

POVERTY BAY

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PROLOGUE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

CHAPTER ONE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

CHAPTER TWO

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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