when the time comes. Can you and Andy keep in touch and get us out as soon as you

can. Andy's number, yes I've got it right here. It's 09-360-4783. Great, yeah, we'll be okay. Oh, our lawyer is Jim Morrow. His office is in Maungaturoto. Yeah, thanks again. See you.'

When she put the phone down she turned to look at everyone else. She smiled for the first time that morning.

'Right, it's time for some breakfast. Do you boys want some bacon and eggs?'

'Sounds good to me,' said Will. Good old Mum, she's going to make the cops watch us eat. It will serve the sods right if they haven't had theirs yet.

32

Jacinta slumped forward onto the table, glad for the respite from the interviews. The policewoman remained by the door but the detectives had gone. The intense interview sessions had been interrupted by long periods of sheer boredom, when left alone in a bare room. She was prepared for another of these when two constables came into the room and escorted her out to a paddy wagon. When the rear door opened again, she was already inside the remand prison. There, she was processed, poked and prodded and treated the same way farm animals were treated. The irony of this was not lost on Jacinta. It put a new light on how farmers behaved. Once dressed in prison garb, she was escorted through the corridors to her cell. It was like running the gauntlet. Abuse and taunts showered down on her from every door. The language had a life of its own. It surged and ebbed around her, lashing and defiling her, leaving no part of her untouched. Its vehemence violated her very being. She quivered with fear as she stood in front of the cell door. The cell was a sanctuary from the hellhole outside - a harbour from the storm. The shock wave of the door slamming shut reverberated through her. With no one to see, her pent-up emotions burst, unleashing salty tears down her cheeks. Some inward resolve still held her

frayed edges together. She wiped her face on her sleeve and stared at the little room that now was her home.

A girl, aged about twenty, stared up at her from a bunk. She hadn't noticed her at first. She was chewing gum, her jaw working away, like a cow chewing its cud. Her hair was cut short, with jagged edges to it, like the combs of a harvester. It was blond, or had been originally. The ends were now dyed pink.

'Watcha in for?' asked the girl. She had now got up from her bunk to stand aggressively against Jacinta, face almost touching face.

'Fuck off,' replied Jacinta. 'Leave me alone.'

'Ooh, lady muck is it? Been brought down from your ivory tower? What a shame. Well take it from me, it only gets worse.'

When Jacinta didn't reply, the girl sat back down on her bunk. Jacinta sank down on the other to look around her new home. The language of the corridors had been inscribed in graphic form on all of the walls. A glass cover had been screwed over the recessed lights to prevent inmates getting at them or finding somewhere to tie something, a rope perhaps. The fluorescent tubes cast a sickly yellow glow over the room. The whole place smelled of disinfectant and an odour she could not readily identify. It took Jacinta a few moments to realise the odour was a melange of body odour, the lingering smell of bodily functions and the smell of fear, or perhaps even despair. It was not something she equated with smell before. She pictured these smells in her mind as colours - a yellowish-grey to match the décor and lighting of her new abode. To complete the scene, the stainless steel toilet at the end of the cell had no seat or flap. She imagined the cold seeping up through her as the girl stared at her with her coal black eyes while she carried out the most basic of necessities.

A sudden urge to urinate caused Jacinta to leap off the bunk and pull down her prison trousers and panties just in time. She settled on the cold hard rim of the toilet with a shudder as a streaming torrent issued forth. The sound was magnified by the stainless steel bowl. A grin creased her face for the first time that day. The girl cast a disapproving glance towards her. Resentment gushed from the girl in waves, perhaps for now having to share the cell. Jacinta got up, flushed the bowl and pulled up her pants.

‘Sorry about that. I haven’t been all day.’

‘Whatever.’

Jacinta climbed back onto her bunk and curled up in the foetal position with her head cradled on her arm. The yelling, cursing, crying and entreaties continued from the other cells. A feeling of desolation descended over her. Her wairua felt as though it had been stripped from her. The spirit of the person formerly known as Jacinta Rena Sutherland no longer existed or mattered to this world. She also feared the justice system. Was justice what it was really about? She was beginning to understand how early Māori felt when they first faced white man’s justice. It had been used as a weapon then. A blunt instrument was the term.

The girl was now talking to her. For all she knew she may have been talking for some time. Jacinta couldn’t take on board anyone else’s problems. She shut her mind off from the girl’s diatribe and the constant bedlam outside the door. Thoughts came and went through her mind like clouds racing across the sky before a storm. Fleeting images of her family and neighbours swept past in faceless yet recognisable forms; their mouths open wide, as though shouting across a void, before vanishing in a swirl of emotions and mist. She racked her brain to see if she could have done anything different. What more could she have done? A nagging doubt afflicted her.

Had she let Gray down in his hour of need? The old biblical parables kept coming back to her; Peter disavowing Christ and Judas selling Him for twenty pieces of silver. Which was she? Bumble-headed Peter, or the two faced friend, Judas. A wave of nausea swept over her. She tasted the saltiness of the tears running down her cheeks at the same time as some bile rose in her throat. She gulped it down, tasting its acrid residue.

To calm herself she took several deep breaths. The air in the cell was both foul smelling and lifeless. The air-conditioning no longer worked. The only air now passed along the corridor and in and out of the cells to reach her. It had been breathed by all the drunk drivers, murderers, rapists and other unfortunates housed there. She had a sudden desire to breathe fresh air but the only opening in the gray walls was small and high up on the wall. It was fixed glazed, so no air could pass through. It was covered in grime, so that little light shone through.

‘Well if you’re not going to talk, you can stick it up yourself,’ said the girl. Jacinta realised the girl had been talking the whole time. She was young, probably the same age as Andy, about eighteen. She was probably as scared as she was about being there.

‘I’m sorry. I was away with the fairies. It’s a bit of a shock being thrown in here. A person needs time to adjust. What’s your name?’

‘Sharon, what’s yours?’

Jacinta hesitated before giving her own. Jacinta sounded far too flash for this place.

‘Rena,’ she replied.

The girl reached across to shake hands. Jacinta took her hand in hers. It felt frail.

‘Have you a family?’ asked Jacinta.

‘Me, nah! Not really. Dad beat the shit out of me and my sister, while Mum was stoned most of the time. Most nights he came home pissed and took it out on us when there was no dinner. I walked out on my fifteenth birthday. Never seen them since and hope I never will.’

‘I’m sorry.’

‘Don’t you worry; I can take care of myself.’

There were puncture marks on the inside of her arms. Not only was she a hooker but she was hooked.

‘What about you? Have you a family?’

‘Yeah, I have three sons.’

‘What’s your old man do?’

‘He was a farmer. He died recently, that’s why I’m here.’

‘Wha! Ya mean ya done him in?’

Jacinta didn’t answer and let the question settle on the floor between them. A look of fear and new respect filled the eyes of the girl. She crawled to the back of her bunk and sat there with her back to the wall, staring at Jacinta. Jacinta rolled over on her side, keeping her back to the wall, and closed her eyes. At least she had shut up.

Jacinta’s eyes fluttered open again to the same yellow light and plain walls. It had not been a dream as she had hoped. She was still in a cell. The girl was now fast asleep. Jacinta wondered what would happen if the lights went out. She was unsure whether it was still daylight outside. The glow coming through the grime of the window could be from a security light. She supposed they turned out the inside lights at night to let the inmates sleep. There was a line of light under the door. The lights in the corridor must be on. Even if they did turn the lights off in the cells that would

always be there. She clung to this thought as if it was a life belt and she was adrift on the sea. Perhaps somewhere in this labyrinthine world Will and Jaimie were going through the same thoughts.

A shadow passed over her and she looked up to see a moth fluttering about under the light. Its multi-shadowed image appeared on the walls, darting up and down, and from wall to wall. It was like a kehua trapped between worlds. Jacinta stood up and tried to capture it in her cupped hands. She needed to hold this little life close to her. Several times she almost fell on her cell mate. It always eluded her as though it was indeed a phantom. Finally giving up, she lay back down and shut her eyes. Thoughts swirled around as sleep once more crept stealthily towards her. Had Will caused Graham's death? If only Will was not so impulsive but then that's the way he was born. He always took silly risks. There were those blood rushes to the head when things did not go his way. It was all like some shabby opera where the actors spoke their lines but could not alter the end result? All she had now were her sons. She must do what she could to protect them. The shadow of the moth fluttered over the insides of her eyelids and she began to feel drowsy. Even if the boys had let Gray and her down, she still loved them.

33

Will's eyes snapped open to blackness. His full bladder told him it must be close to dawn. After the bedlam of their arrival and the noises of the night, there was now a sterile silence. His ears attuned to the low rumble of motorway traffic nearby. That and the sound of a train on the Western line told him the city encompassing the prison was awakening. From the courtyard below the annoying beep-beep-beep of a backing truck penetrated the dull background noise. This was followed by the crashing and screeching of metal on metal, as a bin was unloaded. His mother would undoubtedly hear the same noise. She always hated scraping noises like that. It put her nerves on edge. Will closed his eyes again, not knowing how much time they had before the lights were turned on and the prisoners roused. He pulled the rough blanket up to his chin and wriggled down, trying to keep warm.

When he was fully awake, his mind picked up where it had left off the day before, reviewing everything that had happened in the last few weeks. Was anyone else aware there had only been one farm bike in the utility shed when his Mum went out there? After the ambulance had gone, he had taken his own bike back down to the old house to remove his crop and tidy the place up. That was when he had been

confronted by the problem of the two bikes. He had driven back to the farm on his own and run all the way back down to the run-off to bring back his old man's. It had all taken longer than he had expected and he was stuffed by the time he arrived at the hospital.

The whine of a winch loading a full rubbish skip onto the truck invaded his thoughts. The lights above him came on, dazzling him for an instant. Jaimie cursed at the intrusion into his sleep, before rolling over and sitting up to look at Will with bloodshot eyes.

'Christ! I hardly got any sleep at all,' he muttered.

Will looked at him in wonder. He had been asleep for hours, if his snoring was any indication. It was he who hadn't had much sleep. Above the general clamour, Will heard the wardens as they banged on doors and shouted it was time to get up. When the rap of a baton hit their door Will clambered off his bunk and stood before the toilet to release a steaming arc towards the stainless steel. There was no coffee smell this morning but the water hitting the metal set up a whirring sound, like a spinning top. After washing his hands and face in the tiny stainless steel sink, he lay back on his bunk while Jaimie got up to do his morning ablutions. Will tried not to think of the grunts, pips and squeaks let alone the malignant odour emanating from his younger brother.

'Jeez! Hurry up and get rid of that. You're knocking me out'

'I can't help it.'

Jaimie was caught still with his pants down when the door crashed open. Will who had been holding his breath exhaled and then inhaled the slightly less putrid air from the corridor as Jaimie hitched up his pants. A warder stared balefully at them before speaking.

‘Shower time!’

Will told Jaimie to walk in front of him. They waited in the corridor as all the inmates came out of their cells. They were then marched along the corridor and down some stairs to the washroom, where they were given a bar of soap, a Bic safety razor and a towel each.

‘Okay, let’s make this quick,’ said Will, stripping of his clothes and hanging them and the towel on a hook before stepping into the showers. Jamie dithered for a second before following suit. Someone whistled and Jamie blushed.

‘Get in and hurry up,’ said Will, lathering the soap in his hands so that he could shave while in the shower.

The tough looking guy under the next shower was shaving the top of his head. He had gaudy red tats all over his body and arms. After he had rinsed his shaven head under the rose he looked up to see Jaimie staring at him. He pouted his lips at Jamie and said, ‘Hullo sweetheart, Whyn’t you come over and keep me company?’

Jaimie turned away and looked at his older brother. Will walked out of the shower with Jamie rushing out to keep up with him. Behind them, several others let out throaty laughs. Will dressed and Jamie put on his pants before going to a sink to shave. When he had finished, they threw their towels in a hamper and handed back their soap and razors to a warden. All razors had to be returned.

The dining hall was a large stark room with walls and ceiling painted in gloss white. There were five rows of long tables with bench seats each side. Will and Jamie joined the end of the queue waiting at the servery. They picked up an aluminium plate and mug each and were served a full English breakfast of bacon and eggs; toast, sausages and tomatoes. They picked up their plastic cutlery at the end of the servery. Both filled their mugs with luke-warm coffee from the urn. After

breakfast, they went back to their cell and lay back down on their bunks. The cell doors were all left open and there was nothing to prevent anyone else coming into the cell. Will got up and pushed it closed.

The prison wardens came for them about ten and escorted them to a loading dock, where they were ushered into the back of a police van. The door slammed shut behind them, pitching them into semi-darkness. It is only a short drive from Mt Eden Prison to the courtrooms and they were soon driving down a ramp into an underground basement. The tyres of the van squealed on the smooth concrete floor and when the engine stopped there was a sense of being in a hollow chamber of some sort. Voices reverberated in the void and doors banged louder than usual. Their driver opened the rear door of the van and Will climbed out first. A smell of burnt rubber and exhaust vapours hung in the air.

A group of court wardens stood nearby. The driver produced a clipboard and one of the wardens signed it, formalising the handover of their prisoners. Will and Jamie were escorted by the court wardens through a maze of corridors and up some stairs. Everything was immaculate, as though an army of cleaners descended on the corridors each night. The faint smell of cleaning rags and aerosol cleansers still hovered in the air. They waited in a small room with bench seats on two sides, for what seemed ages, before they were summoned to appear in court.

Once again they were led along more corridors and up a flight of stairs to emerge in the courtroom. Court warden took station each side of them as though they were desperate criminals about to go berserk and attack the judge. Their mother was already standing in a separate dock with her own court wardens. She gave them brief smile of recognition but Will read the tiredness in her face and the trepidation for their future. The system might intimidate her but it bloody well wasn't going to

intimidate him. He pulled himself upright and stood with a straight back and looked at the furthest point he could find in the room and focussed his eyes on it. This point happened to be a grain pattern in a timber wall panel. The grain had formed around an old branch, making a cyclopean eye, which looked back at him, unblinking. The clerk stood up to read the charges.

‘The first charges are against William Hector Sutherland. William Hector Sutherland, please step forward.’

‘William Hector Sutherland, you are charged on the first count with the murder of your father, Graham Gordon Sutherland on the 31st day of May 1989 in that you deliberately struck him on the back of the head with a blunt instrument during a disagreement between yourself and your father . How do you plead?’

‘Not guilty.’

‘You are charged on the second count with the manslaughter of your father, Graham Gordon Sutherland on the 31st day of May 1989 in that following a head injury to that person by whatsoever means, you failed to provide the necessities of life, resulting in the death of that person. How do you plead?’

‘Not guilty.’

‘You are charged on the third count with conspiring to defeat justice in that following the death of your father, Graham Gordon Sutherland on the 31st day of May 1989 you conspired with others to pervert the course of justice by covering up the crime of culpable homicide. How do you plead?’

‘Not guilty.’

Even though their Counsel had been through the charges prepared by the prosecution against them, the reading of the charges against Will in court sounded like the voice of doom. Will’s mind reeled at the magnitude of the charges.

‘The second accused is Jacinta Rena Sutherland. Jacinta Rena Sutherland, please step forward.’

Will’s mother stepped forward a pace to grip the rail. She looked unsteady on her feet. Perhaps that was why she gripped the rail. Will inwardly cursed his foolishness for putting her in such a situation. At first she looked down at the floor and then slowly lifted her gaze to stare back at the clerk. The corners of her eyes were moist and her mouth set in a thin line. There was defiance in her face as she confronted her accusers. Will felt a flush of pride, when he realised she might be down but she wasn’t beaten.

‘Jacinta Rena Sutherland, you are charged on the first count with being a party to an offence, namely the culpable homicide of your husband, Graham Hector Sutherland on the 31st day of May 1989. How do you plead?’

‘Not guilty.’

‘You are charged on the second count with failing to provide the necessities of life in that on the 31st day of May 1989 there was an inordinate amount of time between the inflicting of the wound that ultimately killed your husband, Graham Gordon Sutherland and the time your son called 111. This length of time is alleged to have been used by yourself and your sons to tamper with and to suppress evidence that may have led to the arrest and conviction of your son. How do you plead?’

‘Not guilty.’

‘You are charged on the third count with being an accessory after the fact in that you knowing that your son, William Hector Sutherland had committed a criminal in the culpable homicide of your husband, Graham Gordon Sutherland, did knowingly enter into partnership with him to tamper with and suppress evidence that could have led to his arrest and conviction. How do you plead?’

‘Not guilty.’

‘You are charged on the fourth count with conspiring to defeat justice in that you conspired with your son William Hector Sutherland and your other son, James Robert Sutherland to pervert the course of justice in that you all knowingly tampered with evidence that could have led to the arrest and conviction of your son, William Hector Sutherland. How do you plead?’

‘Not guilty.’

‘The next accused is James Robert Sutherland. James Robert Sutherland, please step forward.’

Jaimie stepped up to the rail next to Will. His eyes darted this way and then that, like those of a trapped animal seeking a means of escape. His hands moved from his sides to his front and then back to his sides. When his hands came together in front, his fingers meshed and his thumbs rotated about one another. When by his sides he clenched them into fists. All this time his sneaker clad feet shuffled about wearing away the carpet. For Jaimie to be facing criminal charges seemed grossly unfair to Will but then life wasn’t fair. He would just have to grow up a little and learn to be a man. It wasn’t as if he could be found guilty, was it? Will stepped back a pace as the court clerk read the same charges against Jaimie as they had against their mother. Each time he stammered ‘not guilty,’ his voice cracked a little more. After the charges had been read there was a murmur around the room as Counsel conferred with their assistants. This all stopped when the judge coughed deliberately into his microphone before speaking.

‘I have been over the facts of this case. It is an unfortunate case that would never have come to court at all, had it not been for the forensic evidence that indicates there is some doubt as to the manner of the deceased’s death and that he

may have been moved after being concussed. This movement may have contributed to his subsequent death. The other possibility is that he was moved after he died in an attempt to pervert the course of justice. The manner and timing of his death needs to be determined to the satisfaction of the law. None of the defendants in this case has a criminal conviction and up until this point Jacinta Rena Sutherland and her son James Robert Sutherland have been model citizens. William Hector Sutherland is however known to the police. On this basis, I am releasing Jacinta Rena Sutherland and James Robert Sutherland on payment of bail to the amount of fifty thousand dollars each. Each of you shall appear to face the charges when summoned at a later date. William Hector Sutherland, I am setting your bail at one hundred thousand dollars. You shall also appear to face the charge made against you when summoned at a later date. A condition of your bail is that you report to the police station in Mangawhai or in Maungaturoto once a week. Next case.'

Will wondered what the term 'known to police' meant. Maybe they were harking back to the stoush at the rugby club but that was years ago. The possibility it might mean something else gave him the uneasy feeling.

Someone tapped his shoulder and turned to see the warden motioning him back down the stairs. In the corridor below the court his mother took him in her arms and kissed him before doing the same to Jamie. They were disinclined to talk with the wardens so near but all knew they should soon be home soon and could put the worst part of all this behind them. After the brief reunion the wardens took them back down to the basement car park and placed them into the police van again. They returned to the remand prison where they had to remain until such time as someone fronted up with the bail money.

34

Two hundred thousand dollars was a lot of money. Jacinta was worried Tipene and Andy would not be able to come up with the bail money. Graham had investment money in Jim Morrow's mortgage nominee fund but it would take quite a bit of juggling to release sufficient funds to pay the full amount. She wished it was not Andy sorting it out with Jim Morrow, preferring Angus to be doing it. It was pretty clear that Angus and Margaret had been shocked by the allegations against them and were at a loss as to how to react. She couldn't blame them really, she was in shock herself. It still hurt though, Angus and Margaret were more than just relations, they were good friends. The only way that rift could be healed was for them to be all found innocent. The trial was still months away though. They would just have to work through any preconceived ideas they had until then.

On the second day, Jacinta was ushered out through the gate, free for the time being. A day and a night in Mt Eden prison wasn't one of the highlights of her life but it was an experience she wouldn't forget in a hurry. Jacinta exhaled all of the tainted prison air from her lungs and sucked in the lovely clean air. It was still warm and sweet, as the country was basking in an Indian summer. Andy was

lounging against the fender of an old Corolla and looked up when she came through the door. She walked across the cul-de-sac to Andy and gave him a kiss and a hug. Even with his orange dreadlocks and Bob Marley Tee-shirt she was pleased to see him. She was out and he was there to pick her up and take her home.

‘Where’d you get the car?’ she asked.

‘It belongs to one of the guys in the flat.’

He looked as if he didn’t have a worry in the world but then life had always been easy for Andy. For a long time Andy had said he would join the army when he reached seventeen. Then, when he reached seventeen, he changed his mind and decided to study architecture. None of them had any idea where that came from. Straight out of left field, a regular Peter Pan, ethereal even, like Whanawhana of the *patu-pairehe*, the fairy-folk Jacinta’s gran, Rena used to tell her about.

Jacinta turned to look at the black basalt walls of the prison with their castellated parapets, reminding her of a medieval castle. She had been the princess in the tower. A shiver ran up her back at the thought she had been held captive in such a place. Fairy stories always did have an evil side to them. Andy now leaned against the roof of the car as she turned full circle taking in her surroundings. It was composed of time-worn office buildings, scruffy car parks and graffiti covered warehouses. Not much to celebrate but better than what was inside. She took another deep breath of fresh air before climbing into front passenger seat of the car.

‘Are William and Jaimie coming?’

‘Morrow’s still trying to get their bail money together. He has enough money for Jaimie but is still struggling with the hundred thousand for Will. I think he is being forced to raise a mortgage against the farm but needs approval from Uncle Angus.’

‘They are here though?’

‘Yeah, somewhere in that rock pile.’

‘I don’t envy them spending another day in there,’ said Jacinta.

‘What do you want to do now? Go back to the farm straightway? We could go downtown and look at the shops, have a cup of coffee and a bite of lunch first.’

‘I’m not in any hurry to go back to the farm. Why don’t you take me to your flat? We can have a cup of coffee there. I’ll phone Jim later in the day to see if he has made any progress with the bail money. It seems a pity to have to make two trips down here unnecessarily.’

Andy looked at his mother as though trying to gauge what she was up to. Jacinta smiled at this. He had changed a lot since coming to Auckland. From a clean cut young boy he was now a Rastafarian or a good impression of one. Goodness knows what he was involved with, sects, drugs, sex, probably all three. It had been a slow realisation but Jacinta suspected Andy was not the innocent little boy she had always pictured him as.

‘If you don’t mind the mess, that’s fine with me,’ he replied, turning the ignition.

They drove slowly down Lauder Road to stop at the intersection with Normanby Road. Over the intersection someone had planted a grove of golden elms. The leaves were a rich gold, lighting up an otherwise drab neighbourhood. They turned right heading towards Mt Eden. Jacinta was soon lost as they meandered through a maze of streets, lined with trees, parked cars, wheelie-bins and letterboxes. The stands of Eden Park reared up above the green and red rooftops. They must be in Sandringham, or was it Kingsland? She was never sure where one started and the other ended. Andy parked the car against the kerb outside an old timber bay-villa that

had seen better days. He came around and helped Jacinta out of the car and held her arm up the concrete steps to the front door as if she were an old lady. The original posts and intricate fretwork to the front veranda were still visible outside the ugly asbestos-cement sheets. Closing-in the veranda had spoiled the look of the house. Inside, a long central corridor extended from the front door to a blank wall at the end. The high stud walls were topped by a moulded timber ceiling. The house could have looked magnificent with a bit of tender loving care. A slightly sweet-sour smell of human occupation greeted them as they crossed the threshold. Jacinta savoured the smells like a dog sniffing the evening breeze. The familiar closed house smell was tainted by the smell of sweaty clothes, stale bedclothes and bodily fluids. The tang of sex was faint but unmistakeable. She smiled as Andy led her to the kitchen at the rear of the house.

She removed some washed clothes needing an iron from a kitchen chair before sitting down. Andy put the kettle on and rummaged around in the cupboard trying to find a clean cup and saucer. Eventually he gave up and resorted to washing two cups and saucers in the sink.

‘How many of you are there here?’

‘There’re six of us. Me, Leo, Joe, Maree, Hine and Tracey.’

‘Gosh, how many bedrooms are there?’ asked Jacinta, having noted only three bedrooms while coming down the corridor.

Andy gave his mother one of his beatific smiles.

‘We share rooms.’

She wondered which of the girls he slept with. Was it Maree, Hine or Tracey? She wanted it to be Hine. Just then the kettle gave a shrill whistle and Andy busied

himself pouring the steaming water into a teapot where he had placed a single teabag. He caught her looking at the single teabag.

‘We bought a teapot to save on teabags. It really works and the tea tastes better.’

‘What are the others doing, at Uni, I mean?’

‘Leo and Tracey are doing architecture like me. Leo’s a year behind Tracey and me. Joe’s doing law and Hine’s at AUT doing film animation.’

‘Interesting,’ replied Jacinta. So Tracey is most likely his partner. No image presented itself. Andy was now in his second Professional year. There would be more fees to pay next year. Where would that money come from?

‘You realise we might not be able to continue paying your fees next year,’ she said.

‘She’s sweet. I can get by with part-time jobs and taking out a student loan,’ replied Andy.

‘You know Will resents our paying your fees, don’t you?’

‘I don’t see why. He could have gone to Uni if he wanted to. I’m sure you would have paid his fees, if he had.’

Jacinta looked at Andy and wondered if he had a conscience about anything. If something was offered to him he would take it with a smile, with never a thought as to whether it was fair or not, more that it was his entitlement for being who he was. When he was little, he had always been clever enough not to get caught if he had been naughty. He had always given Jacinta one of his beatific smiles if he had been asked whether he had caused this or that. Not once had she ever caught him out. She had never been able to catch him out. She was sure Will was taking the can for something Andy was involved in. If he was, it would be characteristic of each of

them. Will protecting his younger brother and Andy accepting it, as if a God-given right, too bad about Will. Andy obviously had access to a car anytime he wanted and could have come up from Auckland anytime he chose. It wasn't beyond the realms of possibility was it? After all, he had managed to borrow a car to pick her up. No, she was being daft. Andy wouldn't do anything bad, would he?

They waited until two, before Jacinta telephoned Jim Morrow. His secretary answered to explain that Jim had sent the requisite papers off to Angus by courier and was expecting them back any day now. Of course, it might take another couple of days for the wheels of justice to slowly turn after that.

'Christ! The bail money for your brothers isn't ready!' exploded Jacinta, putting down the phone. 'Morrow has only just sent the papers to Angus for signing. It might be days before the money is available.' Jacinta instantly regretted her outburst but not what she had said. She rarely allowed anger or frustration a face in her life. The idea of the boys having to spend anything up to a further week in jail was too terrible to contemplate. They were all in this together. It was all for one, and one for all, whether they liked it or not. The boys had now been let down. All her own elation at being released now evaporated like a puff of smoke.

'Shall I give Angus a ring to see if he has received the papers?'

'No, I don't want to push Angus into a corner. We'll just have to wait.'

Andy remained silent. Jacinta, in that moment, didn't care what he might have thought.

'Let's see if we can visit Will and Jamie before I go back up north.'

'I was just about to suggest that.'

Forty minutes later they were parked back in the cul-de-sac head of Lauder Street.

Both looked at the grim façade of the prison.

‘Are you coming with me?’ asked Jacinta, as she opened her door.

‘Do I have to?’

‘Not if you don’t have the constitution for it.’

Jacinta got out of the car and stood looking at the austere prison walls. The idea of going back into the foul place was not something she looked forward to but she would do anything to see her sons. When Andy’s door didn’t open, she leant back down to look inside the car. Andy was still slouched in his seat with his knees touching the dashboard. His face blanched when she looked at him.

‘Well?’

‘I think I’ll stay here.’

Jacinta slammed her door and stormed across the tarmac towards the same door she had so recently exited. She pressed the button beside the gate. After several seconds a panel slid across at eye level.

‘Yes.’

‘My sons are being held here on remand. I would like to visit them.’

‘Have you permission from the prison manager to visit.’

‘No, I didn’t know I needed it.’

‘Well you can’t come in without it.’

‘I was only let out myself this morning. Can you ring the manager and see if he can make an exception?’

There was a long pause as though she had asked the impossible, before the warden asked for their names

‘William and James Sutherland.’

‘And what’s your name and your relationship to them?’

‘My names Jacinta Sutherland and I’m their mother.’

‘Wait there and I’ll see if something can be arranged.’

The metal slide closed, leaving Jacinta staring at a blank door. She had counted to three hundred and forty one before the metal slide slid open again. A pair of bespectacled eyes topped with bushy eyebrows looked out at her.

‘Mrs. Sutherland?’

‘Yes.’

‘I’m afraid you will need to download an ‘Application to Visit Form’ from the web, fill in the details and then post it to the prison. Just go to the website for the Department of Corrections. The details are all on the Form.’

‘We’re arranging their bail as we speak. By the time I go through all that rigmarole they’ll be out.’

‘I’m sorry Ma’am, those are the rules.’

Jacinta was livid. She could picture the warden on the other side of the door shrugging his shoulders and splaying out his arms like a Frenchman. Wasn’t she just another hysterical relation trying to get around the system?

‘Can you at least give them a message?’

‘Yes, what shall I tell them?’

‘Say Jim has let us down. Their bail may take several more days to clear.

Sign it, Love Mum.’

‘I’ll see they get the message,’ said the warder, before sliding back the panel.

Jacinta let her anger subside before turning around to march back towards the car.

Andy’s pale face looked out through the windscreen at her. Something in his look reignited her anger. The least he could have done is come with her and support her.

After all, they are his brothers in there. She opened the door and climbed in. Her

hands gripped the dashboard as she looked straight ahead, not trusting herself to look at Andy, who had suddenly become the symbol of all her frustrations.

‘Sod it!’ she exclaimed, before bursting into tears. She let the tears flow freely down her cheeks. When she had calmed down, she took some tissues from her purse and wiped her face before balling the tissue and dropping it on the floor. What the hell! The car was a tip anyway! Andy made no move to comfort her during her emotional breakdown. When she finally looked at him, he had a slightly quizzical look on his face.

‘No joy then?’

‘No. You have to have the permission of the prison manager to visit and that takes days.’

‘What now?’

‘Just take me home.’

Jacinta wound the back of the seat back and shut her eyes.

‘Its Guy Fawkes tonight,’ observed Andy.

Jacinta didn’t answer. What the fuck did that matter! She had lost track of time. She hardly knew what day of the week it was let alone what the date was. If it was the fifth of November then the Whakapirau Cruising Club would be having their barbeque down at the beach. Everybody would be there around the big bonfire. The idea of facing all of the friends and neighbours was more than she could bear. Anyway she couldn’t go; she hadn’t defrosted any meat.

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Not being a member of the bar, Jim Morrow referred them to a barrister in Auckland by the name of David Wilkinson. Wilkinson was briefed about the case and a meeting was arranged in his chambers. The reception area to his chambers appeared large enough to hold a wedding reception. It was decorated in soft greys and festooned with fine art prints and original oils by iconic New Zealand artists. To country folk it all looked very grand and very expensive. Will envisaged the farm mortgaged up to its eye-balls and his inheritance vanishing into the lawyer's coffers.

‘Perhaps we should consider pleading guilty in exchange for a sentence reduction,’ said Jacinta.

His mother was in the process of getting up to leave when a secretary came out to meet them. She was pretty tasty to look at but way out of Will's league. Her deportment and her clothes smacked of some posh private school for girls. This image was confirmed when she spoke. She was very professional and polite, yet there was a whiff of elitism about her. The secretary gave her name as Judith McCallum. She was Wilkinson's legal assistant. So much for her being a secretary! Will reappraised her, musing on what sort of salary she might be getting. After the

introductions were over they were ushered along a wide corridor lined with bookcases full of leather-bound spines of law books. Some poor sod must go up and down straightening the books every day to make sure they were all in alignment.

They entered a glass lined conference room with panoramic views of the harbour and Hauraki Gulf. It was a beautiful spring day with yachts dotted about on the harbour. The water sparkled, even from that distance. Another woman offered them tea or coffee. Will watched his mother appraising the clothes of both women and grinned. These women probably spent more on clothes in a month than his mother did in a year or more. Will's cappuccino arrived in a white cup and saucer accompanied by a pink marshmallow. A tall man in a well cut three piece business suit came in just as Will was putting his cup to his lips. It was another snail trail suit as his Mum was keen to say every time Winston Peters appeared on TV. It probably cost more than Temara's engagement ring. There wasn't much chance of his being able to pay that off now. The jewellers will probably claim his deposit as well. His mother rose to shake hands as he introduced himself. This was their barrister, David Wilkinson. Will and Jamie stood up as they were introduced to him by their mother. Wilkinson was a lot younger than Will had expected. Rumpole of the Bailey had been Will's only measure of what a barrister looked like. Wilkinson was nothing like old Rumpole. He looked and spoke as if he had had a private school education, as well.

'I understand how difficult this will be for you all, especially so soon after losing your husband' said Wilkinson, addressing himself to his mother, as though Will did not exist.

'The good news is we have sought discovery and have been through all of the evidence the prosecution has against you all. The police were difficult, as usual but

we got there in the end. The case against William here is highly contentious. There are no witnesses to what the Crown alleges to have happened and the death of your husband may indeed have been misadventure. They have some highly speculative motives as to why William might have wanted his father dead and we feel we should be able to counter these. Their case hangs on a lot of pieced together circumstantial evidence, which looks innocuous enough by itself but when strung together the Crown may well be able to convince a jury. It all hinges on their belief Graham was moved after being struck on the head and taken to the implement shed by his assailant in order to make it look like an accident. This belief is based on the fact that there was an unaccounted period of time between when he was hit on the head and the time William called the ambulance, the fact that Graham had certain fungus spores in his lungs when he died and the fact that he also had traces of marijuana leaf on his hands and the arms of his clothes. From all of this, the Crown believes Graham was knocked unconscious in the old house on your run-off. This has been substantiated to a large degree by their finding blood stains on the floor and spatters on the wall of the kitchen as well as on a ladder, which had matching blood and hair on it. This would indicate Graham died in the old house and William lied to the police. All their evidence points to William being the assailant, however, due to the delays in getting medical help they are saying you all acted in collusion to cover up a crime of homicide. Their case against Mrs Sutherland and Jaimie is pretty thin and I don't think I will have much trouble in convincing a jury of your innocence, provided I know what really happened between William and Mr Sutherland.

Now William, you have stuck to your story about finding Graham in the implement shed. If I'm to defend you, I need to know exactly what happened. If I

don't, I could be in a weak position should the prosecution spring any new forensic evidence on us. Firstly, I need to be assured it was an accident.'

William found himself staring into a pair of uncompromising steel grey eyes. There didn't seem much point in denying what had already been stated.

'We had a bit of a stoush but neither of us did anything more than shove each other around a bit. There were no punches or anything like that. While we were struggling, the ladder fell down hitting Dad on the back of the head. There was nothing else to it.'

'Where did this take place?'

'In the old house.'

'So, you are admitting to giving police false information.'

Will looked at the barrister for several seconds in silence. Didn't everyone mislead the police one way or another?

'It seemed harmless enough at the time.'

'That won't look good to a jury.'

'Well, what's done is done. What do you suggest?'

'I'll think about it for the moment. You appear to have a record of losing your cool. The prosecution will use this against you. My guess is they will try to provoke you into an angry outburst in court. Do you think you can remain calm under verbal attack by the Prosecution?'

'Yeah. I'm fine with that. I know it's just a game on their part.'

'I wish it were just a game. The charges against you are deadly serious. If they find you guilty of murder you face life imprisonment. That's seventeen years here. If you are found guilty of manslaughter you face up to ten years behind bars.'

'That's your job to prevent, isn't it?'

‘It is indeed. A key factor with regard to your little contretemps with your father is whether you were provoked. Provocation is a key factor in deciding whether you are found guilty of murder or manslaughter. I take it you were provoked to take the action you did.’

‘Yeah, you could say that. I mean, I didn’t go in there to have a stoush with my old man. I was just trying to look after my investment.’

‘What kind of investment was that?’

‘I’d been growing a bit of weed and was preparing some of it when Dad walked in.’

‘So this investment was a criminal act?’

‘If you say so.’

‘It’s what the Prosecution will say. Look, I need to know several things before I can commit myself to defending any of you. Can you assure me your mother and James here had nothing to do with your father’s death?’

‘Is what I say here confidential? I mean is there any way the Prosecution can gain anything I say here through discovery?’ asked Will.

‘Not unless it’s written down.’

‘Okay, then don’t write this down,’ said Will, turning towards Judith who had a note pad in her hand. At a nod from Wilkinson she put the pen on the side of the note pad allowing Will to continue.

‘I was processing some weed I had grown around the farm when Dad found me. The Indian summer had allowed me to grow a late crop.’

‘Where was this?’

‘In the old house down on the run-off.’

‘God, I don’t believe this,’ interrupted Jacinta. ‘We’ve always brought you up to be good kids. You didn’t have to get into drugs. If you needed money, why didn’t you come to me?’

‘Can we keep recriminations out of this,’ said Wilkinson, ‘No one’s saying you didn’t bring up your boys well but we need to stick to the issue in hand.’

‘Well, I think my son growing pot on our farm is a big issue.’ exclaimed Jacinta.

‘Indeed it is and it may have considerable bearing on the case but I need to hear first hand what Will has to say. Go on Will. What happened when your father discovered you?’

‘When I heard him come in I made out I was fixing a mullet net while waiting for the rain to stop. He seemed to accept that and rode off on his farm bike. I stashed everything I had been working on back in the roof space and got on my own bike to head back to the house. Something made me look back as I reached the ridge. I caught sight of Dad out of the corner of my eye returning to the house. I was afraid he would do something to my crop. It had taken a lot of time and effort to get it to that stage. I turned around and drove back to the old house. When I got there Dad was half way up the ladder looking in the roof space. He was pretty riled up on discovering it was full of weed drying out. He told me I had to get rid of it. I told him it would all be gone in a couple of weeks but he wouldn’t have any of that. That’s when he threatened to climb into the roof and pull it all out. I grabbed a leg to stop him climbing up any further. He began kicking me about my head and shoulders. One thing led to the other and suddenly we were on the floor. He fell on top of me and winded me, then the ladder fell on top of us. I’m pretty sure that’s when he was hit on the back of the head. I remember hearing a loud crack, like a gunshot.’

‘Oh, God!’ exclaimed Jacinta.

Everyone looked at her, before exchanging glances. No one said a word. Wilkinson made a little cough and then looked back at Will.

‘Go on.’

‘The ladder bounced up into the air to come down a second time but there was no cracking sound the second time, just a dull thud.’

Jacinta emitted a little groan, causing Will to pause. He didn’t know whether he should go on. This was obviously hard on his Mum. He looked at Wilkinson, who merely gave a nod to continue.

‘When he didn’t come around I got pretty scared. I was faced with a dilemma. Did I leave him alone to race back to the house and summon help, or, did I risk putting him on a farm bike to take him back to the house? I had no phone and an ambulance had no way of getting down to the old house. If I got help, there was always the chance someone might find the marijuana. That’s why I decided to put him on the farm bike.’

‘I see,’ mused Wilkinson. ‘That would explain the police having another investigation involving you.’

Will stared long and hard at Wilkinson.

‘What do you mean?’

It was now Wilkinson’s turn to remain silent for a time.

‘I have been informed you were under investigation for several weeks prior to the accident. Anyway, what did you do with the marijuana?’

‘After the ambulance arrived, I hoofed it back down to the old house and stripped everything out of the roof space, sealed it into plastic rubbish bags and then

packed it into a couple of old 200 litre plastic drums I had. It was all dry by then and was easy to cram into the drums.'

'And what did you do with it then?'

'I left the drums in a gully the first day and when I got the chance I loaded them in the boot of my car and disposed of them.'

'What about the crime scene. Did you clean that?'

'Yeah, after I had packed all of the stuff in the drums and rolled them into the gully, I scrubbed the kitchen floor and walls. I even dragged some hay bales back and forward over the floor.'

'Did you use a cleanser when you scrubbed the floor?'

'Yeah, I tipped some Jif into a bucket of water.'

'This will all sound premeditated to a jury.'

Will paused to look at his mother. She had turned pale and her lips cut a thin line across her taut face. It was more important for Will to convince his mother it was an accident than any court of law. He looked her straight in the eye before answering.

'Well it wasn't. I was scared shitless that's all.'

The attempt was wasted though, when Will saw eyes were not even focussed. Her mind had drifted off to somewhere else.

'You realise you are admitting to covering up a crime, don't you?' said Wilkinson

'It was an accident. I didn't want it to end like it did.'

'Was your father alive when you put him on the bike?'

'Yeah, I'm pretty sure. I checked his pulse before hoisting him onto the bike and he was alive then. When I got to the shed and laid him down on the floor. I don't know why I did it. It was a spur of the moment thing but I put some of his blood and

hair on the side of the baler to make out that was what he had hit when he fell. It only took a few seconds before I left him there to race into the kitchen and get Mum.'

Jacinta seemed to come out of her reveries at that point and stared at Will. No emotion showed on her face and Will remained impassive under her scrutiny.

Wilkinson prodded his glasses over the bridge of his nose to push them back up as he turned towards her.

'Mrs. Sutherland, this is very important, so I want you to think about it before answering. Did you take his pulse or do anything else to see if he was still alive?'

'I can't remember for sure,' said Jacinta. 'I could see he was concussed and knew enough not to move a person who had been concussed for a long period. I had no idea how long he had been lying there so I decided to play safe. He was still warm when I held his hand.'

'Okay, we'll have to see what the Prosecution springs on us but I'm pretty sure we can get Mrs Sutherland and James off the hook. I'm going to have to ask William here to take the stand and recite what he just said. By doing so, we can get you off a charge of murder and your mother and brother off altogether but there are uncertainties about getting William off the manslaughter charge. At the very least, you will be seen to have failed in your duty to provide the necessities of life. The fact you admit you were covering up another crime at the time, even though it is only your word that this took place, will go against you. We have no idea what the police investigation has uncovered or whether they were watching the property at the time. You can be sure they will have expert forensic witnesses to back their case. Naturally, we shall hire one of our own.'

'Do we have to mention the weed at all?' asked Will.

‘The police investigation has already confirmed the presence of marijuana in the old house. It’s sure to be raised during the trial.’

‘Even so, can’t we just say there was an accident with the ladder and I put him on the farm bike as the fastest way to get help?’

‘That might have worked if you had taken him back to the house and not the implement shed. I’m afraid at this juncture, I see no other way of ensuring your mother and brother get off, than by your being strictly honest over what happened.’

‘Fair enough, I thought it worth asking,’ said Will.

‘In cases like this, Mrs Sutherland, you can expect the Crown and the defence to need at least four to six months to prepare their evidence. The trial probably won’t take place until late spring.’

‘What happens in the meantime?’ asked Jacinta.

‘Judith here will be in touch, should we want any more statements from any of you. In cases such as this, I like to get a feel for the scene of the crime, so to speak. I would like to come up to the farm soon.’

‘We’re going straight back now,’ said Jacinta. ‘You can come up any time you like.’

‘How does next Saturday morning sound?’

‘That should be fine.’

‘I’ll be up there at nine in the morning. Is that suitable?’

‘Fine,’ replied Jacinta. ‘Bring your gumboots.’

‘I will.’

Will was in the tractor shed changing the oil in the Charger when a silver-grey Audi station wagon glided down the driveway. When it stopped, David

Wilkinson got out of the driver's door and walked around to open the rear passenger door. He bent into the doorway and retrieved something from the back seat. When he straightened up it was evident the something was a little girl in a pink dress with matching pink gumboots. Just then, Will's mother came out from the house to greet them. She shook hands with Wilkinson and then knelt down to make a fuss over the little girl. Wilkinson looked a lot different from the last time he had seen him. Gone was his thousand dollar suit. He was now wearing a red checked shirt hanging loose over a pair of blue jeans. While Will's mother was fussing over the little girl, Wilkinson opened the boot and took out some overalls and gumboots, which he put on. He and his mother had a long conversation, after which she pointed towards the old tractor shed. It was time to make an appearance. Will wiped his hands on a rag and then sauntered down the hill towards them.

‘Will, this is David's daughter, Amy. Can you show David around the farm on the farm bikes while I show Amy some of our animals?’

‘What do you want to see?’

‘I need to see everything but especially the old house. I have to be back in Auckland by two, so we will need to leave here before half past twelve.’

‘All right, the first port of call has to be the implement shed.’

In the shed Will showed Wilkinson exactly where he had put his father. Wilkinson walked around looking at everything then bent down to examine the hay baler more closely.

‘If you've seen everything you want here, we can get going. Have you ridden a farm bike before?’

‘Yes, I've been off-roading through the Woodhill Forest on a company outing.’

‘Right. If you take this one, we’ll be on our way,’ said Will.

They rode over the farm and around the shoreline before going down the road to the run-off. Wilkinson spent a lot of time in the old house recreating the scene Will had described. The police had taken away the ladder as evidence, so they piled up hay bales so Wilkinson could reach the ceiling hatch. He climbed into the roof space and fossicked about for a while, before they rode back to the farmhouse. When they got back, Will’s mother asked them to come in for tea but David declined pleading a lack of time. He stripped off his overalls and boots and strapped Amy into her car seat, before thanking them for the tour. He then climbed into the driver’s seat and reversed the car out to the road. The visit hadn’t taken more than a couple of hours but Will figured there wasn’t a lot David had missed.

The trial itself started in the first week of September. They travelled down to Auckland and parked in the Downtown car park, before walking up Shortland Street to Wilkinson’s chambers. There they were greeted by Wilkinson and Judith McCallum, who had a pile of boxes and files to carry up to court. They ushered the family ahead of them out the door and up the street towards the High Court. At the court, Wilkinson secured one of the side rooms where they could go over the procedures for the day. Firstly, they were informed, the Crown would make their case against each of the charged and it was unlikely any of them would be called to the box to give evidence on the first day. About quarter past ten a court official called them into the courtroom. His Honour was late that morning. Will hoped he was not in a bad mood as a result.

Proceedings started with the reading of the charges against each of the accused followed by the prosecution stating its case. The leading Counsel for the

Crown was a man in his late fifties or possibly early sixties. He would have been a tall man, except he had a stooped back. His skin was grey and his voice was as dry as a desert wind. He was assisted by three other lawyers, each at least thirty years his junior. Everything appeared long winded and repetitious. The Counsel for the Crown was in the habit of going over the evidence at last three times in the most pedantic manner. After the charges were read against each of the accused, the first day ticked by at a slow pace as the Crown Prosecutor described his version of what took place that day to the jury.

The second morning was much the same, however in the afternoon the Crown began summoning their witnesses. Will's interest perked up when the police forensic officer took the stand after the midday recess. He gave a description of his investigations in the old house and in the implement shed where he used products called Luminol and Fluorescein to detect blood. He had lots of photographs and diagrams, which he explained to the court. Of particular note was his evidence of blood spatter on the wall of the kitchen of the old house. When asked by the Counsel for the Crown what his explanation for this was, he replied it was his professional opinion the fatal blow had taken place in the kitchen of the old house and not in the implement shed. The Counsel for the Crown looked very pleased as he finished his examination of the witness. Wilkinson then stood up to cross-examine the witness.

'Is it not true that Luminol and Fluorescein can give false readings if there is copper or bleach present, or in the case of Luminol, if there is horse radish present?'

That might depend ..'

'A simple yes or no will suffice.'

'Well, yes. That's correct.'

‘Please record that as a yes to my question. Now, would you not expect these products to be present in a kitchen that had been used as such for roughly fifty years?’

‘I suppose so, yes.’

‘Is it not possible for a head injury to take place without there being blood sprayed in the immediate vicinity?’

‘It’s rare for that to happen but I suppose in some instances the injury is such that no blood is lost.’

‘Thank you.’

William smiled at the way Wilkinson had cast doubt on each one of the expert’s conclusions.

. On the third day they heard from more police witnesses who read out their prepared statements to the court. It all became routine and didn’t prove anything, one way or the other. After a time Will found his thoughts drifting. The barristers and their assistants seemed to blend into the furniture. It wasn’t natural to sit in a room like this day after day. What he needed was to get up and go for a long walk. To keep himself awake he made a study of the jurors. These were normal people, the sort you might meet on the street or in a pub. He began to wonder what each did in his or her daily life. The foreman was aged in his sixties. His hair was silvered to the sides and he wore glasses. He looked like a retired or soon-to-be retired professional man. He was constantly taking notes in a small notebook perched on his knee. A well organised man who took his role of foreman seriously, as he should. There were only three other men and the rest were women of varying ages. One of the men was obviously a worker, the sort that works in a factory all his life. He was short and

stocky and leaned forward with elbows on his knees for much of the time. Every so often he would break out into a smoker's cough and cover his face with a handkerchief. Another man looked like he might be a school teacher. He sat throughout the proceedings, looking backwards and forwards at the Counsel, as though at a tennis match. This trial was probably the most exciting thing that had happened in his life. The last man was aged in his early thirties. He wore an open necked shirt and slacks and looked bored out of his brain. Of the eight women in the jury, four were in their sixties or seventies, two looked like business women dressed in their suit tops and matching tight skirts, while the rest were young mothers who had probably had to get Nana in to look after the kids for the duration. For them, the entire business must have been as frustrating as it was for the defendants.

The only surprise of the day was the last witness of the day. This was Tamati Shepherd. They had been briefed by Wilkinson that the Prosecution was calling Shepherd and Will had told him about his contractual troubles with him. The Counsel for the Crown looked smug as he held the sides of his robes with each hand before starting.

‘Please state your name, address and occupation.’

‘Tamati Eruera Shepherd. I live in Mangawhai and I’m a driver and part time fencing contractor.’

‘I understand you also work on a shearing gang.’

‘Yeah, my family has a shearing gang but I’ve pretty much given that away now.’

‘Thank you, now do you recognise any of the defendants in this case?’

‘I do.’

‘Could you point out which of the defendants you recognise?’

‘I recognise Will Sutherland standing there,’ he said, pointing straight at Will.

‘And how do you know the defendant?’

‘He’s in the Otamatea Senior Rugby team with me and I worked for him on his father’s farm for a few weeks last year.’

‘So you know the defendant quite well?’

‘That’s right.’

‘So in the circumstances, it is likely you socialised with the defendant.’

‘Yeah, we met at the pub quite a bit.’

‘Which pubs would they be?’

‘Mostly the Mangawhai Arms and The Furlongs Hotel in Kaiwaka.’

‘Did you observe the defendant doing anything unusual at these events?’

‘Yes, I observed him exchanging packets for money.’

‘And what did you surmise to be in these packets.’

‘We are not dealing with surmises here,’ called David Wilkinson.

‘I’ll rephrase that then,’ said the Counsel for the Crown. ‘Do you know what was in these packets?’

‘It was commonly known he was selling marijuana.’

You lying bastard, thought Will. He could just see Tamati being collared by the cops for much the same thing and then doing a deal by fingering Will. Wilkinson stood up at that moment and objected that this line of questioning was not pertinent to the case. The Counsel for the Crown argued that they were trying to show that Will was not just growing marijuana for his own use but selling it openly around the district. The judge disallowed the objection and let the prosecution continue but the damage had been done. At the end of the evidence, Wilkinson stood up to try and repair as much of the damage as he could.

‘You say you worked with William Sutherland on his father’s farm last year. Please describe what sort of work you were doing.’

‘We were putting in some new fences. Will hired me to drill the post holes.’

‘Did you or did you not have a dispute over payment with William Sutherland?’

‘Yes, the ground was very hard and I requested an additional payment for wear and tear.’

‘Did you not say to William Sutherland that the owner of the machine had requested that extra money?’

‘I may have, I can’t remember.’

‘I would put it to you that you did and when the deceased, Mr Graham Sutherland confronted the owner of the drilling machine, a Mr Franko Pivac, about this and was told that he had made no such demand. I put it to you that you claimed the additional payment and when William Sutherland quite rightly refused to pay the extra sum on the basis that you had supplied him with a lump sum quote to do the work, you then carried a grudge campaign against William Sutherland.’

‘I can’t remember the exact details but there was a dispute at the time.’

‘It is a simple matter to call Mr Pivac to the stand.’

‘Well, all right, the work took a lot longer than I had allowed for and I tried to get the extra payment to make up for my own losses.’

‘I’m pleased you had the decency to own up to that because I have here an affidavit from Mr. Franko Pivac testifying that he made no such claim. Now, did you or did you not then go around the area bad-mouthing William Sutherland as a person who was not trustworthy and one who didn’t pay his debts?’

‘Yes, I tried to shame him into paying me.’

‘So you freely admit you have a grudge against William Sutherland even though he was quite right in refusing to pay the disputed amount.’

‘I suppose.’

‘Have you been in trouble with the law at any time, Mr. Shepherd?’

‘Only for the odd speeding ticket.’

‘Not for selling marijuana?’

‘Just once for possession, when I was a lot younger.’

‘That is all your Honour.’

The judge peered down his nose at the witness and all but sniffed before stating:

‘The witness may step down’

The next witness was a policeman from Maungaturoto Station. After he had stated his name, rank and time on the police force, the Counsel for the Crown got down to why they had brought him in.

‘Sergeant Mathews, are you acquainted with the defendant, William Sutherland?’

‘Yes, we heard he had been selling marijuana to some of his fellow rugby players.’

‘Why didn’t you arrest him at the time?’

‘We didn’t have any proof, and anyway we figured he was just a small player. We keep him under watch when we can.’

‘What can you tell me of the events that took place on the Puketotara Peninsular on the 28th of February 1989?’

‘A police spotter plane crashed onto some farmland on that day. Two officers were killed in the crash.’

‘And what was the plane doing in the area?’

‘It was searching for marijuana plantations.’

‘So you believed there were large plantations in the area?’

‘There were more likely to be lots of smaller plots scattered through the bush gullies and in the bush reserve at the end of the peninsular.’

‘I understand you had been watching a large plot in the bush reserve on the peninsular, is that not so?’

‘That is correct.’

‘Had you ever seen any of the accused in that bush reserve?’

‘No but the Sutherland’s run-off borders the reserve.’

‘With regards to the aeroplane crash, do you know what caused the crash?’

‘Your Honour, I must object. I fail to see how any of this is pertinent to the case.’

‘I will allow the question. The witness may answer the question.’

‘Yes. The aircraft was hit by three .303 bullets, one of which hit the engine, causing it to lose oil pressure. We think the pilot tried to head for Kaipara Flats airfield but ran out of height and crashed into a hillside.’

‘Have you caught the culprits involved?’

‘No.’

‘Do you have anyone under suspicion?’

‘Naturally the defendant, William Sutherland was one of our chief suspects as he lives in the immediate area of the crash.’

‘And have you found any evidence to suggest he was involved?’

‘No. When the defendants were on remand, an extensive search was carried out of the farm and the run-off. The only firearms found were a .22, a .177 slug gun and a 12 gauge shotgun. We searched all buildings for signs of marijuana or other

drugs. Some marijuana seeds were found on the floor and a lot of dried seeds in the roof space of the old derelict house down by the foreshore of the run-off.'

'What did you make of that?'

'We figured someone was using the roof space to carry out drying of the seed heads.'

'Is this a common practice?'

'No. Usually a vaporiser is used.'

'What did you deduce from this, then?'

'It confirmed our initial assessment that William Sutherland was only growing a small amount of the drug.'

'One of the Prosecution's claims in this case is that there was an argument followed by a tussle between the accused and his father over the removal of marijuana from the property. Would what you found be consistent with that testimony?'

'It would.'

'If the roof space was full of drying seed heads, can you assess how much the marijuana would fetch on the open market?'

'It's hard to say as we can't determine how much was up there but at a rough guess I would say several thousand dollars.'

'Enough to kill over?'

'Your Honour,' called Wilkinson. 'We have already heard from the witness that he does not know how much was in the roof space and he cannot know what was in the mind of the defendant or the deceased at the time.'

'Agreed, Counsel shall keep strictly to factual matters.'

‘As you please, your Honour. In your time in the police force have you come across a homicide caused by the loss of profits from the sale of marijuana?’

‘Yes.’

‘Thank you,’ said the Counsel for the Crown.

Wilkinson stood up and walked towards the witness.

‘How much time have you spent in lower Kaipara area?’

‘About nine months.’

‘So you have got to know the locals quite well, then?’

‘I suppose so, the younger ones, at least.’

‘How many young men of William Sutherland’s age would you say have you identified as smoking marijuana?’

‘That’s hard to say but at a guess I would say more than half of the people under thirty would smoke pot at some time.’

‘And how many have you identified as growing the marijuana in the region?’

‘I guess I would have identified around fifty to a hundred growers.’

‘And how many of these have been prosecuted?’

‘None.’

‘Why is that?’

‘Most are only growing for themselves and their mates. We tend only to keep a watching brief over them in case any should get involved in growing it commercially or getting involved with the gangs.’

‘Getting back to the defendant, William Sutherland, prior to this case you have already stated that you have no proof he was involved in the growing and selling of marijuana. Is that correct?’

‘Yes.’

‘So as far as the police are concerned, there was no evidence the defendant was involved in crime of any sort?’

‘No.’

‘That is all.’

On the fourth day, the prosecution called in their forensic pathologist. Will was surprised the pathologist was a woman. Why would any woman want to cut up dead people? There was no way Will would let his mother or Temara or any woman, for that matter, kill and cut up a carcass on the farm. The pathologist was aged in her fifties and appeared to be familiar with court procedure. She described the injuries to Graham’s head. Her testimony was matter of fact as she spoke about traumatic brain injury, a depressed skull fracture, epidural and subarchnoid hematomas leading to coma, brain swelling and ischemia. Will glanced across at his mother to see how she was coping. Her lips were set and she gripped the rail in front of her. Christ, she shouldn’t have to listen to this sort of thing. Half of the evidence went right over Will’s head and he was thankful the Counsel for the Crown elaborated on some of the more obscure terms and asked the witness if that was correct. The only trouble with drawing like that was it only made it harder for his mother. The only good thing to come out of it was her opinion the impact would have stunned his father and he would have been unaware of what happened. It was also pretty conclusive the blow from the ladder caused his death. The question was then raised as to whether it was possible for him to have regained consciousness before lapsing into a coma. When the pathologist said it had been known to happen in some small percentage of cases, Will wondered if it was possible his old man had come to during the bike ride back to the implement shed. The Counsel for the Crown asked how many blows to the

head the pathologist had detected. She replied there was evidence of two blows to the head, the first probably being the fatal blow that indented the skull, causing cracking to the skull itself and the second blow breaking off a section of the base of the skull. When asked to give her opinion on what might have caused the second blow, Will was relieved when the woman stated it was her opinion it was probably due to rebound from the ladder. The Counsel for the Crown then asked if the pathologist was aware the victim was undergoing chemotherapy at the time of the accident.

‘Yes,’ she replied ‘I understand the victim was taking the CHOP treatment for Non-Hodgkin’s Lymphoma at the time of the injury.’

‘Can you elucidate us on what CHOP stands for?’

‘CHOP is an acronym based on the first letter of the drugs used in the treatment regimen. These drugs: *Cyclophosphamide*, *Hydroxdaunrubicrin*, *Oncovin* and *Prednisone*.’ Various drug companies have different brand names and in fact, *Oncovin* is a brand name for the drug *Vincristine*.

‘Are any of these drugs likely to have had any effect on the patient as a result of his traumatic brain injury?’

‘That is not clear from studies to date. There is evidence certain drugs can be beneficial in cases of neurotrauma. For example, the drug *Adamantine* has been shown to have beneficial effects in that it acts on the neurotransmitter *Dopamine*. Other drugs such as *Desipramine* have also shown beneficial results in trials.’

‘I take it then the drugs taken by the victim are unlikely to have deleterious effects on the victim following his injury?’

‘I have seen no research that would indicate this to be the case.’

‘Thank you,’ said the Counsel for the Crown, who took his seat again.

Wilkinson stood up and walked around in front of the jury before turning to face the witness.

‘From what you have said, I take it you have seen no clinical evidence that the drugs used in the CHOP treatment would have affected the patient after the brain injury either way?’

‘That is correct.’

‘To summarise therefore, you cannot say whether the drugs taken by the victim increased the chance of the victim dying after the injury?’

‘Not directly, no.’

‘Thank you,’ said Wilkinson.

That afternoon the Crown called in a neurosurgeon as an expert witness. He took the stand and swore the oath before looking imperiously around the court. The Counsel for the Crown questioned him about his credentials, which were impressive. The Counsel for the Crown then proceeded to question him about comas, which were his specialty.

‘Mr. Sinclair, you have examined the evidence regarding the injuries suffered by the deceased in this case. In your opinion, would the deceased have gone into a coma directly as a result of being hit on the head by the ladder?’

‘In my opinion, that is unlikely. In cases like this, there is often a delay before a coma sets in.’

‘So you think it likely Mr. Sutherland was merely unconscious and not in a coma directly after the impact of the blow?’

‘I do.’

‘Do you consider the actions of Mr. Sutherland’s son William to have influenced the onset of the coma?’

‘Yes, I do. The deceased may have been unconscious at the time but we must remember he was suffering from traumatic brain injury and a depressed skull fracture. As a result of this, there would have been epidural hematomas to the base of the skull under the impact site and possibly subdural hematomas at the frontal lobe from the motion of the brain against the front of the skull following the impact. I understand the patient was then placed on a farm bike and driven over rough ground for a considerable period of time. This action would have been highly prejudicial to the health of the patient. It would have exacerbated the bleeding already occurring in the skull and put greater pressure on the brain. I have little doubt therefore this action was the cause of the onset of coma and led eventually to the patient’s death.’

‘Is it your opinion Mr. Sutherland’s life may have been saved if he had not been moved?’

‘That is a question I cannot give a definitive answer as I was not able to examine the patient at the time and place.’

‘In your opinion, then.’

‘In my opinion, there was always a chance the patient’s life could have been saved if he had received prompt medical attention and had been taken by helicopter to a hospital where he could have undergone brain surgery.’

‘Thank you.’

Wilkinson then stood up to cross-examine the witness.

‘In your testimony, you said it was unlikely for Mr. Sutherland to have gone into a coma immediately as a result of the blow. From that, am I to take it that in exceptional circumstances it is possible for this to occur?’

‘There have be...’

‘A simple yes or no to the question will suffice.’

‘Well, Yes.’

‘Presupposing Mr. Sutherland was already in a coma at the time and bearing in mind there was no road access to the site of the accident, was not William Sutherland merely trying to get his father to medical attention by the only means available to him.’

‘Possibly but as I have said, this method was highly prejudicial to his father’s health.’

‘We understand that now but how was William Sutherland to know that at the time?’

‘I have no knowledge of what William Sutherland knew or did not know at the time.’

‘That is precisely my point.’ Wilkinson now turned his back on the witness and faced the jury. It was a theatrical move that on one hand dismissed the witness and on the other engaged the jury.

‘William Sutherland had no medical knowledge of this type of injury. There he was in an isolated place with an injured man on his hands. He knew an ambulance could not reach him there, so he placed his father on a farm bike to get him back to where an ambulance could reach him. Isn’t that what anyone else would do in the circumstances? I put it to you it is.’

William allowed himself a small smile. Wilkinson had put the jury in the mind of Will at the point where he was faced with a dilemma. Surely the jury would ponder this. That afternoon, the Crown rested and the judge adjourned for the day.

The next day the defence presented its case. Wilkinson was ably assisted by Judith McCallum and another young woman. Each of the accused was called up to

give evidence on what occurred that day. Wilkinson was skilful in his questioning. Will was the first witness. He stated what he had said in chambers, admitting growing marijuana so he could buy an engagement ring, as well as growing a bit for his own use. Wilkinson had told them that telling the jury about the engagement ring would soften their stance towards him. Wilkinson asked Will whether he had any knowledge of traumatic brain injury. When he answered in the negative, Wilkinson then asked him why he put his father on the bike and did not call in a helicopter. Will replied he had no means of making a telephone call from the old house and at the time he did not think his father was as seriously injured as he in fact was. Wilkinson then asked why he pretended the injury had taken place in the implement shed. Will replied he had panicked when his father did not come around. He admitted it was a foolish thing to have done in retrospect but thought it harmless at the time.

Jacinta was then called to testify. Judith McCallum and she had been through Jacinta's wardrobe to select what she would wear in court. It was important that she made the right impression with the jury. Jacinta was wearing a grey skirt, powder blue blouse and black jacket. Judith had warned her not to wear anything that was patterned or too flamboyant. Her only jewellery was a thin gold chain holding a cross. Before the trial had started she had been to the hairdressers and had her hair cut short in order to appear well presented each day of the trial. All heads turned towards her as she faced her Counsel. Will had the satisfaction of seeing many of the jurors were sympathetic towards her even though he had sensed their antipathy towards himself.

'Mrs Sutherland, what did you do when your son, William came into the house to tell you of the accident?'

‘After questioning him as to the severity of the accident, I instructed him to ring for an ambulance. I then rushed across to the utility shed to see if I could do anything for my husband,’

‘Please describe what you saw when you entered the utility shed.’

‘Graham was lying unconscious on the floor. He was still in his wet weather gear and there was water on the floor all around him and blood under his head.’

‘Did you see if he was still alive?’

‘I can’t remember for sure what I did. I may have checked his pulse but I can’t be sure. He was very pale at the time. When I saw the blood on the floor and under his head and in his hair I then I felt gently around the back of his head. That was when I knew he had a fracture to his skull. I then held his hand until the ambulance arrived. I remember his hand was still warm then.’

‘So, from the best of your recollection, you thought your husband was still alive?’

‘Yes.’

‘I understand that you and your husband had done a St John’s First Aid course?’

‘Yes, we thought we should do that in case of an emergency on the farm.’

‘Is that how you knew not to move a person in a coma?’

‘Yes. My natural inclination was to take him in my arms and cradle his head but we had been warned against doing that.’

‘That must have been a difficult decision to make?’

‘Yes it was. I got one of the boys to get some blankets and I put them over him. It was all that I could do in the circumstances.’

‘And very difficult circumstances they were too,’ said Wilkinson, turning towards the jurors for sympathy, which he received back in spades.

‘Did you have any reason to believe that your husband may have received his injuries anywhere else than where he lay in the utility shed?’

‘No. He looked as though he had come straight into the shed out of the weather. There was blood on the floor and on the hay baler beside him as well as water on the floor. My natural conclusion was that he had slipped or had some sort of seizure.’

Thank you, Mrs Sutherland. That will be all.

As Wilkinson returned to his seat to confer with Judith McCallum, the Counsel for the Prosecution stood up and proceeded to the front of the court, where he turned to face the jury and commence his cross-examination.

‘Mrs Sutherland, there was always the possibility that your husband was hit on the head deliberately. Did this not occur to you at the time?’

‘No. Who could have done such a thing?’

‘The obvious candidate would have been your son, William?’

‘That is a preposterous suggestion.’

‘Do you mean to say you have never harboured doubts in this direction?’

‘Never!’

‘Very well, can you tell me how many farm bikes were in the utility shed when you went into check on your husband?’

‘I can’t say for sure. That wasn’t the focus of my attention at the time.’

‘Can you recall now?’

‘All I can say is there was at least one.’

‘Is that one or two?’

‘I can’t be sure?’

‘Thank you that will be all.’

When Jaimie was called to give evidence he backed up everything his mother had said. Under cross-examination the Counsel tried his best to get Jaimie to retract his statement that he had found his father’s phone but he gave the run-off. Jaimie refused to be baited by the Counsel and stuck to his story, clearly convincing the jury. After the judge adjourned the court for the day the family headed back to their hotel. Will’s mother seemed to be strangely buoyed up by the events of the day. The defence team was doing a good job but was it enough?

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The defence summed up at three o'clock on the tenth day of the trial. The judge then made his closing address to the jury, who duly retired to consider the evidence. The accused were instructed to stand as the jury left the room and then allowed to sit again. The judge asked each of the Counsel if they had any legal issues needing to be discussed. David immediately answered in the affirmative and the judge ordered the courtroom closed. All members of the public and the press were asked to leave and the doors were then locked. The Counsel approached the bench and some heated argument went on in hushed tones between the Counsel and the judge. Will and Jamie were too far away to hear what was said. A glance at his mother showed that she could not hear what was being said either.

At five o'clock there was still no sign of the jury returning and many in court glanced at their watches. By six o'clock there was talk of the jury being sequestered for the night. With no directives from the judge that they were going to adjourn for the day everyone remained in court. At twenty past six the news came that the jury had reached agreement and was coming back into the court. Barristers and assistants came rushing back into court and settled down at their desks, shuffling papers and

tidying folders. The court clerk came out first and ordered '*all to stand.*' They stood as the judge walked to his seat and sat down, almost vanishing behind the ornate woodwork in front of his bench. Soon, a court warden led in the jury who all took their seats and stared ahead, not wishing to make eye contact with the accused, all emotion drained out of them.

The court clerk stood up from the bench below the judge. She was a middle aged woman with cornflower hair and glasses. A pleasant enough woman that Will imagined being a mother with several children.

'Has the jury unanimously agreed on the verdict?' she asked the foreman of the jury.

'We have,' replied the foreman.

'With regard to the first defendant, William Hector Sutherland, how do you find the defendant on the first count of murder; guilty or not guilty?'

'Not guilty'

'With regard to the first defendant, William Hector Sutherland, how do you find the defendant on the second count of manslaughter; guilty or not guilty?'

'Guilty.'

The pronouncement of guilty to manslaughter left Will reeling. He always kept a thread of hope they would see it as an accident. He gripped the rail in front of him and stared straight ahead not wanting the smug buggers in gowns know they had beaten him.

'With regard to the first defendant, William Hector Sutherland, how do you find the defendant on the third count of conspiring to defeat justice; guilty or not guilty?'

‘Not guilty.’

‘With regard to the second defendant Jacinta Rena Sutherland, how do you find the defendant on the first count of being a party to an offence, namely the culpable homicide; guilty or not guilty?’

‘Not guilty.’

‘With regard to the second defendant, Jacinta Rena Sutherland, how do you find the defendant on the second count of failing to provide the necessaries of life; guilty or not guilty?’

‘Not guilty.’

‘With regard to the second defendant. Jacinta Rena Sutherland, how do you find the defendant on the third count of being an accessory after the fact; guilty or not guilty?’

‘Not guilty.’

‘With regard to the second defendant, Jacinta Rena Sutherland, how do you find the defendant on the fourth count of conspiring to defeat justice; guilty or not guilty?’

‘Not guilty.’

His guilty conviction at least had saved his mother and Jamie from any further anguish. It is what their Counsel had said from the start. He was the sacrificial lamb required by the system in exchange for saving his mother and Jaimie. There was a commotion over in his mother’s dock and he saw his mother had collapsed. Court wardens were holding her and helping her back to the seat at the back of the dock. The judge was peering over at her, looking concerned.

‘I trust you are recovered,’ he inquired.

‘Yes, your Honour,’ she muttered.

‘Good, we shall continue then.

‘With regard to the third defendant James Robert Sutherland, how do you find the defendant on the first count of being a party to an offence, namely the culpable homicide; guilty or not guilty?’

‘Not guilty.’

‘With regard to the third defendant, James Robert Sutherland, how do you find the defendant on the second count of failing to provide the necessities of life; guilty or not guilty?’

‘Not guilty.’

‘With regard to the third defendant James Robert Sutherland, how do you find the defendant on the third count of being an accessory after the fact; guilty or not guilty?’

‘Not guilty.’

‘With regard to the third defendant, James Robert Sutherland, how do you find the defendant on the fourth count of conspiring to defeat justice; guilty or not guilty?’

‘Not guilty.’

Jaimie looked at Will and then across at his mother and gave her one of his lop-sided grins. She smiled back, each sharing their relief. Will’s mother had never had much faith in the legal system. She considered too many people were convicted of crimes they did not commit. Will didn’t disagree with her. The legal system was a cumbersome machine that seemed difficult to stop once set in motion. His thoughts were broken by the judge addressing the court.

‘I would like to thank the jury in this case. It has been a difficult case and there have been many charges laid. I am satisfied the correct verdict has been reached on all counts. The jury is now dismissed.’

The foreman led the jury out of the courtroom, no doubt happy it was all over and they could now go home. Will wished he could go home too but knew that was not to be. While they were filing out there was a lull in which Will was able to look up and scan the public gallery for anyone he knew. Temara was there with her parents. God knows what they thought of him now. Further along the row Andy sat with a Chinese girl. He alone of the members of his family had got off scot-free, yet in many ways it was his actions that had led to Will’s conviction. There was a good chance the whole thing would have been seen as an accident if it hadn’t been for the plane getting shot down. He was bloody sure that had been Malosi and Leo. He wasn’t about to forget Andy’s role in all of this. He owed him big time.

Once the door to the juror’s room had been closed the court settled down again and everyone looked towards the judge.

‘William Hector Sutherland, you have been found guilty of manslaughter. You are to be bound over to await sentence. Jacinta Rena Sutherland and James Robert Sutherland, you have both been found not guilty on all of the charges against you and you are now free to depart this courtroom. The court order regarding suppression of the names of the accused is now lifted.’

‘The court room will rise.’

Everyone stood as the judge left the chambers. There was a general hubbub as papers were stacked and placed in briefing boxes, barristers congratulated each other and then crossed to their opponents to shake hands. It was all very proper, yet somehow surreal. It was like the end of a play, which is what it was, drama and play

acting, all to a prescribed text. Will's right arm was gripped by one of the wardens and he turned to look into his face. He was a Māori, the type he played rugby with. Probably a decent enough bloke. He nodded his head and pulled at Will's arm. Will allowed himself to be led back down the stairs.

‘What about my brother?’

‘He's free to go.’

Will resisted and turned to face Jaimie.

‘Tell Mum I'm sorry about the mess I caused. The same goes for you too.’

Jaimie's elation at being found innocent changed as he considered what his brother was going to face.

‘Keep your mana in there.’

‘Don't worry. I can look after myself.’

‘We'll come and visit.’

‘I know. Thanks for that. See ya, squirt. Look after Mum,’ said Will, as he was herded down the stairs. The last thing he saw was Jaimie's lop-sided grin and a waving arm.

Three weeks later they reassembled in the courtroom to hear Will's sentence read. Will was brought up into the dock flanked by two court wardens. He looked around the courtroom to see who had come for his final humiliation. The barristers and their assistants sat at their places fidgeting about with their papers and passing notes back and forth. There was only a smattering of people in the public gallery, probably a court reporter or two, the odd student and perhaps a writer checking on his court procedure. His Mum and Jamie were there, as were Temara and her parents and Andy and his Chinese bird. Tipene was standing at the back as if he had just

come in. Will appreciated him taking the time to come down. He gave them all a quick smile of appreciation for having come before putting on the deadpan expression he had developed for facing the justice system. Tracey, that's what her name was, he suddenly remembered. He hadn't really been trying to remember her name. It didn't matter a damn to him what her name was but it suddenly popped into his mind.

The court clerk strode in through a side door and asked the court to rise. They all stood as the judge entered the room, cast a quick look around as though checking for threats and sat down. Everyone sat down again with exhalations of breath, grunts and coughs, the scraping of chairs on the floor and more shuffling of papers and brief boxes.

‘William Hector Sutherland, you have been found guilty on the charge of manslaughter. The police believe you may have been involved with other crimes before the event, however no evidence was brought forward with regard to these allegations and we can dismiss them from our considerations in this case. From the evidence, it is apparent your father died as a result of an accident during a scuffle between you and your father. The question of provocation arises in a case such as this. The jury has evidently decided there was sufficient provocation in this case that the more serious charge of murder was not found against you. On top of that there was no evidence of malice aforethought. The maximum sentence for manslaughter in this country is life imprisonment. I have carefully examined all of the evidence in this case and have concluded your father's death was indeed an accident; however under the law you are still guilty of committing culpable homicide whether or not it was intended. Because of that I am sentencing you to five years of imprisonment. Have you anything to say?’

William looked up and his eyes locked with his mother's and then with Temara's. Both looked stricken at the length of the sentence. He tried to convey to them through thought alone that he would get through it but Temara broke down and her mother took her into her arms. He then turned towards the judge to speak. He stood as erect as he could and looked the judge in the eye as he spoke.

'I would like to acknowledge that all this came about as a result of an accident. In my panic I made a foolish decision, which has resulted in a great deal of inconvenience to all concerned, most especially my own family. For all of that, I ask my family's and the court's forgiveness.'

Will's words settled over the courtroom like so much dust. Nothing was said for several seconds, and then the judge gave a slight cough before speaking.

'Your words of contrition will be noted. Take the prisoner down. Next case.'

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William had been imprisoned for almost three weeks before Jacinta was able to get through all the red tape and visit him. They had all received their approvals to visit the prison on the same day, weeks after having made their applications. When the time came for the first visit, Jaimie said he couldn't face going back into a prison. Jacinta sympathised with him and did not push the point. She then telephoned Temara to see if she wanted to accompany her. When Temara told her she hadn't received permission to make a visit yet, Jacinta sensed there might be something amiss.

Some spur-winged plover were foraging among the sheep in the field adjacent to the car park as she pulled in. The concrete walls of the prison appeared to grow out of the green swathe. Guard towers, looking like runaway airport control towers, loomed over the walls. The walls were surrounded by razor wire barriers, chain linked fences and the trip wire barriers. The whole thing looked like it had been dropped from space into the gentle rural setting; a huge blot on the landscape, like the steel mill beside the other harbour.

Other families and loved ones were sitting in cars or talking in huddles around the boots of their cars waiting for visiting time. A cold wind bit into Jacinta as she stepped out of the car. Jacinta pulled up her jacket collar and set off into the wind with head bowed. She showed her approval letter from the prison manager and her passport to the guard at the gate. At the main entry through the prison wall she was motioned through a scanner similar to those used at the airport. Another guard waved a wand over her and she had to turn out her pockets and hand over her purse. By now a queue had formed behind her. Once she was cleared, she was put into a waiting room until another twenty people had been passed. They waited there for some time, presumably so that the prisoners could be brought to the visitor's room. The whole process took more than half an hour and an undercurrent of anticipation built up in the group. As soon as the door was opened they burst into the visiting room to look for their loved one.

William was sitting half way along a long bench. He was dressed in prison overalls. As Jacinta sat opposite him, he looked up, eyes full of yearning. As much as she wanted to give him a big hug, she could not reach him through the Perspex barrier. Not even a fleeting touch of hands. All she could do was talk through the microphone.

‘How are you faring.’

‘Okay, I guess.’

‘What’s it really like?’

‘I have my own cell. Each cell has a radio and a TV. Most of the time everyone has both of them on full bore. Together with all the screaming, crying shouting and cursing you can barely hear yourself think.’

‘Will you be able to cope?’

‘Yeah, I just switch off.’

‘At least you can do that in a single cell.’

‘They keep threatening to put two people in a cell. I hope that doesn’t happen.’

‘Have you been threatened?’

‘I was sized up by the other inmates when I was first brought in. You have to expect that sort of thing. They left me alone when I told them I was in for murder and wouldn’t take any shit.’

‘Fair enough! I guess you need to use any means at your disposal to survive in a place like this. I must say you look well, even so.’

‘Yeah, well the grub’s basic but okay.’

‘Sorry about taking so long to visit you. It took forever to get our approvals. We’ve arranged for Andy to visit you on Wednesdays and Jaimie or me to come on Sundays. When Andy finishes his semester he might be able to come more often.’

‘Where’s Jamie then?’

‘He said he couldn’t face coming into the prison so soon after Mt Eden.’

‘I can understand that. Tell him not to feel bad about it.’

‘I will. He does care, you know?’

‘I expected that more from Andy than Jaimie.’

‘What’s that supposed to mean?’

‘Nothing.’

‘David Wilkinson is looking at filing an appeal against your sentence.’

‘Yeah, he’s spoken to me about that. I told him not to bother.’

‘Surely you want to get out of here.’

‘I do but I don’t want to prejudice your position. He told me if I went to appeal then Jamie and your position could be put into jeopardy. I told him I didn’t want that. I’ll sit out my sentence and hope for early parole.’

‘Are you sure? You know we’ll go the whole way if necessary.’

‘Yeah, I’m sure. I’ve seen how the justice system works. Fighting the system uses up all your financial and emotional resources. It’s better for me to sit this out and for the rest of the family to get on with their lives. How’s Temara taking it all?’ Jacinta had been dreading this question. She placed her hands hard up against the Perspex and looked down at them as a means of averting her eyes.

‘She was terribly cut up when you were sentenced. I’m afraid with one thing and another I haven’t had time to go around and see them. I rang her to see if she could come down this time but she is still awaiting her visiting form.’

‘I was kinda hoping she might be visiting today.’

‘I know son. Perhaps she’ll have the forms next week. I’ll certainly make it my business to go around and see her.’

‘I’d appreciate that. Anyway, enough about me, what’s happening with the farm?’

‘We’re paying Jock McKenzie to make a round of the property every day. Jaimie helps him with moving stock, drenching and things like that. Naturally maintenance has fallen behind.’

‘Must be costing a bit to retain Jock on a daily basis?’

‘Well, if you must know, we’re heavily into debt. The legal costs have been unbelievable. I’ve applied for Legal Aid but it takes forever to get a response from them. So much for being innocent until proven guilty, eh? Thank God we got the bail money back.’

‘You can’t keep going like that.’

‘I worry about it. I know you had your heart set on taking over the farm but I don’t think I can manage it by myself until then.’

‘Don’t fret over that. I’ve had plenty of time to think things over in here. There are programmes available here for retraining. You can do most of the trades and some even do university courses. Some of the lags do law. Can you believe that? I guess if they know the law better than the cops then they can keep one step ahead of them. It’s quite funny really. Anyway I’ve been thinking about doing an extramural paper in soil management at Lincoln. I thought for the first year I’d just see how it went and then maybe I could do more papers towards a Bachelor of Agriculture. It seems the sensible thing to do while locked away in here. I may as well put the time to good use.’

‘That’s great,’ said Jacinta. Her heart filled to bursting at how Will was handling the situation. She wanted to reach across and hold him but the Perspex barrier prevented any contact.

‘There’s only one snag.’

‘What’s that?’

The university courses aren’t funded by the Department of Corrections.’

‘So?’

‘I’d have to get private funding or a student loan to pay for the papers.’

‘I can’t guarantee anything at the moment. We’ll have to see what Angus has to say about running the farm and if there is any money in the Trust Fund. There is a faint chance we might get a grant from the Iwi Trust but I’d have to talk to Tipene about how to go about that.’

‘That’s okay. I’m not going anywhere in a hurry.’

Will was grinning at his little joke. She smiled back, thankful he could see some humour in his situation.

‘What are your thoughts about selling the farm?’

‘As I said, I’ve been giving everything a lot of thought. If I can finish all my papers for a Bachelor of Agriculture here, I’ll need to go down to Lincoln to do my practical training. There are heaps of jobs for farm managers down in the South Island. I should be okay. You do what you have to with the farm.’

‘If we do sell the farm what do you want us to do with your things?’

‘I guess I haven’t got a hell of a lot. You can probably pack all my gear in one suitcase.’

‘What about the Charger?’

‘Let Jamie drive it in the meantime.’

‘Not Andy?’

‘Nah, I wouldn’t give him the time of day right now and anyway I owe something to Jaimie for putting him through the ringer like that.’

Jacinta barely had time to think of the implications of this before the loud speaker burst into life to announce that visitors only had another five minutes. They sat looking at each other not knowing what else to say.

‘What’s with the rancour with Andy?’

‘He just pisses me off at the moment. He could have given more support.’

Will had been looking down as he said this and now he looked up. An emotion flickered across his face and her heart went out to him. Somehow or other Andy had wounded him.

‘I love you son. I know it was an accident.’

‘Thanks. It means a lot - your not holding it against me, I mean.’

‘You always were a hothead but then again, so was your father.’

‘How’s Jaimie faring?’

‘Oh, you know Jaimie; he’ll always be the same.’

‘Yeah, I suppose so. It won’t be easy for him having a brother inside.’

‘I don’t think he’ll worry too much about that.’

‘Time’s up.’

‘Give my regards to squirt and my love to Temara when you see her.’

‘You look after yourself.’

‘Don’t worry on that score.’

‘Bye.’

Jacinta didn’t remember much about the drive home. It was only when she passed through Te Hana that her mind switched back into gear and she decided to visit the Anich’s. The radio was still recycling the hits of 1966 playing ‘*Rainy Day Woman*’ by Bob Dylan. This seemed apt as she had just run driven into a shower. The windscreen wipers clicked and clacked their way back and forth all the way to the Anich’s. When she pulled into their driveway, two cars were parked in front of the house. Jacinta parked beside one, leaving room for both to back out. She then opened her door and ran towards the house. Hana opened the door for her as she mounted the small deck by the door.

‘Hello Hana. How are you?’

‘A bit drier than you. I’ll get you a towel.’

‘No, don’t bother. It was hardly anything. I was hoping to catch Temara. Is she home?’

‘Temara, no. You just missed her. She’s gone up the road to a friend’s.’

Jacinta knew straight away Hana was being evasive. She hadn't expected that from Hana.

'That's a pity. I've just been down to visit Will. Tell her Will sends his love.'

'I will. Come into the kitchen and I'll make a cup of tea.'

'Wonderful. I could do with a cuppa,' replied Jacinta, sensing Hana had something important to say to her. She decided to take her time and see what ensued. It wasn't until the kettle had boiled and Hana had poured the tea and the milk in the cups that Hana broke the silence.

'I guess this is difficult for both of us. Since Will was sentenced, Temara has been on an emotional roller-coaster. I think she is genuinely very fond of Will, it's hard to say whether it's really love or not. That's always hard to define for anyone.'

'I thought they loved each other. They certainly seemed devoted to each other.'

'Perhaps it was and perhaps it wasn't. I think Temara is now looking at her options. Five years is a long time for a girl of her age to wait.'

'What are you saying?'

'I'm just saying we need to give her time to sort things out. I don't think this is the time to press her to make visits to the prison.'

'Oh!'

'I can imagine the disappointment Will might feel over this.'

'He'll be pretty cut up over it.'

'She may yet decide to continue the relationship. She just needs time to sort out what's going on in her head.'

'I understand. Thanks for being so frank and for the cup of tea. I should be going now. Please give Temara my love as well as Will's.'

‘I will. Kia kaha, as they say.’

‘You too.’

Jacinta walked out of the house in a bit of a daze. How she was going to break this to Will? She got into the car like an automaton and backed out of the drive. While waiting to see if any traffic was coming, she glanced back at the house to see Temara’s face framed in a window. Jacinta pretended not to see and drove away.

That night at dinner Jacinta broached the subject of selling the farm with Jaimie.

‘I was talking to Will today about the farm. He agreed with me that with all the debt hanging over us and no one to run it, we should sell it. What do you think about that?’

Jaimie had just bitten a piece of lamb off his fork and took his time chewing it before answering. He had become much more mature since the accident. It seemed everyone had changed in different ways.

‘I had been planning to leave home soon anyway. If Dad hadn’t died there was a fair chance Will and Temara would have taken the farm over sooner or later and I didn’t want to feel beholden to them.’

‘What do you have in mind?’

‘I was thinking of joining the army, for a while at least. After that who knows. The police pipe band has always appealed to me.’

‘The police, heaven forbid!’

‘What’s wrong with the police?’

‘Oh, nothing really. It’s just that I’ve seen quite a bit of them lately and was hoping never to have close contact with them for a very long time.’

‘They were just doing their job. You can’t blame them for what happened.’

‘Maybe and maybe not. They’re all part of the machine that keeps us in our place. Anyway, your seventeenth birthday is coming up, only a couple of months away now. I presume you’ll enlist as soon as you can.’

‘There’s nothing to keep me here now, unless you feel you need me to hang around and help out on the farm.’

‘Well, that might be useful at least until I can arrange the selling of the farm.’

‘Okay Mum, I’ll wait until then. It’s no skin off my nose one way or the other.’

‘Thanks son.’

‘Won’t you have to get approval from Angus, after all isn’t he a Trustee or something?’

‘That’s right. Things haven’t been too good between us since the accident. I’ll give him a ring soon and broach the subject. I might have to go cap in hand down to Hahei.’

‘Angus is a good bloke. He won’t stand in your way. His only concern will be to get a good price for the farm.’

Jacinta looked at Jaimie in a new light. He spoke with more confidence. He was no longer a gangly kid. His chest had filled out and he actually had a biceps in place of the little golf balls that used to slide up and down under his skin. She took his hands in hers.

‘I know it’s been hard on us lately but I’m so proud of you the way you’ve handled yourself through the whole thing.’

‘You were pretty awesome too, Mum.’

‘Oh, I didn’t do anything out of the ordinary. To tell you the truth I broke down quite a bit when I was alone in the remand cell.’

‘Yeah, I was scared shitless in there myself.’

‘I looked up the uni holidays on the internet today. There are two weeks in September. I thought of asking Andy to come up for a week so we could round up most of our stock and send them to the sales. What do you think?’

‘You can’t send pregnant ewes to market. It’ll have to be just the steers.’

‘All right, we’ll sell the steers and leave the ewes and lambs as part of the stock we sell with the farm.’

‘Sounds good, that means we should sell the farm no later than the autumn of next year.’

‘I’ll arrange for the farm to be put on the market in the New Year then, provided Angus is okay with it.’

‘I think there’s an intake to the army in April. That should suit me pretty well.’

‘Great, things are starting to fall into place, at last.’

‘Where are you going to live? I mean, we’re all accounted for except you.’

‘Oh, I dunno. Maybe I’ll go back up to Ngunguru for a while and stay with Tipene, at least till something comes along.’

‘You’ve always had a hankering to go back up there, haven’t you?’

‘I didn’t think I let it show but yeah, that’s where I have always felt most at home. Life has been good here but that westerly wind gets you after a while.’

Jacinta rang Angus the next evening. Margaret answered the phone. She apologised to Jacinta about how things had gone. From what they had been told, it sounded as though they had all plotted Graham’s death to get hold of the farm. Jacinta wondered how to broach the subject of selling the farm without making it

seem as though they had achieved their aim. She let her ramble on before asking if Angus was in. Apparently, he was out at Rotary and wouldn't be in till late. Jacinta asked if he could ring her the next day.

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Jacinta pondered a clue in the Northern Advocate's crossword. A look of self satisfaction crossed her face as she divined the answer and filled in 10 across. The shrill ring of the phone beside her made her jump. She put down her pen before lifting the handset. It was Angus returning her call from the evening before.

'Angus, thanks for ringing back.'

'I must apologise for our behaviour after Graham died. What with the police investigation and the publicity in the media, we didn't know what to think. I should have known better though. I wasn't there for you and the boys when you most needed someone. Please accept my most abject apologies.'

'I understand. Graham was your brother, after all.'

'How are you coping now?'

'We are okay, I suppose. Will is toughing it out. Inmates can do training in prison. The prison manager has given him approval to do some extramural papers from Lincoln.'

'At least something good might have come out of the whole mess.'

Jacinta picked up the subtle drop in his tone when she mentioned Will. Perhaps Angus still blamed Will for the death of his brother.

‘Something that might please you is Jaimie is joining the army.’

‘That’s a surprise.’

‘He mentioned it just before the accident. I think he just feels a need to get away and start a life of his own.’

‘Well, the army will do that for him.’

‘I hope so.’

‘What did you want to discuss?’

‘The reason I rang is financial really. We’ve got into debt over the court case. The barristers cost us a small fortune as you can imagine. We might get something back through Legal Aid but I’m not holding my breath. There’s also the problem of managing the farm. With only Jamie and me, I’ve had to hire one of the neighbours to call in each day but the cost of that is starting to mount up. I’ve been thinking it might be for the best to sell the farm.....Are you still there?’

‘Yes, Jacinta, I’m still here.’

‘I know this is a bit sudden from your end and I’m only putting it forward as a solution at the moment. I wanted to run it past you and see what your reaction would be.’

‘I’ll have to think about it, Jacinta. The farm’s been in the family for three generations. Selling it is not something that should be done just because you are facing temporary hardship.’

‘I understand that but with Will out of the picture, there’s no one to look after it.’

‘There may be a way around that. Let me give it some thought. Did Graham get the accounts into the accountant before he died?’

‘Yes, he always had them ready by the end of April.’

‘Okay, I’ll give the accountant a call and see if he can get them done early. As soon as they are ready I’ll come up and then we can go over the options. Do you need any money in the meantime?’

‘No, we can get by till then.’

‘If you need anything, just give me a call.’

‘Thanks Angus. I appreciate that, Bye Bye.’

Jacinta hung up concerned Angus might block the sale of the farm. Selling seemed to be the answer to everything. It gave her financial freedom and would allow her to start a new life somewhere else. She wanted to get away as much as Jaimie. Since the trial Jacinta had become more and more critical of everything about the place; the faded wall paper, the scuffed skirting boards, the bent Venetian blind slats and the knotted chords. Everything dated from the time the house was first built. ‘No girl,’ she said, ‘it’s time to move on.’

A month passed before Angus called again. Jacinta was convinced he would do everything in his power to retain the farm. Her heart missed a beat when he asked if she had received the farm accounts.

‘Not yet but I haven’t been up to the letter box today.’

‘Well, you should be getting them in the next couple of days. I’ve given considerable thought to your situation and have come up with some options I think we should discuss.’

‘Fine.’

‘How about we meet for lunch in Auckland at The Officers’ Club?’

‘Are women allowed in such an august establishment?’

‘Of course! There are plenty of women in the armed services these days.’

‘I didn’t realise. Anyway that sounds fine. Where is it?’

‘Have you a pen and paper?’

‘Yes.’

‘The address is 14 Edgerley Ave in Newmarket. That’s off Broadway. The club is at the end of the road.’

‘I’ve got that. When shall we meet?’

‘Does midday Tuesday week suit you?’

‘Yes, that’s fine.’

‘Great, I can arrange a private room where we can discuss the farm after we’ve had lunch. I’ll see you there then.’

‘Righto, oh, do I need to wear anything special, like a tiara or something?’

‘No, just good street clothes will do.’

‘Okay, just kidding, I’ll see you there.’

Jacinta arrived a bit late for the lunch appointment hoping Angus and Margaret would be there first. After signing the visitor’s book and listing Angus as her host a hostess led her up the stairs to the main clubrooms. Memorabilia, in the form of flags, crests, photos and awards, covered the walls. A framed official portrait of Her Majesty, The Queen and a similar one of Prince Phillip held pride of place. Old men wearing blazers with badges sewn on their breast pockets, all veterans of some campaign or other, filled the room. Despite the maleness the room evoked, it still had a certain time-worn charm to it. Angus and Margaret were already seated in

the restaurant. Angus had bags under his eyes and jowls hanging down from what used to be a firm jaw line. He suddenly looked old. Gray's death had affected him badly. He rose from his seat as soon as he saw her, always the gentleman. He came forward to embrace Jacinta and kiss her on the cheek.

'Jacinta, you're looking well.'

When someone close to you looks the worse for wear the natural thing is to wonder if you have aged as well. Gray's death had affected them all. After giving Margaret a quick peck on her cheek she sat down. A waiter came and gave each of them a menu. It was short but adequate. Angus ordered a bottle of cabernet-sauvignon to go with their meal.

After lunch they adjourned to a small meeting room. This one also had a photograph of The Queen and one of Prince Phillip. Did the toilets also have these? No, that wouldn't be practical would it? Perhaps over the urinals would be all right. All the men could stand to attention and give a strange right handed salute. Jacinta allowed herself a small smile at the thought. She would find out soon enough whether she was right or not. A club official brought Angus his satchel from which he extracted several sheaves of paper.

'Right,' said Angus, slipping easily back into his old practice of giving orders and running things. Jacinta looked at Margaret, who gave her a rueful smile.

'As I see it we have three options. We can lease the farm, put in a manager, or sell it.'

'In each case we would have to move off the farm,' said Jacinta.

'You said you wanted to.'

'Yes, there are too many ghosts there now. I feel Gray's kehua has joined all those other poor souls there.'

‘Yes, well, hm, I think I understand how you feel. The advantage of the first two options is that we retain the farm in the family.’

‘Why bother. Will is the only one of our children who wants to be a farmer and he hasn’t any expectations in that regard to the farm any more.’

‘Look, I know Graham’s death was an unfortunate accident. Will has to live with what happened. It can’t be easy for him. Perhaps he needs this time in prison to make him feel he has served his penance, so to speak. Anyway, I have given the matter of the farm a lot of thought, as you can well imagine. I have come to the conclusion nothing will be gained by cutting Will out of his inheritance. I think we should keep the farm in the long term in the expectation he will take it over when he is ready. He’ll provide the continuous link for the family on the farm. We’ve all got boys, so perhaps a grandchild down the line will want to take it over after Will.’

‘He’ll be pleased. He does love the farm.’

‘Selling it just didn’t seem an option. Why give up a good money earner? There’s no mortgage on the property. Everything it makes is pure profit.’

‘Apart from taxes.’

‘Yes but a farm property is a very handy vehicle to write other incomes off against.’

‘Well, some of us don’t have other incomes. I’m still going to need something to live on.’

‘I’ve given consideration to that. We need to change the Trustees to the Trust, anyway. Under the existing arrangement, my side of the family will still hold fifty percent and your family will hold fifty percent. I’m proposing the Trust pays out to you your twenty-five percent of the value of the farm immediately. That should allow you to set yourself up in a home wherever you want and to have sufficient

funds to live on. The remaining twenty-five percent shall remain in three equal shares for your boys. I propose the new Trustees shall be Andrew and Roderick. The aim is that when William is properly trained and ready to take over the running of the farm then he shall be allowed to do so. He'll be paid a farm manager's salary and we will make it possible for him to buy shares back from the trust. Your 25% holding will be kept available in trust for him to buy back when he is in a financial position to do so. Should Andy or Jaimie wish to sell their shareholding to him at some point in the future then the Trustees will approve this. What do you think?'

'Someone will still need to oversee the property through regular inspections, that sort of thing.'

'Rod and I are willing to do that until such time as William can take over the management of the property.'

'You seem to have covered all the bases. That only leaves the question of leasing it or putting on a farm manager.'

'We don't need to decide that yet. The important thing is to agree in principle to setting up a new Trust Deed for the farm and getting everyone's agreement. I need more time to investigate what management services are available. I am leaning towards hiring a manager to look after the farm. If we lease it, we effectively lose control of it during the period of the lease but if we put a manager on it we will still retain some control.'

'From what I've heard of managers he will want to live off the stock.'

'You can't expect him not to. The right to do this will be written into his contract. The amount of stock he will be allowed to slaughter or dispose of himself will be specified in the contract.'

'As long as he isn't selling it to some butcher in the city on the sly.'

‘I’ll be keeping a close eye on stock numbers.’

‘All right, I’ll leave it your capable hands, Angus. All I need to know is when to vacate the house.’

‘I’d say sometime in the spring will be best. Let’s plan for September.’

‘Done.’

The next time Jacinta visited Will, he seemed pleased with the proposal, in fact he was taken aback by Angus’ generosity. When he said he would write to Angus to thank him it was Jacinta’s turn to be taken aback. She couldn’t remember him ever writing to anyone. Will had changed in subtle ways since he had been in prison. The happy-go-lucky Will of old had been replaced by a more mature thinking man. He had been giving his future a lot of thought. Jacinta was proud of his handling of a difficult situation. She would have cracked up completely by now.

‘Oh, by the way, I’ve received my papers back from Lincoln. I’m now officially enrolled,’ he said. ‘Thank Tipene for arranging the grant from the Iwi Trust.’

‘You know that that grant has put an obligation on both of us, don’t you?’

‘I know. I’ll always be in their debt.’

‘I’m pleased for you. It gives you a new start in life.’

‘Yeah, I hope so. By the way, they’ve given approval for me to use a computer in the prison library.’

‘Can you send e-mails on it?’

‘I suppose so. I guess I’ll have to ask first.’

‘We could keep in touch everyday that way.’

‘I’ll check it out. If you receive an e-mail from me you’ll know that it is allowed. Did I tell you I wrote to Temara?’

‘No. Did you get a reply?’

‘Yeah, she says she’s sorry but can’t wait five years for me to get out. She said it would be better if we broke off our relationship.’

‘I’m so sorry.’

‘I half expected it anyway. You can’t blame her. The trouble is I still love her.’

‘And I’m sure she loves you. That’s the tragedy of the whole situation.’

‘If you see Temara or her parents, tell them I still love her but understand if she wants to break up.’

‘I will. At least you’ve got a future of sorts mapped out now. Learn as much as you can while you’ve got the time.’

As soon as Jacinta said it, he looked at her in a funny way then broke out in a laugh.

‘What did I say?’

‘I’ve got plenty of time.’

‘Oh, sorry I didn’t mean it to sound like that.’

‘No worries.’

‘Has Andy been to visit?’

‘Yeah, he came last Wednesday. They’ve got holidays again next week so he might get in to see me a bit more over the break.’

‘That’s good. I spoke to him over the phone about Angus’ proposal for the farm. He was in favour of it.’

‘Yeah. I don’t know about him being a Trustee though.’

‘Angus will be keeping a tight control over it.’

‘Looks like time is up. I’ll catch you next week then. I love you.’

‘Ditto.’

‘I worry about you.’

‘Don’t worry on that score. I’m on top of it.’

Angus arranged for a manager to take over the farm on the 23rd of September. The new manager and his family came up to inspect the farm in July. He wasn’t a lot older than William really, maybe twenty-seven. He had a young wife and a little one in tow and another on the way. Jacinta showed them around the house and told them that it needed sprucing up a bit. They jumped at the opportunity to do it up themselves – to put their stamp on the place, they said. She took them out to the implement shed where each of them hopped on a farm bike and then drove over the property. They were ecstatic to have got a farm in the area.

As the date for leaving drew nearer, Jacinta became more fretful. One day, while doing the ironing the constant droning of a bumble bee trapped inside caught her attention. After making frantic attempts to escape through the window and beating itself against the invisible barrier, Jacinta finally opened the window and watched it buzz out through the opening. She closed the window to prevent more insects coming in. Night was drawing in. She turned on the lamp near her chair and settled down to watch the television.

That night she couldn’t sleep. She lay in bed staring at the ceiling until, giving up she turned on her bedside lamp to read. The light caused Huhu beetles to smash themselves against the outside of the window pane. She pictured them as great flying carapaces with their long antennae waving about. It sounded like a kamikaze

attack. Great thuds and whacks slammed into the window every second. She prayed the glass would hold. The idea of them flying about the room terrified her. She tried to concentrate on reading but the lines on the page began to dissolve in front of her. Her thoughts returned to the aerial assault on the window. Were they spirits upset at her leaving? Was Graham stirring them up?

Jacinta did most of her grieving when alone, especially at night. She had anxious moments when she tried to summon up his image. She let her thoughts drift and his outline would come and go, like smoke blown back down a chimney to swirl around in front of the hearth. Forms appeared in snippets, before swirling around and reappearing, joined together. A mouth would appear, shaped as his boyish grin with some naughty secret it was keeping from her. This would reform as his whole face with one eye shut against the glare of the sun and the other one staring out at her. Frizzy red hair, all bleached on the ends, bordered the face. Freckles marched across the bridge of his nose and along his forehead, everything strangely two-dimensional.

She used to tease him about his freckles and the way he burnt each summer. He'd say she was just one big freckle, before bursting into laughter, like the braying of a donkey. After a while the onslaught of beetles against the window pane died away. A lone moth fluttered around the ceiling and she immediately thought of Gray again. Was it Gray's spirit staying close to her? God, she missed him. Why did he have to leave her? Life was not the same anymore. The moth fluttered about above the bed, before alighting on the lampshade next to her bed. Gray had never liked frilly lampshades, preferring cleaner lines, not girly things like that. Surely, Gray wouldn't go near a frilly shade? The thought made her smile. What a nice feeling! A morepork called in the distance. A flock of shorebirds, oyster-catchers, most

probably, flew over the house calling to each other. She took comfort from the sounds of the night. At last she fell asleep, free of her anxieties, until the next time.

On the day of her leaving Jacinta packed her clothes into three suitcases and placed these in the boot of her car. Her coats, she draped over the other suitcase holding Will's clothes, on the back seat. She then went around the house looking at what she might want to take. Naturally, she took the boys' personal things, the family photo albums and some of her favourite books but on the whole, she left most things behind. The manager and his wife would use all the crockery, cutlery and linen. What did she need it for? She wanted to start afresh. Once installed at Ngunguru, she would drive into Whangarei and, for the first time in her life, buy everything new. She left the house keys on the hall table and shut the door behind her. The manager and his family were due later that evening, so she had no qualms about leaving the house unlocked for that period of time. Once she had packed her car she backed it up to the horse float, she had hired, and hitched it on. The last thing to do was to lead 'Star' into the float and belt her in. Her old Mitsi was still going strong even if it was down a bit on the springs on one side. The car was old but reliable, just like her. She smiled to herself as she slid into the driver's seat. With the turn of the key, the car burst into life. She tuned the radio to Classic Hits and released the brakes.

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After Tipene's sleep-out had been refurbished, Jacinta was able to use it until she figured out what she wanted to do. Angus kept in touch regarding the farm and in return she told him how Will and Jamie were faring. Andy had vanished off the face of the planet. The last Jacinta heard, he'd gone to Sydney. Goodness knew where he lived or how he made a living. Will was coming up for his second parole hearing. The word was he would get parole this time but you could never be sure. He was now two years off completing his agricultural degree. They were hoping his studies would count for something when he came up for parole. She wondered whether she should contact Hana and ask if Temara was in a relationship. Then she thought it better to leave it for now. If Will wanted to go down that path, he had to be the one to make the next move. Jaimie had taken himself off to join the army a couple of weeks before Jacinta left the farm. After his basic training he had been sent to Bougainville on peacekeeping duties. He had come to see her on his last furlough before being sent to Waiouru to take up a new post as an instructor. He hoped to get into next year's intake for officer training at Duntroon. Jacinta was in regular e-mail contact with both Will and Jaimie.

From Angus' reports, the manager was looking after the farm well. Angus now looked after all the farm affairs and Rod went up there once a month to meet with the manager. Rod was now a qualified lawyer and by reports a very astute individual.

The kaumatua housing at the marae was at last through all the planning hurdles and construction was due to start. Jacinta made an application for one of the units but had no idea as to whether she would be deemed suitable or not.

It was her niece, Naida who suggested Jacinta join a Ngati Tarara women's pilgrimage to Croatia to look up their tipuna. Jacinta was about to say no, when she reflected on her life. There were no mokopuna on the horizon and it would be several months before the kaumatua housing would be ready. Tipene and Hiria had been great but she had the feeling her welcome was wearing a bit thin. The trip seemed a heaven sent opportunity to get away and relieve Tipene and Hiria of their burden. Naida had seen an article on the trip on the internet and Jacinta wondered if the woman organizing it was the same one Hana had spoken of four years earlier.

On the big day, Tipene drove her down to Auckland. None of her sons were there to see her off. Her old life on the farm had now vanished into a wall of mist. Tipene had looked genuinely happy for her when he kissed her goodbye but Hiria looked worried about something. Perhaps she was afraid of such a long flight. Jacinta travelled light with a single suitcase and a holdall for her purse, camera and a book to read. Once through the screening process she emerged into the departure area and checked an overhead screen for her gate number before walking past the shops trying to load people with weight restrictions on their baggage with even more with things before they reached their aircraft.

In the departure gate lounge she found her tour group and introduced herself to the tour leader, Hine Mihaljevich. She, in turn introduced her to the other members of the group. After an eleven hour flight they landed at Changi in Singapore around midnight local time. With an hour and a half to fill in before their next flight, Hine took them to a place where they all had a massage followed by a hot shower. By the time they boarded the flight to Frankfurt they were all feeling mellow and exuding a warm cloud.

They arrived at Frankfurt at seven in the morning, local time. The terminal building was vast and sterile looking, like something out of a science fiction novel. With plenty of time to kick their heels they got to know the terminal well. The smokers' stations in the middle of the concourse with their extraction pipes rising to the ceiling above them particularly amused them. The smokers sitting in them looked pitiable in their habit. Thank God she had given up smoking. It looked so demeaning and desperate. When it came time to board their flight they were loaded on board a bus and carried across the vast tarmac area to their plane. It was a twin prop aircraft, like the old Friendships they used to have back home. Jacinta followed the others up the mobile stairs, just like the old days, and found her seat. This time she was favoured with a window seat.

The safety pamphlet in the back of the seat in front of her told her the aircraft was an ATR42, whatever that meant. The whole aircraft shook as the pilot brought the engines up to full revs awaiting clearance to take off. Just when it felt like all her fillings were going to fall out, the plane lurched forward along the runway and they were off once again. Jacinta leaned back in the seat with mouth agape and hands gripping the arms on the seat. She only released her grip when they had lifted off the ground and were well into their ascent. Once they reached their cruising altitude the

roar of the engines eased and she relaxed. A patchwork of farmland, forests, rivers and villages sped by below them. They crossed over Munich and the Alps. The Alps looked just like the Southern Alps, only bigger. Fold after fold of sharp edged peaks covered in hanging glaciers and ice. She must have dozed off for a while as the next time she opened her eyes they were flying over the sea. For half an hour there was nothing but sea then they banked around to the west to begin their descent.

Peninsulas and islands appeared as they neared the mainland again. It looked just like the Northland coast. No wonder the Dalmations felt so at home in New Zealand.

Already her Dalmatian tipuna were reaching out to take her into their embrace. The plane passed over a cluster of terracotta tiled roofs and bell towers. A web of narrow streets ran between the buildings. On their starboard side, a wide bay curved around towards a far headland with stone houses lining the shore. With a gentle bump they touched down. The aircraft rattled violently for a few moments when the engines were put into reverse thrust. They turned off the main runway onto a diagonal taxiway linking the runway with the main tarmac area. As the plane came to a stop in front of the terminal they all looked at each other and grinned. Hine had changed from her track suit into a black dress with red Māori motifs in a white strip running down the length of it.

Jacinta was about to comment, when the hostess opened the cabin door and people leaped out of their seats to haul down their baggage from the overhead lockers. The terminal was small compared to Frankfurt or Changi or, even Auckland. They passed through immigration before emerging into the public concourse. A man stood there holding a sign stating '*Ngati Tarara.*' They all laughed at that. He drove them in his combi van to their tourist apartments. These had been converted from an old house conveniently located in the old town. The old stone buildings, with their

terracotta tiled roofs backdropped by the islands sitting in the blue waters of the Adriatic, formed a postcard scene. There was no sign of the recent conflict. Their hosts both spoke passable English and were very helpful. After signing in they were shown to their rooms. Hine had booked three double rooms and as tour leader she appropriated one room for herself, leaving the other two to be shared. Jacinta shared hers with Ivy Nola and soon they were nattering away about their families, hapu and anyone they thought might be a common thread to our lives. They weren't called Tarara for nothing.

The next morning they set off on a walk down the little alleyway streets to the waterfront where they paid to enter Diocletian's Palace. After passing through the peristyle court they emerged into a truly immense space but were immediately disappointed to find parts of the interior had been knocked down and more modern structures built within the walls. These buildings were used to house a conglomeration of shops selling tourist tack. The visit brought home to them how far back these people went. Jacinta wondered whether she had Roman blood flowing through her veins. The idea had never occurred to her before but now it didn't seem such a fanciful notion.

The next day they split up and went their various ways. Jacinta made her way down to the ferry terminal where ferries departed for all parts of the Skoji Archipelago. It reminded her a bit of the Auckland ferry terminal where the ferries came and went to the islands of the Hauraki Gulf. Enough people spoke English to make it easy for her to buy a ticket for Korcula and board the right vessel. On the trip the ferry passed through the narrow passage between the islands of Solta and Brac. The waters then opened out again with the island of Hvar ahead of them. They

skirted around the end of the island and called in at the township of Hvar, which looked quite beautiful with its old buildings nestled against each other all the way down the hillsides to the bay. Nearly everyone got off at this point before the ferry continued on its way between the islands of Hvar and Korcula. The ferry entered a narrow passage between the mainland and the island of Korcula before turning into the township of Korcula. Jacinta disembarked and took a taxi for the short ride to Rascisce, the town where her grandfather was born and raised. There, an esplanade lined with phoenix palms wound around the broad bay. The old stone buildings with their terracotta roofs clustered around the bay, spreading back up into the hills. Above these the hills were covered a patchwork of greens from pines, olive groves and vineyards. Jacinta wandered around the promenade taking in all the things familiar to her: the phoenix palms, the olive trees, the oleanders, a single casuarina tree, cars, scooters, pavement cafes and the ever present pleasure boats. All of these things were familiar to her, yet it had only been during the last couple of generations that these things had become common in New Zealand. What weren't familiar were the stone buildings, the language and the heat. Jacinta had a smattering of what used to be called Serbo-Croat from her youth, the usual words of greeting, basic verbs and profanities her grandfather spoke to his mates. They were well known and used throughout Northland even now. For the rest, she relied on her Croatian phrase book and on the young people, at least, having a reasonable grasp of English.

Half way along the esplanade she found the Tourist Information Office and entered the building where she waited her turn behind some German tourists. After the girl behind the desk had finished with the Germans and loaded them with maps she looked up at Jacinta.

'Dobar Dan.'

‘Dobro Dosli. Do you speak English?’

‘Yes, how can I help you?’

‘Oh, wonderful, my Croatian isn’t up to much I’m afraid. I’m from New Zealand and my grandfather came from this village. His name was Mate Ilich. I was wondering if you could tell me if there are Ilichs still in the area.’

‘Let me check in the telephone book.’

The girl took a phone book, opened it up and ran her finger down the columns searching for the surname.

‘Yes, there are two Ilics still in town. Would you like me to ring them and see if any of them know about your grandfather?’

‘Yes, that would be wonderful.’

Jacinta listened to the girl talking to the first Ilic and knew immediately she was having no joy. Even though she could not understand the words, the tone was self evident. The girl hung up and rang the next number. Her voice was dead pan at first, before suddenly becoming more animated. She spoke rapidly to the other party before hanging up and turning towards Jacinta.

‘That was Luka Ilic. He says he is a nephew of your grandfather. He is coming in to meet you and take you to his house.’

‘Thank you so much. You don’t know how much this means to me.’

‘Oh, I don’t know. My relatives came last year from America.’

‘Have you any in New Zealand?’

‘Not that I know of.’

‘I’m sorry, I’m holding up the queue, I’ll wait by the door, thank you so much.’

‘My pleasure.’

Jacinta did not have long to wait before a short broad man of indeterminate age came through the door looking from side to side. Jacinta, standing behind a stand of postcards, looked up and he walked straight towards her.

‘Dobro Dosli. I am Luka Ilic. You from New Zealand, no?’

‘Yes, I’m Jacinta Sutherland. My grandfather was Mate Ilich.’

‘Da, I remember him from when I was a boy. He sailed over the seas to find his fortune and was never heard from again. Pleased to meet you. Perhaps we have lunch at café?’

‘Da, that would be good.’

A few minutes later they were sitting at a café looking out over the boats and passersby, Luka ordered fish for both of them. After the waiter had taken their orders and placed a carafe of wine on the table, Luka picked up the carafe and poured two glasses before turning towards Jacinta.

‘Jacinta, is an unusual name in English, No?’

‘Well, yes, it is rare in English speaking countries.’

Da, maybe. My aunt had a similar name. She was called Yassenka. It is Croatian for tree we find in the mountains.’

‘Are you saying I am named after her?’

‘Maybe, my aunt was your grandfather’s sister. It is possible.’

‘I had no idea. Is she still alive?’

‘No, she died when she was quite young.’

‘How many brothers and sisters were there?’

‘Yassenka was the oldest, followed by your grandfather, Mate. Then there was Stipe and finally my mother, Natasa. Let’s leave all that for now. My son Petar lives in the house your grandfather was born in. I think you would like to visit that, no?’

‘Incredible, how far away is it?’

‘About two kilometres along the coast.’

‘Is that all. Can you take me?’

‘*Da*, I take you. No problem.’

An hour later Luka drove Jacinta to a farm in a valley formed by a fold in the hills. They stopped beside a collection of old stone buildings surrounded by a peach orchard, heavy with fruit. As they got out of the car several dogs ran around their legs sniffing them and wagging their tails. A woman about Jacinta’s age came out of the house and Luka and she embraced and kissed each other on both cheeks. Luka summoned Jacinta over and introduced her in Croatian. At the end of the introduction the woman turned and embraced Jacinta, kissing her on both cheeks, as well.

‘This is Mirna. She is the wife of my son, Petar who is grandson of Natasa, your grandfather’s sister. Come on into the house. Mirna make coffee for us.’

The cottage had only three rooms. It must have once had a wood range to keep it warm and to cook on. They sat at a plain wooden table while Mirna made coffee. Jacinta tried to absorb as much as she could of the feel of the place; to let it become part of her. The underside of the roof tiles formed the ceiling. A swallow’s nest clung to the end wall hard up under the tiles. The nest was just like the ones the welcome swallows made in the tractor shed at home. It was all incredibly familiar. While they were having tea, they heard the sound of boots crossing the brick patio outside. A large silhouette then filled the doorway. The figure ducked under the door head before coming into the room. Mirna leapt to her feet and rushed over to the figure to give it an embrace before rattling off a tirade of Croatian that Jacinta had no

hope of following, except in what she expected it might mean. The figure turned out to be Luka's nephew, Ivan. He came over and kissed her on both cheeks while wrapping his arms around her in a bear hug.

'Dobrodo" sli u Korcula,' he said.

'Hvala,' replied Jacinta. 'Is this house where my grandfather was born?'

'Da,' replied Luka.

'And where he grew up?

'Da, Mate was the older of the two brothers. Mate was the first to leave when he reached about 15 years of age. He went to sea and was never seen again. Srecko went to California soon after, for the gold rush and settled over there. Natasa was the only one left after Yassenka died, so she got to live on the property.'

Luka was about to say more but was stopped by a quick glance from Mirna. Luka looked at Ivan who also nodded his head as though agreeing with Luka stopping there. Something important appeared to have been left unsaid. Was it about the ownership of the property? Surely Jacinta didn't have any claim on it; that would be ridiculous, wouldn't it? Maybe it was held by the family in trust, much the same as an iwi held land for all. Wouldn't that be amazing!

'Do you know where the family in America is?'

'No but we expect them to turn up some day, just like you.'

'We all return to our origins. I am part Māori, the people of New Zealand before the Europeans. We call returning to the place where your feet belong, our turangawaewae.'

'I don't understand. What do you mean?' asked Luka.

'Māori voyaged to New Zealand over six hundred years ago. Before that they lived in Tahiti, the Marquesas and the Cook Islands. It is believed they originally

came from Taiwan. They call their place of origin Hawaiki. For me, I also have another place of origin, and that is here.'

'Ah, I understand,' said Luka, who immediately rattled off more Croatian, which seemed to satisfy the others. After finishing their coffee, they took Jacinta for a walk around the property. It was as if she had dreamed of the place before, a collective subconscious memory or déjà vu. They walked up a long hill, passing from the peach orchard into an olive grove. Further on, the olive grove petered out to be replaced by a scrubby wood composed of pines, cypress and other trees unfamiliar to Jacinta. After a couple of hundred metres they emerged into a clearing with another small stone cottage. Above its door was a wooden plaque with the word '*Dalek*' carved into it. Jacinta smiled at the thought of the enemies of Dr Who having been here and then realised she had missed something.

'What does "*Dalek*" mean?'

'It means faraway. There is someone here I think you should meet,' said Luka.

Ivan pushed open the door calling out in Croatian. Luka provided a rough translation by saying 'he is calling out whether the owner, called Goran, is home.'

Jacinta and Luka followed Ivan into the first room. It was dark after the brilliant light outside. Only the open doorway and a single window on the rear wall let in any light.

An old bent man appeared in the doorway to the second room. Jacinta's eyes were still adjusting to the gloom and couldn't make him out clearly. He looked very old.

Ivan rattled off another burst of Croatian at the old man. Luka translated this as 'I have brought you a visitor from the far side of the world,'

Ivan took the old man into his arms and gave him a great bear hug. When he opened his arms again he turned to present Jacinta to him. The man had leather for skin. It

crinkled all around his eyes and mouth, hinting at a life spent laughing and squinting into the sun. He still had all his hair, which stuck out of his head, including his ears, in white tufts. His sunken mouth indicated few of his teeth were remaining. His blue eyes bore into Jacinta and his mouth creased into a smile. Ivan then spoke slowly in Croat introducing Jacinta to him.

‘He said you are Yassenka, Mate’s granddaughter from New Zealand,’ translated Luka.

Jacinta took his hand and then thought that was silly, so she embraced him. Despite being as frail as a little bird, there was a strong life force in him. His clothes smelled of a mixture of dust, lavender and tobacco. She liked him. Ivan and Luka had a rapid fire conversation in Croat before Luka turned to Jacinta to relay what had been said.

‘This is Goran Vodanovich. He was a friend of both Mate’s and Srecko’s. They all went to school together. He is the oldest man on the island.’

‘How old is he?’

Luka spoke in Croat to Goran for a minute or so before turning back to Jacinta.

‘He says he doesn’t know for sure but thinks he is a hundred and five.’

‘Does he remember Mate?’

‘*Da*, of course he remembers Mate. Those are the days old people remember best.’

‘Tell him when Mate went to New Zealand he married my grandmother Rena. She was Māori, the native people of New Zealand. They had three children, my mother, Miriama, Juraj or George and Mere. Miriama married a part Māori, part Englishman called John Hemi Shaw and had two children, me and my brother Stephen.’

Luka rattled off all this information in Croat to Goran who nodded his head. Sreko nodded his head and smiled the whole time. When Luka finished, the old man looked up at Jacinta and asked a question in Croat.

‘He asks if you are married,’ said Luka.

‘*Da*. I have three children, all boys. My husband was killed in an accident a few years ago.’

Luka related this information to Goran who looked down at the floor while it was being related, nodding his head intermittently until Luka had finished. He then looked up as though he had had an inspiration and shuffled off into his other room. He came back clutching a box. He began to speak in Croat, which Luka translated as he went.

‘Most people travel long distances in search of something. What is it you are looking for?’

‘I came for a holiday and to look up my ancestral roots.’

When Luka translated this to Goran the old man merely looked sad. After speaking with Luka, Luka translated what he said back to Jacinta.

‘He doesn’t think you came all this way for that. He thinks you came looking for your lost husband?’

‘I hadn’t thought about it in those terms.’

‘He says it is an old story. Your husband is lost to this world and cannot come back but you still seek him. Tradition says you can never return with a lost one.’

Jacinta didn’t know what to say. Who was this old man with such an insight into human emotions that even the person involved was unaware of their own desires?

She had no idea she had been seeking Graham but the idea unsettled her. Perhaps in her subconscious this is what she was doing.

The old man was opening the box. Whatever was inside, it made him stop and look down at it in reverence for several seconds before putting in his hand to lift it out. Jacinta recognised the object as a finely crafted crucifix and chain. Goran raised it up and presented it to Jacinta, at the same time speaking something to Luka.

‘He says this was his wife’s crucifix. It is made of white gold. He has no one to leave it to, so it would give him great pleasure if you would have it.’

The ground under Jacinta’s feet seemed to move. What was happening here? She had all but given up her religion and now here it was claiming her back again.

‘Has he no other relative to whom he can give it?’

This question was relayed in Croat and the old man answered by looking directly at Jacinta and replying in Croat with a plea in his eyes. She knew then, even though she understood but a few of the words he spoke that she could not refuse this gift.

‘Apparently he is the last of his family. That is why he wants a woman of the faith to have it,’ repeated Luka.

Jacinta stepped forward to accept the crucifix which she clasped around her neck.

She then embraced Goran as if he were her own grandfather.

‘Tell him I accept his gift with deep humility and will honour his wife and those before her as my own. It will provide a tangible connection between this land and mine.’

After another round of hugs all round they made their lengthy *adieux* with many *do videnjas* before Luka drove Jacinta back to Korcula to catch the ferry back to Split.

While waiting for the ferry to arrive they had coffee at a café where they exchanged

e-mail addresses and phone numbers. When the ferry arrived they walked across to the terminal where she and Luka hugged each other like brother and sister.

Once aboard, Jacinta rushed to the rail where she watched the figure of Luka diminish in size the further out the ferry went. A cool breeze, where none existed, made her eyes water and she brushed some tears away.

The others in the group had similar stories to tell, except that many of the original houses in fishing villages around the coast had been demolished to make way for hotels and apartment blocks. All had exchanged gifts with their relatives or hosts but none had received anything as precious as Jacinta's. The crucifix was a heavy burden to carry after years of being a lapsed Catholic. When the first opportunity presented itself Jacinta entered the cool and dark interior of a church to pray. She took a candle and lit it, placing it in front of the Virgin. After genuflecting towards the cross at the head of the aisle she walked down the aisle and entered the fifth pew. There she knelt down to lean her head on her hands, which in turn rested on the back of the pew in front. In this position, Jacinta entered a world of peace. She recognised the age of the building through the infused smell of centuries of burning candles. The heavy stillness calmed her. She let her mind drift but soon it was empty of thought. In this state she felt close to those departed of this world. Graham swam into her vision as clear as day. He seemed to be pleased for her and his mouth was working, as though speaking to her. Other images floated past. Was one of them Goran's wife? She would never know. Parts of the Catechism came back to her and she tried to remember all of the words from her youth. When she failed in this task she was not concerned, merely moving to the paternoster, which she mumbled in muted tones. When finished, she sat back to sit in silence to take in the ambience of

the place. Perhaps it was as Goran had suggested; she had been seeking Graham all along. In that dark place he seemed to have released her to continue her journey alone. With this thought, Jacinta re-entered the bright light of the outside world to rejoin her fellow travellers.

The group then travelled down the coast to Dubrovnik. Signs of the recent war were everywhere. It almost made Jacinta cry to see the beautiful buildings smashed by shellfire. Workmen scampered all over the place repairing and rebuilding. Several times Jacinta paused to watch the masons rebuilding the stone buildings. Each stone laid would eventually make a building whole again. It was a restorative process that paralleled her own experience in rebuilding her life. Dust lay over each building site and spread over the surrounding roadways and neighbouring properties. The heat and the dust seemed a far cry from the rain and cold occurring at the same time in faraway Northland. Soon little sign of war would remain. The buildings would look untouched by the tragedies that had overtaken them. All would look the same as before. These disturbances in the life of the inhabitants, even the whole period Venetians, Romans, Slavs, Greeks and Dalmatae had inhabited this land, were next to nothing compared to the life of one of these stones. A brightly coloured ladybird landed on a stone by Jacinta's feet. Compared to the life of the stone, its brief sojourn before flying away again seemed to represent the whole course of human history. Jacinta smiled as she turned to follow the others to the bus. She fingered the crucifix hanging around her neck with the knowledge she had found her connection to this land.

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Jacinta began to feel excited at the prospect of coming home. Croatia had been a revelation and part of her now belonged to that distant land. The other part of her, her place of birth, was now reaching out to take her in its embrace. The screen in front of her went blank as the pilot announced they were now making their final approach. The shining grey blade of the wing rose up like a fascist salute to the sky outside her window as the plane banked around to line up with the runway. When she looked through the opposite window, across the aisle, there were houses, factories and motorways below. The morning traffic was thick along the arterials to the city. The aircraft levelled out again and she heard the clunk of the undercarriage locking into place below her. Tidal estuaries full of mangroves and lined each side by swathes of bright green grass sped past below. Airport buildings came into view and the end of the runway appeared below them. With a gentle bump the tyres kissed the runway, like long lost lovers. Jacinta watched the passing pageant of parked aircraft, baggage trolleys, fuel tankers and buildings as the aircraft slowed down. A huddle of brightly coloured tail planes clustered around the terminal fingers, like piglets feeding at a trough. The intercom came on to announce they should keep our seat

belts buckled until the aircraft had docked. Already several seat belts had unclicked around her as passengers stood up to reach for their baggage in the overhead lockers.

Inside the processing hall, the officers from various agencies were pleasant and welcomed the group home as though they were celebrities. It was all seamless as they passed from one to the other and then suddenly they were out in the arrival hall. A sea of faces crowded around the departing passengers enhancing the celebrity feeling. Jacinta scanned the faces of the myriad ethnicities represented as they stared back at her. For a second she had that sinking feeling there was no one to meet her. It was then she heard a familiar voice call out.

‘Hey Sis, over here.’

Jacinta looked to her right and there were Tipene and Hiria. Both wore broad grins as they pushed through the crowd to reach the end of the barrier. Jacinta reached them at the same time to give Tipene a big hug and kiss.

‘Haere mai ki Aotearoa, Sis.’

‘It feels good to be home. Hello Hiria, thanks for coming to get me.’

‘Ooh, it was our pleasure,’ said Hiria.

‘Where are the girls?’

‘Naida’s at work and Aroha and Niko are at school or, at least on their way there hopefully.’

‘I forget people still go about their daily lives.’

Jacinta sensed another presence hovering around at the edge of her vision and turned to see Andy standing there. He stepped forward and gave her a hug.

‘Hi Mum, how did it go?’

She didn’t know where it came from but in that instant she knew in her heart Andy had been the cause of all the heartache in the family. Of course, she had no proof and

neither did the police. It was strange how Will had turned his life around once he had been imprisoned and Jaimie had started his own journey. There seemed no point in saying anything about her instincts to Andy.

‘Oh, fantastic. We had a great group and had lots of fun.’

‘I can’t stay. Tracey’s Mum is in hospital. That’s why we came home. I’m glad I caught you.’

‘Thanks for coming.’

‘I’ll come up to see you before we go back to Sydney.’

‘I’d like that,’ said Jacinta, knowing it was an empty promise.

Jacinta watched him turn away and walk through the sliding doors. She was glad he could not stay. The results of twenty-five years of marriage walked out the door with him, like dust blowing away in the wind. She had decided against revisiting the farm. There was nothing there for her now. She had a new life now. During the trip it seemed her Māori side was making a claim on her. The time had come for her to return her roots. She had learnt through an e-mail from Tipene that her application for a Unit on the marae had been successful. She had e-mailed back saying she would like to continue staying with Tipene and Hiria until she could take possession of her new unit. It was only two months to wait and she knew she would be happy there with Tipene and Hiria’s kids around and looking after the little ones at the crèche. Tipene had replied that that was fine.

Tipene took hold of the baggage trolley while Jacinta and Hiria walked arm in arm out of the terminal arm in arm behind him.

A van with the words ‘*Ngati Wai Iwi Trust*’ painted along the sides awaited them in the car park. Tipene slid the door open and loaded the bags in the back. He then helped Jacinta up the step and into the seat.

‘I’ll just go and sort out paying for the parking and be right back,’ said Tipene. As he walked off, pushing the trolley in front of him, Hiria climbed into the front passenger seat.

‘Is everyone well at home?’

‘Yes, they’re all fine. They can’t wait to see you this evening.’

Jacinta was surprised how quickly they reached Ngunguru. She had in her mind that it was twice as far as from Auckland to the farm. Only the porch light was on when she put down her bags while Tipene took the house keys out of his pocket. Tipene opened the door and ushered Hiria and Jacinta in through the door. Hiria turned on the hall light and entered the living room with Jacinta close behind. She should have twigged something was up but she was tired from the flight. Hiria threw on the light switch to the lounge and a great ‘*Surprise!*’ rang out. Jacinta was immediately surrounded by her nieces and nephew, each hugging her in turn and planting kisses all over her face. Over their shoulders, standing back was Nana Rena. God, she hadn’t seen her for ages. She looked great. Jacinta struggled free of her nieces and walked across to her.

‘Well, you’re a bit of a surprise. When did you come down from Whananaki?’

‘Yesterday. Naida drove up to get me.’

‘It’s great to see you. You look so well.’

‘Not bad for an old girl, eh?’

‘Pretty good, if you ask me.’

‘How was Dalmatia?’

‘You know, when I was there I remembered all those stories and things said at the dinner table by Poppa Mattie. I’ve always felt as though a part of me was

missing but never understood why. How can a little kid in New Zealand understand the culture of a place on the other side of the world? Anyway, being able to stand in the same house and the same village as he grew up made everything fall into place. I guess I reached one of my turangawaewae.'

'That's terrific. I'm truly pleased for you.'

'Thanks Nana. I've also decided to return to my Māori roots. I want to work on the marae to help our youngsters get on in the world.'

'Ooh! Welcome home Jacinta.'

'That's great Sis.'

Jacinta turned to see Tipene standing behind her, grinning.

'How long have you been standing there?'

'Long enough to hear you're coming back to us.'

'Yeah, well after raising three boys, I thought I would treat myself to hanging out with Naida and Aroha, and Hiria of course.'

Somebody put some music on and soon everyone was dancing. Tipene did the honours with drinks and it was all on. At some stage Jacinta crashed but she had no recollection of it. She awoke the next morning in bed, still in her clothes. God, how long was it since she had done that? Twenty-five years, she reckoned.

The next day, Naida came over to the sleep-out to tell her she had a visitor.

'Who is it?'

'Wait and see,' teased Naida.

'It isn't Will, is it?'

'Wait and see.'

'You're incorrigible,' called Jacinta, as she rushed into her bathroom to tidy herself up. She quickly brushed her hair, cleaned her teeth and then applied some

lipstick before rushing out the door. Naida was waiting for her by the door to the house. She opened it as Jacinta reached her and Jacinta rushed through into the kitchen.

Will was standing with Tipene. She was struck by the likeness between them.

‘Hi Mum.’

‘Oh, Will. What a homecoming,’ cried Jacinta, taking Will in her arms.

‘When did you get out?’

‘Yesterday. I caught a bus to Whangarei last night, then another up here this morning.’

‘You look good, son. I’m so pleased you got through it safely.’

‘Yeah, so am I. It had its moments, I can tell you.’

‘What are your plans?’

‘I was just discussing them with Tipene. I need to do my practical work time. The liaison officer at Lincoln has it all teed up. I need to get down there by Tuesday week.’

‘I don’t suppose you have made contact with Temara?’

‘Actually, I broke my trip at Kaiwaka and went to visit Hana and Tame.

Temara wasn’t there but they said she wasn’t going out with anyone at the moment.

They led me to believe we might be able to get back together.’

‘That’s great. You can borrow my car if you want.’

‘Thanks, Mum. I might just do that.’

Jacinta stayed on in the sleep-out for another two months until the kaumatua housing was ready for occupation. After the blessing ceremony she was able to move in. It was all she wanted. She loved walking out on the sand spit and watching the

birds. They had a programme for planting pingao on the strip and watching after the dotterel and fairy tern breeding pairs. Tipene also involved her in the review of resource consents. The Ngati Wai Trust had review rights for all of the resource consents in the Iwi area. She helped out in the office in Whangarei two days a week doing clerical work and learning the ropes about processing consents. When they thought she was ready, the Trust Board said they would supply her with a laptop so she could work from home. All correspondence was carried out by e-mail anyway so that was a pretty easy transition. She still needed to go into the office for meetings and to liaise with Council staff. When not doing iwi paperwork, Jacinta helped Hiria, Naida and Aroha and some of the other kuia training the little ones in stick games, waiata and dance. These were all the things she loved as a kid. Working with the little ones was her greatest joy in life.

Her old life now seemed a faint echo or a ripple in the fabric of time. She didn't miss the house on the farm. Andy never did come to see her. She presumed he was back in Sydney doing whatever he did to make money. She really didn't care any more. She had had a full life. There was nothing much more she could do for any of her sons, not until they had children of their own. She still missed Gray dreadfully. While the trial was going on she hadn't had time to think about it much, too many things happening. Six months after the trial had been the worst time. It was better now but it would never go away.