

PART 1

PROLOGUE

Oahu, Hawaii, December 7 1941

Lying sprawled face down on the water-hardened sand, Rob Turner peeked over his arm, watching the delight flowing through his wife as each near-spent wave washed up and over her body. He grinned at the ebbing water diverting around her bulging mid-riff which she had tried so hard to conceal this past month. Not that Debbie resented the event; at the time she had enthusiastically abandoned all caution, urgent passion sweeping aside any consideration of the potential.

They had been married only three weeks at conception, and Rob knew she had taken a ribbing from friends. So had he but, at twenty-two years of age and in the Navy, the ribald attention provided a perverse boost. *Lieutenant, you've got it all right here*, he told himself proudly, while still covertly eyeing her prostrate form.

'You've been watching me you...you pervert!' she squealed, quickly sucking in her stomach.

'What's perverted about it? We're married,' he said with a grin.

'It's just not fair! How can I relax with you watching me get fatter and uglier by the week?' Rolling indignantly onto one side with her back to him, she feigned disregard and tried to be still. Moments later, after several attempted adjustments, she self-consciously scooped a hollow in the wet sand for their child.

'Don't you...!' she began. Turner was already laughing and, after seconds of attempted disdain, Debbie's reserve crumbled. They rolled giggling and tussling playfully in the surf's edge until exhausted, then lapsed into a contented silence.

Rob looked around at the tiny bay – paradise! The headland protected from the heavy winter swells and prevailing wind, encouraging lush tropical growth almost to water's edge. No one came here much other than locals evading the seasonal tourists. Whether by accident or collusion – more likely the latter – the spot did not appear on the glossy brochures and the lucky few with shacks here, Debbie's father included, did not advertise their good fortune.

Dwelling on this reminded him. 'I have to go back down to Pearl today. Your old man's in a flap about something. He's been agitated ever since a call from the mainland yesterday.'

'Do you have to, Rob? It is Sunday. I could ring daddy and persuade him to let you look after me...morning sickness or something.'

'That finished three months ago and he knows that. He was adamant, Deb. I'd better go in. Did you bring a watch?'

As she rose and went to her beach bag deposited on the dry sand, Rob admired her rear, the firm hips and long legs, and wondered how he'd been so lucky. He glanced at the sky. They had walked down at first dawn – the baby saw to that – and now the sun was striking most of the beach.

'7:35 – what time does daddy want you?'

'9:00 – we'd better head back. I'm sorry – I'd like to hang here with you all day but duty calls. You know how it is in the services.'

She knew, having lived within the military world all her life, yet still asked coyly. 'One more dip? Five minutes won't hurt – not on Sunday.'

'Okay. Let's make it quick,' Rob said, jumping to his feet.

Maintaining what composure was left to her, Debbie chose not to match his headlong dash into the water. Entering gracefully, she watched with admiration as he emerged from the shallow dive through the first wave, standing and slicking water from his face back through blond hair in one smooth motion.

Usually, he would have turned and enticed her in further. Instead, he stood still, raising one hand to the sun. She now heard it too – the air hummed. *He'd love to be back up there*, she knew. Instinctively Turner had homed on the source – over toward Kahuku Point. Typical fly-boys, he was thinking. *Exercise over...head for home*. They'd have two hours on dry land before the seamen even tie up. Not that he resented it; these guys paid their dues. However, somehow on weekends one wing of the carrier squadron usually managed to develop a malaise necessitating an early return to land. The problem could be one of a large number of issues – whatever worked at the time. Some joyless cynic had once even suggested that there seemed to be a direct correlation between those who came home early and the fortunes of Friday nights' poker game.

The formation was unusual – playing games perhaps – but the numbers were wrong. *USS Lexington* was away delivering a Marine bomber squadron to Midway Island, some 1300 miles distant. *Saratoga* was over on the west coast of the States. Only *Enterprise* was out there, on its way back from a fighter delivery to Wake Island. The planes, flying low and closer now, could not have been from that carrier. Perhaps it was a new squadron from the mainland, Rob considered, straining to identify the massed silhouettes. Then came the understanding – there were too many and too early in the day.

'Jesus! Move, Debbie, move! *Run!*' Grasping her hand, Robert Turner, dragging and supporting his wife, charged for the beach. 'They're not ours – they're Japs! *Goddamn Japs!*'

The prior evening, their leisurely drive to the secluded North Shore bay had taken an hour. To return, Turner was desperately going for half that. In the middle of the island, Schofield Barracks and Wheeler airbase were devastated and in chaos, but he did not stop. Still fifteen minutes out from Pearl City, he could see the smoke and anticipate the carnage.

The nine-to-five navy, mid-week marines and other derisive terms laughingly bantered around bars and social gatherings flooded to mind. It was a fact – civilian-like, Pearl Harbor virtually closed for the weekend.

Why not? They were three thousand miles from any possible land-based attack; any threat from the sea was logistically implausible, therefore out of contention. They were safe and secure...patsies! *A goddamn shooting gallery, with stationary ducks!* He could not remove the image of the orderly lines of warships, many doubled up, at rest and recreation. Awesome power and potential now rendered immobile and impotent!

Angry, near crying with helplessness, Turner hurled his father-in-law's car at the bends, descending rapidly. *Had the old man known?*

Thirty minutes had elapsed since leaving the beach. The aerial armada had gone; the attack over. As he emerged from the foothills, dense foliage absorbed all sign of the certain destruction ahead. Last evening they had enjoyed this greenery, but now it wasn't appreciated – only asphalt counted. He accelerated, with distant profile rapidly firming to buildings as the outskirts neared. The pall extended several thousand feet, fed fiercely from the raging furnaces below. It was like entering an eclipse, progressively dimmer yet eerily illuminated.

Turner jumped involuntarily as sudden shadows enveloped the car then, striking bitumen, raced ahead, leaving him seemingly motionless. The roar followed, engulfing his motor noise, and adding to the sense of physical suspension.

'The carrier squad,' he breathed aloud, ducking beside the wheel to crane upwards. The planes were low – he could pick the torpedoes slung heavily to

the fuselage, bomb racks laden, and the red emblems under each wing. 'More! Where the shit are our fighters?' he cursed to himself, at anyone...then remembered Wheeler.

A single Mitsubishi Zero peeled off the last formation, banking severely down and around. At fifty feet it levelled off at him, aligned perfectly with the centre marking, wingtips at right angles to the power poles – perspective and relativity exemplified in one display. Normally Turner would have noticed the relationship, perhaps admired the aviation, but the spurting pattern of asphalt and base erupting towards the car negated contemplation. He swung hard right at the roadside ditch. The deadly ribbons of machine-gun bullets continued unerring, stitching pockmarks centre and side, passing beyond the car then abruptly ceasing.

Momentum near carried the heavy vehicle right across the watercourse. Had it, the landing would be relatively soft, in a muddy cane field. The car's angle of trajectory and incline, however, had imparted irreversible rotation. Turner felt it begin, then no more as the rear end slammed into the embankment, accelerating the roll ten-fold.

'Hey, buddy! Hey man, wake up!'

'He's alive, get the kit. *Move it!*'

Seconds or minutes passed; Rob felt the ginger probing and the lifting of head and limb.

'Arm looks broken, Sarge. Seems okay inside but can't really tell. Could have concussion – big bump on the head.'

'No salts, Sarge.'

'Here, give him this.' A southern inflection; Texan? Turner felt the liquid before tasting it, and when those senses merged, he jolted.

'You're okay, buddy,' the Sargent drawled. 'Good ol' Tucky Bourbon, guaranteed to bring back the dead!'

'Or keep 'em that way,' someone murmured carefully.

Rob felt reasonably alright. There was a crude yet comfortable splint on his left arm, and his head ached like hell.

'You're damn lucky, bud! Came out the door on the first impact and landed in the ditch. You feel up to it come look't your car.'

The black Packard was on its side, still smouldering thirty yards out in the field. Not only crumpled – the Zero had made a second run.

The Sargent's incidental patter as they drove had ceased long before the marine slowly turned the troop truck into the harbour compound. Inintelligible mutterings, but for the odd clenched word, passed his lips. He could have been reciting a litany. Turner pieced sufficient together to understand that the

Japanese would become horribly acquainted with this slow-talking Texan marine.

Arizona, California, Oklahoma, West Virginia – once-mighty battleships now sunken, maimed and blazing. Hundreds of personnel dead and dying. Five destroyers, keeled right over or canted, accepting the tons of potent extinguisher jetted into their bowels. One was his father-in-law's command.

'Drop me over at the Navy Admin Building please, Sarge.' There was nothing more to say. Marines, Navy – rivalries aside they were family.

As the vehicle pulled up and Rob clambered out, he could see that the building had only been hit lightly. Supporting his splinted arm, Turner went up the stairs to the first floor as fast as he could, ignoring the pain. The office was unscathed, but the old man wasn't there. Nor were the charts and worksheets that had cluttered the tables when Turner left late yesterday afternoon.

He must have taken them home, Turner assumed, then chilled. With his wife back on the mainland – *civilization* to her mind – the Admiral often slept on board his ship. '*God, no!*' Turner exhaled, moving swiftly for the corridor.

The Operations room overflowed with confusion and people; milling, barking orders, sitting stunned.

'Is Vice Admiral Conally in there?' Turner had gripped an aide by the shoulder – hard, for the man winced.

'No, sir. They think he was on his ship. No one's sure. Everything was so confused, ship-to-shore overloaded.'

Turner wheeled and strode to a window. The Admiral's command was on its side, its superstructure raging, the bridge a dark gaping hole. He knew the old man would have been in there. Numbly watching the turmoil, he could only think of Debbie.

As he left the building to walk to the dock, Turner scarcely noticed the open Jeep pull alongside.

'*Robert.*' It was Captain Miles Stanton of Naval Intelligence. The man looked strained and nervous, as did Michael Yates, the ashen civilian beside him.

'He's gone, son. I'm sorry,' Stanton stated. 'There's nothing he could have done.'

So, it was final; confirmed. Admiral Conally had become a substitute for his own bastard of a father; there would be a deep sad void. Debbie, though, would fall apart. Her father was her rock, whereas her mother had little real substance.

Stanton roused him. 'We have to go, Rob. Bear up – he was a good Navy man doing his job.'

That's all! What the hell would you know, Stanton? Turner thought. These

two had only met with the Admiral last evening. What had that been about?

'We're going back East today. I'll be seeing your father. He'll want you back – *need you* – now that this war is on. Take your wife and go back home.'

Turner glanced at Stanton, then rapidly ahead, welling inside; incredulous but believing. Just like that – *now that this war is on!* Sure, there wouldn't be a problem – he would be classified as having essential civilian status, or even 4F if necessary. It would be arranged, just like everything his father required or desired.

'Shove it!' he spat out and walked purposefully away.

Oil, foam, and debris covered the water. Staring into it from the dock, oblivious to the staccato of pumps and activity, Turner could not erase the question, and more so its answer. *The Admiral must have known!*

CHAPTER 1

CENTRAL AUSTRALIA, January 1994

The gathering around the five small hardwood plaques half-buried in the hard red earth was unusual in that the attendees were on a remote former cattle station deep in west-central Queensland that had no cattle or human occupants. One Caucasian couple in their late forties were there with two kids aged eleven and fourteen, and an older man in his mid-seventies. Joining them were two Japanese in their thirties and their girl and boy who were not yet ten. Two weather-beaten very black Aborigines - man and wife - whose ages defied guessing completed the guest list.

'And that's that,' David Turner concluded. '*Vale* Jim Murphy, Sarah and dogs.'

His wife Julie blew kisses toward her uncle and aunt in the ground and then turned towards the dilapidated house. As the group left the shade of the enormous gum, the forty-five-degree heat pounded them for the twenty metres to the relative cool of the covered verandah.

Julie had bought a hamper with scones, cake and Thermoses of tea. 'No point in opening the house up,' she'd said, 'there's no power or water any more.'

David's father, Robert, had provided the obligatory *esky* of beer and wine, which old Jim would have wanted. Rob had reasoned earlier that if either he or David drank more than responsible, Julie could fly the group back to his station - nine in a seven-seater plane wasn't a big deal out here, especially with small kids.

As David stood on the weathered hardwood deck looking out over the vast broken land, the memory surfaced of he and Jim Murphy settled in the sagging squatters chairs only months ago, drinking beer into the evening as the old man poured out his concerns on what he had done. Battling emotion, Turner took

Julie's hand and led her on a walk around the outside of the house, over to the former stables, then back as he explained what had happened the next night that had led to her Uncle Jim's death. The more he conveyed about Jimmy Shan, the tighter she squeezed his hand; despite his withholding the worst of it.

When they returned to the verandah, David saw that Oishi Okimura was engaged in earnest conversation with Jacky, the old aborigine who had worked this station with Jim for decades.

'You two are getting along okay I see, Oishi. Jacky and his family were the ones that found Jim and me last year...locked in that stinking mine prefab. Saved my life...too late for Jim unfortunately.'

'As well you did, Jacky, otherwise we would never have known what was going on at that plant until it was over. My family – the world – is eternally grateful.'

'No worries, Oishi. I sure didn't like that Jimmy Shan bugger. Dave told me that you could've killed him in Washington but didn't...why? I would've for what he did right here, let alone the rest.'

'He had a troubled soul, Jacky, being raised by such an evil father. He ended his own life to find peace.'

'Well, I hope the bastard didn't. Now, Oishi, Dave flew you and Yukio around the lease over there earlier. He tells me you own it now or have an option or something. You gonna do anything with it?'

The young Japanese hesitated. The question had pervaded his mind ever since the flyover.

'Tanada Industries holds the lease, Jacky, and Yukio is a Tanada. She has the say-so. There's a lot of high-grade uranium ore there, Jacky. Japan needs it for its power supply. Yet, when we looked down and really saw the land, pristine and undisturbed for millions of years, we felt that we really don't want to touch it. Is that land important to you – your people?'

'All the land is important to us – it is part of us, and we are of it.'

Okimura reflected for some time before speaking. 'Then it stays as it is, we can get the ore elsewhere. Now another thing, this station of Jim Murphy's – he left it to Julie, right David?'

Turner nodded. 'With me to manage the half-a-million bucks you unknowingly paid for the lease as well.'

'Okay. Now, David, Julie and Yukio have spent a lot of time talking during our past week here with you...as women do.'

'I've noticed.'

'Yes, well, Yukio informed me earlier today that she and your wife have come to an arrangement over the land.'

'News to me, Oishi. I'm always last to know. Do tell.'

'They've agreed to a joint venture. Julie puts in the farm and the money, Yukio buys the leased land to protect it and tips in some more money, and they restore this station to its former glory.'

David near gagged at the prospect.

'Why – the joint's stuffed? Too many years of drought and neglect, the cattle market's at rock bottom, farmers are shooting their stock because they can't afford the feed. These women are bloody mad. I'll talk to Julie. You talk to Yukio.'

'David...Yukio is a Tanada. You know now what that means. Money has only one meaning for her – the ability to achieve things for the better.'

'Jesus, Oishi. Talk to my old man. He'll tell you just how tough it is out here, even in the good times.'

'The women already have, David. He's all for it. Jacky...could you and your people bring this place back to viability?'

'It'll take longer than the time I've got left, but yeah...it was a lot better than this for thousands of years.'

'Sounds like a deal,' Robert Turner said as he ambled over. He was still a fraction taller than David, his blond hair had begun to grey only recently and he still retained just a hint of an American accent despite living nearly fifty years in Central Australia.

'You knew about this, Rob, and didn't think to mention it to me?'

Turner senior grinned. '*Oh yeah*, I thought about it plenty, Dave – had to choose whose wrath I was going to incur. Yours or those two young ladies – didn't take long. They are formidable, and I reckon they'll make a go of it. Especially with the help of Jacky and his people.'

'There's water deep down there, Dave...lots of it.' Jacky chipped in. 'Old Jim never had the money for the bores. Later, when he did, he just couldn't be stuffed doing it.'

David sensed eyes on him from behind and looked around. Julie and Yukio were there, smiling innocently as they gave him a little wave. He wagged his finger at them, yet already knew he had lost. And coming around to the prospect – *it was a bloody great idea*.

Back at Robert's homestead, the Okimuras were preparing to leave. Their business jet had landed half-an-hour earlier, and it was a pleasure for David to meet again with Oishi's pilot Harada and young Suki, Oishi's niece. As those two carried the luggage and herded the two children to the gleaming plane, Oishi and Yukio made their final goodbyes.

After Rob, Julie and the Turner children, they came to David.

'Last year we said we were coming and now we have,' Oishi stated. 'We've all loved it. The Barrier Reef and now this outback, the bush and its *tucker* that

Jacky and his family introduced us to. The infinite expanse of the land still stuns me. Being back in Tokyo is going to be a shock.'

'It sure will be,' Yukio agreed as she reached up to hug the Australian. 'Thank you so much, David.'

'Our pleasure. You'll be able to come back often now to see the progress on the other property. When your kids are a bit older they can spend some holidays here...it'd be good for them.'

'*Hai*...I know it would be,' Oishi said. 'Our experience last year bonds us forever, Dave. I'm spending quite a bit of time with Carmen these days, helping her on various aspects of her venture. It's not easy. There's been a lot of resistance from the drug cartels to what she's doing...and achieving.'

'I bet. Say hello to her from me and, ah...tell her that all is great with Julie and me. She'll understand what I mean.'

'I will. And David...anything at all you need help on, you just call me, okay? Anything. Do you still have the Tanada satellite phone I gave you?'

'Yeah...used it a few times way out there where there's bugger all Telstra service. Hey, you'd get billed for that – I'll fix you up.'

'No bills from our own satellite, David. Use it all you want.'

Turner watched with Julie, Rob and the kids as the couple walked to their plane hand-in-hand, then waved from the top of the airstair. He shuddered as he recalled how close to death he and Oishi had come six months ago. They were lucky to have had this pleasant time together at all.

Lounging back in the soft Moran leather settee, with feet extended onto the fold-out rest and beer in hand, David looked at his father who was seated similarly and totally content.

'Thanks for having them here all week, Dad.'

'No problem – loved it. Need the company really, and they're nice people.'

'Being Japanese didn't bother you, given your wartime experiences?'

Robert Turner hesitated, then replied thoughtfully.

'Oishi and Yukio weren't even born then, son. The sins of the fathers shan't be visited on the sons and vice versa – something like that. No...that part of my life is long gone and forgotten...or was.'

'I'm pleased. You've never talked about it to me much, though. I'd really like to know sometime.'

'One day, Dave. There's a lot to tell about how the US got drawn into World War 2 by Pearl Harbor. I was there, as you know.'

'Yeah...you've never told me much more than that though, Dad. I've always figured you had things you were holding back.'

'You're right, there's a lot more, and some aspects seem to be surfacing again, fifty-three years later. You're off early in the morning – it's late, get some sleep.'

When you're back I'll tell you about what happened then and why I came over here from the States. It's time you knew. How long are you away?"

'Five days in the Northern Territory, checking out a bauxite deposit over there that looks promising. There's assay work, negotiations with the aluminium company and the indigenous landowners. And yeah...I am tired.'

As David rose, his father also stood and clasped his only son tightly.

'Take care. And David...you've never really told me much about what you and Oishi got up to last year. You two and that Israeli fella...Uri Meyer, wasn't it? And those others, including our head of ASIS. You also had a hand in getting the US President sacked. *Classified government business*, my arse – you want my tale, you give me yours.'

David laughed and hugged back. 'You're on, old man.'

Julie appeared to be asleep when David slipped into bed. He tried not to stir her, failing miserably as she snuggled into him. In little time they were engaged in passionate love-making, which was usual on the eve of David's departures. Also as usual, David fell into deep torpor immediately after, while Julie wanted to talk.

'Honey, you're not mad with me for what I'm doing with Yukio, are you?'

'Nope, you know I'm stubborn, but I also know when I'm wrong. It is an excellent thing to do. Goodnight, now...I'm up at five.'

She lasted around ten seconds.

'Thank you, darling. The kids and I are going to stay here while you're away so I can go back and check over Jim's land a couple of times. Your dad's happy with that, and he'll fly us up to meet you in Mount Isa. He's got some business things to deal with there, so it works out fine all-round. We'll see you there, darling. *Ooh*...I'm so looking forward to getting to the coast. The Noosa beaches, the sea breeze, the shops, the food. David...'

Turner was dead asleep.

'Hey, Jarra – you want anything from town?'

'No, boss. Not unless you 'kin get some of them fancy rubbers to keep my missus happy!'

Rob Turner laughed; he liked the stocky little cattleman, always had done since the kid had been born in 1946. Soon after he had purchased the station – it had been that long!

'I'll see what I can do, Jarra. Meanwhile, you make do with what you got, okay.'

They grinned, like most Fridays at the same time. Jarra never wanted anything from town.

'Say hello to Dave for me, eh, Rob?' the black man asked.

'Sure will,' Turner agreed and swivelled to his plane. Last checks and they were ready to go.

'Julie,' he called at the house. 'Let's get moving. David's already well on the way.'

Late or not, Turner warmed as the trio came from the house and walked over to the twin-engine Piper Seneca. It was how it could have been, should have been for him – but that was long ago. At least he had these grandkids to enjoy.

'Okay you two – in here,' he ordered holding the plane's rear door open. 'Belts on, no squabbling.'

'You want to drive, Julie?' Turner asked over his shoulder as he locked the rear door.

'No thanks, Rob. I'll probably share some of the flying with David. It's a long haul from the Isa to Noosa.'

Behind her father-in-law, she clambered over the starboard wing, adjusted the forward seat, and secured the door.

'*The coast*,' she sighed, sharing the satisfaction. 'How long has it been? Two years – at least two.' On this short hop, she would nestle back and savour the pending pleasures.

'Righto, kids. All quiet. Hold onto your hats, we're off.' Despite them being eleven and fourteen now, Rob had used these same words ever since their first flights as infants.

'Yes, *Pop*,' came the chorus, humouring him, as Turner knew and liked. If either said anything else, it was immediately consumed by the roar of the twin Lycomings.

As the plane banked west at 500 feet, Julie gazed down at the homestead. She had enjoyed their stay. It was so good for the kids – school holidays in the city could be bedlam.

David yearned to live out here again and she understood that. His upbringing had certainly been unusual, but she was city-bred. And then there was the matter of the children's schooling. She had won on that point. Fortunately, in the two years since David had started his own geological business and set his plane up as a mobile assay laboratory, he had almost as much time out on field exploration as in the office. He seemed to be content with the compromise.

The homestead and outbuildings were like a tiny model now. Greenery faded with distance from the oasis around the house into the red-brown regarded as 'cattle country.' How raising one beast per square kilometre constituted *cattle country* Julie had never fathomed, yet she knew it got worse than this. It would take ten minutes flying time to reach the west boundary yet this station was a relatively small concern. Five thousand head, managed efficiently or not, would hardly make or break the industry. Still, it was theirs, Rob and David's.

They had made something out of the hostile terrain and loved it.

Julie subtly eyed Rob Turner. He was an enigma in some ways. How this American had been so apparently contented here for forty-eight years, persisting in the never-ending struggle with the alien territory, continued to amaze her. All right, he'd won - profitable years now outnumbered the bad. Yet there was still the question – why had he chosen this remote life?

He was a good man – generous, consistent, and equitable. She could have hoped for no more for herself and the children and had come to love him. Yet even David, with the closeness and open rapport he shared, could not penetrate a particular stratum of his father's make-up. A portion of his life was unavailable.

Her contemplation was interrupted. 'We're going up,' Rob announced. She could see the bluish-mauve Selwyn Range ahead; though not really high it warranted some elevation. 'David will be in Isa before us. By the time we get there, he should be fuelled up. E.T.A. thirty-five minutes – give or take a few,' he added.

Julie smiled. Rob always bantered casually about flying but really was a meticulous pilot. She assumed that the cavalier approach probably carried over from the war. Years ago, David had shown her the photographs and medals he'd found as a kid, secreted in a never-opened trunk.

They were nearing 2000 feet. Looking below, Julie followed the long twisting gorge that defined part of the western boundary. While a dry gully now, with sporadic tree pockets marking near-surface water, in the monsoonal wet it became a surging torrent. A few cattle were lost to it then; small sacrifice for the station-saving rains.

She had twisted around to Steve and Susan, directing them to the landmark below, when the cabin erupted.

Knee pressed hard into the canny gelding's stomach, Jarra applied a last hitch of the girth. 'Take that, you bugger!' he exclaimed triumphantly, although they had the same contest each morning and had for seven years. Despite the initial rivalry, once mounted, man and horse would mutually cede and meld into a very potent culling machine.

One foot in the stirrup and about to swing up, Jarra sensed the disturbance to order. Whether via earth or air, he felt it. He lowered his leg to the ground and stood still. Far off, to the north-west...the transmission tapered off.

Not wanting to accept his gut instinct, he slowly reversed procedures, leaving the confused beast standing, the saddle where it dropped in the dust. He turned and began to walk, then upped tempo, loping toward the steel sheds and the four-wheel-drive ute. Opening the vehicle's door, he heard the crackle of the radio receiver in the roughly partitioned corner that served as the station office.

'Longreach calling Harobed. Anyone there?' A pause. 'Do you read me, Harobed? *For Christ's sake...bloody answer!*'

With one man in the cab beside him and two more in the back tray, Jarra drove maniacally at the low scrub, as direct a course as possible. The others held on tightly, with well-founded doubt that Jarra would stop for anyone thrown out. *A fireball*, the Longreach foreman had said. His stockmen working out toward their east boundary had witnessed the aerial inferno from some distance. It would take them half an hour to reach the area, having to circumvent the gorge. *Couldn't be anything left.*

Re-hearing the awful words, Jarra angrily stomped the accelerator to the floor pan. His eyes streamed, and not due solely to the clawing air.

David will know now...they will have reached him, he realised. *You poor bugger, my friend, you poor bloody bastard!*

It had been an abridged communique from Mount Isa - the plane was down, no advice on damage or casualty. The controller of the regional aviation authority, a friend, had made it that way to ease him toward the tragedy.

David knew, though. The speaker's last words were lost in the primal anguish erupting through his head. His body electrified, convulsed with shock, stomach constricting to upheaval until his mind's defences activated parries to extreme emotion and he entered a vacuous unbelieving stupor.

Minutes passed before he was aware of flying and where he had to go. Focusing desperately on the instruments, he found the plane already on the station heading and auto-pilot. He must have made the actions even as the message came through.

Irrationally, David switched to manual, as if his personal command would achieve more. The Cessna was already at maximum safe airspeed and then some. For the next twenty minutes, nothing would be allowed to distract him from his single task – to get there. All else was rejected from consciousness.

Sweeping low over the gully David sighted the work vehicles and the men. Jarra and his guys; the others would be from Longreach. They were huddled together, inactive. A chilling spasm racked his body. Barriers were dissolving as if on time-delay locks, admitting reality in concise doses.

Where is the plane? Surely they'd found it! He could see no sign, no remnant. A faint surge of hope surfaced, then retreated as he realised that the men were waiting at the only landing spot in kilometres; a stony flat beside the gorge.

Jarra had wrenched the door open before David could switch the engine off, the hideous truth welling in his eyes. If they were to speak, David had to initiate.

'Where is it?' he whispered hoarsely.

The stockman glanced away, around, then hesitantly back. His mouth opened twice and tears streaked the dusty black face.

'Please, Jarra. Where?' David implored, no more wanting the answer than the other wished to give it. His hand came forward to rest on the man's shoulder. The words staggered out, directed downward, anywhere other than at his lifetime friend.

'It's...it's...everywhere, Dave. It's every bloody where!' Jarra heaved, wanting to turn, to run. He felt the stiffening fingers, the tension and trembling building within his friend. David would not survive this; no man could.

Still, he held fast, forcibly prising David's grip and gently pulling him forward until they were locked together. The tremors intensified, compounding epileptically, and a low primitive sound came forth that raised the hair on Jarra's nape. He squeezed the more tightly lest his friend shook apart.

*

Tel Aviv, Israel

'Shimon, Robert Turner is dead. We were too late.'

There was a lengthy silence from the recipient of the call.

'God help us, Uri. I didn't expect that...not him especially. How?'

'Levi was approaching the cattle station, on his way to alert Turner...just in case. He witnessed the explosion. Turner's light plane was consumed in a massive blast. Shimon...his son David's wife and two children were with him.'

'David Turner – is that the man you were involved with last year in that war-criminal Mitani case?'

'The same...and he is now also my friend. I must make contact – we have to protect him.'

'We shall, Uri, but do not call him directly. His telephones will be tapped and if they have any inkling we're on to them, he may be next. Watch over him, Uri...have Levi remain close but discreet. Allow no more deaths.'

'I'm afraid I already have, Shimon – two more. Levi caught up to and terminated the assassins who planted the bomb.'

Libya, North Africa

'Nikolai, you told me that only Robert Turner would be on that plane. You said nothing about the son's wife and children being on it too.'

'I didn't? Must have slipped my mind, Roso. Then again, it might have been

personal. Anyway, since when have you cared about such things? You referred Constantine to me as the man for the job. He engaged his own men, so it's well removed from you.'

'Maybe not, Niki – Constantine's just been onto me. His men haven't reported in, and he can't raise them on their satphone.'

'Maybe they're lost out there in the vast Australian outback, Roso. Perhaps the Aborigines caught and ate them.'

'If so, they know how to operate a satellite phone, Niki. Someone called Constantine from that phone and it wasn't one of his boys. And the caller swore off in Hebrew!'

CHAPTER 2

'You goin' away, Dave?' the stockman called at the house. He sat tiredly on the second step beside a green backpack leaning against the verandah post. David came through the wide doorway, thrust his rifle pouch into the straps, and hoisted the kit easily onto his broad shoulders.

'Just a few days, Jarra. I have to get away.'

'Want me to come?'

'No!' It was too sharp. 'Sorry, mate. Thanks, but I...you understand.'

Jarra did. Survival in the bush wasn't the worry; David was damn near as good as himself at finding sustenance in the wild. Turner looked okay and sounded pulled together but out there, even without such trauma, a man can go funny.

'You sure? The damn thing only happened two days ago. Your phone's been going nuts, and you're not answering. People 'round here care, Dave...can I at least let them know that you're sort of okay?'

'Sure, but after I'm gone. You know how I was a year ago when I split from Julie...what I was going through. She and the kids fixed me, mate, along with the psychiatrist, and I don't want to ever go back to that dark space. Out there will help me right now, Jarra – you know that.'

The black man reluctantly agreed. His friend was right – *out there* taught a man the true order of things in a messed up world.

'I'll be alright. You look after the place. The aviation inspectors will be here Tuesday, and I'll be back for that.'

Jarra watched Turner mount the piebald gelding and ride out of the lush green homestead grounds without haste. Then he silently invoked the protection of the ancient forces that determined life and death in the harsh inland.

David headed due south-west, his route consciously away from the agony of

the debris as if its existence would diminish with distance. With one solid day's ride, he would be within the fringe of the Simpson Desert.

The Simpson; that vast almost treeless sandy plain, barely changed in thirty thousand years. To the uninitiated, it was barren desolation. A vast area of sparsely covered dunes formed over millennia into ridges at wide intervals, rising to thirty metres and stretching for some three hundred kilometres. From space it viewed as a massive vortex; to the lost traveller, it meant purgatory and inevitable extinction.

But he was not lost, nor would be, physically. Other times he had found solace there and learnt. The desert would first humble and reduce him to insignificance then, gradually revealing hidden beauties, refurbish him with understanding and perspective. A sense of entity and the order of things would rebuild in him, in the way it had disciplined the native since the beginning.

In most years the lessons began at first light, as sun's ray clashed with the thin oxide glaze on the quartz sand-grains and the dunes danced with red flame piercing the deepest black of shadow, announcing the arrival of this institute's principal. All day the taskmaster would beat and berate, chide and chastise until the dunes fired again, and the chilling night deputy relieved. Those who failed to know the answers were relegated; on the third day, they were expelled.

This year, while day and night still held deadly forum, they would not be heralded by the fiery dunes for it had rained. The ephemeral plants carpeted all, transposing red to a sea of green with static giant waves. The ridges massed with poached-egg daisies, smothering the all-weather spindly grass. Yellow tops in bright blue jackets ran down the gentle dune slopes into the flats blanketed in white everlastings, paper daisy, desert pea and mulla mullas. It had been years since he had last seen it like this.

He was in mulga country, rough hummocky terrain scattered with spinifex. There was the odd stand of desert oak, the occasional lone bloodwood or mallee eucalypt with its pear-shaped fruit – all striving ever downwards through the ironstone for the underlying sustenance. Making good time, he was established under a bouldered scarp in the last low range before nightfall. This darkness came rapidly. Soon he could hear the scufflings of the little marsupials and reptiles in their night forage. Self-governing in procreation during drought, they too were now abundant. As were other predators, attracted to his fire but remaining cautiously distant despite their limited experience of man.

The urgency of his drive had abated, and David once more admitted thought of his family. It was this part of the country, and life, he had wanted to impart to Julie and the children, just as it had been opened to him by Jarra's people.

Rob had hesitated when the passing nomads first offered to take David on walkabout. He was only nine, and in the four years in Australia, his father was

not sure about these so-called primitives. As a newcomer, and more opportunely a Yank, local whites had enjoyed giving him 'the drum' on the 'blackfella'. A lurid account – part fact, more fiction – that had a residual effect. With later experience, these embellishments, and those applied to snakes and all the other perils were dispelled, though not entirely at that time. David had cried and pleaded to go until his father allowed two nights and had picked him up in the truck at the station boundary.

In later years, David and Jarra had often gone long distances with the natives and ultimately made their own expeditions. Rob had worried at first until, with each safe return though not always unscathed, his fears eased; substituted with a proud acknowledgement of the physical and intellectual balance maturing in his son.

Now it was David's gift to pass on. He had only brought Steve out here once, four years ago when he was ten. He had shown real aptitude...*had*...the tense brought a restriction to David's throat. He felt the sting of salty influx to his eyes, accentuated by the fresh, dry desert air.

Willing other thoughts, he tried desperately to stem the flow. But the pressure, contained too long, burst forth and he gave away to the flood of images. Of his son, and his sister; the eleven-year-old young lady. Of Julie...oh god...*Julie. Why, why, did I ever leave you?*

Like an old-time arcade machine, the vivid pictures rolled over near chronologically. They held, focused and enlarged; sometimes flipping backwards, with special moments running into motion format. He was forced flat, immobilised by the assault of the compulsory review. Yet he was part of it, compelled to witness; neither able nor willing to leave. It was total, the good times and the blemished, as if a tape had been activated at birth and was now called upon to divest its charge. How long it ran he did not know, but eventually the screen cleared – an intermission – and David recognised that this catharsis had to be and that it was not terrible, for the memories were beautiful and now all that he had.

Calmed with the understanding, he settled down and freely received all, consciously assisting the projection and directing its flow until dear tolerant Julie, emerging from the background of children, came forward and stayed with him into deep sleep.

He woke early, his bedding moist from the cold night air's contact with the warm rock. His head was clear, and he felt a lightness of body. The evening's purge was still there yet strangely unthreatening. Today he would descend to the desert floor and reinforce his convalescence.

Sitting up, David stretched the stiffness in his back, rotating his shoulders, and sighted his visitors. They squatted at the outcrop's edge, near-naked,

watching him, throwing spears held upright and unwavering. The younger aborigine, with the beginnings of facial hair, stared impassively then looked away into the distance. The other was much older, the two generations evident. His wiry hair was greyed and he held his yellowed, rheumy eyes on Turner. Only a week ago the man and his wife had been at Jim Murphy's farewell.

'Hey, Jacky...welcome. What brings you here?'

'Giddy, Dave, really sorry for what happened.' Jacky ambled forward with hand extended as David came to his feet.

Before either could say more, scrambling on the lower rocks interrupted. Another black man appeared, wearing a T-shirt, denim jeans and riding boots complemented by a flashy chrome watch on his skinny wrist.

'What the hell are you doing here?' David asked as the newcomer trotted over.

'Met these two over at our south waterhole,' Jarra rushed. 'They were still heading home after Jim's funeral. We came most of the way here in the Landcruiser then walked to this spot, where I figured you'd be.'

'What for? I'm not lost.'

'Know that, Dave – had to see you,' Jarra said seriously. 'It's scary stuff. Jacky can tell you himself. You gotta come back. The young fella will bring your horse home.'

'We came to the billabong from that way,' Jacky pointed south-west and paused. 'We crossed some tracks, a jeep...followed a little way, me showing the grandson, see.'

David nodded, unclear where Jacky was heading, but now following the stick scribing the fine rusty sand.

'Now, these jeep tracks heading this way.' North-east, towards the station, David figured from the new furrow. 'These tyre tracks stop about one kilometre short of your south boundary, right?' David dipped his head again, non-plussed.

'Three men hop out, walk around a bit, have a smoke. Then the jeep turns, goes off another way...two men keep walking, toward the station.'

'Could've been anyone, Jacky – prospectors, roo-hunters.'

'I don't think so, Dave.' The old man shrugged and went on. 'These men stop a bit further on, make day-camp under some mulga. Then they walk on later...in night-time.'

David looked at the timeworn native, who dipped his head gravely. Eyes going or not, David knew Jacky would not be wrong – the signs would be there.

'Go on.' Turner was more interested.

'Now, Dave...these two men were clever buggers. They swept their day camp pretty good – only blackfella see signs.' Conservationists, David wondered, then caught Jacky's worried eyes.

'Dave, on the night-walk these fellas were wearing soft boots,

like...like...*Kadaitcha men.*'

David could sense the tension in the blacks and felt it rise in himself at the mention of the tribal executioners.

'Jacky, these weren't blackfellas though, eh? Not Kadaitcha men?'

The elder shook his head. Had they been, even this master would have been pressed to sight their path.

'How old – the signs?' David asked.

'Four nights.' Turner chilled at the words – the eve of the plane flight.

After digging into his pouch, Jacky held out his gnarly hand. 'We found these things buried at the day camp,' he said tentatively, hoping the significance was warranted.

Taking the items, David studied the rubbish intently. A snip of two-pair wire, an off-cut of black insulation tape crusted with sand, a crumpled strip of olive green wrapping plastic, and the sliver of bright red cardboard embossed with the white Eveready brand.

He mulled on the permutations – four basic items of little consequence and used daily anywhere. Suddenly the awful realisation crystallised – he had utilised these same things in combination many a time...*in South-East Asia*. Blood rushed through his head and his scalp constricted painfully.

The shards he held went with improvised high explosive devices. The olive wrap plastic was synonymous with military-grade C4.

'Over here,' Jarra called. David paced to where the stockman stooped some ten metres from the sheds. Where Rob always parked his plane.

'Here, see this!' The black man pointed into the confusion of wheel mark, human and animal footprint. 'Other marks alright. This one don't belong...and this!'

David watched with growing detachment as the wiry stockman traced the minute undulations south-west...an almost straight line. He did not follow and had no need to. If the monstrosity was possible – and David would not yet admit that to himself – then he could only handle the bottom line. Not this gradual, drawn-out, erosion of his sanity.

When Jarra stopped and bent to pick something up, peruse it, then begin to jog back, Turner knew that it would be significant. Reaching him, the fearful friend held out the item tentatively. It had been a small crumpled ball of paper, now opened, that had a crude drawing on it; not rude but a thousandfold more obscene. It was a diagram of Rob's plane, indicating where to conceal two packages adjacent to the fuel tanks.

The brutal conclusive evidence evaporated all hope of circumstance. David Turner had to acknowledge that his family had been *murdered!*

His primordial cry froze the stockman. Other hands emerged from sheds and

the cookhouse, aroused and alarmed by a sound so deep and anguished. Jarra went to embrace the man but could not as David dropped to his knees, thrust his head down on the red soil, and began beating the ground with his fists. Others gathered silently at a distance and stood vigil, knowing that the private hell had to run its course.

*

The funeral service, short and simple, had been held under the copse of scribbly gums at the homestead. Just a few of the neighbours and station workers plus a handful of Rob's friends from Cloncurry and Mount Isa gathered together quietly; symbolically in that there was no burial. David had refused that – they were gone into the ether and he would have it left that way, without sham. A single caring plaque was lodged in permanent shade, within sight of the house.

Aviation officials had been and gone. What remained of the plane – two distorted engine blocks and near meaningless fragments – gave them little to work on. Johnson, the examiner from Brisbane, would not be drawn beyond the obvious – a bloody great explosion had destroyed the plane. Something far more intense than had it been the fuel tanks alone that erupted, which was corroborated by witnesses' reports and the near totality of the obliteration. He grimly reserved conclusion until test results came in a couple of weeks, at which time he conveyed he might be obliged to recall the police.

David did not want that yet, so he had withheld Jacky's scraps from the bomb-making and the plane diagram that Jarra had found. First, he needed to find out what could have possibly motivated someone to kill his amiable father.

Initially, David had presumed that this assassination had been intended for him – revenge for his part in the events of last year. Payback by the drug cartels, or the yakuza; maybe even G5 – several of those bastards went to jail for a long stretch, adding to the grounds that forced the resignation of the President of the United States.

However, he'd had to dismiss that angle. Clearly, the planners of this atrocity were professionals. They would have known that Rob flew to Mount Isa each Friday and that David was away from the station. The target had to be his father.

The question was why, and David had vowed not to rest until he found the answer – then the perpetrators.

CHAPTER 3

David entered Rob's den on nightfall in a controlled rage, his earlier shock and immobilising numbness displaced by the vindictive reasoning that now consumed his mind. It felt alien to him, yet strangely apt and rational.

Only twice before in his life had he experienced the same deadly purpose and motivation to exact merciless revenge. The first time had been twenty-four years ago when he was with the SAS in Laos and witnessed an atrocity. The second was just last year when Jimmy Shan killed Jim Murphy. There were no thoughts of police involvement with their exhaustive, protracted probing. This was murder – *of his family* – and he would find the bastards, why they had done this and exact retribution. Nothing else, or the consequences, mattered.

David went through the room like a dervish; withdrawing, scanning and discarding files, documents, bills – anything that might reveal a cause. If he sensed frustration taking hold, he quenched it with a generous shot of whisky, and when the fire of his anger dwindled, he fuelled that too. As he searched, his mind churned incessantly – *why, why, why?*

There had to be a lead somewhere, more likely in this room than anywhere else. Who the hell would do such a thing? Rob was well-liked in the district and respected for the hard work that he, a Yank, had put into turning the rundown spread around.

Was it a business dispute? Not likely – Rob was more than fair, often taking a loss to hold his word or help someone else.

David rejected romantic involvement. His father was a loner and would not admit another woman fully into his life. Sure, there had been a few liaisons years ago – David could recall their holiday trips to the Gold Coast when he was young. But those had been casual, without entanglement and well out of the district.

This sabotage had been capably planned and executed. Someone wanting his

father dead had outlaid a lot of money for the operation to be carried out that Friday morning. Which, on thinking through, had led to more ominous questions. Did they know that Julie and the kids were on board, but not care? Couldn't they have waited another week? If not, what could have been so pressing?

After an hour he'd found nothing of even remote interest and the feverish search slowed as failure set in, abetted by the confusing alcohol. David slumped into his father's chair which still felt soft though the leather was cracked and disgorging tufts of padding here and there. He slowly turned back and forth on the swivel base, gazing vacantly at the walls, seeing but not registering what was hung there.

The room still had a faint pipe odour imbued into surfaces over the years, and the atmosphere settled on him, comfortable in its familiarity. It was calming, and he began to focus on the little-polished furniture and the shelves with their well-thumbed library and intrinsic memorabilia cluttering compartments or used as paperweights on sheaves of paper.

The school desk was still there in the corner, lift-top with ceramic inkwell, the posterity of generations etched indelibly into every available surface. He had spent so many bitter winter nights there on studies or just reading as his father did his bookwork. Just them together, warmed from the rough sandstone fireplace that had blackened to the underside of the hewn ironbark mantle.

The room hasn't changed much, perhaps moved around a little, he mused, noting the new position of the walnut roll-top bureau and fade mark on the wall belying the old. Apart from the dictation machine – that was new – nothing gave credence to the near five decades elapsed.

For now, at last, David was distanced from the trauma. The room, its nostalgia and the whisky had worked together to induce a heaviness, drifting him into unconsciousness sprawled across the big chair.

He woke at dawn as the raucous cacophony of roosters, dogs, galahs and every other living thing announced their existence. Sobered, he perused the room again and came to focus on that dictation machine.

Its modernity was incongruous in the old room. David pressed idly at the buttons, making the machine whirr and stop while attempting to gather his wits to face the day. Rising from the chair would be painful.

'What did he want this for?' he pondered aloud, placing one stem of the delicate headphones in his ear and listening to the hum. There wasn't a tape inserted, nor were any on the desk or in the drawers. This struck David as odd. Outback life had conditioned his father, who in turn instilled the practice in David, to carry several spares of everything.

His thoughts returned to his problem. Nothing had been gleaned from Rob's study that gave any suggestion of where to go from here. He would have to trace back from the beginning of last week until something gave direction.

How far back? The cause for the malice would have to be recent he reasoned, after briefly considering the notion that it could stem from long ago, before Rob came to Australia. No, it had to be within the last year or two – no one waited forty-eight years to kill someone.

David felt his objectivity and purpose reassert through the haze. He would start with the business – the station, its assets and liabilities. Then run through his father's associations – business, social, casual – and methodically work through until each factor had been eliminated from contention. It was the only way – after all, he was an analyst, in a different field, although the principles were the same.

Having mentally charted a flow path beginning with the solicitors, accountants and bank in Brisbane, David rose from the chair, wincing at the concurrent spear thrusts to his head and back. In condition or not, he was swinging into action today.

With a last visual sweep of the room, David made for the door and then stopped as he just caught a barely audible clicking. The tape machine was still running.

He returned to depress the 'on-off' and also the wall switch, each with symbolic finality. *What did he need it for anyway?* Rob had no secretary or business need. Obviously it was required to commit something to record, but what? David became a little excited as his mind raced.

Maybe something was going on, and Rob had laid it out on tape – just in case. He arrested the train of thought abruptly. It was B-grade movie stuff, yet the only prospect he had. Dramatic or not, he had to pursue it and allowed the thought pattern to continue.

If the tapes were relevant to the murder – if – had Rob hidden them or placed them safely with solicitors or the bank. David despaired at the possibility that the old man had them with him when the plane went up. If so, that was that.

After a moment's hesitation, he went over the den once more. There were no tapes, but he did find the machine's packing case stored under a bottom shelf, with invoice and guarantee card inside. Purchased only a month earlier – along with six half-hour cassettes! *Then where the hell are they?*

Before turning homestead, vehicles and outbuildings upside down, David decided to contact his father's solicitors and bank. Hopefully, they could save him a lot of work and, more importantly, time.

Seated again in Rob's chair, he swivelled around to the telephone on its stand beside the bureau, ran the Teledex indicator down to the solicitor's initial,

perused, and then dialled the operator. The inland didn't have STD yet, though that would soon change with the latest satellite.

'Operator,' came the perky voice.

'Mary, this is Dave Turner.'

'David.' She sounded surprised. 'How...how are you coping? I'm so sorry.'

'I'm okay, Mary...sort of,' he assured without real assurance at all.

'Of course you're not...I've known you since you were five years old, David Turner. Vietnam changed you a lot and I know you'll get through. No more said; I'll leave it there. Now, there have been dozens of calls for you since...since the other day. From all over the country, and overseas. The ones that were here for the funeral I'll skip. So here goes.'

David wrote down most of them, figuring to respond when he could. Friends from school days, uni days, work associates, friends and relatives of Julie, friends of his kids. That bloody hurt. The fact that there were no calls from relatives of his own didn't concern him – he and Rob were it and always had been in David's memory.

'Now...the overseas ones. Ah, now, Mr Okimura – wasn't he staying with you just over a week ago? The Japanese man and his family with the big flash jet.'

'Yep, keep going, Mary.'

'Sorry, don't see that sort of thing out here much. Now, a Mr Mike Hamilton. Who's he?'

'Former head of ASIO and ASIS...our national intelligence agencies.'

'No need to play games with me, David. He didn't sound like a spy.'

'Next, Mary.'

'Bill Morley, ringing from Indonesia. I suppose he's...'

'General Morley, the Chief of our Army, Mary.'

The elderly woman paused for a moment, still unsure whether David was having her on.

'Um...ooh, this one was from Canberra. John Hewson – even living way out here I know who he is...our Prime Minister. He rang personally...sounded just like he does on the telly. You're not kidding me, are you?'

'Nope. Morley was my CO in Vietnam and elsewhere, Mary. The others I met last year when I was involved in something. Any more?'

'Ahh, just three. Let me see...a Mr John Buchanan, very American, polite too. He left his private number, saying you can call him anytime. I 'spose he's some bigwig too?'

'Just the Attorney General of the United States, Mary – small fry. Last two?'

'Umm...a Mr Guido; said he was calling from Corsica, wherever that is.'

Turner tensed – why the hell would Uri Meyer use that alias from six months ago when they had been in Thailand? The man had rung at New Year as

himself. The answer soon clarified – the Deputy Director of Mossad was letting him know that things were not as they seemed and that Israel was involved.

'Okay, Mary, last one.'

'A woman, David.' He caught the change in her tone. 'American I'd say, calling from, um...Puerto Rico. That's in the Caribbean, isn't it?'

'Name please, Mary.'

'Carmen...Carmen Bettini. Friend of yours?'

'Yes she is, but nothing more than that, Mary. She's a lovely lady and helped immensely in sorting me out and my getting back with Julie. Thank you for all that. Now, I need to make a few calls to Brisbane – at least three, possibly more. I know they'll take you time to patch through and I don't want to tie the line up so, if I give you the names and numbers you could fit them in with other traffic, okay?'

'Of course I will, David. You just read them out. Shouldn't take that long, it's not a busy day.'

She would know, he thought. For over forty-four years Mary Watts had run the combined telephone exchange and post office in the little town. She knew everyone in the district and more than she should about them, not that any gossip ever went beyond her. Even if it did, well, she was a lifeline in these parts, being on call twenty-four hours a day and invaluable in a crisis. No one else would do the job anyway.

'...and to Brecknall and Partners, 073210685, Mr John Brecknell,' Mary read back.

'Spot on. Thanks, Mary.' David made to hang up.

'Oh, David.' Mary's voice was hesitant, which was not like her. 'Before you go – are you coming to town soon?'

'I don't think so. Why?'

'Well, it's just that, um...there was something I wanted to tell you. Probably just me being a silly old woman, but...' she paused.

'You'll never be old, Mary,' David teased. 'Can't you tell me over the phone?'

'Well, I guess so, but it's really so silly. Where shall I start? You know Charlie, our linesman, well...there've been some problems out your way lately. A few people have rung, complaining of funny noises, ghosting...things like that. You know how people get on party lines.' David agreed; a lot of tact and tolerance was required.

'Go on.'

'Well, Charlie drove down the line, testing as he went and narrowed the fault down to the four eastern properties, including yours. You four share the same line, as you know.' She paused again.

'Now, he went to the junction box where you four split off and do you know what he found?'

How he could know eluded David, but this was her manner, so he played along.

'A wasp nest!' he guessed – it had happened before.

'No, not this time. It was a different kind of bug – Charlie called it a Trojan Fly.'

David had never heard of one but still wanted the conversation over. 'Did he fix it?' he asked.

'David, this was a man-made gizmo, you know, a bug – a listening gadget!'

He jolted upright.

'When was this – when did he find it?'

'Just two days ago. Now Charlie, even though he's stuck out here, is pretty cluey. Went on that course in Adelaide if you remember. Well, he reckons these things are the tops, virtually undetectable. He lost me here, some technical hoo-ha about battery life. Anyway, this one was on the blink and causing the interference. Just thought you'd want to know.'

'Yes, thank you, Mary,' David answered quietly now that he understood.

'David, this bugging thing is a Federal offence. Charlie and me haven't reported it yet because we thought... *well*, we figured it must have been Trevor McIntyre trying to catch Ruth out playing around – you know how jealous he is. Rightly so, I might add. We thought, well, if it's a local thing, domestic, we might be able to keep it that way. What do you think?'

David barely heard this last bit but managed to contribute.

'Good idea, Mary. No point in making headlines about it – we've all got to live here. Tell you what – I'll have a word with Trevor and get back to you, okay?'

Mary sounded quite chuffed with the little conspiracy as she ended the conversation, and David settled back to wait on his calls.

So...whoever was behind the murders had been monitoring Rob's phone for some time – at least up to a month from what he knew about the battery life of such devices.

At least a month. Oh, Jesus! Last evening's questions were answered. The bastards did know that Julie and the kids were on the plane – the rendezvous arrangements were all made by phone! They would have learnt that Rob flew to Mount Isa every Friday to collect the wages, supplies and do a little socialising and could have waited another week. Yet did not!

As the callousness sunk in, Turner began to quiver with anger and also more than a little fear.

As the return calls came, Mary put them through, now with a covert tone to her voice.

The solicitors held a case of Rob's, content unknown. If David could come to collect them, they could finalise matters of the estate at the same time. He would just need to sign a few papers to effectively take control of everything as he was already co-owner of the station.

The accountant held very little of relevance but noted that tax returns were due in three months, and proceeded with a one-sided discourse on the effect of the tragedy on affairs and so forth until David tuned out.

All that could wait. Just as he'd have to wait until he saw what Rob had stored with the solicitors. Subject to the contents, with hopefully the recent tapes, he then had options. Letting the police and the other investigative authorities handle everything was one route. However, he still had contacts from his army intelligence days who could assist without the constraints of the official channels. He also had Morley and Hamilton, who could apply their influence and open doors.

Swinging back from the telephone to the desk, his eyes caught the antique walnut bureau. It didn't look right there. The thin rectangle of unbleached wallpaper alongside somehow lowered its dignity, as if it was transient.

As David moved it back to its rightful place, a recollection stirred. When young, he had been fascinated by the mechanics of the roll-top and thrilled when his father showed him the secret compartments, immediately hiding his best possessions that would fit.

His system jumped – if Rob had hidden something anywhere, this was it. Gingerly, he raised the slatted top up and in. Recalling the correct sequence, he pressed two wooden knobs, and with a sudden glide, the backing to the bottom ledge disappeared. He groped into the void. Disappointed, angry, he thrust his hand more firmly into the recess, making contact with the rear panel. It crashed down against floor and wall, admitting faint daylight right through the unit.

David felt guilty; he hadn't hit it that hard. He pulled the bureau out from the wall, and the backing fell down flat, wafting dust all around. Kneeling, he endeavoured to refit it and then noticed the splits and the small brads pulled right through the ply. The backing had been jemmied off and hastily replaced. *Someone had been through this room!*

Clearly, the bastards had been looking for something – had they found it? What could be so valuable to them that they had killed his entire family?

David stared at the piece of furniture, angled off the wall and out of place. He was about to kick it in frustration when he remembered a unique feature. It was a tricky manoeuvre that David had never tried as the sequence required an adult's arm span. Rob had shown him those years ago, and the mechanism still functioned. A tray dropped from the base, its lipped edge preventing some papers within from sliding to the floor.

'You bloody beauty,' David exulted, '...the arseholes didn't find this one!'

There were no tapes, however, just old newspaper cuttings that could have been used as drawer linings. David swore and slammed the contents on the writing top. Nothing!

CHAPTER 4

The heading was east-south-east, almost directly into the rising sun. David sat back comfortably with the Cessna on auto-pilot. After one fuel-stop at Charleville en-route, it was two more hours to the State capital Brisbane. Although he looked ahead for traffic and checked the gauges automatically, David's thoughts were not with the flying.

On the seat beside him lay the newspaper cuttings from Rob's bureau, yellowed and crisp with age. Rejected at first glance, on re-reading the content had proved to be disturbing. Clipped together in order of time, each one, bar the last two, had opened the door a little more until David had an understanding of his father's reticence on that particular period of his life. It was by no means complete, but it was a quantum leap from what he had before. Key pieces of a mosaic had been thrust into place, roughly and slightly askew. David felt a void filling – a blank space rarely contemplated but now so patently there.

Rob would only ever give David the basics on Pearl Harbor – that it was terrible and that his maternal grandfather had died there – bypassing or curtly dismissing David's further youthful enquiry. The first cutting, dated 8th December 1941, held nothing back. It conveyed the graphic living detail – an eyewitness account that had never come through in books. It had been horrific, even to David, who had witnessed the worst in mankind in his own war.

The second article from three days later, an entire front page, headlined with President Roosevelt's sacking of the local commanders – Navy, Army and Airforce. David had scanned quickly until there, amongst many others held to blame in the Navy Secretary's report, glared the name – *Vice Admiral George F. Conally!*

His mother's father; dead before David was born but imagined in boyhood as a hero. Now posthumously grouped with the villains of Pearl Harbor!

David did not feel overly disturbed at the knowledge. It was remote now and

truth, however bitter, was more comforting than doubt. He was relieved – his father's reluctance and inflexible silence had cause at last. If only his dad could have unburdened the secret by telling him.

Subsequent cuttings followed on the official enquiries into the fiasco of Pearl Harbor through to 1945. David read of the public disquiet at their findings and the contrary submissions tending to shift the onus for the tragedy to the highest echelons of the military and politics; then the inevitable gravitation back to the only viable culprits – the Hawaiian commanders. His grandfather was damned.

The fourth last piece, dated July 1945, however, offered some hope. The pending Congressional enquiry, headed by Robert Taft, promised to resolve the debacle once and for all. The newspaper could not pre-empt the hearing but did say that new evidence had come to light, its source confidential and impeccable.

The encapsulated four-year history had kept David absorbed and reading swiftly, eager for the outcome. He had been totally unprepared though when he'd flipped expectantly to the next cutting. It had slammed at him, jerking his head back in disbelief. For the next sheet was not from a newspaper. It was a coroner's report, dated late September, 1945...*on the death of Mrs Deborah Turner, nee Conally! His mother!*

David checked the time – twenty minutes to Charleville – then lapsed back into thought. All those years...he had it locked inside him all those years. You poor bugger, dad.

He had known it was a car smash. That was all Rob ever told him about her death, other than that she was beautiful, and they had been very much in love. David was only three when it happened. The image he held of her he knew really came from the one photograph Rob had retained. *God, that must have hurt him, keeping it for me.*

The report was clinical and dispassionate. Its terms though were quite adequate for David to visualise the sordid reality. The car, its drunken occupants, Debbie Turner and another man, the bridge.

Shocking as it was, David felt strangely satisfied now that he had the essence of his father's private hell. So much was explained. His mother and her father, the Vice Admiral, had never really existed for him, so there was no real sense of profound loss. His father, on the other hand, was very real. Rob had suffered, as he now suffered. However, David would not bear his losses so quietly. What he'd learnt from the papers, though irrelevant to his quest, strengthened his resolve.

Forty minutes out from Brisbane, David disengaged the autopilot and

elevated to clear the Great Dividing Range. The sun was approaching overhead; in a couple of hours, he'd know what the solicitors held for him. Hopefully, some tapes. If so, what would they contain – anything as revealing as the cuttings?

He leaned over and extracted the bottom two news articles. They were baffling – of another era and totally unrelated to his father's story. One was from 1967 and headlined as *The Gulf of Aqaba, Jordan*. The text described the incredible Israeli victory over the Arab nations that had attacked the small fledgling country. It was set around a photograph of a General, arms raised jubilant as he perched atop his tank overlooking the small port.

The other, from 1977, was a profile on an Israeli politician prior to the coming election. He was described as a Russian born WW2 partisan, later a veteran Israeli soldier and now Mapai Labor Party minister. Despite the ten year lapse, David could clearly see that it was the same man who featured in each article.

Why had his father kept these, and why would he secrete such articles with the other stuff? Stumped, he dropped the cuttings back and resumed concentration on the last stage of the flight. After midday, his hunt would begin in earnest.

David strolled within the bustling Friday crowd toward his twelve o'clock appointment, barely noticing the new buildings and passing throng. The city was changing rapidly and its occupants now matched the haste. He used to enjoy Brisbane, in short stints, though today he was focused on one thing.

He came to the corner of Queen and Creek, still with time. Feeling slightly foolish, David walked one more block and back. Why was it with solicitors and such you tried to be exactly on time when you knew there would be an inevitable ten-minute wait?

Only six minutes this time and John Sykes the younger emerged with hand extended. With the pleasantries over, tempered by the gravity of the occasion, David was ushered into the chrome and glass 'workshop' as Sykes called it, and seated amongst manila files covering the desk, shelves and even the floor. These days work was seen to be done, although Sykes apologised for the mess associated with their recent move from the old sandstone building which had been coincident with his father's retirement.

'Now...to business,' the solicitor began as generalities were done with, and the coffees beside them were cold. 'As you know, my father handled your father's affairs. I've had to pick things up from the files, but I've also had a chat with the old man – everything's reasonably straightforward.' He paused to assess David's acceptance of the transition, knowing David had his own solicitors.

'The station is yours, as you are aware, and all that goes with it.' David nodded; Rob had arranged that years ago.

'However, the assets of the family trust are a little more complex. You are familiar with the details of the Trust?'

'Some...Dad outlined it several years back. When he came over here in 1946, he bought the station with money left to him by his mother. As I understand it, the balance – I don't know how much – went into the trust, to be used in necessity. Rob had a conviction about making it on your own. Though he told me that in the first few years until he got to know what he was doing out there, he had to dip into it a bit.'

'In those early days the sum in trust was quite considerable, David. My father tells me that had he wished to use it, your father could have bought a much larger and more economical spread, and picked up several of the neighbouring properties during the bad times.'

No, that wasn't his style, David reflected. That smaller property was all he wanted, and the challenge it represented.

'Getting down to the nitty-gritty,' the solicitor continued, '...when your father said he *dipped in* a bit, the records show that he did this three times. During the droughts of the '50s and '60s, and once more recently, during the '82-83 drought.'

'It was that or the station went down,' David said protectively, although he thought they had weathered the last quite well despite the subsequent crash in beef prices worldwide.

'Exactly,' Sykes agreed, 'and, as you probably know, over the better years your father repaid what he'd utilised. As it stands the Trust reconciles...on paper.'

'How do you mean, *on paper*?

'You don't know?'

'About what' David responded, irritated at the format of the conversation.

'Each time your father drew on the principal, the amounts were for far more than your own station's needs. Your father...' The solicitor broke off, rummaged for a pile of odd-sized papers, pushed them toward David, then leant back.

'Those are bills of sale – i.o.u.'s if you like. Your father lent money to half the district by the looks.'

David scanned the notes; he knew all the names on them. The Slades, McIntyres, Davidsons, and several others. Some had been paid out long ago, others repaid once or even twice then renewed several years later. Half were current; some significant, others not so much.

'But these are held by this nominee company,' David said, pointing to the name.

'Yes. Just a shelf company, insisted upon by your father to shield his involvement. Through us, your neighbours believed, and still do, that Clifton Nominees is a benevolent pastoral loan company. You will note the interest rates – way under par for each period.'

'So, my father – or the Trust – has loans out. That seems reasonable. He hated seeing the banks and big pastoral companies taking over; loaning high in good times then squeezing the battlers out in the bad. And I can understand why he wanted anonymity. Sounds a good thing to me...what's the problem?'

Sykes hesitated. How would the son take it?

'These notes have little worth should any of the outfits go down. They – against our advice – are totally unsecured!'

David stared blankly. 'But they look alright. It says here...'

'Yes, each document reads okay. The loans are all registered first mortgages. To all intents and purposes, the borrowing parties understand that their land and chattels are on the line – for *incentive* my father says. However, the nominee company, as manager of the Trust fund, has to adhere to the instructions of the trustees in dispersing funds. Am I losing you? No...good. Well, your father, as chairman and with the say, made it an article of the trust that no loan could be called in for default of payment, nor property repossessed. You see, the loans are secured but can not be forcibly collected! He obviously disliked that sort of thing!'

Yes, he did, David thought, looking at the earliest note – 1956. That would be right; he'd been out there ten years and seen the despair. Third generation families evicted from their properties, their toil of a hundred years absorbed by corporate entities; mere items in boardroom accounts of profit and loss.

'I can understand that,' David said quietly. 'These people will repay when they can. The drought three years ago set most back a long way, but last summer's wet is beginning to pay off now.'

'Only if beef prices pick up,' Sykes added.

'Sure, that's the way it is. Where do we go from here?'

Quickly suppressing a look of disbelief at David's easy acceptance of his father's largesse, Sykes carried on.

'Ah, right. By the terms of the Will you, at your discretion, assume control of the Trust. I have the necessary papers ready. However...' Sykes paused, 'you will have the power to vary the Trust's articles...change the rules so to speak.'

David could sense the avidness in the solicitor, who continued.

'Would you...ah...want these loans to continue on such a basis? You could obtain proper security merely by revoking that particular article. To their knowledge, the mortgagors would be no worse off.'

'No, leave it as it is for now. My guess is those loans will all be repaid within eighteen months.'

'All but one. *Longreach*...the McIntyres. They have the largest commitment. As solicitors for the first mortgagee, which is now you, by law we have to be notified of any subsequent mortgages even though we can't prohibit additional loans behind our own. Now...seven months ago, shortly after the good rains, McIntyre took out a second mortgage on the property. A large amount, more than our first mortgage.'

'What for?'

'He bought Imbil station, the smaller one adjoining Longreach. David, we've learnt he's in trouble already. A Sydney finance company lent him the money, secured over both properties. McIntyre obtained it as bridging finance for six months at a hell of an interest rate, expecting to re-finance in that time as the beef market rose. Instead, it has slipped steadily and he's stuffed. No one will touch him. He came to us last week, but it's out of the question. If things don't pick up dramatically, he's going out the back door! The finance company will force the sale of both the properties for just enough to cover our first mortgage plus theirs, with hefty penalties and costs. The McIntyres will get nothing!'

Trevor McIntyre, the silly prick, David thought. The man had always yearned for that extension and gambled on the rain improving beef prices. To prove himself to Ruth maybe – god that man had battled to hold onto both Longreach and his wife. Trevor was about ten years younger than David, with four kids too. He hadn't inherited the property or money; he'd worked his guts out just for the deposit and every year since to stay afloat.

'Does the trust have enough to pay out the loan sharks?'

'Surely, you're not...' The legal man tapered off at David's glare.

'Ah, let me see...the Carter's loan was paid off last week. So...'

'What would that leave in the kitty...after costs of course?'

'Around two hundred thousand dollars – it would nearly clean us out.'

And drastically reduce your fees, David thought. One large loan wasn't near as lucrative as several smaller ones.

'I'll sign the necessary papers right now, and anything else required to make that money available to McIntyre,' David stated, then added. 'Would you let him know today, by phone, that you've been able to reconsider seeing as the Carter loan is in? Now, how does the chairman obtain a loan from his trust? I'll need some money over the next few weeks.'

With the paperwork done, David noticed the other's not so subtle glance at his watch. They must have run into the lunch hour; more likely two or three judging by the solicitor's paunch. However, Turner had further business with Sykes – his primary reason for the visit, although he was pleased to have learnt of McIntyre's plight.

'You mentioned the other day that my father deposited some things here for

safekeeping. May I have them?'

'Oh, yes,' Sykes replied, again checking his watch as he reached for the intercom. 'I was coming to that.' While waiting for the secretary's arrival, Sykes explained.

'Once, sometimes twice a year for the past forty-eight years, correspondence for your father has arrived here from the United States. When your father comes...*came* to Brisbane, he would merely scan the contents then drop it all in a case. Never took anything with him apparently or said anything about it.'

'Just stuff from the States?' David queried. 'Nothing else?'

'Not that I know of. I've only been in the firm for twelve years, and my father handled things until recently. Kath would know though, she's been here since the year dot. Would you like me to buzz her?'

'No thanks, we'll know soon enough. It's more recent deposits I'm interested in. Say, in the last two months.'

'Marcia handles that now. She's fetching the case, but your father didn't come here during that time. It has a combination lock, so we don't get to open it. Anything that comes in is kept until he is – sorry was – here.'

After an awkward silence, Marcia arrived. The young woman placed the suitcase beside the desk, bending a little more than necessary in David's direction. In the absence of a reaction to her cleavage, she began to leave when Sykes asked.

'Oh, Marcia, has anything come in for Mr Turner senior lately that's not in there?'

'Yes, Mr Sykes. There is one package, a small one,' she replied coyly. Moments later, it was in David's hands.

'Do you want to open it, or the case?' the solicitor asked expectantly. 'I might be able to assist if need be.'

'Thanks, but no, and I don't have the combination with me. I'll go into these at my leisure. I've taken up enough of your time already. If anything comes up, I'll certainly be in touch. Thanks once again.'

'No problem at all, David, glad to help.'

Turner rose, extended his hand and did not even feel the response. He had it. What exactly he did not know, but this had to be it!

Holding the half-inch plate glass door open, Sykes once again extended his sincere sympathies for the loss.

'Thanks again,' David responded, looking squarely at the solicitor. 'Please be sure to give McIntyre a call this afternoon. I'd like him to have a good end to the week.'

As he walked the few blocks to his hotel, David noticed his pace matching the urgency of other pedestrians. Maybe, like him, they *were* on important

business.

Though quite heavy, the case swung easily from one hand and in the other, he clutched the package tightly. Savouring the opening produced a spring in his step and the McIntyre business pleased him too. *Would Rob have done it*, he mused, and concluded yes. The canny old man; a good man.

Briefly, when Sykes had first revealed the workings of the trust, David had felt piqued. He could understand his exclusion from the detail in his youth. But why hadn't his father brought him in on it when he was older? The flush of resentment had evaporated once David acknowledged that he had never really enquired, having been quite content working on his own interests and career. Independent and cutting it on his own – Robert had allowed him the luxury.

McIntyre would make it. The new acreage would help Longreach's viability – it was good land and a natural adjunct. And no one would work it harder than Trevor. It was amazing that he still had the ambition left – the years and the rumours about his wife had taken their toll. Some said he'd gone a bit crazy under the strain. That was understandable – he was a proud man. The finance company's stranglehold must have been slowly killing him. David hoped Sykes had the subtlety to do it right, not condescending or charitable. And above all never allowing him to know it was his neighbour's money bailing him out – McIntyre would hate that.

Suddenly, the thoughts on McIntyre took a nasty twist as David remembered the phone-tap. Mary, the phone operator, had suggested that Trevor could have been behind it. If he was and overheard a call of Sykes to Rob about the loan and repossession, he might have construed that Turner was out to get his property. And Trevor had a temper.

David's pace lost its sprightliness as he wrestled with the prospect. McIntyre knew the country, would know about *kadaitcha* feather shoes, had access to explosives and it happened near the Longreach boundary.

Turner dismissed the awful conjecture. No, it wouldn't be McIntyre. If that guy had cracked and been intent on murder, it would have been a direct one-on-one confrontation; without stealth or consideration of consequence.

Relieved, David entered his hotel and made directly for the elevator. He had to quell the mounting excitement, reminding himself that his vital possessions might reveal nothing at all. On touching the up button, he eyed the level indicator – one lift on ten, another on the way down. As he waited, he looked around the plush lobby and saw himself reflected in the mirror-clad central column. Looking at his image standing there, poised to ape every gesture, made him realise just how very much alone he was.

With a faint recoil, the lift stopped at the eighth floor, its doors silently

gliding back to reveal the relatively austere hallway.

Once at his room, he placed the case between his feet and slipped the access card through the electronic lock. Whether he saw the peripheral movement or sensed it did not matter. A man was rushing at him, stooped with an arm outstretched. David instinctively locked his heels onto the case and swung half round, the turn causing the other's hand to miss its snatch for the handle. The thief nearly went right past but made a second desperate lunge. By that time, David was holding the case firmly with both hands and was swinging it upward in an arc that connected with the other's face – hard. David heard the nose break and the grunt of pain and surprise.

The snatcher was only an unkempt youth. David felt almost sorry as the kid reeled back with the blow, throwing his hands to his face as the blood began to spurt. Over the dirty fingers, David saw the tears forming, veiling a look of hate. The teen quickly turned and dashed for the fire stairs, droplets of red marking his weaving path.

Once in his suite, David slipped off his shoes and opened a beer from the regulation bar fridge.

'Poor bugger!' he muttered then dismissed the incident. The kid probably made a living that way or supported a dope habit – the dole alone wasn't enough for either. Turner was glad he grew up in the country.

The parcel and the locked case lay on the bed. He was almost reluctant to approach them, fearing both disappointment and perhaps terrible answers. The case couldn't contain the tapes, so he went for the package. He ripped off the brown paper wrapping, revealing a six-by-eight-inch cardboard box with the Sony label. As David opened and tipped it, three cassettes slid out, each half an hours playing time. *He had them!* At least three out of the six that had initially filled the box.

Feeling both anxious and jubilant, he reached for the telephone and asked Reception to send up the Dictaphone machine he had pre-ordered in anticipation.

Now for the case. David pulled a small envelope from his shirt pocket that had been with the Will and addressed to him in his father's handwriting. Inside was a slip of paper providing the combination numbers that would open the receptacle of forty-eight years of correspondence from America. *About what?*

CHAPTER 5

David had the lid raised, the first handful of papers extracted and laid out neatly on the queen-size bed when the door chime sounded, startling him from the ceremony.

Given the scene with the youth earlier, he cautiously questioned the caller before opening the door and took delivery of the recording device. Placing the machine on the bedside table, David had it functioning in moments. Now he had a choice - case or tapes. He opted for the recordings, being more recent and vital - he hoped. Two were marked in his father's upper-case script - *DAVID 1* and *DAVID 2*, the other *PH 1*.

After loading the first, he had only to depress play. Instead, he balked, went to the bar and poured a comforting Scotch, noticing that his hand shook a little. After one sip, a suck of breath and a determined stare at the device, David dragged a chair over. Then, suddenly conscious of a need for intimacy, he crossed the room and drew in the pleated curtains. For the same reason, once settled comfortably, he withdrew the flimsy headphones from the hygienically-sealed plastic bag and inserted the jack. After rumblings, his father began.

'David, I know this will seem dramatic and an odd way for me to communicate, but we won't have much time in Mount Isa during the changeover. Also, I might have to go to the States before you get back from the coast, so I've put things down on tape just in case. Whichever way it works out, at least you'll have the lowdown on what happened way back that caused me to move to Australia.'

It was his father's voice, different on tape, but indelibly his. David's throat constricted.

'Now, I'm sending these three tapes to Sykes for safe-keeping, and I'm still working on one other which I'll give to you in Isa or get to you somehow if I

go away. I was going to get Sykes to type up the one marked PH, but I'll hold on that until you've heard them all and we can talk about it...not real good holiday material I'm sorry. You'll understand later why I didn't want to discuss this over the phone or write. Or leave them lying around if we don't meet up. John Anders is dropping in on his way to Brisbane tomorrow so he'll deliver them to Sykes.'

There was a pause, and David detected his father's awkward attempts at editing on the new contraption. Waiting, he leaned forward and picked up the parcel's wrapping – no postmarks.

'Bloody contraption! Sorry, anyway...before I go too far, Sykes has a case of mine held at his office. Its contents go with what I'm about to relate, so you can get it – I'll let him know. Between the tapes and what's in the case, you'll have a pretty clear idea of things. When you get back from the coast, we can decide together what to do'.

It was so live, so present and positive, that David found himself eagerly agreeing – yes, *alright, we'll do that!* Only a click on the machine jerked him back to the sober reality.

'Now son, I should have brought you in on things long ago, I know that now. You're a man and have a right to know where you're from and where you're going. But you...ah...hold something I was never fortunate enough to retain – your family. They are your life, and I never could bring myself to involve you – impose on you – in matters of my life that would jeopardise that. When...'

David pressed the pause; he had to steel himself or fall apart. He must listen carefully, third-person and dispassionate if he was to absorb and act decisively. Sipping lightly at his drink, he rocked back and forth until confident that he could continue.

The tape deck automatically back-spaced then continued *'...would jeopardise that. When you were a kid, I put your questions aside, gave enough to keep you quiet for a while, even had to shut the door sometimes. Later, when I would have told you, you never asked. Thanks for respecting my privacy but I sometimes wished you hadn't.'*

There was another pause, and David could hear the shuffling of paper.

'Anyway, it's time now, and I wish this were personal. It's kind of funny – we've probably had this chat by the time you're listening to this.'

Hearing his father's little chuckle at the situation, David nearly grinned with him then checked; this situation was tragic.

'Okay...to begin. I've made a few notes here to keep me on track. I'll try and keep it simple and fill in the gaps later. You'll have a lot of questions, I know. Some of it will hurt – hell, it still hurts in me. At least now you're older and distant enough. I've sat on this a long time but never forgotten about it. Somehow I've managed to suppress it, to avoid this past ruling, or ruining our

lives. Unfortunately, the matter is revived, and I have to face it. And it was inevitable that you would have to come into it one day.

'Now...you know the basics about me and that I left the US because of things I didn't like there. Sure, I didn't like the Second World War and the crass capitalism involved before and after. I didn't like the racial thing that divided society – not that I found things a whole lot better here. There was plenty I didn't agree with. But I still loved my country, believed in it and still do. I fought for it, or so I thought. I did not run away from the country. Even your mother's death alone, and I'll come to that later, wouldn't have made me leave.'

David thought it had, because of what was in the coroner's report. Had he read too much into it?

'Son, I...I left because I hated my father – and he hated me.'

The words were forced out. David sat dumb, only slightly surprised – schisms between father and son were not uncommon.

'This was not a slight hate, David...it was a deep irreconcilable enmity. It began in 1935, with events I'll tell you about soon; with what he did to my mother. My contempt for him really escalated in late 1945, when I learned what a total arsehole he really was. Not a nice thing to say about the man who sired you but that's mild. He was a fiendish, avaricious, murdering bastard – yes, murdering!'

Halting the tape, Turner stood and fetched another drink. He hadn't known what to expect – maybe something like an affair; not a rift this deep within his forebears' history. What in hell's name came next?

'David, this was only my first hate for him. It was well-founded, for what he did to me...us, in 1945. I thought he did it for one reason only, though even back then I had a feeling there was more to it. There was another aspect, yet I could never pinpoint it, let alone prove it. I think I can now and if I detested him before, now that hatred is compounded a thousandfold. I'll give you the history and reasons, but first – I don't think I've ever consciously lied to you; maybe evaded in this area. Except once, in 1970, when you were in Vietnam. You may remember I went to the States...for his funeral.'

That's right, David recalled. When Joseph Turner died, he'd felt awkward and concerned as to what emotion he should feel about his grandfather. There had been little; he'd had no recollection of the man.

Rob Turner had paused speaking, searching for the best words and strength for their utterance.

'Son – that wasn't true. He did not die then and, I'm sorry to say...he's still alive!'

David's glass fell to the floor, its liquid inching radially out from the point of impact in a rough circle through the dense carpet pile. He had been hunched

forward over his knees, thoughtfully rotating the vessel in front of him. He could not move. Neutral in 1970 now, at the inverted obituary, he was twisted violently inside. His father – *now dead*, was speaking to him. His grandfather – long dead, was *now living*!

There was a long silence in the statement as if his father had anticipated the moment, giving David time. When his voice came on again, David jumped, then leant over and stabbed the thing off.

He sat still for several minutes, grappling with the portent of his father's admissions. Then, lifting himself from the chair, he paced to the curtains and pulled them back his arm's span, admitting the warmth and dazzling light. Yes, there was life out there, ordinary and ongoing...this had to be real.

He checked the time – it was near four. So much had come out in the four hours since he had entered the solicitor's impressive office.

To remain rational, he had to spread the input or overload. Without looking at the machine, he pulled on his shoes and slipped the keycard into his shirt pocket. He would do something normal; break from the disturbing commentary and refurbish his mind.

David entered the elegant house restaurant from the lobby, noting that it was well patronised with business people on extended lunch-break and expense account, with a smattering of chic ladies' groups enjoying their day in town and personal credit cards.

David sat alone, his awareness of others fading as he became lost in thought. He should have been hungry, but only picked at the random selections he'd made from the smorgasbord. His coffee was nearly cold.

He deliberately reviewed everything that had occurred from that fatal Friday two weeks earlier, forcing himself to accept it all as reality. If he could do that, handle it as a package and suppress his emotion, then nothing further could break him. Nothing could be worse than what had come so far.

With a last sip of the now awful coffee, he left abruptly, unconcerned by the curious stares from the dining room staff. Now resolute and confident of control, he would see this through with strength.

As the lift doors closed in front of him, David became conscious of the large close-cropped man seated reading in the foyer. He had been there when David first returned to the hotel after the solicitor; had not been there as he had passed through to the restaurant; now was again. *I'm getting paranoid*, David realised and divested himself of the thought. Stepping out at the eighth, once again he felt a tensioning – hell, who could know who or where he was, and what he had? He was being stupid. Nevertheless, remembering the youth, he approached his door with caution. Once inside and after a quick relieving perusal about the suite, Turner noticed he was sweating despite the air-

conditioning.

He accepted that he should be concerned – alert but not obsessed. Someone had killed his father, callously taking out his son's wife and kids as well. *For what Rob knew or for what he had?* Was the answer in the tapes or case?

Rob had taken precautions so that both stayed in safe hands; not posted or left in the house. Perhaps he had figured out that he could be under surveillance and acted accordingly. That prospect sent a shiver through David – now it could be him being watched.

He had hunted before – both game and man – and in turn been stalked by both. With calm determination, he swore that he would not be the quarry in this pursuit. However, he first had to identify his prey. Sitting down, he donned the headphones, knowing that he would make it through this time.

An hour passed, with David static as he listened. He was not unmoved but was rendered motionless by what he absorbed. Until the last words from the tape roused him from the paralysis.

'Damn! David, there's a bloody little red light blinking at me. That means this tape's nearly run out, from what I've read. Look, ah...' and his father's speech quickened. 'I've nearly finished anyway. With what I've told you so far and what's on the next Pearl Harbor tape you'll have the gist of what I'm on about. When I get those records from Prentiss, about my father's loans in 1941 and who he was dealing with back then, I can finish the second tape for the US State Department. You should have it by now anyway. My conclusions – proof I'm damn certain – will be on that and we'll nail my father and the other bastards to the wall. Think about it while you're away – but don't phone me. When you get back, we'll...'

There was silence, then a soft click as the machine stopped. His father would have been watching the tape still rolling, being unfamiliar with the un-oxidised tail length. That was it – *his father's last words to him.*

David almost slumped in dejection but he'd suppressed that emotion in the dining room below. Forcing detachment, he removed the second spent cassette and inserted the third, marked *PHI*, determined to have all there was.

In half-an-hour, he had most of the saga. Ten more minutes spent reading the three photocopied articles on Pearl Harbor that had been folded neatly within the Sony tape box, gave him the rest. Not complete answers, yet sufficient to provide direction and purpose...and he had names.

Miles Stanton, Michael Yates...and Joseph Turner, his father's father, never really known. The murder of his own wife and kids was linked to these three men and their despicable mercenary actions in 1941, compelling David to assume the mantle of his father's hate for them. A cold, vengeful hatred – for 1941, for 1945, and the years before. And now for the filth of the present.

*

'Shimon. David Turner has booked a flight to the United States – New York.'
'When?'

'Tomorrow'.

'He will have learned of his inheritance and god knows what of the rest. Have Levi watch over him, Uri. Shalom.'

*

'Nikolai...David Turner has seen his father's lawyers in Brisbane. He's now on a plane to New York.'

'I'm aware of that, Constantine. Do you have your men in place there?'

'Dah. He can't do anything that we will not know about.'

'Perhaps – but do not be at all complacent with that man. He was once a skilled intelligence operative, and he's not going to America out of love for his long-lost grandfather. He was meant to be on that plane, and you fucked up. Don't miss again, and do not tell Roso what you're doing. He put me on to you to deal with the father but knows nothing about this play. Screw up again, it's you that's dead. Verstehst du?'