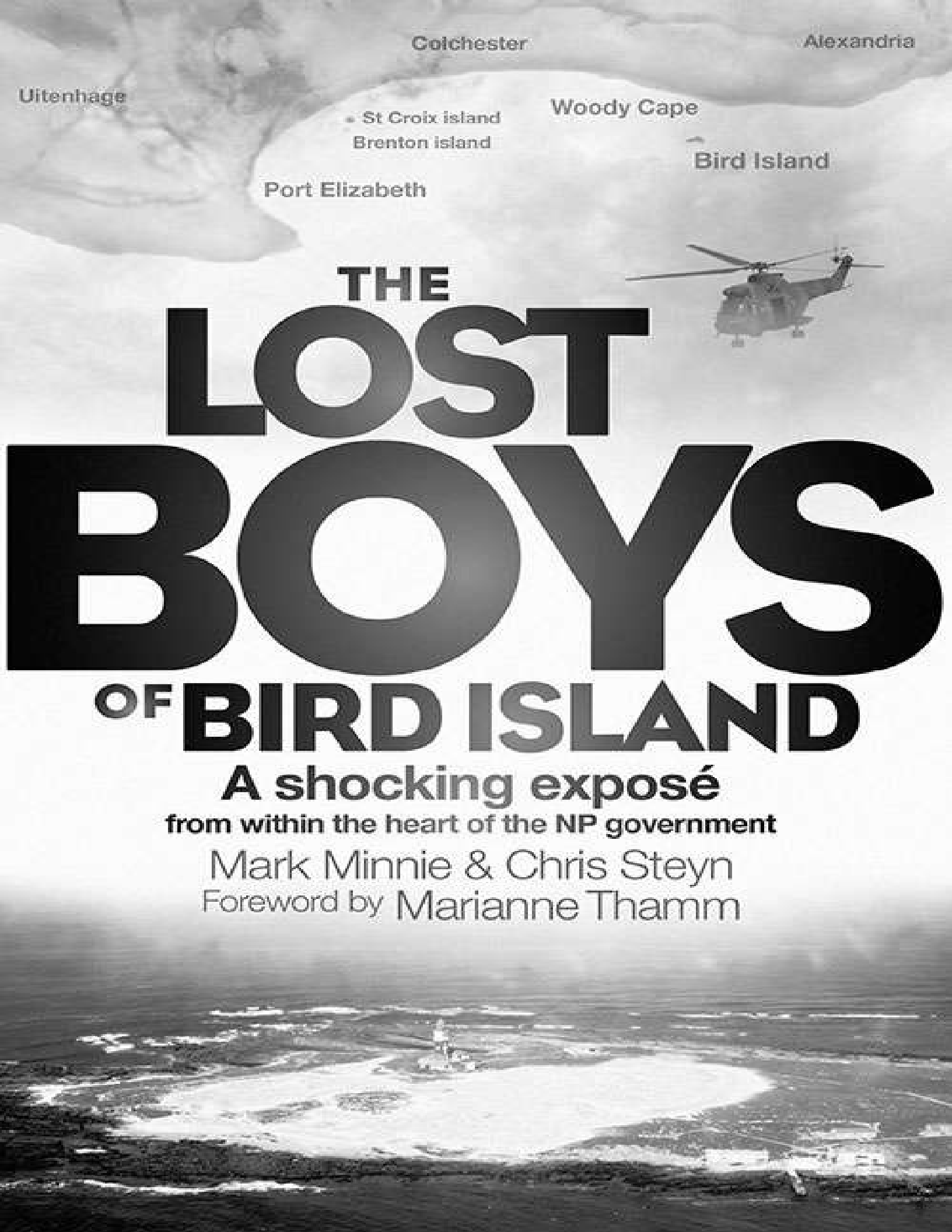


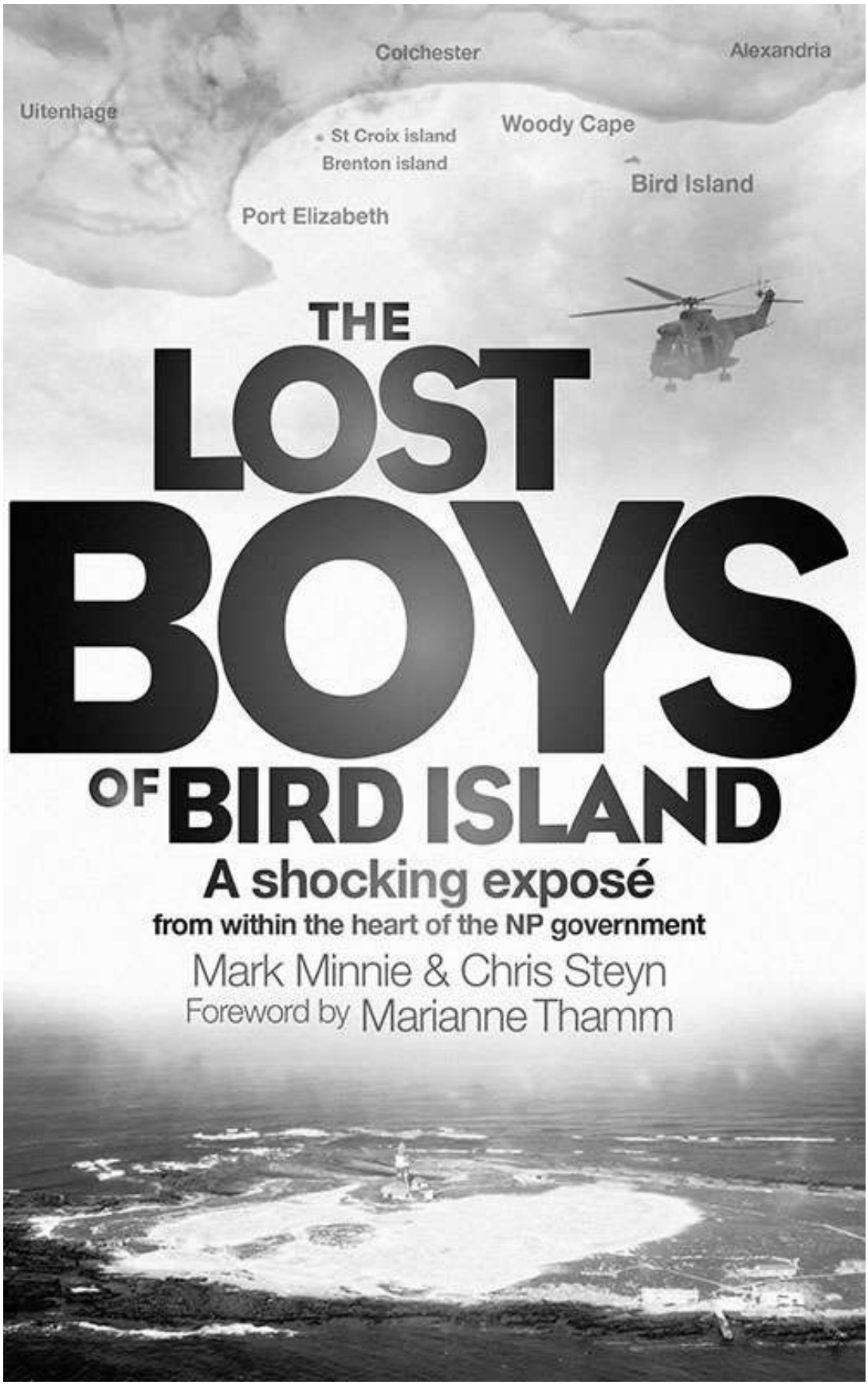
THE LOST BOYS OF BIRD ISLAND

A shocking exposé

from within the heart of the NP government

Mark Minnie & Chris Steyn

Foreword by Marianne Thamm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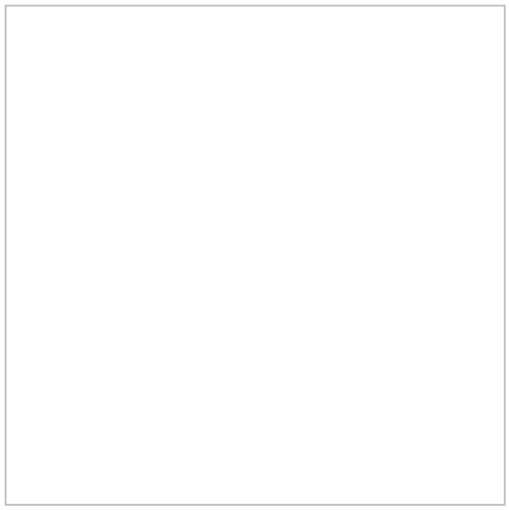

Tafelberg

To the lost boys of Bird Island – and to all voiceless children who have suffered abuse by those with power over them

Foreword by Marianne Thamm

Secrets, lies and cover-ups

In January 2015, an investigative team consisting of South African and Belgian police swooped on the home of a 37-year-old computer engineer, William Beale, located in the popular Garden Route seaside town of Plettenberg Bay. The raid on Beale came after months of meticulous planning that was part of an intercontinental investigation into an online child sex and pornography ring. The investigation was code-named Operation Cloud 9.

Beale was the first South African to be arrested. He was snagged as a direct result of the October 2014 arrest by members of the Antwerp Child Sexual Exploitation Team of a Belgian paedophile implicated in the ring. South African police, under the leadership of Lieutenant Colonel Heila Niemand, cooperated with Belgian counterparts to expose the sinister network, which extended across South Africa and the globe. By July 2017, at least 40 suspects had been arrested, including a 64-year-old Johannesburg legal consultant and a twenty-year-old Johannesburg student.

What police found on Beale's computer was horrifying. There were thousands of images and videos of children, and even babies, being abused, tortured, raped and murdered. In November 2017, Beale pleaded guilty to around 19 000 counts of possession of child pornography and was sentenced to fifteen years in jail, the harshest punishment ever handed down in a South African court for the possession of child pornography.

While Beale himself had not been arrested or convicted for physically harming the children, the court found that the possession of pornography is not a victimless crime. Somewhere in the world babies and children who featured in the hideous images had been abused, raped and murdered.

In 2014, Peter McKelvie, a retired officer with the Hereford and Worcester Child Protection Team in the UK, disclosed that a list of child abusers, which included the names of at least twenty current and former UK politicians, existed and claimed that there had been a massive official cover-up of this in the 1980s. He was adamant that his findings warranted a formal investigation.

McKelvie had compiled the list after interviewing a myriad survivors, as well as officials in the care system who had dealt with them in the aftermath. The site of the abuse was the Elm Guest House in Barnes, South London. Prompted by McKelvie's dossier, Scotland Yard eventually launched Operation Fernbridge.

In May 2015, the British police launched Operation Hydrant, an overarching investigation that included Operation Fernbridge and an astounding number of smaller investigations into child sex abuse by prominent individuals in the UK. The police released statistics indicating that more than 1 400 men, including 261 high-profile individuals, were being investigated in relation to allegations of historical child abuse.

While many ordinary people can, at a push, imagine themselves in the mind of a criminal – be it a thief, a cheat, an embezzler or even a murderer – it is virtually impossible to fathom the mind of the child sex offender. Perhaps it is because this crime – when adults tasked with caring for and protecting children actually abuse, rape and harm them – goes so against nature that it requires an enormous effort to engage and not look away in utter horror and disgust or, worse, retreat into denial. One need only read or listen to the testimony of those who have survived serial sexual abuse and rape as children to understand the havoc and damage this causes, leaving victims with wounds and scars that linger for the rest of their lives.

There have been several exposures of child sex and paedophile rings in South Africa in recent years, but back in the late 1980s these cases seldom made headlines. The secrecy of the transgressions, and the close proximity to the victims by predatory adults, often in trusted or powerful positions, made this a difficult crime to detect and expose. But in 1986–87 a high-profile investigation involving three prominent National Party cabinet ministers and one of their

associates suspected of abusing young boys blipped briefly onto the radar before disappearing completely. South Africans who were alive at the time may have a vague recollection of rather sanitised reports involving these political leaders – but that's about it. Until now.

The 1980s marked the beginning of the end of Nationalist government rule in South Africa, with increased violence, state repression and an iron-fisted clampdown on those considered by authorities to be political opponents. Apart from mass arrests, there were also several political assassinations by state-sanctioned secret death squads. Media freedom and freedom of speech and movement were severely curtailed, and the restriction and intimidation of newspaper editors and journalists was routine.

The tumultuous era saw the declaration of two states of emergency, one in 1985 and another in 1988, which suspended the country's then constitution, providing wide powers to the police and the South African Defence Force (SADF), then under the control of the hugely powerful Magnus Malan, minister of defence in President PW Botha's cabinet.

Magnus André de Merindol Malan was a blue-blooded Afrikaner Nationalist who rose through the military ranks and had always been destined for high office. A military man all his life, who also trained in the US, Malan was appointed chief of staff of the South African Army (SAA) in 1973. Three years later, he was appointed head of the SADF. The minister of defence at this time was future South African president PW Botha, who later appointed the trusted Malan as his defence minister.

It would be safe to say that Malan was the second-most powerful man in apartheid South Africa, which towards the late 1980s was slowly imploding. The country was gripped by a permanent sense of impending crisis. Crime and violence were rampant as a low-grade civil war raged, mostly in the townships where South Africa's black majority had been forcibly removed and 'contained'. It is against this disruptive and turbulent backdrop that the shocking story you are about to read took place.

The writers of the two narratives contained in this work, Mark Anthony Dawid Minnie and Chris Steyn, had never compared notes until Minnie, haunted by his past as an undercover narcotics agent with the South African Police in Port Elizabeth in the 1980s, delivered his account of the story to the publisher.

Both Mark and Chris had spent a considerable amount of time investigating the same case, but somehow, until the publisher brought them together in 2017 to write this book, their paths had crossed only briefly.

In 1987 Chris Steyn began working at the English-language morning newspaper the *Cape Times*. She was a *rara avis* in a newsroom then populated by young, mostly white, 'leftie' journalists, including myself. Chris stood out immediately. She didn't dress like the rest of us. She was always impeccably groomed, wearing tailored jackets and high heels and carrying a briefcase. She was also Afrikaans-speaking, or so we thought, which in those claustrophobic times led to immediate stereotyping and a modicum of suspicion. Which is odd, because some of the country's most vociferous anti-apartheid journalists were Afrikaners – such as Max du Preez, Pearlie Joubert and Jacques Pauw, to name only a few.

Chris came to the *Cape Times* trailed by a frisson of political intrigue. As she recounted in her 2006 memoir, *Publish and Be Damned: Two Decades of Scandals*, some news stories are neither forgotten nor forgiven. In Chris's case, the 'Boesak Affair' was one such story. 'I had no way of knowing it would transform me from an accidental journalist into an enemy of the State,' she wrote.

The Boesak story requires a short retelling as it encapsulates so many of the currents that flowed through and beneath South African life back then. In January 1985, Chris had been drawn into the story about the hugely popular anti-apartheid activist cleric Allan Boesak, a member of the South African Council of Churches (SACC), when Michael Shafto, who was then Chris's news editor at the Johannesburg daily *The Star*, handed her a pamphlet that had mysteriously turned up in the newsroom in-tray.

Shafto tasked Chris with investigating the pamphlet, which featured a

photograph of Boesak alongside one of Dianne Melanie Scott, an SACC official. The pamphlet alleged that Boesak, a father of four, was having an affair with Scott. It detailed a series of hotel and chalet bookings allegedly proving that Boesak and Scott had had several romantic trysts.

Chris, a meticulous, dogged and hugely professional journalist, set about verifying the information in the pamphlet through telephone calls and visits to each establishment. During her investigation Chris learned that the security police had visited the Johannesburger Hotel the night before Boesak had checked in and had asked staff to let them know when the cleric arrived. The feared security police were known for their 'black ops' and dirty tricks aimed at prominent anti-apartheid activists. Later, a mysterious recording of Boesak and Scott talking inside another hotel room, this time at the President Holiday Inn, also found its way to Shafto's in-tray.

Chris, along with then crime reporter Mike Cohen, confronted the security police with the evidence and soon learned that it was indeed they who had sent the evidence to *The Star* as well as several other newspapers, including the *Sunday Times*, which, after Boesak had denied the allegations, took it no further. But the security police denied, on the record, their involvement in the set-up.

Chris herself was faced with a dilemma. Boesak was having an affair with Scott: he admitted as much to Chris when she called him for comment. Boesak, says Chris, told her he had known the security police had been trailing him and that the information might be leaked. In the end the decision to publish the story, exposing the affair as well as the role the security police had played in bringing it to light, was taken by *The Star*'s then editor-in-chief, Harvey Tyson.

Then came the fallout. First Boesak, contacted by other newspapers and news agencies following up on *The Star* story, denied the affair. The security police and the police commissioner also denied their official involvement in trying to smear the cleric. *The Star*, Tyson and Chris found themselves under attack from various quarters, including the opposition Progressive Federal Party and other newspapers.

But Tyson defended his decision to publish the story as well as Chris's

credibility and professionalism, even when the *Cape Times* editor Tony Heard had lashed out against the story in an editorial. Heard labelled the publication of the story ‘an extraordinary lapse from established standards of respect for privacy’ and had warned that this ‘breach of established practice’ was an ‘aberration’.

Tyson and Heard communicated privately, Tyson reminding Heard that the *Cape Times* had not always been silent on the private affairs of politicians. Heard believed that Tyson had played into the hands of state agents, while Tyson insisted that the story was in the public interest, exposing not only Boesak’s hypocrisy but also the state’s dirty tricks. It was complicated and fraught – and Chris Steyn was caught in the middle.

By the end of 1985, Chris had established herself as one of the most prolific, ingenious and fearless journalists in South Africa. Having had enough of Joburg, she packed up her life and headed for Cape Town and a new job at the *Cape Times.*

But Chris soon found herself on the wrong side of the law, which is not a difficult accomplishment in a virtual police state. In 1986 the police subpoenaed Chris to give evidence against a source she had interviewed. This source had provided information about the deaths of eight people and the injury of seven others in separate hand-grenade and limpet-mine blasts in the East Rand townships of Duduza, Tsakane and KwaThemba in June 1985. Six of those killed had their right hands blown off. Chris’s source, as well as other residents and witnesses, had contradicted the police finding that the men had ‘accidentally’ blown themselves up when the grenades exploded prematurely while the victims were carrying out what the authorities had described as a ‘coordinated terrorist attack’.

So it was that Chris found herself ordered to appear before a Johannesburg magistrate on 6 August 1986. She was expected to give evidence in the trial of three men who had been accused of contravening section 27(b) of the Police Act, a section designed to deal with people the state claimed had ‘lied’ about the police. Among the accused was one of the township residents Chris had

interviewed a year earlier with regard to the hand-grenade blasts.

Chris was served with a subpoena in terms of section 205 of the Criminal Procedure Act. This section of the law gave police the power to demand that an individual appear before a magistrate, in secret if needs be, and without legal representation, and to reveal under oath the names of sources or any other information required. Section 205 had been deliberately formulated to destroy the ability and capacity of journalists to protect sources.

Shortly after the subpoena, Chris received information that some sources had ‘changed their stories’ after they had been visited by police. One source’s memory had been jogged by a gun held in each ear. The version of events recounted to Chris by the township resident she interviewed no longer stood. He had ‘admitted’ to lying about the police. The implications were serious, not only for the source, but for Chris. In the ultimate irony, Chris was being subpoenaed to testify against her source by reiterating his original story in court under oath.

There were only two possible outcomes. If Chris testified against him, the source would be convicted of lying about the police and would go to jail for up to five years. If Chris refused to testify, she would go to jail until she cracked and agreed to comply with the subpoena. It was a classic catch-22.

For Chris, while the case against her source was clearly political, her considerations were not. She saw it as a matter of principle, a simple question of ethics. The unbreakable rule of journalism applied: never reveal the identity of a source to those who would wish them harm for telling the truth.

Despite intense legal efforts, Chris was informed that there was no hope of her escaping a prison sentence if she turned up in court and refused to testify. And if she simply didn’t pitch, she would eventually be arrested and imprisoned. The latter became a real possibility when Chris failed to appear at the 6 August hearing. A warrant for her arrest was issued but held over, pending a second appearance scheduled for 21 August.

Meanwhile, given the sinister fates that had befallen many detainees and inmates, there were rising fears for Chris’s safety and it was decided, in the greatest secrecy, that she should leave the country and continue the fight for truth

from abroad. Her ‘escape’ was duly plotted in bouts of intense whispering in a corner of the Café Royal, the watering hole of the Cape Town Press Club, across the road from Newspaper House, the iconic building that was home to the *Cape Times* and *The Argus*. Chris continued with her normal work routine until the last minute.

On the morning of her escape, Chris had endured a tense time with members of the Peninsula Murder and Robbery Squad hovering around her house in Tamboerskloof just in case she received a phone call from a murdered man’s lover who had made contact with her a day earlier. If the detectives had any inkling that Chris was about to skip the country, she would have been arrested on the spot.

Chris finally left South Africa on Saturday 16 August without knowing whether she would ever be able to return. When she failed to appear at the second scheduled court hearing on 21 August, the order for her arrest was finalised.

Chris lived in exile in England for a few months, waiting for the charges against the source to be ‘temporarily’ withdrawn. But it would take many years for the truth in that case to finally emerge. She later learned from police sources how some of their technically minded colleagues had doctored the time fuses on hand grenades and limpet mines so that they would explode immediately upon arming. They then swapped these munitions for similar ones in known arms caches that were subsequently used by activists. Several activists were eliminated in the process.

In October 1996, former police commissioner General Johan van der Merwe disclosed in his submission to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) that he had been the brain behind the hand-grenade blasts. Five years later, in 2001, the TRC granted amnesty to thirteen Security Branch policemen in connection with the East Rand grenade blasts, the factual reporting of which had led to charges against people for telling the truth – and an arrest warrant and exile for Chris for reporting that truth.

While all this was happening to Chris in Cape Town, about 700 kilometres

away in Port Elizabeth, known as South Africa's 'friendly city' nestled on the shore of the Eastern Cape, Mark Minnie was embroiled in an investigation of his own, one that would lead him to some of the most powerful men in the country.

Mark grew up in Port Elizabeth and joined the South African Police after matriculating at the end of 1978. His intention was to spend two years in the police force, and then study law at university. But after donning the blue uniform, Mark fell in love with being a cop. It felt to him as if he had found his true calling.

After a six-month stint at the Police College in Pretoria, Mark was assigned to the Special Guard unit, responsible for the welfare and security of National Party government ministers. This is truly ironic given that, years later, the actions of certain cabinet ministers would lead to him resigning from the force. A year later, Mark was transferred to the Uniform Branch in Port Elizabeth, a position he held for five years. He spent his last couple of years as a full-time cop working as an agent attached to the South African Narcotics Bureau in Port Elizabeth. It was during that time that Mark found himself embroiled in the investigation described in this book.

In 1987 Chris Steyn made it back to South Africa and began to follow up on a series of perplexing events, including the apparent suicide of a well-known cabinet minister and his close friend – a conservationist, diver and police reserve lieutenant.

From opposite ends of the country, 30 years later, Chris and Mark would finally connect the dots to rip the veil of secrecy off the tragic and shocking story of abuse, criminality, cover-ups and official complicity in the rape and possible murder of a number of children, most of them vulnerable and black.

These children are the Lost Boys of Bird Island.

Marianne Thamm
Cape Town
2018

MARK

1

The call

Paedophilia. Government corruption. Murders. And they wanted to kill me. Fuck them. I'm an undercover narcotics agent with the South African Police. Here's my story, which begins in February 1987.

The phone rings. It's the brigadier.

'To my office. Now!' he barks.

He hangs up abruptly, leaving me no opportunity to reply, much less resist. It sounds bad. I'd better get there.

But why on earth is he calling me? I'm 50 leagues below him in the chain of command. If he needed to see an investigator, he could have summoned one through my branch commander, the lieutenant. Something's clearly amiss. I begin to panic, but tell myself to keep calm and maintain a level head. The thing is, you don't mess around with this guy. He can end your career in a blink and mine's already going nowhere.

I rush along the dark corridor, grabbing a cup of watered-down coffee along the way. I'm hoping it will mask the smell of stale whisky on my breath. I'm battling to hold the cup with my right hand. My pinkie is swollen and has taken on a purplish colour. It looks distinctly like a miniature eggplant. I'm convinced it's broken but I'll have to deal with it later.

I hate the smell along this stretch of the corridor en route to the brigadier's office. Why can't they unclog the damn toilets?

I hesitate before knocking on the brig's door. I have a crashing headache. I definitely should not have overindulged last night. It wasn't good. Maybe that's why he wants to see me? I'm in deep trouble if he has found out what happened. Or maybe he just lost on the horses again. He's an irredeemable gambler. So

much so that if he spotted two cockroaches running up a wall he'd be inclined to place a bet.

'Come in,' the brigadier growls. I enter his office, my stomach churning. The air inside is thick with the acrid smell of cherry tobacco. It makes me want to wretch. A quick look at the ashtray reveals five cigar stubs and it's only 8:30 am. He clocks in at 8:00, so either the stubs are yesterday's leftovers or he's got enough nicotine in him to keep his cardiovascular system in a state of semi-permanent overdrive. Horse-racing guides and betting tickets litter the rest of his desk.

'Always take your time, don't you, Max?'

My initials are 'MAD', so someone conveniently added the 'Max'. My colleagues love calling me Mad Max.

I ignore the brigadier's cheap shot. Besides, the pain in my finger is killing me. He barely looks up at me while handing me a piece of paper.

His demeanour confirms my suspicions. The fool has clearly lost a huge chunk of his salary on the ponies. Now he's intent on recovering some of his losses, throwing good money after bad. He's annoyed that the process has been interrupted.

A phone number is scrawled on the slip of paper. It's a local exchange.

'Phone this woman,' the brigadier says. 'She's a member of my church. Her son has got some info for you. That's all.'

What the fuck! So now I'm just being used? He's clearly abusing his status as a senior police officer to do favours for his congregation. I'm an undercover narcotics agent, not a babysitter for some religious do-gooder who wants to tell me stories about petty dope-smoking going on at a local school. But I keep this to myself – I know all too well not to disappoint the brigadier. As I turn to leave, the smell of tobacco now so overwhelming I feel quite queasy, he calls out: 'And, Max, I want feedback by this afternoon. No stories.'

Fuck off, I mumble to myself.

Back in my office, I dial the number immediately. A woman answers in Afrikaans. I speak it fluently. She agrees to see me within an hour. At least my

headache is starting to subside. The pressure's probably off because the brigadier clearly has no inkling of the previous night's shenanigans. I'm feeling more relaxed, off the hook for now, but my finger is aching.

About an hour later a portly woman enters my office followed by a scrawny dark-skinned youngster. The kid is visibly distraught and his mother is clearly extremely anxious. He doesn't look like a dope-smoking delinquent or a dealer. What am I in for?

In that moment, I have no idea that what this boy is about to tell me will change my life forever.

2

The interview

I can tell this is going to be a long day. The kid's mother insists on speaking English. She's not making sense; she's repeating things, hesitating, searching for the right words to tell the story. It's driving me up the wall. The office chair she sits in creaks each time she moves.

My patience is wearing thin. I wonder why she insists on speaking English. Perhaps she's just being polite because I greeted her in my mother tongue? I tell her to relax, breathe and speak her own language. This seems to offer her some respite.

'My son is only fourteen,' she says, glancing in his direction. 'His name is Igor.'

The boy is leaning back in his chair, hands clenched, eyes fixed on the floor. I notice his knuckles are white, drained of blood. He's obviously very uncomfortable.

Ten minutes into the engagement all I have extracted are the name and age of her son. The familiar odour of cheap musk perfume mixed with perspiration begins to permeate the room. It's not doing my hangover any favours. There are beads of sweat, glistening like small diamonds, on the woman's top lip, all of this offset by garish red lipstick.

I look at the kid again. This time he holds my gaze and I sense an opening, but I have to act swiftly. He's the one with the story, and if I don't move now I know I will end up with nothing.

But first I have to get his mother out of my office. The more I look at the boy, the more it feels like he is offering me a glimpse into his troubled soul. He's clearly desperate for someone to listen to his story and help him out of his

misery. Having his mother there is not helping. I decide to be direct. I stand up and make eye contact with her.

‘Please follow me,’ I say.

‘But, my son …’

‘He stays here.’

I turn to the boy and say, ‘You’ll be fine.’ I can tell he is relieved.

I escort his mother out of the office, a trail of nauseating body fragrance following in her wake. In the passage, I can tell she is confused, but she doesn’t ask any questions or resist. I’m grateful for not having to offer an explanation. I take a crumpled note out of my pocket. The distinct green colour assures me it’s only R10.

‘Have a cup of coffee in the cafeteria downstairs,’ I say to her as I hand her the money.

She wobbles off slightly perturbed, but content with the fact that coffee is on me.

Back in my office I offer the boy a soda from the miniature bar fridge. He accepts, hesitantly.

‘Listen, Igor, I know there is something that you want to tell me, but you’re afraid. I want you to know that whatever gets said in this office will remain between you and me. You need to trust me, son.’

The boy sucks at his straw, glancing up at me. Then his mouth begins to quiver and tears roll down his cheeks. He looks away, embarrassed. This boy, I can tell, is in bad shape.

‘It’s about my older brother, sir,’ Igor says. ‘They hurt him.’

‘Where’s your brother now?’

‘In hospital, sir.’

I am fully engaged until a sudden stabbing ache in my swollen pinkie distracts me, reminding me of yesterday’s events in the bar. Odd that my finger should act up now, just as the boy is opening up.

3

The day before

I’m watching as my old school-friend George is about to hustle R200, a lot of money, off a rookie pool player in the bar. The bet started at R100, and of course George allows the stooge to win the first game by a wide margin.

In the second game, George deviously appears to make a lucky comeback and just edges it. It’s the final game now in this best-out-of-three contest. The rookie’s now feeling confident and he raises the bet. I already know the outcome. It’s a foregone conclusion. People who know George are wise enough not to take him on in a game of pool.

George is over 1,8 metres tall and lanky. There is not an ounce of fat on him. And he’s a hustler by nature. He’s always enjoyed taking money off people through bets he knows he can’t lose.

My pool-shark friend is the owner of the bar. The rookie pool player must be from out of town. We’ve never seen him in here before. George proceeds to whip him in the final game. The newcomer hands over the money and gulps down the remainder of his beer, seemingly accepting defeat.

George shoots me a wry smile. He’s done this more times than I’ve eaten breakfast in my entire life. As the loser exits the bar, George quips loudly, ‘Lessons available on Tuesday and Thursday evenings!’ The loser is clearly not amused.

I order another drink from Bernadine, George’s new bar lady. She’s only been working here for a month and already Bernie and I are having what is known as a ‘scene’. It started two weeks ago.

I’ve always had a weakness for a woman behind a bar, particularly when she is as gorgeous as Bernie. And Bernie likes me. She’s comfortable with my drinking

habits and I am more than comfortable with her line of work. The bar's empty apart from George, Bernie and me. Mind you, it is only 3:30 in the afternoon.

Bernie and I settle into a game of rummy – a card game I find interesting enough not to bore me. She wins the first hand, as well as the second, the third and the fourth. I'm thoroughly charmed by her cute giggle every time she's victorious.

'You're cheating, aren't you?' I tease.

'You're just a sore loser, Max,' she replies, sashaying off.

Glancing out the window, I notice the sun has set. It is amazing how time flies inside a bar, especially when you're having fun. I'm in my happy place. The booze has relaxed me and I'm feeling good. So much so that in that instant I feel perfectly happy with my lot in life. I have a job, money in my pocket and a woman whose company I enjoy.

George emerges from his tiny office, eyes red and flaky. It's obvious that he's been sleeping. Bernie's shift ends at midnight and I'm more than happy to wait.

Suddenly, the guy who lost the pool game returns, this time accompanied by two mates. I've never seen these guys before.

One of the two is built like a brick shithouse, and he's ugly as sin. His lack of neck makes him look like his head has been plonked onto his shoulders. His face is scarred, warrior marks from a lifetime of brawls. He sidles up and occupies the seat beside me.

His mate, who sits next to him, is a tall spindly lad. His build matches George's. I have learned never to underestimate scrawny guys. Those long arms and legs can deliver a devastating blow. We call guys like this 'one-punch mechanics' because they can knock your lights out with one well-aimed shot.

The rookie loser positions himself at the far end of the bar. It's obvious that these guys are not here to drink or play pool. They mean business. George glances in my direction and his expression reveals that he too has picked up on the bristling aggression in the air. We're ready and waiting.

The loser orders a round of drinks for him and his mates. Bernie is completely oblivious to any hint of what is about to unfold.

I immediately reckon that I will need to neutralise the guy who poses the most dangerous threat – a tactic I learned from my karate instructor. I decide it will have to be the ox sitting next to me. My eye falls on an ashtray on the bar. It's within reach. I'm calculating all the odds now. George is behind the bar, directly opposite the loser.

Bernie, still oblivious to all the testosterone radiating around the bar, serves them their drinks and proceeds to ring the sale. She returns to the loser and hands him his change.

'Hey, I gave you R50,' the rookie says. 'You've given me change for R20. Where's the rest?'

Ooh, shit's starting quicker than I thought. I'm ready and so is George.

'Impossible – you gave me a R20 note,' Bernie replies.

George winks at me and slowly makes his way to the till. Now we all know George never keeps R50 notes in the cash register. The currency value is too large and impractical for use in the bar. When he does get bigger notes he stashes them in the office.

'No fifties in here, mate. Don't keep them in the till,' George says. He sidles up to the loser, maintaining his position on the opposite side of the bar. 'You must have made a mistake, pal,' he adds.

This clearly does not go down well. Suddenly the loser takes a wild swing at George, missing him by a wide mark. It's time to get involved. I know I need to act decisively; otherwise George and I are in for a hell of a beating.

My adrenalin is pumping as I reach for the ashtray and drive it into the ox's face, breaking his nose on impact. I can hear the crunch of the cartilage. But all it seems to do is knock him off the bar stool. He's still standing, though a bit groggy, and shaking his head from side to side as if he's trying to clear his head. He is not going to go down easily, I realise.

I follow up my first blow with a kick to his stomach. This is immediately followed by the delightful sound of air escaping from his gut, which prompts me to go in for the knockout blow. That rendered, he staggers backwards, opening up a perfect distance for a sucker of a punch, which I deliver to the side of his

head. He collapses, out cold.

I turn to see how George is faring. Fine, by the look of things. George has also knocked out the loser, albeit through the choking method.

The lanky lad has armed himself with a pool cue. This guy is clearly going to fight to the bitter end, something I am not particularly relishing.

Just then four uniformed cops barge into the pub. They are a comforting sight. I wonder who invited them, I think to myself.

Turns out it was Bernie. When the brawl started, she rushed into the street and ran slap bang into the cops out on a foot patrol. At that point, I don't feel like tackling the last man standing. And luckily for me, the cops don't recognise me.

The ox and the loser regain their senses. The ox's face resembles a piece of raw mashed-up meat. There's no hint of a nose. The cops try to find out what's going on, and in true South African fashion the troublemakers refuse to press charges. They've taken their hiding like men. The cops escort them out of the bar.

I have no doubt we'll be seeing these guys again in the not-too-distant future. They will return, seeking revenge. It's the South African way, the Port Elizabeth way. I suddenly feel an excruciating pain shoot through the pinkie of my right hand. It looks broken. Ah well, maybe I can just patch it up and see how it goes. In the meantime, a few painkillers will do the trick.

4

The interview continued

Igor says someone has hurt his brother. That's how he has ended up in hospital.

'Who hurt your brother?' I ask.

'Moffies, sir.'

Moffie is a derogatory South African term used to belittle homosexual men. It's the 1980s, and words like *homosexual* and *paedophile* are virtually interchangeable, regardless of the fact that the majority of paedophiles happen to be heterosexual men.

But the boy's reply intrigues me. I'm keen to find out more, but I'm also careful not to push him too much. I can see he is less fraught and much more comfortable talking now that his mother is out of the room.

I decide to record the interview, realising that what he may choose to tell me about his brother will be hearsay evidence and inadmissible in court. Still, I'll keep the recording for reference.

And then he tells me. The story tumbles out of him. His older brother has been sexually assaulted, viciously so, and has been taken to hospital for the wounds to be treated.

I don't stop him while he speaks. Later, after he has offloaded the burden, I'll try to get something concrete out of him – that is, the evidence he can attest to personally. The things he saw and witnessed with his own eyes.

The boy is somewhat calmer after telling his story. I try to find out exactly what he knows.

'Son, have you seen moffies doing things to or with your brother on any other occasions? That's what I need to know.'

'Yes, sir. I've seen moffies doing things with my brother as well as with other

boys.’

‘What kind of things, Igor?’

‘You know, sir. Moffie sex things.’

‘That means you must have been there as well.’

‘I was, sir. The moffies paid me money. Just like they paid the other boys. Sometimes they like to take two boys at a time. One uncle with two boys or two uncles with two boys. It all depends. Sometimes many boys with three or four uncles.’

Holy smoke! This is serious. I feel a surge of anger but suppress it. I encourage the boy to continue.

‘Now that’s what I want you to tell me, son. Things that happened to other boys in your presence and things that happened to you. Even better is if other boys saw what was happening to you. Got it?’

‘Yes, sir. I have to think. I have to try and remember.’

‘No problem. Take your time. More soda?’

He accepts without hesitating. I switch off the tape recorder. It’s now time to find his mother. I don’t want her barging in and disrupting the flow.

I find her seated at the far end of the cafeteria. A coffee cup rests on the table in front of her. Closer inspection reveals the cup is almost empty. Time for a refill. I leave her with enough money to cover three more servings. She doesn’t argue when I ask her to stay put for a while longer.

I return to my witness. He smiles when I stride through the door. It’s a good sign. He’s feeling comfortable now and trusts me. I turn on the recorder and nod for him to continue.

‘Where must I start?’ Igor asks.

‘You start at the beginning, son, the very beginning. And you leave nothing out. I want it all – lock, stock and barrel.’

The lad sighs, then takes a deep breath and carries on with his story.

When he’s done I turn off the recorder. This boy has been to hell and back, trapped in a sinister world, abused by adult men – and all of this happening in my hometown, Port Elizabeth, the ‘friendly city’ with the filthy underbelly.

I promise the boy I will tell no one what he has told me. I know this isn't strictly true, because once I have had his statement typed up I will need him to sign it in the presence of his mother or another legal guardian. He's still a minor. But I will deal with that snag when I get to it.

I walk the child back to his mother. He's much calmer now.

Then I immediately head for the hospital. I've got to find this Igor's brother and check out the story for myself.

5

Wounded boy

I detest hospitals. The corridors are dank and gloomy. There are no windows, so the cheerful rays of sunlight are kept out.

Frankly, I am terrified of medical institutions. I reckon the only thing you get hanging around them is some disease you never had in the first place. I mean, it makes sense. You're entering a space teeming with millions of germs, viruses, bacteria and infectious diseases. You're bound to walk out with something you didn't ask for. Two weeks later, next thing you know you've come down with some flesh-eating bug and in you go again. It's a vicious circle. It's best not to darken those portals in the first place. I reckon it's a sneaky type of hospital insurance policy – one that ensures you have patients all year round.

The trauma wing is less bleak. This ward is fitted with a sliding glass door leading onto a small patio drenched in glorious sunshine.

It isn't difficult to find my person of interest. He's the only patient in the ward, not a nurse in sight. Just the way I like it.

The boy appears to be heavily sedated or in a deep sleep. I check the clipboard hanging off the iron railing of the bed. The name on the admission sheet confirms this is who I am looking for.

I quickly scan the information sheet. It's Greek to me, and much of it is an indecipherable scrawl that would make sense only to the writer. The particular doctor who penned this patient's record has done his profession proud. I do, however, manage to pick out a few terms like 'rectum' and 'haemorrhage'. I am alarmed by what I think I have read, but I need to find out what happened from the boy himself.

He's asleep now and I'm reluctant to wake him. My finger is throbbing. I

figure that since I'm in a hospital, I might as well seek medical attention.

On my walk back to Casualty I no longer notice the gloomy passages. I am too busy thinking about the boy in the ward. A nurse trusses up my finger, telling me it's broken and that I should try to avoid using it.

Action and reaction. My slamming the ashtray into the ox's face resulted in the concomitant reaction on the hand holding the makeshift weapon. I suppose no good deed goes unpunished.

Back in the trauma ward I find the patient awake and eating lunch. It's already 12:30. He's sitting upright, his back supported by two pillows. There is a nurse in attendance, straightening already straightened beds. I suppose she has to keep busy.

It turns out I know this nurse – intimately, in fact. Suzie looks up, recognises me and then drops her head in an effort to conceal a delightful cherry-red blush that spreads across her neck and face. She doesn't ask why I am here. She already knows.

The boy visibly tenses when he notices me, the knife and fork firmly clenched in his hands. The utensils seem to provide him with a sense of security. Or maybe Suzie's presence helps him feel less apprehensive about my sudden appearance. But he's clearly not expecting a visitor. He has stopped chewing and his jaw is visibly tense.

'Hi, I'm Detective Sergeant Max. Your brother has spoken to me. He's told me everything. Do you understand?'

He stares at me. I am trying not to look like I'm lying. I mean, I don't know exactly what happened. These things take time to uncover. But the boy says nothing.

'Listen,' I tell him, 'I can only help you if you tell me what happened.'

'I don't know what you're talking about.'

'The people who hurt you. I need to know who they are.'

He's on the complete defensive now. 'I've got nothing to say to you,' he says.

I decide to push him.

'I'm not sure that I believe you, son. The doctors say that you're bleeding

from the arse and they're having difficulty stopping the flow of blood.' I lean over and fetch the clipboard. 'It says so right here. Look'.

The boy looks alarmed. He's at a loss for words. 'Ah … er … ,' he stammers.

He's rattled, poor boy, but I have to push home the advantage.

'And your brother has laid a complaint with the police,' I tell him. 'So I have to investigate.'

This is all bullshit of course, but I hope it will open him up. But he's not budging.

'I don't want to talk about it,' he says.

I decide to hold off. I'll come back later and try a different approach when I think of one.

'Okay, son. I'm only doing my job.'

The boy flops back onto the pillows and closes his eyes as I leave. He's obviously terrified. He knows stuff he shouldn't, I think to myself. And my hunch is, the fact that he doesn't want to give up the names of the perpetrators points to them having some status or standing in these parts.

On my way out I stop by the nurses' station. Suzie's there. Her cheeks have returned to a normal colour.

'What's up with the lad, Suzie?'

'It's bad, Max. He won't talk. The medical report says he's been sexually assaulted. Looks like a foreign object was forced up him.'

'My God. Anything else?'

'Well, he's HIV-negative, thank goodness. The results came through this morning. But we're worried that if one of his attackers is positive, this boy will be infected. And he's lost a lot of blood.'

HIV and AIDS have only recently been detected in South Africa and the country is at the beginning of an unimaginable epidemic.

'He won't tell me anything either,' I tell Suzie. 'I don't know how to get through to him.'

'Bluff him, Max. Play the five-card trick on him.'

'And how do I do that, Suzie?'

‘Oh come on. You’re an expert at that.’

I go back to the patient. The boy opens an eye, then closes it again. He’s as defiant as ever. I try using a shock tactic.

‘Son, I’m leaving now. The good news is that you are HIV-negative. The bad news is that if the men who assaulted you are HIV-positive, then in six weeks’ time you are going to test positive. Your anus has been ruptured so badly that it is not impossible that you have been infected.’

The blood drains from the boy’s face.

I tell him about AZT, a drug the Americans have recently manufactured that delays the onset of AIDS. (The problem is that AZT is not available yet in South Africa. And if and when it does get to our shores, it’s going to cost a fortune.) And then I pull the five-card trick.

‘Look, if you sign a sworn statement, if you tell us who sexually assaulted you, when the treatment becomes available the state will give it to you free of charge. That’s the law. You can also sue the men who did this when I arrest them.’

I leave my words hanging in the air and exit the room. I have no idea where this investigation is headed. It is tantamount to whistling in the wind. I have nothing. Will he fold or will he call my bluff?

I wink at Suzie on my way out.

* * *

As I walk into George’s pub, a roar of laughter erupts. A few locals and George find the sight of my bandaged finger hilarious.

‘So, who the hell stuffed you up, Max?’ George quips.

‘That person still needs to be born, mate,’ I retort. ‘Listen, I saved you from taking a beating by that ugly mean machine, if you care to remember correctly.’

‘Yeah, sure, Max. And he’s even uglier now. No stuffing nose. I bet he sounds like a bulldog when he sleeps.’

George fancies himself a bit of a comedian. More laughter echoes throughout the bar. Everyone's in a good mood now. I decide to stop thinking about the boy and join the fun. Bernie emerges from George's office and stares at my finger.

'Broken, is it, Max? I told you so last night. You never closed an eye.'

'And I'm sure you never closed a leg, Bernie,' George wisecracks.

More laughter, even from me.

'Oh, piss off, George,' Bernie retorts.

I settle into a double J&B whisky, laced with plenty of ice and filled to the brim with soda water. That's how I like it. I scratch around in my jacket pocket and remove a container of pills they gave me at the hospital. The label suggests 'Do not mix with alcohol', so I shove the pills back into my pocket.

I'm well into my second whisky when something suddenly dawns on me: the brigadier and the feedback he expected from me this afternoon. The realisation sobers me up instantly, like a blow to the solar plexus. Panicked, I check my watch. I'm relieved to see it's only 1:30. I'm still on schedule.

I motion to George that I need to use the phone in his office. He nods. I dial the switchboard of our offices and the operator puts me through to the brigadier. But the phone just rings and rings. He must be out for lunch. Ah well, back to the bar.

I'm on my third whisky when Bernie suddenly yells that there is a call for me in George's office. Is it the brig calling back?

I pick up the phone. It's Suzie, the nurse.

'Max, he wants to talk to you,' she says.

My tension instantly eases. The boy has folded and I'm elated. I am going to get the story and I sense that it is going to be a big one – a very big one.

6

Running out of time

‘I’ll tell you, but I’m scared. This is hard,’ the boy says to me when I walk into his hospital room.

He leans back on the pillows and sighs. He is struggling to talk but the story gradually comes out, piece by piece. When he stops talking I switch off my recorder. Everything he has told me corroborates what his younger brother has told me. And there’s more. Much, much more.

This is serious stuff. Men picking up and abusing children in the most appalling fashion.

I thank him for being brave and hand him a form to sign stating that he has made the statement of his own free will. The testimony itself will be typed up later. He signs it because he knows now he will be entitled to get treatment for free should he test HIV-positive.

I sense a feeling of relief on his part, and leave him to rest. On my way out I pass Suzie at the nurses’ station.

‘Hey, Max, I need to discuss something with you,’ she calls out.

‘Not right now, darling. I really need to register this case urgently. I’m running out of time.’ As an afterthought I add, ‘Can you ask them to test for Rohypnol? The boy was more than likely slipped a tranquilliser.’

I dash off to the local cop shop, driving like a lunatic. At the charge office, I register a skeleton case docket under Act 41/1971 section 16: sexual offences committed against minors – boys under the age of nineteen. That is, statutory rape.

I didn’t want this investigation. The powers that be threw it at me. This is not my field of expertise. I’m a narcotics agent. But stuff them all now. No one is

going to take this case from me. It’s mine. I want to find the men who did this. I *have* to find the men who did this.

I phone the hospital from the charge office and get put through to Suzie’s office. She picks up and I give her the police reference number of the case docket.

I look up at the wall clock. Shit, it’s 5:00. The brigadier is going to blast me. I haven’t reported back to him yet.

7

Mr Ears

I head back to my office so that I can listen closely to the recording of the older brother's version of events. I will have to anchor my investigation on the evidence of both brothers. I don't have anything else to go on at this point.

I take solace in knowing that half a dozen cold beers are waiting for me in my mini fridge. Leaning back in my ultra-comfortable chair, I crack open a can. I'm quite chuffed with myself as I've accomplished a lot today. The beer is my reward.

I eye the tape recorder on my desk, lean across and press Play.

The boy explains that it all started years before, when a man who called himself Uncle Dave approached him while he was playing pool at the City Snacks Pool Den. I know the place. It is a popular hangout for pimps, sex workers and drug dealers.

Of course, customers gather there too. It's a perfect spot for paedophiles to pick out a young boy left to his own devices. The witness, who was then only fourteen, says he had never met this 'Uncle Dave' before. He knew all the other local moffies who would come to the den for a 'quick one' – a handjob in a car in a quiet back street. 'We get R20,' the boy says.

The problem for the kid is that he has a drug debt. He owes the local dealer R5 for a bag of marijuana he had bought the night before. All such debts need to be settled within 24 hours. This I know. It's my job to bust these guys.

If you don't pay, the dealer sends a heavy to rough you up. It's the way it is and the way it has been for ages everywhere across the planet where crime thrives just below the apparently placid surface of everyday life.

It is easier for the boys to 'do' a client when they are drunk or high. It doesn't

feel real and the boys forget about it quickly. But it's a vicious cycle. Get out to your corner or the street or the pool bar, buy the dope, smoke it, do the client, get paid, pay the dealer. Repeat, over and over.

The boy tells me he went with this stranger to get the dealer off his back. Uncle Dave is a nice guy, says the boy. He drove the boy to a secluded spot not too far from the pool bar where the child jerked him off. Then the man paid him and dropped him off back at City Snacks.

I know lots of young boys like this. I have seen them while doing my undercover work. They are streetwise and often homeless. Many don't have parents, or if they do, they don't care. Many are addicts or alcoholics. That's how you survive in a country filled with violence and prejudice. There are two sides of the war: those who are the victims, and those who are called on to do the work of the existing government. White men like me. We're keeping it all in place in some way. It corrodes and perverts everyone.

Underneath the bureaucracy of it all, the brutal law, I know we are all the same. But I don't think about it too much. I just want to do my job.

Uncle Dave clearly fancied the older brother because the boy tells me the man came back regularly for more 'quick ones'. Soon the contact graduated from mutual masturbation to full-blown sex. The liaisons moved from the car to either a hotel or Uncle Dave's house.

And then comes the bombshell. The boy tells me he was taken to Bird Island for sex. Not only with Uncle Dave, but with other men as well.

Bird Island is the largest of the Algoa Bay islands just off the coast of Port Elizabeth. Seal Island and Stag Island lie nearby. The islands are a well-known breeding spot for a variety of bird species. They are also conservation areas. There is a lighthouse on Bird Island built in 1898. Desolate and isolated, Bird Island is one of only six breeding grounds in the world for the Cape gannet.

My ears prick up. This sounds more like an organised ring than an occasional casual pickup. Who are these men? I wonder as the boy's voice hesitates on the tape.

The boy says that Uncle Dave would regularly arrange for boys to be flown to

Bird Island where they would ‘entertain’ men. For the kid, these trips were a bit of an adventure because the boys would be picked up in a helicopter. It was hugely exciting, he says, and once on the island the boys would be treated to a braai with plenty of meat and alcohol.

When the boy’s younger brother, Igor, turned twelve, he too began to hang out at the pool den at the weekends. By then Uncle Dave was a known regular. Soon he was insisting that Igor accompany them on the pickups. The man offered to pay double, the older brother confesses. The deal, however, is that the man leaves the younger boy out of it. Uncle Dave agrees to this but suggests that the younger brother watch them having sex. And so they drove to the man’s home in Bendor Avenue, Schoenmakerskop, a picturesque suburb south-west of Port Elizabeth.

The presence of his younger brother, the boy tells me, seems to affect Uncle Dave. He is more aggressive in his sexual approach. He forces the older boy to kiss him, which he says he hates. The sex itself he described as almost feral with the older man grunting ‘like an animal’. The anal sex was painful, the boy says, so much so that his anus was ruptured. But he claims that the payment afterwards, double the usual amount, made up for it.

I am taken aback by the boy’s nonchalance, the matter-of-fact way he tells me this part of the story. He sounds numb as he recounts it on the tape.

Afterwards, when the man had dropped both boys off at the pool bar, he had bought food for his younger sibling. ‘We had a foot-long hot dog with chips and salad,’ he says. The details of the meal are clearly important to him. It is not often he can afford to be extravagant.

The older brother goes on to explain that as he grew older, Uncle Dave began to lose interest in him, preferring the younger brother, who had just turned thirteen. Uncle Dave began passing the older sibling off onto his friends.

It is then that the boy first talks of one particularly vicious ‘uncle’, a man who all the boys reckoned was a sadist. I listen carefully, waiting to catch each detail. This man, the boy says, is well known because of his distinctive protruding ears. Because of this physical characteristic the boys call him Ore – Afrikaans for

‘ears’.

Next the boy goes into detail about what happened to him just two days earlier. He says he can’t remember much, apart from Uncle Dave approaching him at City Snacks and telling him that two of his friends would like to be ‘entertained’. The man gave him an address on a slip of paper and R320, a tidy sum, which included the taxi fare. The address was a block of holiday apartments, the boy tells me. I know the spot.

The boy recalls that when he arrived at the apartment, there were two older men there. One was lying on the bed, and the other was in the bathroom, apparently taking a bath. The man in the bathroom instructed the guy on the bed to pour the boy a drink. This guy didn’t seem happy about being told what to do and had muttered, ‘Bliksemse, Ore.’

When the man went into an adjoining room to fetch the drink, the boy peeked inside the bathroom. There he had caught a glimpse of a man with protruding ears lolling in the tub.

The boy tells me that he recognised the man in the tub, which made him panic. He considered making a run for it. But how would he escape? And besides, he had already been paid a handsome sum.

The man who had been lying on the bed returned with a strong alcoholic drink. The boy says he thinks it was brandy and Coke. No one spoke as the child sipped the drink. The man with the jug ears remained in the bath.

‘And then I remember nothing,’ the boy says. ‘I promise, sir. It’s a blank. And now I am here in hospital. That’s my story.’

8

Lucky break

I’m trying to attach faces and identities to two perpetrators. The victim – the older brother – says the men don’t use names. Terms of address are reduced to ‘sir’, ‘you’ and ‘uncle’. But these have to be relatively prominent people. They clearly have money. Or connections. Helicopters don’t come cheap.

My strategy is to start by investigating the scene of the sexual assault at the holiday apartments. Perhaps someone recalls seeing or hearing something the night the boy was there.

But at the block of flats, I am immediately stumped at reception. I could have guessed it beforehand. Few people use their real names booking into these joints. Signatures are just scrawls in the register.

The receptionist is a heavily made-up old hand in the business. Her face and body reveal the signs of rapid ageing brought on by years of too much drinking and partying.

‘Ja, I was on that particular night, Sergeant. But nothing out of the blue happened on my shift. I clocked off around 6 am. It was only the next night that I heard someone had called an ambulance to take a guest to hospital.’

Just then I spot a surveillance camera. Are the gods smiling on me?

‘Are there any more of those cameras in the building?’ I ask.

‘No. That one is for our protection. We take in a lot of money over weekends. Don’t want any criminals here. We don’t like that sort, you know.’

Yeah, like hell, I think to myself. I know what goes on in this type of establishment.

‘So, what about the tape covering the date in question?’

‘Ja, it’s running in the machine. We use the same tape all the time. Put it in and

then it reaches the end and starts again. Runs for seven days.'

'Good. Find a new tape because I am going to need that one.'

She's reluctant but has no choice except to hand it over.

Back at the office I play the old Beta tape on the video machine. The date and time displayed shows that the recording started a few hours before my witness would have entered the building. Four hours before, to be exact.

However, the tape is really poor quality. Like the cheap surveillance equipment at the apartment block.

I squint at the wobbly scene shown on the wobbly tape. It's difficult to identify any faces. Irritated, I fast-forward to the approximate time the victim would have entered the building.

I see a figure entering the lobby. This could possibly be my guy. The time is about right if I go according to the boy's statement. And then the guy's gone. I squint at the screen for the next fifteen minutes. Nothing. I fast-forward, looking for two figures exiting the building together. Again, nothing.

The victim doesn't know when or how he left the apartment. He was clearly drugged or unconscious. The time on the surveillance tape is now 4:30 am.

Suddenly something catches my eye. Two figures exit the building at exactly 4:33 am. I write this info down. I think these might be the suspects, but I need to be sure. I continue forwarding the tape until the timer gets to 8:00 am. Nothing of interest.

I realise that the only way I can get anything valuable out of this tape is with some expert assistance. I need a technical whiz-kid. I know exactly who to contact: my friend Terry, who heads the mobile police video unit. He's a genius in modern technology. I pick up the phone and dial his number.

'Terry, are you in your office at the moment?'

'Yep. As you can hear, I answered the phone,' he replies sarcastically.

'Wait right there, mate. Don't move.'

I grab the tape and rush down the corridor, the smell of those damn toilets still lingering. But I have to pass this way in order to get to Terry's office. Which also means I have to pass the brigadier's office.

My deadline for the report-back has long expired – by more than 24 hours at this point. I am convinced the brigadier is going to chew me up and spit me out.

His door is open so I can't avoid him. It appears as if he has anticipated my arrival.

'Afternoon, Max. Come inside, son.'

Something's amiss. Why is he being so friendly?

'Um, sir, concerning yesterday, I tried phoning …'

'Not to worry, Max. The old girl let me know how you helped her son. She has the utmost respect for you. Good work so far, lad. Now fill me in on the rest.'

I relate to the brig in as complete a manner as possible what the hospitalised victim had told me. He's happy enough with the report-back.

* * *

That went surprisingly well, I tell myself after the briefing. I'm not sure why, but I'll figure it out later. What's uppermost on my mind is getting to Terry's office and doing something with the tape.

Terry has mastered his state-of-the-art equipment and I have always reckoned that he is too smart for the South African police force. He should be working for Apple or for that genius guy in America – I think his name is Bill something.

Terry is waiting for me. I explain what I need and he puts the tape in one of his gadgets. The time seems to crawl by while he fidgets with various controls. He senses my frustration. I know that the dude is really giving it his best shot. But I am expecting miracles, and that's not fair. Soon my hopes of a quick breakthrough begin to diminish. Finally, he turns to me and says, 'That's the best I can do, Max. The tape has obviously been used over and over again. It's in terrible condition.'

I edge him out of his seat and look at the still image in front of me. I can make out two figures exiting the building. The one on the right is closest to the camera. He's about one pace ahead of the man on the left. Both of their heads are

bowed. I can’t make out a distinct profile.

I’m gutted. I try one last time.

‘Can you forward this pic by one frame, Terry? The guy on the right is closest to the security camera. One more frame and he’ll be closer to me on the screen.’

‘I’ll try.’

‘Do it,’ I insist.

Terry fiddles with a knob and then I see it.

‘Stop!’ I cry out.

I move closer to the monitor, desperately looking for something. Anything that will give me a clue to the identities of these suspects. And then I see it.

‘Have a look, Terry, and tell me what you see.’

‘I’m looking, Max. I’m not sure what you want me to see.’

‘The ears, Terry, the ears. The dude on the right has got protruding ears. They look like friggin’ wingnuts.’

I’m overjoyed. Perhaps this is my lucky break. I grab Terry by his regular-shaped ears and land a fat kiss on his bald head.

9

Looking for Wingnut

I scan through hundreds of headshots in the police photo bank looking for someone who might fit the image of the jug-eared man – I'll call him Wingnut – on the screen. But the search leads me nowhere. I can't find a match.

It's time to change my modus operandi. Stuff this Wingnut for the time being.

First, I need to pick up Uncle Dave. Although I've never met him, I know where to find him. Igor mentioned an address when I interviewed him in my office. The house belongs to a certain Dave Allen. He'll lead me to Wingnut, I'm sure.

Dave Allen is well known in police circles. He's a police reservist, holding the rank of lieutenant. He also heads the police underwater diving unit. In real life he's a businessman. He runs a guano project on Bird Island. *Guano* is just a fancy word for bird and bat shit, which makes for a very rich fertiliser because of its high nitrogen, phosphate and potassium content. It is highly sought after and you can make loads of money from it.

I'm definitely going to pop in on Uncle Dave. But first I call my friend Tommy Bell, the dog handler who assists the diving unit when required. He should know a bit more about the man I want to visit.

'Howzit, Tommy. Max here. I want to ask you something.'

'Shoot, Max.'

'Do you know if Dave Allen has an office in town? I need to talk to him about a minor matter, so to speak. A telephone number will do.'

'Dave's not in town right now, Max. He's on the island. I'm expecting him back on Friday. We're going to do some diving on the weekend. Anything I can help with?'

‘No, mate. Not to worry. Nothing serious. It can wait.’

‘Anyhow, I’ll give you his phone numbers. Work and home,’ Tommy offers.

I hang up after jotting down the numbers. I’m feeling irritated. I hate it when an investigation stalls.

10

The beacon

I’m planning to hit Dave Allen’s residence later this afternoon. I got it through the grapevine that he’s returned from Bird Island.

My regular partner is in Pretoria at this time, so I ask Gordon Lamastra to accompany me. He’s been with our unit for a couple of years now, and he’s reliable and trustworthy. We head for Allen’s house, each driving our own unmarked police-issue vehicle. Gordon has an appointment elsewhere later in the day.

As we pull into a smallholding containing a free-standing house, my mind is cast back to my childhood. And suddenly I realise I know exactly where I am. I have seen this house before – years ago, when my Hungarian stepfather used to entertain our family with a drive along Schoenmakerskop Road on summer Sunday mornings.

I remember the outings vividly, but I never enjoyed these rides because I knew how things would go once we got back home. My mom, my two sisters and I simply sat tight-lipped, occupied by our own foreboding thoughts. On those trips the road seemed to be never-ending, stretching for eternity. Maybe my mind was wishing for this to be the case. Bushes lined both sides of the road. I always kept an eye out for this house, which stuck out like a sore thumb among the lush greenery. It was like some kind of beacon, an assurance that the trip was still going to take quite a while. That thought was pleasing, comforting in a way, against the background of my two sisters gnawing their nails while my mom sat nervously in the front seat, her fists tightly clenched.

After a lengthy straight, the road meanders gently to the left, and then there’s a steep decline that allows one to see the sprawling blue ocean in the distance.

Huge waves disintegrate into layers of white foam as they crash into the rocks at the culmination of their journey. I suppose this view would be considered beautiful by most passers-by.

But to us, it meant a step closer to the halls of pain and misery. For the immigrant bastard that was my stepfather, it was closer to his hour of pleasure. The road eventually culminates in a T-junction. Turn right and you'll end up in Seaview, another beautiful part of my hometown's coastline. Turn left and you're heading back to the city. We always turned left.

In order to erase the thoughts of what was inevitably going to happen later, I always tried to count the number of fishermen on the rocks below as we made our way along the narrow road back to town. Eventually we'd make a quick stop at a roadhouse, where my stepfather bought ice-cream cones for everyone.

Heaven forbid, how I hated those ice creams. The look on the Hungarian's face as he watched us consume those delicacies made me sick. I could see the fear and tension written all over the faces of my mom and sisters. I hated myself at that stage.

There is nothing worse than being totally incapable of helping others when they so desperately need you to. I was only a child. My two siblings were younger than me. A span of two and four years, respectively, separated us. My mom took the major brunt of the violence – mostly in her attempts to stop the maniac from raining further blows down upon us. Once he started his beatings, there was no way to stop him.

My biological father was a drunk who abused marijuana. He also laid into my mother, beating her terribly at times. She divorced him when I was six. I never saw him again until I turned eighteen and graduated from the police training college. I duly sent him on his way. I had no feelings for him. He apparently died a drunk.

Mom swapped him for the Hungarian in the hope of a better life. It never materialised. He had grown up in communist Hungary. During the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, he witnessed the traumatic death of his mother at the hands of Russian troops.

In his flight to escape arrest by the Commies, he was shot three times in the back. The arsehole survived and was shipped out to South Africa by the International Red Cross. My mom married him after my dad left. The rest is history.

All of this comes flooding back as we arrive at Uncle Dave's house – this and so much more. The case I'm working – involving grown men abusing underage boys – touches a deeply painful and still raw nerve for me. It's not something I talk about, but I think about it a lot. And it haunts me.

* * *

It's 1972. Spring has arrived. I love this time of year. No more winter wind piercing through my flimsy school blazer and thin cotton shirt, biting at my upper body until my skin starts to burn. Purple-bluish-coloured knees sticking out from a pair of short school pants testify to the icy-cold conditions served up during a Port Elizabeth winter. And this discoloration takes place each morning during the daily trek to school. It's a depressing period for me. But as winter passes, my mood tends to lift.

A week after my twelfth birthday I am in high spirits. School's out and I'm enjoying a ten-day holiday before the start of the fourth and final term. I'm sitting on the stoep of the Harper family's home. They moved into our neighbourhood approximately two months before.

The kids are twin brothers, Bryce and Mickey, aged seventeen; their younger brother, Ferdie, who's the same age as me; and their sister, Gina, who is closing in on her fifteenth birthday.

I've got something going for Gina. When I'm in her company, I experience a feeling that is difficult to describe. It's a 'make a person feel good' feeling. A feeling that tells me that girls are good for boys.

'Hey, are you playing or not?' a kid calls out to me from the back yard of the Harper residence.

A couple of youngsters from the neighbourhood are involved in a game of cricket. Maintaining my position on the stoep in the presence of Gina, I howl back, ‘I’ll join you guys later.’

Gina and I are involved in a conversation that I hope will never end. The nature of our discussion is causing me to experience a completely new sort of feeling. A feeling emanating in the area of my groin, and I’m enjoying every glorified moment.

‘Well, if you’ve never French-kissed a girl before, then I’ll have to teach you, won’t I?’ is Gina’s reply when I tell her I’ve never done such a thing before.

Suddenly, I feel wetness in my pants. It’s without a doubt one of the nicest feelings I’ve ever had. Gina has my full attention now. Bugger the cricket – I don’t want this moment to end.

She’s wearing a tiny white top and a short skirt from which two long beautiful legs tumble out. I am beside myself with desire. Gina ends what has been an incredible and indelible moment for me by whispering ‘See you tomorrow’ in my ear.

That night I find it difficult to fall asleep. Gina occupies my thoughts. In spite of enduring a sleepless night – a happy sleepless night, I should say – I’m all cock-a-hoop early the next morning. So much so that I find myself ringing the doorbell of the Harper residence at 9:00 am.

Ferdie lets me in and leads me to his bedroom. It’s dimly lit. The sun’s rays find it difficult to break through the thick curtains covering the window. The room smells mouldy – same as mine. That’s nothing to be ashamed of. It’s what you get when your folks are part of the lower-income working class. Within seconds, my eyes adapt to the low light. The twins, Bryce and Mickey, are on Ferdie’s double bed along with another guy named Jacques. Jacques is seventeen, the same age as the twins. All three are engaged in a game of play-wrestling on the bed.

Ferdie and I stand to one side observing the proceedings. My thoughts are elsewhere. I’m dying to ask where Gina is, but I can’t do that right now.

It’s then that I pick up on something strange. Jacques is lying face down on the

bed with Mickey on top of him. Mickey suddenly starts to rub the lower part of his torso against Jacques, immediately following this up with three quick thrusts of his hip. Jacques breaks free, clearly upset at Mickey's behaviour.

'Are you a fucking moffie or what? Bumping against my arse like that with your dick!' Jacques yells.

'Yes,' Mickey throws back with a smile on his face.

It appears as if Mickey has derived some sort of pleasure out of this. His expression of contentment verifies this impression. Jacques turns his back and leaves the room. He enunciates his final exit from the house by banging the front door shut. The sound reverberates throughout the premises. I'm stunned, but the three Harper brothers don't seem the least concerned.

The noise of the slamming door brings the brothers' stepmother to the bedroom. She's a young woman – pretty, but sad. She's always sad; I'm not sure why. At that moment, all she does is glare at us. Then she leaves the room.

Then Gina enters. My spirits lift instantly. Her long, blonde hair is wet. She must have just got out of the bath. Our eyes meet and I get the impression that she's glad to see me.

I'm feeling uncomfortable in the room, so I suggest to Ferdie that we go play some cricket in the back yard. He agrees. There's no need to invite Mickey or Bryce for a game. They never play any sport with the boys in the neighbourhood.

By the time Gina emerges from the house, Ferdie and I are well into the game. The sight of her gives me the courage to suggest a break. Ferdie agrees and disappears into the house. Gina's wearing a tight-fitting white V-neck shirt, no bra. I can't hide the bulge of excitement pressing against my shorts.

She signals for me to follow her, and we go into the basement. It's dark and damp inside, but I don't care. Six cement pillars support the weight of the house above. Gina leans against one. I walk up to her and press my body against hers.

'You need to roll your tongue against mine,' she whispers in my ear.

No need for me to reply. I just follow her lead. Never before have I experienced such a wonderful, warm, intensely satisfying feeling.

‘We can do it again tomorrow,’ she says afterwards.

I’m really looking forward to it. She pulls me closer and I kiss her again.

Suddenly, my world of intense pleasure comes to an abrupt halt. The twins catch Gina and I French-kissing. They came into the basement without the two of us noticing.

‘What the fuck is happening here?’ Bryce yells.

‘Fuck outa here, Gina. Right now!’ Mickey screams in a high-pitched voice.

Gina’s off in a whiff. I’m left alone with the twins. And I’m nervous as hell.

‘So, you’re trying to fuck our sister, aren’t you? You’re a little prick,’ Mickey says scornfully.

‘No, Mickey. It’s not like that,’ is all that I can offer in return.

‘Don’t fucking lie to us. We saw what you were doing, you little cunt,’ he blurts out angrily.

I’m hoping that they’re going to turn this into a joke where we all walk away laughing. But not so.

‘Pull the little prick’s pants down. Let’s see what happened,’ Bryce orders.

Mickey proceeds to pull down my pants as well as underwear to below my knees. Two seventeen-year old guys making a mockery of me. Suddenly, without any provocation from my side, their mood changes to one of violence.

Mickey strikes me across the face with a flat hand. It stuns me somewhat. Thereafter, he immediately places me in a head grip and starts choking the life out of me. With gasping breath, I plead with him to stop.

‘It’s all a mistake, a mistake,’ I desperately cry out.

Then Bryce joins the fray. I feel many hands around my body, trying to hold me still. I’m not sure what their intentions are. If their aim is to beat me up, why aren’t they raining blows on my face and body?

It’s more like a wrestling match between them and me. But I’m fighting for my life. These dudes are serious. Gasping for air, I feel the energy being slowly drained from my body. My lungs are on fire. Eventually, one of them manages to clamp my head and neck between his knees, holding my limp arms still at the same time. I’m staring at the ground. The other twin removes what’s left of my

short pants and underwear from the lower half of my body.

‘We’re going to fuck you silly now, you little cunt,’ the twin who’s occupying a position behind me states breathlessly.

What happens next causes me to cry out to God for help, begging him to make them stop. It feels like the lower half of my torso is being ripped apart. The twins take it upon themselves to switch positions, holding my limp carcass in the air. I can bear this no longer. I call out to God again to help me. Thankfully, he answers my prayers. I slip into a world of darkness. No more fear. No more pain. Complete nothingness.

I am not sure how long this all lasts. But the resurgence of a searing pain rouses me from unconsciousness.

I’m alone, thank the Lord. Spread out on the cold basement floor with the lower part of my body unclothed. My neck aches like hell, but that’s nothing in comparison to the feeling in my lower torso. I’m burning up, as if red-hot flames are licking away at my exposed skin.

I scratch around and retrieve my torn and damaged pants and underwear. I need to cover my body. I’m finding it difficult to walk. I hobble painfully out of the basement and exit the back yard via a small gate giving access to a lane. It’s raining. What appear to be purple droplets of rain lash out at me as I struggle to find my way home.

I tell no one what has happened, fearing that if I do my stepfather will knock the hell out of me for allowing this to happen. Even when someone else in the neighbourhood complained about the twins to his parents, who rushed to the cops who then came to question my parents, I kept quiet.

I was terrified of being tagged a moffie. Kids are cruel. That stigma would not wash off easily.

I never found out how the investigation ended. The twins’ father murdered the stepmother a short while later. He was arrested and released on bail. That’s when he and his children moved out of the neighbourhood. The newspaper carried an article many months later, stating that the father had been acquitted on the murder charge because the stepmother died of a heart attack. Some years after

that, I heard that one twin had undergone a sex-change operation, paid for by one of the richest men in town.

Back then I was too young to understand the legal implications of what I had experienced. I blamed myself for the attack, believing that what I was doing with Gina provoked the twins into teaching me a lesson. I've lived with this secret for a long, long time.

Memories of that incident in the Harpers' basement often churned in my mind on those long drives with my stepfather. It intensified my hatred of him, and my wish that he was dead.

Nevertheless, the beatings continued. My mom eventually divorced my stepfather after all the kids had left the house. He killed himself a short while later. The bastard jumped off a chair with one end of a rope secured around his neck and the other end tied to a roof beam. He wasn't mourned, especially not by me.

11

Arresting Uncle Dave

Gordon's rapping on the window of my car brings me back to reality. Uncle Dave is the current occupier of the house that I regarded as my 'beacon' so many years ago.

In the garden, I see four teenagers hosing down wetsuits. They're bare-chested, sporting well-toned upper bodies. You need to be fit for the sport of underwater diving,

I knock on the front door, with Gordon standing next to me. As the door opens I recognise my suspect, Dave Allen. I've seen his mug often enough in the newspaper. He's a good-looking man, in the mould of a young Clint Eastwood, with longish brown hair atop a head sporting a smooth and handsome clean-shaven face.

He has broad shoulders and a muscular chest, with both arms displaying a decent set of biceps. This dude is an athlete, make no mistake. I'm sure that there's a rippling six-pack beneath the T-shirt. This is the type of guy women swoon over. They'd love him to place his shoes beneath their beds.

Dave Allen is a cult figure in our hometown. He hobnobs with the crème de la crème of society. He discovered the wrecks of the *Sacramento* and the *Doddington* just off the South African coastline a few years ago, and donated some cannons, muskets and ammunition to the local museum. He's highly respected by many. But not by me.

I introduce Gordon and myself, displaying the search warrant at the same time. The warrant has been issued by the brigadier. It's all legal, but I've kept it close. I did not fancy applying for the warrant through the office of the senior public prosecutor. Dave Allen has fingers in many pies. Any leak whatsoever and my

investigation would most likely be scuppered.

I tell Allen what he needs to know, and that's all. We're here to search for pornography and pornographic-related material. He's immediately up in arms.

'I'm a lieutenant in the South African Police,' he protests. 'And right now I have guests. This is a most inopportune time. Can you please return later?'

He's pulling the rank card, but it's a wasted effort. He's a reservist lieutenant, an honorary appointment. I'm a fully fledged cop vested with genuine power and authority, although I'm only a sergeant. I'm his senior in this situation, and I am sure to let him know that.

'You'll have to get rid of your guests,' I tell him, 'because I'm executing this warrant immediately. If anything untoward is found on your property, I will be obliged to arrest everyone present. The choice is yours.'

I follow him into the house, determined not to let him out of my sight. Allen's house guests are two young effeminate boys. They immediately sense that something's up and take off like a shot. It must have been my refusal to return their smiles.

As I had advised Gordon, I expect that the porn is somewhere in his bedroom. My witness had vouched for this from his hospital bed. So I play a little game with Uncle Dave. We search the lounge first. Nothing. Then the kitchen. Nothing. The bathroom turns up blank as well. But as I edge closer to his bedroom, I notice he is visibly nervous.

Finally, we go into the bedroom. By now, Uncle Dave is a wreck. Gordon and I are old hands at this sort of search, but we're coming up with absolute zilch. Not a single porn magazine or video anywhere. I return to the wardrobe. I've already checked it, inside out as well as top to bottom. I climb back on the chair to check the top shelf once again. Then my eye catches something I must have missed before: an indentation to the left and right of the wardrobe's top panel. I call for a torch. Gordon obliges. And Uncle Dave is now very jittery.

Situated below each indentation are two miniature handles. I tug at both of them simultaneously. Pain shoots through my broken pinkie but there's no stopping me.

The entire top panel of the wardrobe lifts. I'm close, I know. The pain in my finger is forgotten. The panel rises 90 degrees, revealing a hidden compartment. And there it is: a pile of pornographic literature, gay magazines and videos filling the compartment to the hilt. Everything appears to be of a homosexual nature.

'Bingo,' I say, winking at Gordon.

The suspect calmly sits down on the bed and states resignedly, 'Okay, you've got me.'

This angers me. Got you, you piece of shit? Is that what you think? Got you for possession of pornographic material? Big deal. Your shock is still coming. I don't only have you, I'm going to fucking bury you, I think to myself. If only I could say it out loud.

Uncle Dave has now adopted a smug attitude. Possession of porn does not carry a hefty sentence. It'll be a small fine, that's all. And he knows it. His smugness prompts in me an urge to drive my fist through his chest. Fuck him – I'm going to bring him down to earth.

Forcing myself to remain calm, I haul out the case docket that I've been concealing under my shirt.

'Mr Dave Allen, I'm arresting you for the possession of pornographic material, which is filed as charge 1. I'm also arresting you for allegedly committing sexual offences with minor persons, to wit, boys under the age of nineteen, also commonly known as statutory rape. This will be filed as charge 2. You have the right to remain silent or you can choose to make a statement. Should you wish to make a statement, it will be taken down in writing and may be used as evidence against you. Do you understand?'

He's utterly bewildered, unable to accept that his little private world has been infiltrated by the long arm of the law. He's untouchable, or so he thought, with friends in very high places.

'Sergeant Lamastra, please secure the suspect in accordance with police regulations.'

Gordon handcuffs Uncle Dave's hands behind his back while I hastily gather

all the evidence from the hidden compartment. We march him outside to my vehicle. His protégés are now standing close by. Their supposed hero has taken a massive fall. I'm enjoying the humiliation he's enduring and I consider my feelings justified. This one is for me and all the other children these fuckers prey on.

We wrap up the arrest earlier than expected. Gordon still has time on his hands and agrees to follow us to the cop shop. I proceed to the Louis le Grange Square police station, Gordon in tow.

Dave Allen is seated next to me. He's not so smug any more. In fact, he's displaying signs of defeat. There is an aura of hopelessness about him now. He's definitely not comfortable with his hands cuffed behind his back, but I don't give a shit.

Almost immediately he starts to talk. In fact, he begins to sing like a canary. He makes astonishing revelations. But he's careful. At first, he refuses to mention any names. He's trying to place the major part of the blame at the feet of nameless people. Nameless, powerful men.

But what he's telling me means nothing. He needs to put it in writing with an accompanying signature. I simply ignore him.

And then he drops a bombshell: he mentions a name. And not just any name, but the name of a very powerful cabinet minister. I'm taken aback, but I'm careful to conceal my shock. Then he names two more cabinet ministers. He threatens to open the whole can of worms.

Is this guy for real?

He's clearly not prepared to take the fall on his own. I continue with the silent treatment, confident that, come tomorrow afternoon, he will have revealed the identities of all the perpetrators involved. My refusal to respond to his allegations is having a telling effect. It's not long before he drops another bombshell.

He offers me a bribe to make everything disappear: R100 000, to be exact. This is a lot of money in my world. I think about it. I could settle the bond on my house and still have a huge chunk of change. Or I could resign from the force

and open a pub. Bernie and I in collusion – it's a nice thought. But I don't answer.

A silence ensues as we complete the rest of the journey to the cop shop. I take Allen's fingerprints on the prescribed form. He refuses to make a statement. I thought as much. Anyway, I prefer it this way.

I want to let him hang himself, figuratively speaking, so I adopt an appropriate strategy. I release him on a J-127, an official warning to appear in Court 15 of New Law Courts the following day, no later than 9 am. I suspect that he's going to contact his cohorts, thereby setting the cat among the pigeons. Nervous people tend to rattle, and when they rattle, they make mistakes. Plenty of them.

Allen declines an offer to be taken home. Instead, he asks to make a phone call. I refer him to the charge office sergeant.

As for me, I'm feeling good. The game is in play and the odds are in my favour. I decide to hide out for a while at John MacDonald's place. John is a motor mechanic by trade who recently joined our unit as a reservist. But first I have to call and make sure he's home. I pull over next to a public phone booth and dial his number. He answers.

'Hey, John, what are you up to?' I ask.

'Howzit, Max. Got a fire going. Bring a bottle. I've got plenty of meat.'

'Brilliant, mate. See you in a jiffy.'

I dart across the road to a bottle store and pick up a bottle of J&B before heading to John's place. As I pull into his driveway, I'm greeted by the smell of burning doringhout. The fire is going great guns. This is going to be a great night, I say to myself. John is a jovial character whose face takes on a reddish tint once the liquor starts to talk. And I can see that it's already talking. No problem. It may be early in the evening, but John is capable of drinking through until the next morning. Not that this session will last that long. I have to pick Bernie up at 10 pm.

I watch as the fire slowly devours the doringhout as John feeds the flames. My whisky glass, lovingly grasped in my good hand, is filled to the brim with ice and soda. I'm feeling relaxed and satisfied by the day's work.

Suddenly my pager buzzes, ruining the moment. I don't recognise the number. John gives me a nod, allowing me to use his home phone. I place the call, which is answered after two rings.

'Kabega Park Police Station, Constable Rudy speaking. How may I help you?'

I know Rudy.

'Rudy, it's Max here. What's up?'

'Max, we've got problems with that suspect of yours – Dave Allen. The complainant called us to say he's been harassing her. We had to remove him from her house. He wants her to drop the charges.'

Uncle Dave's cohorts have told him to do this. They're panicking. Just as I thought.

'Is he there with you, Rudy?'

'Yes, Max.'

'Put him on the line.'

Dave Allen takes the phone.

'Sergeant, I'm just trying to fix things, that's all. Meant no harm, really,' he pleads pathetically .

'Well, you're doing your cause no good. Those cops want to arrest you right now for interfering with witnesses.'

I sketch the current state of affairs for him.

'Listen, tomorrow's procedure in court will only be a formality,' I explain. 'The prosecutor is going to remand the case, giving you an opportunity to appoint an attorney. You will have plenty of time to find legal counsel, or to come to speak to me. I need you to recall what you said in my car – something about you not being the only person involved. If you want to talk to me in an honest manner, maybe we can strike a deal. You could possibly turn state witness if there are bigger fish involved. I'm not promising you anything, but that is a possibility. Now go home, Mr Allen. Give it a rest.'

I hang up. Back at the fire John knows not to pry too much.

'Is everything cool?' is all he asks.

'For the time being, mate. For the time being. Anyhow, let's drink. I don't

want to eat right now.'

John raises his glass to this. South Africans have a weird attitude when it comes to a braai. We like to get a few drinks under the belt before we start eating.

* * *

The following morning I'm all cock-a-hoop while travelling to the court building. But my mood is soon dampened.

It's approaching 9 am and there's no sign of my suspect. The court session begins and I request that the prosecutor hold back on my case. He agrees and proceeds with other matters.

At 9:45 there's still no sign of my suspect. By 10:30 I've had enough. I tell the prosecutor to call my case. Fuck Dave Allen now. I will put his arse in jail. That will guarantee he'll be here next time.

The court orderly calls out Allen's name three times down the corridor. But Uncle Dave's a no-show. The magistrate accordingly issues a warrant of arrest effective immediately. Now I just have to pick him up.

But first I stop by the office. I feel like cracking open a beer, but it's too early. Plus there's too many people around. I can't be seen drinking at this time of day. And then Gordon pops in.

'Max, I think you need to get to the mortuary.'

'What the hell for? I've got a suspect to locate.'

'That's just it. Your suspect is waiting for you at the mortuary. Stone-cold dead, mate,' he says with a smirk.

'Fuck off. You're taking the piss, aren't you?'

'No, Max. Word is spreading like wildfire. He's well known in police circles. Better get down there and check it out.'

I rush to the mortuary like a bat out of hell. This is not at all what I expected or wanted. If Allen's dead, then I will be denied seeing him being sent to jail for a

couple of years – my moment of retribution.

At the mortuary I bump into Oom Sias, the mortuary assistant.

‘Got something for you, Max. Heard that he might be one of yours.’

‘Please don’t let it be him.’

My voice is barely audible. I’m praying silently in deadly earnest.

But my prayers aren’t answered. Spread out on the mortuary slab, attired in only his birthday suit, is the body of Dave Allen. A single gunshot wound right in the centre of his forehead displays the manner of his demise.

I’m totally gutted. Now all of his victims have been robbed of justice. And I’ve been robbed too. I stand there, looking at the corpse and the wound. And then it dawns on me: something appears to be out of place.

I’m assuming Uncle Dave would have held the barrel of the gun flush against his forehead before pulling the trigger. If so, then why aren’t there any gunpowder burn marks to the skin surrounding the point of entry?

Very strange …

CHRIS

12

Two suspect suicides

It was 1987 and I had been back in South Africa only a few months after my little sojourn in exile.

I had had an interesting time in London, but I was immensely relieved to be back in Cape Town, my favourite city in South Africa. I was sharing a house in Gardens with other journalists, and back working at the *Cape Times*, where editor Tony Heard agreed to re-employ me – despite the fact that I had gone into exile without informing him first.

The mid- to late 1980s was undoubtedly one of the most eventful periods in South African political history. Marches, protests, running battles between township factions, clashes with police, and children killed in the crossfire of gang shoot-outs were almost routine events. We saw the tears flow. We heard the cries. We watched open-eyed while the prayers of victims' relatives were being said. It was a time of tragedy. It was a time of hope.

It was against this backdrop of revolutionary change and communities in crisis that I spent the most rewarding years of my journalistic life. There was a collective sense of excitement in the so-called left-wing journalistic fraternity. We were so sure of what was right. We were fearless. We did not question our duty to try to hold accountable the government of the day, and we fought bitterly when anybody tried to stop us.

But immense pressure on the press is exactly what resulted when the body of a cabinet minister was discovered at his house.

On 29 March 1987, a Sunday morning, news broke that South Africa's minister of environmental affairs, John Walter Edington Wiley, had been found dead on a single bed in his beloved Noordhoek home in the Cape.

Wiley had had a somewhat eclectic political career, and had party-hopped until he chose the ruling National Party as his final political home in 1980. Despite this apparent opportunism, Wiley's career-long campaign against the abuse of marine resources was at times marked by bitter clashes with Nationalist ministers – even after he had joined the party. As it turned out, that particular passion would lead to his meeting a man who would drastically change the course of both their lives: Dave Allen.

The relationship between the two men had first come to my attention after the shock discovery of Wiley's body early that Sunday morning. The cabinet minister's death made headlines as far as the United States. Even the *Los Angeles Times* reported on the event, suggesting that Wiley's apparent suicide might pose an election problem for PW Botha and the National Party. The election was set to take place in two months.

The opening paragraphs of the story, published on 30 March 1987, read:

> John W.E. Wiley, minister of environmental affairs and tourism in President Pieter W. Botha's Cabinet, was found dead at his home outside Cape Town on Sunday, an apparent suicide.
>
> Wiley, 60, was found on his bed with a bullet wound in his right temple and a .32-caliber pistol at his side, according to the police, who said that 'no crime is suspected' but that their investigation will continue.

The story went on to recount how President Botha had visited the tightly guarded home on the Sunday afternoon to convey his personal sympathy to the Wiley family. Botha later expressed his cabinet's 'great dismay' at the minister's suicide. 'The devastating news of the sudden death of our colleague has shocked us to the hilt,' Botha later said in a statement issued in Cape Town.

The second-last paragraph of the *Los Angeles Times* article read:

> Concern was also quietly expressed Sunday in Nationalist circles about the

stigma attached to suicide in this morally conservative and highly traditional society.

It did not take long for a rumour to reach me that there could be a link between the minister's sudden demise and that of Dave Allen just weeks earlier.

Allen was a 37-year-old Port Elizabeth conservationist, diver and police reserve lieutenant, and also the son of veteran naval officer Charles Allen, a long-time commander of the SAS Donkin Naval Unit.

Allen Senior's distinguished naval career began on the *General Botha* training ship in the Cape, after which, in 1929, he joined the Merchant Marines before leaving ten years later to serve in the Second World War. His service later took him to the recaptured Libyan port city of Tobruk, where he was harbour master for two years. He also commanded the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve Base in Port Elizabeth from 1954 to 1963.

It was a pedigree to be proud of. But it was Allen Junior that Wiley had been close to since meeting him in 1977, through the younger man's efforts to promote underwater and environmental conservation. Following that fateful meeting, the two men were said to have remained very close for nearly a decade.

And then suddenly they died less than a month apart – both violently, of gunshot wounds. Officially, both had died by their own hands.

After receiving the tip-off, it became my job as a reporter to try to trace the links between the two men. I tried to find out what had bound them in life and whether this had ultimately led to their deaths. In an attempt to discover the truth I spent at least seven weeks finding – and speaking to – some of their former friends, enemies, colleagues and associates in Cape Town, Port Elizabeth and Johannesburg.

One of those who confided in me was Allen's brother, Geoff, who had been my colleague on the *Rand Daily Mail*, a left-leaning anti-apartheid daily newspaper in Johannesburg. Geoff revealed to me that his brother's association with Wiley had been not only very close, but also very profitable. He told me that Dave had owned valuable guano concessions for Bird Island and for five

islands off Namibia. In addition, Dave had recently obtained a concession for underwater farming, growing mussels and oysters, in Saldanha and Algoa Bay. This was all turning into a multimillion-rand export industry to the Far East. Allen had frequently given slide shows and lectures in parliament on conservation to John Wiley and other politicians.

The two men had frequently visited each other whenever Wiley was in Port Elizabeth. Wiley's office, I learned, had also been the first to telephone his parents after Allen's death.

I learned that Allen was found shot on Schoenmakerskop beach. He was dressed in a suit and several letters were found next to his body, which was found on the shore in the area of the *Sacramento* wreck, from which the diver had salvaged a cannon and where he first met Wiley.

From Geoff I learned that the last person to see his brother alive had been journalist Robert Ball, who had spoken to Allen. Allen's demeanour had worried Ball, who said his parting words to Dave had been something along the lines of 'How do I know that if I turn my back you aren't going to pull a gun out of your pocket and blow your brains out?'

As far as I could ascertain, Allen had died of a head wound and had been found on the beach on 25 February just two hours before he had been due to appear in court. The information I had was that Allen had resigned from the police reserve on the day of his arrest. The police, however, were saying nothing.

Following my long conversation with Geoff, I wrote an article, which appeared in the *Cape Times* on 30 March 1987, about how Wiley's friend Dave Allen had also committed suicide.

This article, my first report on Wiley's and Allen's deaths, did not mention that Allen's arrest had been in connection with his allegedly having sex with underage boys.

The editorial decision to omit this information could have been taken because of the *Cape Times*' professed squeamishness about publishing details of people's private lives (although the paper never seemed to baulk at doing this in the case of somebody considered 'unimportant'). It reminded me of editor Tony Heard's

editorial outrage back in 1985, when I worked for *The Star*, the Johannesburg daily that published my story in which the private life of struggle icon Allan Boesak was laid bare alongside a dirty-tricks campaign run by the Security Branch to discredit him. But the decision to leave out details from the *Cape Times* story might also have been taken because the police would not confirm the reason for Allen's arrest.

Meanwhile, it was claimed that two 'police colonels' had visited Wiley on the morning of his death – and had imparted 'sensitive information' to him. And, although I don't know where the allegation first surfaced, it was soon being whispered in some political and social circles that Wiley was told that he too had been implicated in child sex allegations along with Allen. But the police wouldn't confirm this.

The next piece I wrote appeared on page one of the *Cape Times* on 4 April 1987 and was headlined 'Police probe Wiley death rumours'. This story reported that the connection between Wiley's and Allen's deaths was being investigated, but the police were still being coy, saying there was no evidence to link the two events. It was all speculation, the police said, and they suggested that the media wait for an inquest for answers.

To muddy the waters even further, the media was openly speculating that Wiley's death might 'harm the government politically', whatever that meant at the time. Moreover, the rumour that two police colonels had visited Wiley before his death refused to go away. However, no one would deny this either, at least not on the record. All the official police spokesperson would say was that the allegation or suggestion was wilful and malicious, a 'slur' on Wiley.

If the police had hoped that this would be the end of the story, they were wrong. The rumours of dark secrets and dastardly deeds were not dying down.

I started focusing my investigation on the conflicting accounts given by Wiley's wife, Jeanne, and the police and others concerning the sequence of events on the morning of the politician's death. By then, members of the Progressive Federal Party (PFP) – the always fiery and always timeously opportunistic opposition party – had become convinced that there was indeed

something ‘fishy’ about the death of the minister.

My next story contained the PFP’s ultimately futile call on government to reveal what it knew. That article appeared in the *Cape Times* on 10 April 1987 under the headline ‘Wiley: Call on govt to come clean’. Opposition party members wanted to know why the police never officially denied that two police colonels had visited the Wiley home on the morning of 29 March. If there had been two such visitors, what was their purpose? Did they ‘impart sensitive information’ to Wiley on that day?

The PFP also wanted to know if the sexual abuse charges had been withdrawn against Allen – and if so, why they had been brought in the first place. Further questions were asked about Allen’s guano concessions. Who granted them, and had they been fairly obtained?

Meanwhile, speculation remained rife about incidents that allegedly took place at Wiley’s home on that Sunday morning and which could have triggered his apparent suicide. The police version of events was that Wiley’s body was discovered when his wife Jeanne, after fetching the morning papers from the local café, had found the house locked at 11:30 am.

But when a colleague of mine spoke to Jeanne later, she said she had left the house at 9:30 am to ‘go and pick up some pineapples and get braai wood’ and that she had returned at 10:30 am. The only time that was not accounted for on the Sunday morning was between 9:30 and 10:30. My colleague also spoke to Delfino de Sousa, owner of the Noordhoek Supermarket, who said that on the day of Wiley’s death his wife had arrived at the café at ‘just about 9 am’, and had asked whether her husband had picked up the newspapers.

For its part, the government was moving fast. On 11 April, the front-page headline of my story announced: ‘Police complete probe on Wiley’. The story began:

> Police have completed their investigations into the apparent suicide of Mr John Wiley, the Commissioner of Police, General Johan Coetzee, said yesterday.

Unsurprisingly, Coetzee said there had been ‘absolutely no substance’ to allegations that the investigation would not be finalised before 6 May, when white voters were expected to go to the polls. He was adamant that the police investigation had been concluded and that all that was outstanding was the pathologist’s report. After that it would be up to the Attorney General to decide whether or not an inquest was necessary.

Apart from noting ‘with regret’ that the *Cape Times* had ‘completely disregarded a request that newspapers should refrain from spreading unfounded rumours about Wiley’s death’, Coetzee also offered a belated official denial that the late minister had been visited by police officers on the morning of his death.

* * *

The more people I spoke to about Wiley, the fewer I came across who had any fond memories of him.

Although people are generally loath to speak ill of the dead, those who used adjectives like ‘honourable’ and ‘above reproach’ in the same sentence as the name ‘Wiley’ were definitely in the minority. The late cabinet minister emerged quite strongly as a man lacking not only in professional and political probity but also personal integrity. Most of those I interviewed remembered Wiley as a businessman who ‘dishonoured agreements’, a politician who ‘went back on his word’, a man who ‘dropped friends’ and a father who ‘let down even his own family’.

Finally, after I had held a series of interviews with a wide range of people, the *Cape Times* allowed me to go to Port Elizabeth to pursue the story further.

I arrived there so focused on getting the story done in the few days I was allowed away from the newsroom that I would not even have noticed whether the wind was blowing in the Windy City or not. All I could think about was meeting up with a source who was supposed to have all the ‘answers’.

I don’t remember whether our meeting was arranged after he had made contact with me or whether I had approached him after being given his name by another source. Nevertheless, I was expecting valuable information from him because of his supposed inside knowledge of the fishing industry and National Party political personalities. However, I was not prepared for the startling claims he would make during the lengthy interview.

What he had to share with me was shocking. As we were huddled together in a rather notoriously seedy bar, this inside source literally whispered to me that Dave Allen had taken young boys, classified as coloured, to Bird Island for sex orgies. According to the source – who told me that he moved among top members of the ruling party – Wiley and two other high-ranking cabinet ministers had accompanied Allen on some occasions. These jaw-dropping claims propelled my investigation onto quite another level.

At that time, it was very rare for a member of the English press to have a ‘deep throat’ (informant) in the ruling party. This meant that officials from the governing party could rest assured that their nefarious activities – both political and personal – were most unlikely to be exposed. The officials were further protected from public scrutiny by a variety of laws and emergency regulations. If any loopholes could be found, there was always plausible denial. And for the really persistent truth-seekers, a range of more extreme measures could be deployed to ensure permanent silence.

In other words, the old NP had the suppression of truth down to a fine art.

Thus, I listened aghast as my NP source told me that one of the boys taken to the island for sex had ended up in hospital – after a pistol inserted into his anus had been discharged or fired.

However, the same source was at pains to stress that Wiley was not the cabinet minister implicated in that horror story. It was someone else, someone much higher up. In fact, by then Wiley had taken a strong public stand against rape. Back in 1981, he had even gone as far as supporting the idea of castration as a punishment for rape.

Against that background, it would be safe to assume that the last thing Wiley

would have wanted was to have his own death linked to that of an associate accused of paedophilia. Yet my source, along with other information I had turned up, was making clear this very link.

Great significance was attached to the timing of both deaths. Allen's body was discovered just two hours before he was due to appear in court on charges of committing sexual offences with boys under the age of nineteen. Had he made it to court alive, the identities of his accomplices might have been revealed in public.

Wiley's demise came in the wake of government's announcement of a general election, in which he was preparing to defend his Simon's Town seat. If Wiley had not died, both his private and public lives could have imploded in a spectacularly destructive way – for both him and his party.

According to my NP source, Wiley had been living too close to the edge of the abyss for too long. Despite Wiley's immense power as a member of cabinet, the source felt that his 'personal predilections' had left him deeply vulnerable. After repeated assurances on my part not to reveal his identity, the source told me that Wiley had been the subject of blackmail on several occasions during the last two years of his life.

Some of the blackmail allegedly involved 'acquaintances who had exploited him because of his homosexual preferences'. The source claimed that, in certain cases, 'valuable fishing concessions' were involved. Moreover, the source said that certain people in government were well aware of the details of Wiley's private life, and even knew of the blackmail.

The source indicated that those in the know in government obviously felt 'acute concern' over the incalculable damage it would cause the ruling party should Wiley's 'secret life' be exposed. He described how Wiley's 'blackmailers' had taken full advantage of the government's announcement of the next general election. 'Threats to expose him were received … and certain deadlines … were set … ,' the source stated.

Fascinated by what I had been told, I tried to find corroboration. A second source told me that Wiley had indeed appeared under 'a lot of pressure' when he

visited a private doctor a week before his death. He had sought medical help after breaking out in boils and developing styes in his eyes.

This was not the first time that the minister had shown signs of suffering from severe stress. On Christmas Eve, a few months earlier, he had turned to the then minister of health and population development, Dr Willie van Niekerk, for a prescription for tranquillisers – twenty Ativan tablets. That prescription was the subject of a front-page lead article I wrote and which was published on 20 May 1987 under the headline ‘Health minister in Wiley mystery’. In his defence, Dr Van Niekerk said that he regarded Ativan as a ‘useful’ tranquilliser.

But for Wiley, that was not a once-off need. A Cape Town chemist, Gary Black, revealed in an affidavit handed in at the inquest that he too had supplied Wiley with Ativan tablets – a total of 140 pills over a period of eleven months – per a doctor’s prescription. Interestingly, Dr S Rushworth, who, according to the chemist’s records, had prescribed the drugs, denied ever treating Wiley.

But back to the NP source. According to him, Wiley was not the only one being blackmailed. He said Allen had become a target too – and a very soft one at that. That was partly because the boy injured on the island had suffered serious internal damage. He told me that the boy had to be admitted to a Port Elizabeth hospital in a critical condition – and needed emergency surgery to ensure his survival. That gave a lot of bargaining power to Allen’s blackmailer, believed to be a person with a close link to some of the youths who had been taken on the Bird Island trips.

Allen took the threat of exposure seriously enough to fly to Cape Town and make a payment to the blackmailer. However, when a second demand for money followed, he refused to pay. Soon the cops were knocking on his door. Not long after that he was found dead with a bullet wound to the forehead.

In addition, some of my other sources were adamant that Allen was visited by Wiley in Port Elizabeth in the days preceding his death. According to them, the two had taken their last walk together on the beach near where they first met – and where Allen’s life would later end.

While I was still in Port Elizabeth, a source told me that the silence of the

family of the gunshot victim had been bought to the tune of at least R20 000. I discovered the name of the surgeon who had operated on the boy – and had undoubtedly saved his life – but he was bound by patient confidentiality, and thus unable to disclose any details relating to the patient, least of all his identity and the extent of his injuries.

* * *

I was running out of people to talk to. So I turned to the one official who I thought would be able to confirm or deny at least some of what I had been told, were he only willing to do so. He was Detective Sergeant Mark Anthony Dawid Minnie, who was investigating the sexual offences allegedly committed against children by Allen.

I called the cop at his office and he agreed to meet me at the Elizabeth Sun Hotel in Humewood. When I asked how I would be able to identify him, he said that he would be wearing a yellow baseball cap with the logo ‘Happy Harry’.

On the day of our meeting I took up a watchful position in the hotel lobby. I did not have long to wait. Soon a youngish man, wearing the said ‘Happy Harry’ cap, swaggered confidently through the hotel foyer.

We shook hands and formally introduced ourselves. Detective Sergeant Minnie took a seat opposite me.

Judging by the wary looks he was giving me, it was obvious that he was not there to give me the scoop of my journalistic life. Despite that, I decided to go for the jugular and asked him straight out to confirm – or deny – what I had already been told.

I was quite surprised when the policeman told me – albeit off the record – that Allen had implicated Wiley and others in paedophilia. Mistakenly feeling that I was actually getting somewhere with him, I dropped the name of the most senior cabinet minister alleged to be involved.

It was like throwing a hand grenade into his lap. Minnie jumped up

indignantly, looked me straight in the eye, and hissed: ‘Fuck off, you bitch! Are you trying to get me killed or what?’ He turned on his heel and stormed off.

We would not speak to each other again for 30 years.

MARK

13

The senior public prosecutor

The day after Allen's death I call Suzie, the nurse, from my office. She's not answering her home phone, so I try her work number. She answers this time.

'Hi, Suzie, Max here. Is my witness still under your tender loving care?'

'Yes, Max. The boy's still here. He won't be going home for a while.'

'Reckon I've got some bad news for him. He's not going to like it.'

'Before you continue, Max,' Suzie interjects, 'is your bad news possibly related to the story in this morning's newspaper?'

'What story?'

'The story about Dave Allen's suicide.'

Fuck! I've been so engrossed in my own self-pity that I've completely forgotten about the newspapers.

'Suzie, whatever you do, do not allow that boy to get anywhere near a paper.'

'Not to worry, Max. He's not a reader. He hasn't asked for a newspaper since he's been here.'

'Good. Keep it that way.'

I hang up, then yell at the top of my voice for someone to bring me the morning paper. Hanna, our secretary, is in my office within seconds with the desired item.

'I thought you'd fancy a read, Max,' Hanna tells me. 'It's bloody bullshit what they've written in the papers.'

Hanna is up to date on the case. She types the statements that I've written by hand or recorded. She's already completed the two brothers' statements.

I'm livid as I read the final sentence of the article. Uncle Dave apparently left a suicide note explaining why he decided to take his own life. It boils down to

him being unable to bear the excruciating pain he allegedly suffered from an injury sustained in a motor-vehicle accident many years ago.

What a bunch of absolute hogwash – the bastard tried to bow out in a blaze of glory. But not if I can help it …

I immediately head out to the offices of the Uniform Investigation Division. They handle all inquests – the formal investigations relating to unnatural deaths.

‘Who’s dealing with the Dave Allen suicide?’ I ask as I enter the division’s secretarial office. Three females have their noses buried in typewriters.

‘Blommetjie,’ one of them replies.

Blommetjie, aka Constable Alwyn Blom, is a genuine and pleasant man. In fact, he’s so pleasant that he’ll go out of his way to please all and sundry around him. At times his boyish features and likeable nature result in people taking advantage of him. As I walk into his office, he also has his nose buried in something – namely, an inquest docket.

‘You’ve got the Allen suicide, Blommetjie?’

‘Busy with it at this moment, Max. The investigation’s almost complete. Just need the state pathologist’s signature on one document, and then I can forward the entire docket to the office of the senior magistrate. Death by suicide will be the ruling in this case.’

‘Mind if I take a look?’

‘All yours. Go ahead.’

I quickly read through a statement issued by the person who discovered the body on the beach. I then look through a statement made by the cop who was summoned to the scene.

Something is amiss.

The suicide note is also in the docket. It confirms the story in the newspaper. But it is all bullshit. I know differently.

And, finally, I spot the photo filed in the inquest docket. It’s a beautiful police snap of the deceased as he was found at his final resting place.

I am perplexed by Blommetjie’s failure to pick up on the questionable part of the statement made by the guy who discovered the body. It’s a glaring anomaly.

‘Blommetjie, have you read the statement made by the person who came across Allen’s body?’

He nods in the affirmative.

‘Notice anything peculiar?’

Blommetjie shakes his head no.

I hand him the photo of Allen sitting in an upright position with his back leaning against a cement block. A gun rests on top of the block. Allen’s head is slumped forward with his chin resting on his chest.

While Blommetjie looks at the picture I hold out to him, I quickly check the back of the docket for other exhibits that have been handed in. The gun must be listed there. It is, registered as a 9mm Walther Parabellum PPK. These firearms are standard police issue, handed out to full-time career cops as well as reservists.

‘Nothing strange to me, Max. Guy shot himself in the head. That’s all.’

I leave it at that. I also pick up on the fact that no mention is made of the cartridge, which surely had to be found at the scene of the suicide. Did it simply disappear into thin air?

‘I need to ask you a favour, Blommetjie—’

The constable hastily interrupts me. ‘Max, say no more. I think I know what it is, and if I agree it could ultimately cost me my job. Anyhow, I suddenly have this urgent need to go to the loo. Please excuse me. I’ll be back in five minutes flat.’

Blommetjie has read me like a book. As he leaves the office, I quickly pick up the photo and insert it back in the inquest docket, which I still have in my possession. I dart into the secretarial office two doors down.

‘No need for any alarm, ladies,’ I announce. ‘I know exactly where the copier is.’

They’re not concerned in any event – they’re too busy typing. I feed the documents into the copy machine in a frenzy. Just as quickly, it spits out the duplicates I so urgently desire.

The copying completed, I place the original inquest docket back on

Blommetjie's desk. He's still in the toilet. I need to be careful how I manage matters with regard to the duplicate documents I now have firmly in my grasp. Any leak and Blommetjie's job could be on the line. Remember what I said earlier about people taking advantage of him. It's so true.

Back in my office I summon Gordon. He enters, munching on a hamburger. I simply love the smell of onions mixed with beef. Hunger pangs claw at my stomach.

'Only think of yourself, don't you?' I dig at him.

'Fuck off. You weren't here. I felt hungry so I went down and got a burger.'

The cafeteria downstairs makes awesome burgers.

'Want a bite?' he teases, waving the half-eaten burger in my face.

'Piss off and shove that burger up your fundament. No, better still, place your bum in that seat. I need to show you something.'

I hand the photocopied statement to him, as well as the photograph.

'Read that quickly, and before you say anything, I need you to know that the gun lying next to the deceased is a 9mm Walther Parabellum.'

Gordon responds within two minutes. 'The scene was definitely staged, if you go according to this statement,' he says.

These are precisely the words I want to hear. Anyone familiar with the 9mm Walther Parabellum will tell you of its nasty recoil action. It's got an ugly kickback. Holding that particular firearm at the unnatural angle of shooting yourself square in the forehead would result in the fired gun being flung from your hand. Clear as daylight. However, the witness statement in part reads as follows:

'My son and I spotted Mr Allen's van on the beach, and after walking along the beach we found him dead, sitting upright against a cement block, gun in hand. I removed the gun and placed it on the block.'

What now? I once again ask myself. I decide to throw a spanner in the works. Gordon leaves, and I get on the phone. The telephonist at the *Eastern Province Herald*, our local newspaper, puts me through to Chris Rennie's office. He's a journalist who works as a crime reporter. There's no answer. I get rerouted to the

editor’s office. A female voice answers.

‘I need you to convey the following message to Mr Rennie,’ I say.

‘Who, may I ask, is calling?’

‘My identity is of no concern at this stage. It’s imperative that you get Mr Rennie to check the records at Court 15 of New Law Courts. He must concentrate on yesterday’s court roll for the day. He’ll be mildly surprised at what he uncovers.’

I hang up immediately. Am I being a bastard for acting in such a manner? Not at all. I have personal reasons for wanting to have a go at Uncle Dave and his cohorts.

If the journalist follows my cue, he will uncover the number of my case docket, the related charges, as well as the name of the accused who has been charged in accordance with the alleged offences. It’s all there in black and white. All he needs to do is peruse through the court record book for Court 15. It’s a public document, open to all. Nothing underhanded about it.

Let the truth prevail. I smile sinisterly to myself.

Two days pass by. There’s nothing in the newspaper. Is Uncle Dave manipulating matters from the grave? He did have a lot of clout in the community. Citizens in our town are mourning him as if he was a saint. This is wrong. I want to see the record put straight.

The public have the right to know what an evil world their so-called hero lived in during the twilight hours. They need to know about his depraved sexual desires. I’m driven by a burning desire to disclose everything. I need to act with caution, though. It would be foolish of me to reveal everything that I know at this stage – especially after Gordon confirmed my suspicion that the suicide scene looks staged.

Everything points to foul play. If Dave Allen died by any means other than his own hand, then we’re dealing with murder. Or perhaps an assisted suicide.

Foul play implies that the case will be referred to the Murder and Robbery Squad for further investigation. The case will thus be removed from my hands. This scenario doesn’t go down well with me. My best option would be to play

everything by ear.

Also, I know I am on very dangerous ground. If word gets out that I know some of the other, high-up names mentioned, I would not put it past the security police to organise a little something to get me out of the way.

For now, I am being cautious of everyone, trusting no one I don't know.

I still need confirmation regarding one more document that I copied from Blommetjie's file, so I pay a visit to an expert in this field – Eddie Marco.

Eddie is a handwriting expert in the employ of the South African Police. I like Eddie. He's the type of person who will go out of his way to help me with an investigation. I can also trust him to keep his mouth shut.

At his office, I hand him the copied version of the suicide note. Eddie studies it thoroughly through a thick lens. Minutes pass before he says, 'Going to need a specimen, Max. Have you got one?'

I knew beforehand that this specimen thing was going to be a problem.

'The closest thing I have to a handwriting specimen is the signature of the deceased on the official warning statement I issued him,' I reply somewhat sheepishly.

I hand Eddie the warning statement. I realise that I haven't offered anything too useful – most signatures simply look like scrawls. Eddie studies the handwriting samples carefully and then says: 'Max, my friend, I don't want to get your hopes up. You haven't given me much to work with. However, off the record, I'm willing to state that the same person is not responsible for what's written on both documents. Bring me a decent specimen and I'll give you an answer that will stand up in any court of law.'

I thank Eddie for his time and leave his office feeling pretty content. Slowly but surely my suspicions about the demise of Uncle Dave are being confirmed.

In order to get a specimen of the deceased's handwriting, I'll need to visit his house again. There must be something lying around that he's written. Possibly a grocery list, an order for pornographic material or even a diary – I don't know. I've got to find something.

Once I have proof, when no doubt whatsoever exists in my mind that the

deceased was murdered or was the victim of an assisted suicide, then I'll hand the case over to the Murder and Robbery Squad.

A proper specimen should clear up all remaining doubt. Right now, I console myself with the fact that I'm actually doing part of the investigation for the squad, something they'd appreciate. I'll go look for a handwriting specimen at Uncle Dave's house tomorrow.

I head back to my office, stopping off to pick up a hamburger from the cafeteria. The aroma of beef and onions fills my office. I want to dig into the burger straight away.

But my hunger pangs will need to continue unabated for a while longer because as I sit down, my eyes fall upon a handwritten note on my desk. It's in red ink. Must be urgent, or I'm in some type of shit. In my world, anything written in red ink denotes importance or trouble.

The note reads: 'Contact the SPP urgently.'

Why would the senior public prosecutor be looking for me? I have no pending investigations or court cases requiring his attention. I dial his direct number.

'Senior public prosecutor's office …'

It's him.

'Morning, sir. Sergeant Max here. '

'Oh yes, Sergeant Max. Concerning the Dave Allen investigation, which I happen to have no knowledge of, I need you and the docket to be in my office straight after lunch. Clear?'

'No problem, sir …'

He hangs up. At least he's giving me time to munch my burger.

The senior public prosecutor is a highly intelligent man who has worked himself up into a powerful position in the legal profession at a relatively young age. He's smart, suave and handsome. You'll always find him surrounded by a bevy of gorgeous beauties when he's dining out. And don't forget the men. All of them important, rich people. I do happen to get around in my town. It's the nature of my job.

I walk into the SPP's office, the case docket held under my arm. The smell of

English Blazer aftershave lingers tantalisingly in the air. It's a Yardley product, affordable only to the rich, or so I think.

He stands up – a man of above-average height, immaculately attired in an expensive-looking black suit. The accompanying white silk shirt and impressive-looking red tie add to his aura of confidence. He gazes sternly at my 1,78-metre stature, eyeballing me from head to toe. I'm not intimidated.

'Why is it that you did not approach me first with this case?' he asks, clearly annoyed.

Am I missing something here? This guy's upset, in a flutter regarding this case, and he has no cause to be. I'm not obligated to discuss dog shit with him. I'm the fucking cop, not him. If the law has been broken, I investigate, I arrest and I see to it that the case lands up in court. His job is to delegate work to the team of prosecutors beneath him.

'I had no reason to discuss it with you,' I reply. 'I decided that in order to expedite the investigation, applying for the search warrant through the office of my brigadier would serve my cause better. I have the necessary affidavit justifying my application.'

'Show me what you've got.'

I hand him the docket and he casually retires to his chair and begins to read it. The waiting gets to me – I'm dying for a smoke.

After a while the SPP writes something in the docket, closes it and hands it back to me.

'That's all. Thank you,' he says.

I'm dismissed. I turn and walk out.

At this point my sole intention is to get out of this building as quickly as possible in order to light up. I'll read the entry he made in the docket later. Outside, I appreciatively puff away on two cigarettes in quick succession before departing for my office.

Only once I am at my desk do I check the docket. I'm flabbergasted. No, in actual fact, I'm fucking pissed off.

I fly into the brigadier's office. He reads the entry by the senior public

prosecutor for the magisterial district of my home town.

‘Appears as if you’ve ruffled some feathers, Max. The SPP must be acting on instructions from higher authority. Who, though? That’s the million-dollar question.’

I proceed to inform the brigadier of my suspicions regarding the ‘suicide’ scene – namely, the witness finding the gun resting in the deceased’s hand and no trace of the cartridge anywhere. I also relate to him the fact that the deceased bore no gunpowder burns to his forehead. The old man is intrigued.

‘Right now you’re sitting on a powder keg, Max. If it explodes, it’s going to blow up in your face. You need that handwriting specimen as much as an alcoholic needs a drink. However, if you go into that house, the SPP will skin you alive. My advice is to sit back and let things play out on their own accord.’

‘And keep your mouth shut because walls have ears,’ he quickly adds.

Back in my office I re-read the SPP’s entry in my docket. It’s written in bold red ink and reads as follows: ‘All investigation into this matter must cease immediately’ – signed, ‘John Scott’.

14

Fateful Tuesday

It’s Tuesday, a few weeks after Dave Allen’s ‘suicide’. On my way to work I’m greeted by billboards along the road displaying the headline ‘Cabinet minister commits suicide’.

I’m intrigued, so I pull over and buy the morning edition of our local newspaper from a vendor. After establishing the identity of the deceased minister, I realise that I need to get to the brigadier’s office without delay. Is it possible that Uncle Dave was not bullshitting me with regard to certain revelations he made on the day of his arrest? I ask myself.

I rush into the brigadier’s office and immediately share the revelation that on the day of his arrest Dave Allen had mentioned the name of the recently deceased minister.

‘Seems as if the chickens are coming home to roost, Max,’ he says in a flat, unemotional tone of voice.

The old man is close to retirement. A staunch member of the Dutch Reformed Church, he has given the major part of his life to the service of the state. The rest he shares between God and the ponies. The state of affairs with regard to our case is not going down well with him. Someone is tying our hands behind our backs. The brig’s not happy and neither am I. But he advises restraint.

‘At our last meeting, I told you to sit back and let things play out on their own accord. That was a month ago. Continue doing so, son. They’ve got the watches, but we have the time. Let them use whatever connections they’ve got in order to quell the flames. Eventually, these low-life scum are going to hang themselves.’

I leave his office aware that I have come to feel totally different about him since I’ve been spending some time with him on this investigation. He’s not such

a grumpy prick after all. In fact, I now view him as a wise old owl – although owls tend to be moody at times, granted.

I pop into George's pub for lunch. He serves a mean steak, egg and chips – tasty, and more than enough to fill your gut. Ruddy well cheap too. Bernie senses a change in my mood.

'I can tell that today's story in the *Herald* has got something to do with the case you're investigating, Max. You're bloody well smiling like a Cheshire cat,' she chirps girlishly.

'Possibly,' is all that I'm prepared to offer in return.

'Things are starting to look real nasty, Max,' Bernie says in a hushed voice barely loud enough for me to hear.

'No, babes. You're wrong. Things are starting to look real damn good. I had a hunch that these bastards would start rattling. It's exactly what they're doing. They're shitting in their pants right now. Anyhow, let's enjoy the rest of the day and celebrate.'

Wiley's suicide has aroused a lot of interest among journalists in the country. Everyone's looking for the reason he would have taken his own life. I could point the vultures in a possible direction, but I won't. Let them do their own digging. Anyway, I don't trust anyone now. We're flying close to a very large and dangerous flame. I wouldn't put it past the powers that be to send someone posing as a journalist to find out what I know. They could even take me out, I think to myself.

The general consensus is that Minister Wiley was experiencing financial problems of such magnitude that he decided to end his life. The journalistic frenzy is short-lived. However, inside information leads me to believe that 'Die Groot Krokodil' – PW Botha, the president of South Africa – has put the fear of God into all editors regarding the publication of information that points to an association between his deceased cabinet minister and the late Dave Allen.

Botha is no doubt protecting his party. Elections are approaching, with 6 May looming in the not-too-distant future. Freedom of speech? My arse. The National Party is running scared, and consequently using strong-arm tactics in order to

protect its interests. Does this explain the mystery of my local newspaper refusing to follow up on the lead I supplied a month ago? Reporters usually pounce like lions when fed information of this nature.

* * *

Two days later, while enjoying a quiet moment in my office, the peaceful silence is broken by an unexpected call from my branch commander.

‘You need to get your butt over to the Security building,’ he says. ‘Two colonels are waiting for you at this very moment.’ He supplies me with the floor and office number.

The wing housing the Security Branch is in a different building from mine. Access is through a private entrance, a five-minute walk from my office. As I enter the premises, a feeling of foreboding envelops me. The place is dark and curiously quiet. I know where I’m headed, but it’s a destination I feel wary about reaching.

I have the feeling that I am at the centre of the Afrikaner fiefdom’s enforcement arm. The powerful and efficient Security Branch is in charge of countering sabotage and other subversive activities that threaten the apartheid state. Guys working at the South African Security Branch are not cut from your ordinary cloth. Loyalty to the Afrikaner Broederbond – the influential secret society dedicated to promoting Afrikaner control in government, the economy and culture – needs to be proved all the way back to the arrival of Jan van Riebeeck.

These Security Branch guys are vetted, screened and vetted again before being allowed to join this brotherhood. There’s too much ‘English’ blood coursing through my veins even to be considered as a member of this protected and secretive clan.

I know of only two Englishmen who have met their vetting standards and who have been taken in by them. One is a Rhodes University graduate. The other is

running around somewhere in Ovamboland, South West Africa, fighting a war on behalf of the South African government in a territory we should have relinquished ages ago in terms of international law. But you can't get that point across to these knuckleheaded Dutchmen. The Americans have blown the danger of communism way out of proportion, to the extent that they're chasing their own tail. They got our government convinced that the 'Reds' (Russia and China) are intent on destroying South Africa.

As I arrive at the specific office number supplied to me by my commander, two guys who are already seated invite me in. They're complete strangers to me, definitely not locals. Both are dressed in grey suits. More than likely these were purchased from the same Indian tailor, who probably offered the guys a cheap cut of cloth and made the suits in haste so as not to waste any time in pocketing R500 per customer, this being the annual clothing allowance afforded to these dudes by the government. Five hundred rand gets you two cheap-assed suits, two coarse-necked shirts, two matching ties and a pair of shoes. Most tailors throw a pair of socks into the mix as well.

After a brief exchange of pleasantries and greetings, I'm instructed to take a seat. The guys get straight to the point. What I thought was going to be a friendly discussion soon transforms into a full-blown interrogation.

One dude assumes the role of the good cop, with the other one coming across as pretty bad. What the fuck! Am I the enemy here? We're on the same side, aren't we? It soon becomes obvious to me that they're 'fishing'. They don't know much about my discussion with Uncle Dave.

They're afraid that I might be 'concealing sensitive information' supplied to me by the deceased party. They are not interested in establishing whether there are other players involved in a possible paedophile ring. They're simply intent on protecting existing players.

Their attitude proves to me that I have opened a can of worms. Not out of my own doing, however – I was asked to investigate. I stick to the story I gave to the brigadier, revealing to them the same information I've shared with him. Nothing more, nothing less. They will speak to the brigadier at some stage if they haven't

already done so. I also notify them of the senior public prosecutor’s decree to halt all further investigation into the matter. This seems to put them at ease. I’m dismissed.

A bitter taste runs through my mouth.

CHRIS

15

Squashed

After weeks of investigation, it was hard not to suspect that David Allen and John Wiley had died because of paedophilia, blackmail, a looming cabinet scandal of epic proportions – and the urgent need to protect the reputations of certain other top politicians.

It was a hell of a story. There is no other way of putting it. However, little of what I knew would eventually appear in print.

The inquest failed to establish the real reason behind Wiley's death, and no clear picture emerged of the reason for what still appeared to be a suicide. Furthermore, it was found that no one could be held criminally responsible, either through an act or an omission.

The day before the inquest, on 14 May 1987, I wrote a story under the headline 'Wiley inquest in Simon's Town today'. I pointed out that in South African law an inquest had limited scope. That story also contained this rather promising-looking announcement:

> After an intensive seven-week investigation into Mr Wiley's life and death, the *Cape Times* will publish the 'Wiley Dossier' after the inquest.

We were alerting readers to the fact that I had interviewed dozens of Wiley's closest business and political associates and friends in an attempt to clear up some aspects of the mystery surrounding his death.

I had spent many hours seeking facts from every possible source willing to discuss the intimate details of the sex and professional lives of a cabinet minister and his police reservist friend, as well as a couple of cabinet colleagues. I had

spoken to a source whose information was based on the account of a Bird Island eyewitness. I knew for a fact that a child victim needed a life-saving operation. I was told of concessions lost and given, of brazen blackmail and blatant corruption. The most explosive of these allegations were not vague, but very detailed. I even had an off-the-record confirmation from a hostile cop that cabinet ministers had been implicated in acts of sex with children.

But any hopes I might have had of seeing in print any counterbalance to official ‘findings’ were dashed by the newspaper’s decision to handle the matter with what I deemed to be unwarranted diplomacy. I was not allowed to reveal most of what I had uncovered during my investigation. This was not something I accepted without a fight. I argued, I raged, I threw tantrums as draft after draft of the story was gutted by the news desk until there was a version deemed safe for publication.

This excessive caution exercised by the *Cape Times* in the case of the Wiley story was as baffling to me as it was infuriating. Various excuses were used, including the fact that my primary source was a ‘colourful character’, as if that automatically made him a liar.

Although I had always applied the same standards of journalistic treatment to the living and the dead, the newspaper acted like it had never heard the words ‘dead men can’t sue’. In fact, I had known the paper to be less cautious in accusations against people still very much alive.

I would like to think the newspaper was once again just being overly respectful of privacy – despite the matter clearly being in the public interest – but I could not stop wondering whether there was more to it than that. In my moments of darkest suspicion, I feared that the newspaper could be trying to protect two other cabinet ministers who had been named to me as having been on the alleged sex tours to Bird Island. But then, I would argue with myself, why would a liberal paper that had fought so bravely to expose the excesses of the apartheid government want to protect two of its most notorious stalwarts?

Perhaps Mahogany Row (newspaper management) simply didn’t want to see the newspaper dragged through the lengthy – and expensive – ethical and legal

battles my Boesak story had put *The Star* through. Or maybe they thought the paper would be accused of hypocrisy for allowing me to write about the private life of an NP minister (or three) when it had condemned me so strongly for exposing the private life of a struggle icon.

I did not have the answer. And nobody ever gave me one.

Although not everyone involved in the newspaper's decision-making processes was as liberal as editor Tony Heard, I could not even begin to identify the person responsible for ensuring that the 'Wiley Dossier' was reduced to an insignificant little tattletale.

Of course, it was no secret that *Cape Times* news editor Colin Howell had an unhealthy belief in the credibility of government officials – especially policemen. Despite the fact that I usually wrote the bigger stories of the day, he and I clashed – often. In a confidential memo that I got to read, he went as far as to describe me as 'our unguided missile'. Still, he did not have sole decision-making power over what went into the paper and what was kept out of it.

I suspected then, as I still do now, that it was probably the result of a collective call by the newspaper's hierarchy, inspired either by a lack of courage or an obligation on the part of somebody to cover up the truth.

Either way, when the 'The Wiley Dossier – a *Cape Times* investigation' finally appeared in the paper on 16 May, it was a masterpiece of understatement. The headline of the front-page piece posed the question, 'Who was the real John Wiley?' The blurb continued:

> The motive behind Mr Wiley's suicide – not clearly established in the inquest evidence this week – appears to be as baffling and secret as was the true nature of his character during the closing chapter of this life.

The newspaper then warned its readers that 'during an intensive seven-week investigation into Mr Wiley's life and death, *Cape Times* reporter Chris Steyn found herself bombarded with accusation, insinuation and rumour which,

without specific corroboration, cannot be published'.

The paper did admit that during interviews with at least 25 people across the country, including political and business associates of Wiley, new insights had emerged:

> A picture far removed from what most South Africans believed the former Oxford cricket blue and dashing man-about-town to be started taking shape … In reality, Mr Wiley preferred the company of men to women.

The story was a whitewash, so much so that on reading it the ruling NP – accustomed as it was to being subjected to a regular battering by the newspaper – must have blinked twice and double-checked that it was not reading a new English version of its beloved Cape newspaper, *Die Burger*. Indeed, the story as it appeared in print that day had been so watered down that, on reflection, I felt it would have been better if it had not been published at all. Even if people were able to read between the lines, they would have been hard-pressed to come to any useful conclusion.

The most glaring omission from the published story was that it contained no reference whatsoever to what had allegedly occurred on Bird Island. And the story's only redeeming feature was that it at least included a mention of the charges against Allen. It also contained a quote from sources in the gay community who confirmed that Allen had a preference for young boys whom 'he could get rid of when they turn sixteen'.

In the end the 'Wiley Dossier' served mostly as a roll call of Wiley's achievements in terms of his education, career and political life. Yet his death stood in stark contrast to his glittering persona. He was found on his single bed surrounded by books on a bedside table next to a lamp that was nothing more than a mounted bare globe. These unglamorous surroundings were in sharp contrast to his flamboyant personal image. He was noted for his immaculate dress sense, always wearing expensive and neatly tailored suits or fashionable

casual wear.

Wiley's younger son, Mark, had told the inquest court that his father had been 'bitter and disillusioned' because 'exceptional pressure' had been exerted on him to sell his beloved De Goede Hoop Estate manor house in Noordhoek. Finality of the sale was to have been reached in the week ending 30 March – the day after he killed himself. His wife disputed this and said that although she was aware he had financial worries, she did not think this or the upcoming election would have driven him to kill himself.

This was corroborated by his elder son, Jeremy, who said that his father's indirect involvement in the affairs of the company couldn't have contributed in any way to his death; nor did his death affect the financial or trading position of the company, which was, he said, 'healthy and sound'.

That Wiley had not left a note baffled everyone. This was because he was regarded as a 'meticulous' man who 'always wrote notes', even to thank people for the smallest and most insignificant gestures.

In the end, unsurprisingly, the court found that 'no one could be held criminally responsible, through an act or an omission, for Mr Wiley's death'. But the story did highlight that Wiley had died caught in a web of deceit spun of his own good intentions and colourful lifestyle. His much-publicised marriages and other liaisons with beautiful women, such as Hollywood starlet Linda Christian, turned out to be the bright side of a shadowed life. In reality, I wrote, he preferred the company of men to women.

This had become increasingly clear, I informed readers, during interviews with several of Wiley's close associates in Port Elizabeth and Cape Town, and was something openly discussed in gay clubs in the city after Wiley's death. This had made him vulnerable to blackmail and it was this, a source had told me, that had finally threatened to expose him. I could never corroborate this allegation.

It was easier to confirm and prove Allen's proclivity for young boys. There was one boy who had openly admitted that he had lived with Allen for years before being turfed out when he turned sixteen. I also reported that sources had said that Wiley had visited Allen in the days before his death.

I was deeply disappointed that my newspaper had opted to sanitise my story. I felt it read more like a pamphlet than an exposé, and South Africans who were interested in it were left with more questions than answers. Of course, that non-story became the source of much debate and speculation over countless glasses of wine in the Café Royal, where Cape Town's journalists met after work.

At some point the Wiley inquest docket was returned to the office of the Cape Attorney General because of the possibility that press investigations could bring new facts to light. But they never did and we never returned to the story.

In all fairness, no newspaper could have afforded to let one of its most prolific hard-news reporters languish indefinitely on an investigation full of dead ends – literally and figuratively. But I never stopped thinking about it.

MARK

16

A boy called William Hart[1]

There’s another character who plays an important part in this story. William is a lad who lives on the street. He plies his trade at Five Ways, an intersection at the top of Albany Road in Port Elizabeth. He asks passing motorists for spare change. Once he has enough money, he clocks off and heads for the local liquor store.

William is an alcoholic who also smokes a joint on the odd occasion – anything to lift his spirits and help him temporarily forget his wasted life. He’s credited with having set his high school ablaze on the eve of a midterm exam.

William was never arrested for the crime, so everything is pure speculation, of course. But I know better. His parents kicked him out of the house when he was still very young. They just couldn’t handle the booze and the drugs.

In the summer, he sleeps in St George’s Park, not too far from Five Ways. Everyone in town knows William. He comes from good stock. His family owns an engineering workshop in North End and a home in the posh suburb of Summerstrand. In the cold winter months, his parents allow their son the use of a Wendy house situated in their back yard, but he’s not allowed access to the main house. I don’t blame his parents. William doesn’t either. He knows that once he’s inside the house, he’ll loot and pilfer, ultimately pawning the goods so he can buy booze and drugs.

But in spite of all these personal drawbacks, William is a likeable fellow. In fact, he is actually a registered informer with the police. As the eyes and ears of the neighbourhood, he helps the guys from the housebreaking unit a lot.

When homes are burgled in the plush area of nearby Mill Park, the thieves tend to hide the loot in the immediate area, usually in St George’s Park. They

return later, mostly at night, to collect their ill-gotten gains. If William notices anything suspicious, he pounces. I've always wondered why he hands over the stolen goods he comes across to the cops. And why risk being arrested for possession of suspected stolen property? Maybe the police reward is on par with the amount of money he would have collected at a pawn shop. In other words, he's a useful character to have in your area.

William is the repository of many, many secrets.

17

In search of bigger fish

Five months pass with nothing in the papers regarding Dave Allen's sexual escapades. I handed the info on a plate to the *Herald*, yet nothing was reported. My hands are still tied by virtue of the senior public prosecutor's decree prohibiting me from pursuing my investigation.

But then, towards the end of July, the sun starts shining on the case. An article appears in the *Herald* regarding the upcoming Allen inquest. The story quotes the court roll on the day of Allen's death, revealing that Allen had been scheduled to appear in court on charges of 'sexual offences with male juveniles'.

At last, some light is being shed on Uncle Dave's dark past. The 6 May elections have come and gone. The Nats won in a landslide victory. Surely some apparent ban from high up, prohibiting newspaper editors from publishing articles referring to the 'Wiley–Allen suicide connection', has been lifted. Is the cat about to be set loose among the pigeons? I ask myself.

On 6 August another article on Allen makes front-page news in the evening edition. It's an astonishing story. Allen, the newspaper article suggests, could no longer bear the pain from an old back injury and had committed suicide. There was no foul play.

Letters had supposedly been handed in to the inquest – letters written by Allen. One letter was about the chronic pain; the second was an apology to his parents.

It was the first time that some semblance of a narrative emerged about Allen's last hours alive. Our case against him is referred to, and mention is made of an affidavit from Robert Ball, the man who last saw Allen on the beach.

Ball says he had met Allen while walking his dog about 6:25 am on 25

February. The two men strolled on the beach, chatting about this and that – Allen's back pain, his business, the police reserve. Allen had looked depressed, 'a bit down', Ball had noticed. He had asked Allen if he was going to be okay, to which Allen had replied he would.

Then there was the inquest testimony of John McAdam, one of Allen's employees. A journalist covering the inquest hearing reported that Allen called McAdam at home on the night of 24 February and requested that he 'attend to certain work the next morning, seeing he [Allen] would not be there'.

The next morning, McAdam found a number of envelopes bearing Allen's handwriting. Later, an Anne Rennie had contacted McAdam and told him that Allen had called her the previous night. She had been concerned about him. When she learned of the notes, she told McAdam that if Allen had killed himself it would be at Schoenmakerskop, where he had salvaged the *Sacramento* wreck.

McAdam and his son had gone to Schoenmakerskop, where they had spotted Allen's van. They walked along the beach, and eventually found Allen's body sitting upright against a cement block, gun in hand. McAdam removed the gun and placed it on the block. The body was still warm.

The SAPS investigator, Detective Warrant Officer JSS Lotter, had said that when he arrived on the scene he saw the gaping wound in Allen's forehead. Next to Allen's right leg was a police appointment certificate and a letter addressed to the police. Next to his head on the cement block was a loaded and cocked 9mm Walther pistol, said Lotter. He could not locate any spent cartridge case and there were no signs of a struggle.

McAdam explained to Lotter that he had moved the gun. He then handed the officer five sealed envelopes.

The two notes found next to Allen's body were published as well. The first note, dated 25 February 1987, 07:20, read:

> To the SAP. I have committed suicide. There is nobody to blame for this. I have suffered incredible back problems since a motor accident many years ago – and I have decided to end things. You may speak to Mr R Ball of SA

> Newspapers – he and I spoke while walking along the beach this morning. I am sober and of sound mind – but feel this is best. Please give my best to [illegible] and friends at Louis le Grange. I have said farewell of sorts to my parents. Please contact Mr J McAdam at my work so that he may break the news to them. You will find my service pistol and appointment certificate on me. Please accept my resignation. Please tell De Souza and Oom Sias (mortuary assistant) to treat me with respect after fifteen years. I have left a signed and witnessed will. Please ask Mr HC Benecke of Atlas Sea Farms to have me cremated and have my ashes spread on all our islands and farms. Thank you. David Allen.

The second note read:

> Dear Mom and Dad, sorry to do this to you, but I could no longer bear the pain. Hans, Brian and the Macs will look after you. Love to Jenny, Lynn and Geoff. Sorry, but the pain was too much. Dad, please stay on board and guide Brian. I have left the ASF [Atlas Sea Farms – Allen's company] shares to him and he and Hans will provide for you and Mom. All love. David.

Two sentences in the article immediately jump out at me: 'Next to [Allen's] right leg was a police appointment certificate and a letter addressed to the police', and 'Mr McAdam told him [Officer Lotter] that he had moved the gun and handed him five sealed envelopes'.

I know for a fact that the inquest docket that Blommetjie had handed me contained only one letter, this being the suicide note. At what stage of the inquest investigation were the other letters or envelopes added to the docket? Puzzling indeed.

But what was no longer puzzling was the refusal of my local newspaper to follow up on the lead I had given them many months previously. The following

sentences from the article shed light and understanding: ‘Just then he received a telephone call from Mrs Anne Rennie. She said Mr Allen had contacted her the previous night. She was worried about him.’

Is Mrs Anne Rennie the spouse of Chris Rennie, our well-known local journalist? I’m not sure. Nor do I know much about the relationship between Mrs Rennie and Uncle Dave.

The following morning I wake up with a sense that my luck has changed. I head off to the petrol station at Five Ways. They sell a decent steak-and-kidney pie that I’m in the mood for right now. Along the road I encounter news posters strapped to electricity poles with the headline ‘Allen died at site of his Sacramento’.

I pick up my pie and the morning paper, noting that the article about Allen has made the front page. While I’m walking back to my car, a familiar figure confronts me. It’s William Hart.

‘Sergeant Max,’ he happily greets me, ‘I see you’re in the papers again.’

‘Really? Which papers?’

‘The *Herald*, Sarge. I get to read the *Herald* every morning. Vendors sell them at the robots. They don’t charge me a cent. I just return it once I’m finished.’

He’s got to be referring to the story about the Allen inquest. My name must have been mentioned after all.

‘I knew Dave Allen pretty well,’ William continues. ‘He used to take me to Witelsbos. Other boys he would take to Bird Island …’

I almost choke on the pie.

‘Aw, c’mon, Sarge. Don’t hold that against me. Dave busted me for possession of marijuana years ago when I was still a teenager.’

William goes on to tell me that instead of charging him, Allen drove him to a quiet spot and forced him to perform a blowjob. After that Allen kept coming back for sexual favours, always with the threat of arrest.

But William is happy to tell me he has a girlfriend now. He still works the robots but says he goes home to her at night.

‘She lives with her mom in South End,’ he says. ‘Both of them have got jobs.

Anyway, when I turned eighteen, Dave lost interest in me sexually. He forced me to find younger boys for him.'

Here we have it. William has confirmed Allen's modus operandi: pick up young boys who wandered about late at night. William used to fit this mould. But if William was at Witelsbos, as he claims, then he might be my lead to Wingnut, the biggest shark in the tank.

'What's your schedule like in two days' time, William?' I ask him. 'I've got something on tomorrow, but I'd like to speak to you after that.'

I'm busy formulating a plan, but need to discuss it with the brigadier first.

'I usually start working at 8 am at those robots,' William says, pointing to the Five Ways intersection. 'At 12 I take a long lunch break until 2:30. The sun is too hot to work during those hours.'

'I'll see you at 12 sharp in two days' time,' I tell him. 'Could be some money in it for you,' I add.

His eyes light up at the thought of earning money. 'No problem, Sarge,' he says.

My head is in a spin. This could possibly be another lucky break in the investigation.

Then my pager starts doing its thing: *bleep, bleep*. I bid William farewell and check the number on the pager's screen. It's Suzie's office number. No need to call her back. The hospital is right around the corner from Five Ways. I'll just pop in and see what she wants.

As I step into her ward, I notice that she's tending to a patient. She signals to me that I should wait, so I retire to her office. A few minutes later an anxious Suzie joins me there. Her face is fraught with concern.

'Max, have you forgotten that I asked to speak with you?' she asks sharply.

I stare back in utter bewilderment.

'Oh, Max. The day that you darted out of here in order to get a case number for the young boy who had been raped,' she says, clearly flustered.

'Sorry, Suzie. It completely slipped my mind. What's going on?'

Suzie is only a few minutes into her story when I realise that I need to get this

on tape. What she's mentioned so far has started to raise the hairs on my arms. I quickly go out to my car and retrieve the recorder from the cubbyhole.

Suzie's more relaxed upon my return. I listen closely while she relates an astonishing incident related to my now frozen investigation. By the time she finishes and I turn off the recorder, Suzie is a nervous wreck, unable to contain her flow of tears.

I console her to the best of my ability, and then excuse myself. She's reassured by the knowledge that I will look into what she has just told me. And look into it I will.

Back at the office I share my findings once more with the brigadier – only William's revelation, though. Not Suzie's story.

'Did you mention the cabinet minister to him?' the brig enquires.

'No, not at all. He came up with Dave Allen's name of his own accord. And he only spoke about Allen, nobody else.'

'Good. So, if he genuinely went to Witelsbos, or possibly had contact with any of Allen's mates, then the chances are good that he might be able to identify Wiley. Not so?'

'Well, if he's not bullshitting me, then he should be able to make the identification.'

'So, Max, what you need to do is test him. Show him a couple of pics of various people. Make sure to include one of Allen and one of Wiley. Let's see what your witness comes up with.'

Back at the office, I easily locate a pic of Allen. But I'm having difficulty finding one of the minister. Then Gordon suddenly walks into my office, a gloating expression on his face.

'Thought I'd help you out, so I did some reading on the wrecks of the *Doddington* and the *Sacramento,*' he says. 'You know, the two ships Allen salvaged off the coast a few years ago.'

'Yeah, I know about those two wrecks, asshole. What about them?'

'What do you know about rules and regulations pertaining to wreck salvaging off our coast?' he asks in a manner similar to a lecturer posing a question to a

class full of second-year law students.

‘Absolutely fuck all.’

‘Thought as much, you numbskull. It just so happens that a salvager needs a licence to undertake such work. And the mentioned licence is issued by only one government department. Think about it, Max.’ Gordon’s tone is more than slightly boastful.

‘How could I have missed it?’ I reply. ‘Goodness gracious, it’s as clear as day. Come here, you beautiful thing. Let Uncle Max kiss those fat little cheeks of yours.’

‘Fuck off. I’m tired of doing your detective work for you,’ he jokes as he leaves my office.

Little does Gordon know that I’ve been aware of the role of the deceased minister of environmental and water affairs – namely, John Wiley – for some time now. That was bombshell number one that Dave Allen dropped in my car on the day of his arrest. I’ve been keeping it to myself for good reason. But the connection between Allen and the minister has now been made through Allen’s getting the salvaging licence from Wiley.

The puzzle is slowly coming together but will only be complete once I’ve established a connection between this duo and the elusive Wingnut. With regard to the senior public prosecutor’s ruling that all investigation into this matter must cease, I’m still in abidance. I have not proactively sought out clues or evidence. Things have simply fallen into my lap.

The key to this case at the moment is for me to establish the identity of Wingnut, and I firmly believe that William is going to be able to help me with this. He’s the one keeping this ‘frozen’ case warm and alive.

Hanna walks in, pulling me back from dreamland to reality. It turns out she’s solved my problem regarding a picture of Wiley. She hands me an enlarged group photo displaying, among others, the figure of the minister in question.

‘And where, may I ask, did you steal this?’ I ask her.

‘Never you mind. Just make sure that I have it back by the end of the week. Otherwise I will be up on theft charges. The owner of the photograph is out of

office for the next couple of days, and I have his keys.'

There's a minor problem with the photograph, though. I'll need to cover the title and the names of all the people in it. It's not too tough a task. I remove the photograph from its frame and place it squarely on my desk. I use two telephone directories to conceal the title at the top and all the names at the bottom of the print. Not exactly a professional job, but it will serve its intended purpose.

I reckon that's about it for the day. Might as well head off to George's bar for a drink.

18

William’s day

Investigations into the minster’s identity, the paedophile ring and the Bird Island sojourns have to go on the back burner temporarily when I am sent on an undercover narc job to the local nuthouse at Fort England Hospital. I have been instructed to crack open a drug-smuggling ring, which I accomplish. It wasn’t too difficult, but there were a few hairy moments among the inmates.

The time spent away from the office has resulted in a deluge of paperwork on my desk. Cases requiring immediate attention, arrest warrants to be executed and summonses to be served. I am at my wits’ end, not knowing where to begin. The sudden sharp trill of the telephone brings me back to reality.

I answer the phone. There’s no response. Strange. I call out my name again. A hushed voice responds.

‘Sergeant Max?’

‘Yes, that’s me. How can I help you?’

‘Don’t stop digging now, Sarge. Follow the money and you’ll uncover a mountain of refuse.’

It’s definitely a male voice, and it keeps speaking.

‘The Dave Allen case. Don’t stop now. Follow the gold and you’ll bring down big players.’

‘Who am I speaking to?’ I ask impatiently.

A sigh is followed by a pause, and then the voice pipes up again.

‘I’m trying to point you in the right direction, Sarge. Don’t ask me for my name, because I won’t reveal that to you.’

I suddenly change my vocal demeanour. I speak in an overly friendly manner.

‘Listen, mate, whoever you are, I really appreciate what you’re doing. But if

you’re trying to help, I suggest you call me on a secure line, not at my office. There’s too many prying ears on the switchboard.’

‘Where, then?’ is the reply.

I supply the unidentified caller with my home phone number, with strict instructions to call me any time after 11:30 pm. That’s when I’m sure to be at home. I offer my pager’s number, but the caller scoffs at the idea. Clever fellow, this one.

When the call is over, I burrow my head into the mountain of paperwork. I hate this part of the job. But I have only myself to blame for falling behind on it. For the next couple days I spend my office hours winnowing down the pile of paper on my desk. And, as true as the sky is blue, the unidentified caller calls me on my home phone on two occasions.

His revelations are startling. It is time for me to pick up on the Allen investigation again, albeit in a discreet manner.

I’ve arranged to pick William up the following afternoon. This will give Hanna, our secretary, time to ‘borrow’ that much-needed photo again. It will also supply me with sufficient time to dismantle it once more and place it in an appropriate position on my desk.

The following morning I’m all cheerful at the office. The prearranged time to meet up with William is approaching. George’s pub is situated close to Five Ways, so I pop in for a quick drink. There’s not much talk going on at the bar. I spend the time anticipating what William might come up with today.

He’s ready and waiting as I pull up alongside his place of employment.

‘How much bucks do you think I’ll get, Sarge?’ are the first words he utters as he climbs into my car.

Personally, I hate this attitude from any witness. People who spill for money become prime targets for defence attorneys once it becomes known that they’re giving evidence on behalf of the state in return for payment. Lawyers end up tearing them apart in court. But it’s my bad – I did mention to William the prospect of him earning some money.

‘Relax, Rockefeller,’ I tell him, managing to conceal my annoyance. ‘You

don’t even know what the case is about yet.’

When we get to my office, I ask Gordon to keep William busy for a while. Once I have everything ready, I call for Gordon to bring him through.

Both of them enter my office. Gordon makes sure to close the door behind him. William takes up a seat in front of my desk while Gordon hovers in the background. I’m seated in my customary position behind my desk. I proceed to ask William questions pertaining to Witelsbos – for example, where it’s situated, whether it’s a residential or rural community. I bring up the idea of taking him to the area, and ask him whether he would be able to point out the house where he was taken and allegedly molested. William replies in the affirmative, saying, ‘I just need to ride around the area for a while, Sarge. I’ll definitely find the house.’

I don’t want to mention Dave Allen or any other individuals who were possibly at Witelsbos. I want William to expose their roles to me voluntarily. I do not want to lead him. He passes this test without any problems. He’s positive about the facts.

He swears to being at Witelsbos on numerous occasions, and each time either Uncle Dave or one of the other uncles present had sex with him. The routine was simple. Once an uncle took a liking to a boy, they would wander off to a secluded spot away from the braai area. The house offered the perfect haven. Money or bottles of liquor were exchanged for sex.

William appears to be rather amused at the way things are panning out. He also seems rather perplexed by my apparent hesitation to accept what he’s saying. ‘What’s up, Sarge?’ he asks me. ‘Don’t you believe me?’

‘Let’s not go there, William. I’m only doing my job and you know that.’

I stand up and move around to his side of the desk, taking up a position to his immediate left. I can smell the cheap wine permeating through his pores. He, of course, is completely unaware of the odour. I hand William a photo album, instructing him to point out Dave Allen and any other person or persons associated with Uncle Dave at Witelsbos. Gordon has now moved to the right of William, obviously wanting a better view.

William opens the album to the first page and stares intensely at the pics of

convicted offenders as well as criminals who are currently on the run. Page one evokes no response from him. Neither does page two or page three. But on page four he points without hesitation to the picture of Dave Allen.

‘Are you saying that this man was at Witelsbos while you were there?’ I ask.

‘Yes, that’s Dave Allen,’ William replies. ‘He’s the man who drove me to Witelsbos. There was always another uncle present in the car during these trips.’

‘Please continue.’

The next three pages loaded with pics provoke no reaction – as I expect. I retrieve the album from William. To make sure no one sees the photograph still lying squarely on my desk, I’ve placed a third telephone directory right on top of it. There are plenty of telephone directories on our floor – each office has one.

I explain to William that he might need to stand up. He does so. William seems to have grasped the seriousness of the situation. He’s no longer in such a jovial mood. I repeat the instruction to point out anyone associated with Uncle Dave at Witelsbos as I remove the directory concealing the photo. William hovers over the pic like a buzzard over an impending meal. After what seems like an eternity, he points at a figure. I know the person. It’s not Wingnut, but another prominent cabinet minister, currently in office. He is one of the three cabinet ministers named by Allen while he was driving with me in the car after his arrest.

‘Anyone else?’ I ask.

William ignores me. His eyes are still locked on the photo. He slowly raises his right arm and then places the index finger of his right hand on Wiley’s face. He’s now confirmed another cabinet minister named by Allen in the car.

Just when I think he is finished, I see that William, unknowingly, is about to commit a fatal error. I can tell he is about to identify a fourth person. His finger is aiming in the direction of someone with quite prominent ears. Wingnut! But the timing’s not yet right. I first need to gather more evidence before William identifies the Big One.

I lean across the photo and push his hand away as he attempts to make a fourth identification. He picks up on the intention of my actions and retracts his hand.

I'm grateful that he refrains from asking me why I've stopped him. Maybe that's due to the stern glare I shot in his direction as I prevented him from fingering a fourth suspect. Gordon has missed this interaction between William and me.

It's perfect. I have not gone out actively seeking any information, clues or evidence with regard to this case. Everything has come to me. So, fuck the senior public prosecutor, I say to myself.

I excuse William and ask him to wait outside. Gordon has a look of disbelief on his face.

'I don't believe this, Max. Three big fish: two dead and one still in office. What the fuck, man?'

Little does Gordon know that there are more fish to fry, and they all swim in the same pond. And the biggest one is Wingnut.

'Do you realise what we're dealing with, pal?' I ask Gordon in turn.

'Not what *we're* dealing with. What *you're* dealing with. Count me out on this one. I've got a wife and a beautiful daughter to consider. It's all yours, Max,' he says.

I know Gordon. He won't walk away from this. But the shock is perhaps a bit too much for him right now.

When I join William outside my office, he immediately asks me how much money he's going to be paid. I let him understand that this is only the beginning of a very complex investigation and that he'll need to wait for quite a while longer. But William's not happy.

'I need bucks soon, Sarge. I've got some more info for you right now. Work on it and then the cops can pay me sooner,' he implores.

'Info about what?' I ask.

He proceeds to tell me about a businessman who approached him at the robots at Five Ways. This character apparently wants William – and his girlfriend – to make a blue movie with him. Blue movies – that's what we call porn. Apparently the dude has got all the movie-making equipment, but he needs William to come up with a house or flat where they can shoot the scenes. I don't feel like taking on this case. It's Mickey Mouse compared to what I'm currently dealing with. I

contemplate asking Gordon to handle it. However, should I do that, I might alienate William in the process, so I halt this train of discussion.

‘I’ll pick you up tomorrow,’ I tell him. ‘Same place, same time. Then we can plan this investigation. It seems pretty straightforward. Now let me get you back to your place of work before your shift is over.’

While we’re travelling to Five Ways, William’s curiosity bubbles over and he asks me the question I’ve been anticipating.

‘Why did you stop me from identifying the fourth guy, Sarge?’

‘Because the timing’s not right,’ I tell him. ‘I’ll let you know when I need you to finger him.’

‘But what if I pointed him out first? What would you have done then?’

‘Well, you didn’t, did you? So now we have no problem,’ I confidently reply.

‘Rumour has it that this oke is the one who shot one of the youngsters through the arse at Bird Island. I’m not sure how true it is, because I wasn’t there. The boys used to call him Ore. Not difficult to see why!’ William breaks out in a fit of laughter.

‘Do you know his real name?’ I ask.

‘I didn’t those days, but it’s different now. I get to read the newspapers on a regular basis and I try to keep up with what’s going on. For sure I know his real name and how powerful he is. The whole of fucking South Africa knows his real name, Sarge.’

This revelation by William does not shock me. I’ve been busy the last couple of days with my own clandestine operation. After receiving the anonymous call at my office instructing me to ‘follow the money’, I had contacted Detective Warrant Officer Mike Smit, who is attached to the Security Branch of the South African Police.

He’s the go-to man when you want an apartment bugged or a telephone line tapped. I filled him in with the necessary info, and asked him to place a trace on my home telephone line. When the anonymous caller proceeded to phone me at home, within the blink of an eye I knew the details of the registered owner of the Telkom line he used. What is interesting about this caller is that he is ingrained

in the heart of the Allen family business empire. I'm feasting on the information he's been supplying.

I throw one last question at William.

'How did they get all the kids to Bird Island?'

'Military helicopters or boats,' William replies.

This answer completes the puzzle 100 per cent. The connection between Uncle Dave, the deceased Wiley and Wingnut has been made.

'Flew there in choppers,' was what my first witness said months ago.

It would require an enormously powerful and influential person to authorise the use of military helicopters for a non-military exercise. My highest-ranking suspect – namely, Wingnut – has exactly that power and authority as minister of defence.

I recall Suzie's story. I quickly open the cubbyhole to find the tape recorder still safely there. Everything is coming together for me to arrest and prosecute Wingnut. I push my foot down hard on the accelerator. I want to get to the office in order to listen to Suzie's story in detail again.

19

Suzie’s story

The office is deserted. Gordon, I notice, has left a note on my desk. ‘Police canteen,’ it reads.

I’m not interested. Suzie’s story is occupying my mind right now. And I have a couple of ales in the fridge. I turn the recorder on, lean back in my chair, take a huge gulp of beer and listen up.

> I’m not sure what to make of this, Max. The whole situation is scaring me, you know. The thing with Dave Allen’s suicide, and then that of Wiley. Also, the stories about young boys being sexually molested.

Suzie says everything seems to be pointing in the same direction and she’s really afraid. And then she recalls the night the victim was brought in.

> About a year ago I was on night shift. All of a sudden, this bright light lit up the ward and I heard a helicopter outside. You know that landing pad next to the ward – well, it’s right there. And the noise … just so loud.

Evacuated injured soldiers have been transported by helicopter to this hospital before. So Suzie says her first thought was that there had been an accident at one of the military bases.

> I remember looking at my watch. It was 11:30 pm.

Five hours later, says Suzie, a patient was brought into the trauma ward after

surgery.

> It was strange because the patient was wheeled into a private room by three men dressed in grey suits. There was a fourth man – a doctor, I think. I'd never seen him before. The patient was on a drip. They never asked me to help.

In the ward, the matron on duty assisted the unknown doctor.

> About 40 minutes later the doctor and the men in suits left. Another man sat outside the door like a guard.

Naturally Suzie was curious, so she decided to check the ward's admittance register.

> I paged through it when I booked off, but guess what? There's nothing in the register about this patient. Not even a name. It was like he didn't exist. I came back on duty later and the register is still the same. I'm not allowed in the ward and the guy in the suit is still sitting outside the room.

Suzie says only the matron was allowed to tend to this patient.

> Why all the secrecy? I really wanted to see who was in the room, so I waited until the matron went in and timed a walk-past as the door opened.

In those days South African life was completely segregated. Black and white people did not mix in spaces controlled by the government. And this hospital was designated for whites.

> So I look in and I can't believe what I see. There's a child in there. A

> coloured child. He looks about twelve. Imagine that, Max!

Suzie says the guard had watched her pass the room and had seen her peeking in.

> Later, before I go off duty, the matron calls me in. The guard has told her what I've seen and she tells me never, ever to talk to anyone about it. I could tell from her tone of voice that she was serious.

So Suzie followed the matron's instructions and kept away. Then suddenly the boy was gone. Discharged, Suzie says, after a week. But the strangest thing is that there are no records, not one, of the boy's stay in the hospital.

I can tell from Suzie's voice on the tape that even recounting the story is hard for her. She's clearly afraid and towards the end she gets tearful.

> It must have been something big. A helicopter, men in suits, a guard. Then suddenly the matron is gone. She just disappeared. I'm scared, Max. What if they think I saw too much? But please don't tell anyone. I'm telling you because I trust you. My job in on the line here.

I switch off the recorder. My mind wanders back to William and what he had told me earlier – that there were rumours about Wingnut shooting a youngster in the anus. Now I'm wondering, does this boy in the hospital have anything to do with this? Is he the one William is talking about? The fact that the boy's hospital admittance was covered up points to something sinister.

The only way to establish the facts would be to question the matron who has mysteriously vanished. Now I have to find her, and figure out a way to approach her and protect Suzie at the same time.

20

The case of the missing docket

It's Monday. I had my Sunday off with Bernie yesterday and we spent the day lounging around the pool. I'm now taking stock of the Allen case. Two of the suspects are dead, both meeting their end under suspicious circumstances. Two suspects are alive and well. The older of the two brothers who first brought me evidence about 'moffie uncles' can place Allen at the scene of the alleged sexual assault. Not bad so far, but not good enough. I need something concrete in order to bring the mighty Wingnut before a court of law.

Finding the mystery patient would be the final nail I need to seal the case. If I can get him to testify, then we have Wingnut. Who knows who else the boy might have seen or dealt with?

Gordon storms into my office. The look on his face says he has something important to share with me.

'I did some work with Dean and Pietertjie over the weekend,' he blurts out.

Dean Steynberg and Pieter Kapp are brothers-in-law who are both attached to our unit.

'And?'

'We searched a house in Jeffreys Bay for pornographic material,' Gordon says. 'At the start of our search, the resident of the premises, a hoity-toity rich bitch, threatened to report us to a cabinet minister in the National Party. Says they are friends.'

I keep quiet, not wanting to reveal my suspicion of who this minister might be. Gordon leaps into the pause.

'Do you remember William pointing out the first figure in the group photo?' he asks excitedly.

'As clear as daylight,' I throw back.

‘And who the fuck was that?’ Gordon shoots back.

‘None other than the Honourable Minister,’ I gleefully howl. But not Wingnut, I think to myself.

‘Did you find any porn?’ I ask.

‘What do you fucking think, Max?’ Gordon says. ‘Of course we did. The rich bitch was as quiet as a mouse when we came across the illegal literature and videos. Dean’s handling the docket. Do you see the implication?’

This is a rhetorical question – unworthy of an answer on my part. Gordon proceeds to enlighten me anyway.

‘Jeffreys Bay and Witelsbos are not far from each other. If this minister and the rich bitch are friends, as she claims, then he must own or rent property in the vicinity. And in the vicinity is Witelsbos, where William says he was molested,’ says Gordon.

* * *

My lead to the mysterious boy in the trauma ward is going to be through the elderly matron who treated him while he was there. But she has somehow disappeared.

I don’t want to start asking questions about the matron at Suzie’s place of employment. I promised I would not expose her. But it shouldn’t be too difficult to trace the old girl if she’s alive.

It turns out I’m right about this. A few phone calls later and I have the matron’s new address as well as her telephone numbers – home and work.

As government employees, nurses are in the same position as cops: their take-home pay is meagre. This means that people who work for the state often live on credit. (Ask me. I’m one of them.) And creditors are only too keen to open accounts for government employees. If you fall behind on payments, the creditor knows it’s really easy to get a garnishee order against the salary of the state-employed defaulter. And if you live on credit, you can never hide.

I head off to the matron’s new address. A woman answers the door. It’s the housekeeper. She informs me that the ‘madam’ is at work. I don’t leave a message. I also refrain from contacting the old girl at her new place of employment. She was obviously transferred, perhaps at her own request. There’s no need for other people to know that the cops are looking for her. She’s done nothing wrong at this stage.

I pop into the brigadier’s office, determined to lay all the cards on the table. I tell him about William’s identification of Allen and Wiley, as well as the possibility of linking the other minister he identified to the sexual offences allegedly committed in Witelsbos. I also clue him in on Suzie’s story. He’s happy with how the investigation is proceeding – without me ‘actively’ pursuing it.

And then I drop the bombshell about Wingnut – including how I prevented William from pointing him out in the photo.

It shocks him to the core, that I can see. But professional as he is, his brain keeps running at a good click.

‘What’s your next move, Max?’ he asks me.

‘Finding the boy Suzie told me about. If he gives me a statement implicating Wingnut, then I’m personally dragging that bastard’s arse into court to face all allegations currently on the cards.’

The brigadier gives me a wry smile, followed by a wink.

‘Officially, Max, I’m instructing you to cease all further investigation with regard to this matter.’

And with that, I go back to my office.

I’ve barely taken a seat when the phone rings. It’s the brigadier.

‘Max, be careful, son. Keep this as close to your chest as possible. This investigation can turn against you. Make sure that you’ve got all your ducks in a row before you act against Wingnut. The man is extremely powerful.’

‘Got it, sir. Thank you.’

Why all this fear and trepidation? I wonder. Wingnut is not above the law. He’s a citizen of this country, and he’s compelled to respect and obey the laws as set out in our constitution. Fuck him.

I spend the rest of the day completing more paperwork, which has mysteriously mounted up again. I've never been a dude for paperwork, but it must be done.

At 6 pm I dial the matron's home number. A woman with a raspy voice answers in Afrikaans. It must be her.

I speak to her in Afrikaans. She confirms her name and surname and then I identify myself.

There's a slight pause before she asks me the reason for my call. I get straight to the point, wanting to drive home the advantage immediately. She senses that I know something about the mysterious patient. I hear her breathing on the other end of the line, but otherwise she remains silent. I suspect that her pulse rate has nearly doubled by now. And then suddenly she's a bag of tears, begging for the Lord's forgiveness.

'I haven't spent one cent, not a penny, Sergeant Max. All of the money is still here. I always knew it was trouble. It's dirty money. And now God has seen fit to punish me for my sins. Oh God, please forgive me,' she bawls over the phone.

I pretend to have known about the money. The rest is going to be easy. She doesn't know how much I know and I'm going to milk her for as much information as possible.

'Yes, and exactly how much money was it again? Hold on, I can quickly check my records,' I bluff as I ruffle some papers on my desk.

'R10 000, Sergeant. I've still got it all,' she blurts out.

By the time our conversation, or should I say interrogation, reaches the 45-minute mark, she's given me exactly what I need: the name of the surgeon who treated the youngster. She's also told me that she honestly doesn't know the particulars or current whereabouts of the kid.

It's clear that this woman was duped into believing that the R10 000 was to cover her relocation expenses as part of her transfer to the new hospital. She's been trying for years to get a transfer, and then all of a sudden it happens. She's an expendable pawn being used by manipulative people who have no conscience and think they can do as they please. Now she's a nervous wreck, hellbent on

offering the rest of her life to the service of God and everything else that is pure in this world.

In closing, she wants to know what she must do with the tainted money. I advise her to go out and spend it all as quickly as possible. Then I hang up the phone.

* * *

The name of the surgeon who treated the boy in the trauma ward has been bandied about at our office for a while now. Vice Squad members have him on their radar. It's rumoured that he recklessly supplies Schedule 5 drugs to some of his patients.

I phone the doctor directly, fully aware that I need to be careful in my choice of words when speaking to him. Being bombastic will accomplish nothing. I also need to keep in mind that he could expose me as someone actively investigating the case that the senior public prosecutor has shut down. Yet, in spite of this sword hanging over my head, I'm hoping that the doctor will fess up and tell me what I need to know about the young boy.

But my hopes are dashed. The doctor refuses to talk about the case, opting to play the patient–doctor privilege card afforded him as a professional medical practitioner. He reveals nothing. The men in grey suits have done their job well. My clandestine investigation has run up against a brick wall.

When I hang up the phone, I reflect on what I have so far. I have to concede that I don't have enough firepower at my disposal to arrest Wingnut. Yet, if the suspect had been a person of lesser stature, an immediate arrest could have been considered. I decide to approach the brigadier to get his input on the situation. His response is succinct – and cautious.

'Max, I'm going to take this up with higher authority. Let the bigwigs bend their heads around the Wingnut saga. Should they give the go-ahead to take steps against him, then they'll be forced to bear the brunt of any resulting

repercussions. We're just passing the buck, son.'

'It's worth a try, sir. Let's just hope that someone up there has the balls to act.'

* * *

A month passes. There's no word from the brigadier regarding the case. I'm no fool; I don't need to be Sherlock Holmes to understand what's going on. The bastards are covering it up – and from the very top.

But I can also play this game. I decide to get into bed with the enemy. Stuff them. I have to push on.

I know a journalist working at *Die Burger*, the Afrikaans daily newspaper. English newspapers are more radical in attacking the government, but for some reason I trust Afrikaans journalists more. And just maybe the editor at *Die Burger* is willing to take a risk and publish something.

The journalist and the editor at *Die Burger* prove to have balls. Using the information I have supplied, the newspaper publishes a story about the unusual circumstances surrounding John Wiley's suicide, bravely making the connection between the deceased minister and Dave Allen.

Bingo. The fuse has been lit. All of a sudden every journalist in South Africa is calling me. I'm extremely cautious about what I say. Mostly I don't say much at all. Let them find their own way, I figure. I make sure never to mention Wingnut. But it isn't long before something untoward takes place.

One morning, upon entering my office, I immediately sense that something is amiss. Looking around, I quickly discover that the Allen case docket is gone. The entire file has disappeared – without my knowledge or approval. I rush into the branch commander's office. It seems he knew I was on my way.

'Relax, Max,' the lieutenant says nonchalantly. 'Two high-ranking officers from head office in Pretoria, accompanied by Brigadier Schnetler, walked in demanding the docket. I unlocked your office and they took everything they needed.'

I am livid. Especially because I accidentally made it easier for the bastards. I kept the Allen docket separate from my other cases. I had a special file where I stored the docket, the illegal copies of the inquest file as well as the tape recorder.

And now everything is gone.

CHRIS

21

On the minster’s trail

When Mark Minnie and I met up again in 2017 to talk about writing this book together, he startled me with the claim that he almost had me killed that day our paths crossed so briefly in Port Elizabeth 30 years earlier.

According to him, he had two trained marksmen giving him backup, and had given them instructions to shoot me on sight should anything untoward happen to him. He said, ‘I told them that if I just as much as fall asleep while sitting talking to you, they should shoot to kill …’

I must say I found that hard to believe – even from a South African cop in the eighties. But Minnie was adamant that he felt in need of protection – from me. As he put it, ‘I feared for my life. I did not know who you were really working for. You could have been Security Branch, which had showed such interest in my case to the point that the docket was stolen out of my office.’

He told me that there were rumours that Dave Allen had been taken out by the branch, and then I had turned up expecting him to confirm that one of the most powerful and dangerous men in South Africa was part of a paedophile ring abusing boys on Bird Island. The former detective added: ‘But even if I knew you were on the right side, I would never have confirmed anything in view of the fact that you were a member of the liberal press who would possibly twist my words, and then they would have come after me.’

For my part, the meeting with Minnie was so useless from a journalistic point of view that I had actually completely forgotten about it. It was only while working on this book that I was reminded of the frustratingly fruitless exchange between the detective and me in that hotel foyer three decades ago.

In retrospect, Minnie’s attitude towards me at that time did make some sense.

In those years, members of the so-called left-wing press and the ‘Boere’ (police) were usually on opposing sides.

In an e-mail to me in 2017, Minnie revealed just how much he had distrusted me:

> Nice meeting up with you … once again. This time it’s under different circumstances, though. We’re on the same side, now. I apologise profusely for the ‘cold shoulder’ treatment which I meted out to you so many years ago in Port Elizabeth. I was unaware as to your true agenda on that specific day that we spoke to each other in the lobby of the Elizabeth Hotel … Those days, for some or other reason, I felt more comfortable in the presence of journalists working for the Afrikaans press.

In 2017, after the long, long silence between us, I finally got to read Minnie’s version of his own investigation. I learned for the first time that he had suspected right from the start that Allen’s death had not been a suicide. I also learned that he had shared my own suspicions that Wiley’s death, too, was not suicide.

The fact that the key to the minister’s locked bedroom had gone missing – according to a source close to the family – was certainly suspicious. At first it had been presumed that Wiley had locked himself in his room before lying down on the bed and taking his life. But when his son, Mark, gained access to the bedroom through an outside window, he couldn’t find the key. Sources close to the Wileys told me at the time that the family had searched everywhere for the key and were completely baffled by its disappearance.

Adding to my suspicion that there was something odd about Wiley’s death was confirmation by the police that he had not left a suicide note – despite his well-known penchant for constantly writing notes. And, during the writing of this book, I learned that many of Wiley’s notes were found burnt in the driveway of his home a couple of days after his death. Whoever had set fire to the notes was in such a hurry that the scorched ring binders had been left behind.

I also found out that Wiley's bedroom window looked out over an open veranda from where one could walk onto the lawn and straight across it into a quarry. 'Anyone could have gotten in,' I was told. Moreover, I learned that the police officer on night guard duty had left at 6 am that morning. Furthermore, although Wiley's wife seldom rose early, I was told that she had also gone out by 6 am.

There is more. The crime-scene investigation that followed the discovery of Wiley's body was 'non-existent', and the scene was 'contaminated' on the assumption that it was a suicide. In addition, I was told that – despite there supposedly not being a spare key to his safe – some of Wiley's personal effects had been removed sometime after his death.

In another development, during the writing of this book a source forwarded me a message with this claim:

> According to my info, the first person allowed into Wiley's house was Magnus Malan. He left the house with two boxes. ONLY after he left, the police was allowed to enter the house. Why??!! He swept/cleaned the house personally. Must have been some info for a prominent person to stoop so low (as to) to sweep a house.

This information was passed on to me from a former member of Military Intelligence's Counter Intelligence and Counter Espionage Division.

I subsequently asked someone else who had been at the house that morning whether Malan had indeed been there, but he could not remember.

MARK

22

South Africa burning

It's been two months since the docket and accompanying files were 'stolen' out of my office. I haven't heard a word from anyone regarding the case.

My tactics have proven to be of no avail. No further media investigations have followed, and my missing witness remains missing. I need to find that boy.

It's time to up the tempo. I make a telephone call to the *Sunday Times* in Johannesburg. I'm playing with my career, but at this stage I no longer give a shit. Without a care in the world, I identify myself and make it known that I want to expose a paedophile ring associated with the late Dave Allen.

The person on the other side of the line is concentrating fully on what I have to say. He acts immediately, arranging for me to meet a journalist the next weekend. He says the time, date and venue will be forwarded to me shortly. I'm going full bore now, guns fucking blazing.

I meet up with William and let him know that together we are going to reveal the identities of people who belong to one of the most significant paedophile rings in the history of South Africa. We will go down as the two musketeers who brought this corrupt fucking government to its knees. He says he is up for it.

Without any delay, the *Sunday Times* gets back to me. The meeting has been set. When I pick William up at his girlfriend's house at 10:30 on the Sunday morning, he's all smiles – probably because the *Sunday Times* has agreed to pay him a fee for his story. How much exactly? They never mentioned a figure. We stop outside the office of the *Herald*, my hometown's local newspaper, where the *Sunday Times* journalist asked to meet us. William and I take an elevator to the third floor.

Exiting the elevator, we turn right and enter a small office. The journalist, a

burly gentleman, is seated in front of a typewriter. There's no need for introductions. He knows who we are and is aware of the purpose of our visit. I explain to him that I prefer to excuse myself as I want William to relate everything he knows without feeling intimidated by my presence. So I leave him with the journalist.

After his interview, William meets up with me. In the car he hands me a cheque for R750. It's made out to cash.

'I need you to cash this for me, Max. I don't have a bank account,' he says.

'Did you tell him everything?' I ask.

'Absolutely everything,' he replies.

'Good. Now it's my turn,' I say. The excitement in my voice is unmistakable.

William waits in the car while I return to the *Herald*. When I sit down with the journalist, I let him know in no uncertain terms that he cannot quote me on anything. What I'm about to tell him has to remain totally off the record.

I'm still bound by the gag placed on me by the senior public prosecutor. The journalist can tell his editor what I've verbally offered in order to convince the guy to publish William's story, but that's all. The journalist agrees to these terms.

I proceed to give him everything I know, leaving out no details. I offer him Wingnut on a plate. If his name is mentioned only once with regard to the Wiley and Allen suicides and the Bird Island/Witelsbos trips, the public in turn will make an 'association' between him and the deceased. Pressure to explain will thus be brought on this very public figure. That will pave the way for my two original witnesses to have a go at him. This public spat might then encourage the young boy who was shot to come to the fore.

Anyhow, that is the way I hope it will all turn out.

'Your story should be in next Sunday's paper,' I happily tell William upon my return to the car.

But Sunday comes and not a word of the story appears in the paper.

I wait for the following Sunday. Again, nothing is published. Has the *Sunday Times* gone lame on me as well? I wonder.

A call to the newspaper's office the following day reveals that 'the editor'

refuses to publish our story.

In the meantime, South Africa is burning. Township residents have taken to the streets … again. They vent their anger and hatred of the apartheid regime using the only tools at their disposal: stones, matches and petrol. Township schools are gutted, municipal buses torched.

Any black person remotely suspected of passing on information to the authorities is necklaced – meaning a car tyre is placed around the victim's neck, doused with petrol and then set alight. Mob justice is meted out by kangaroo courts in black communities, with ordinary people acting as judge and executioner. A heavy pall of smoke hangs over the country's townships.

Whites, however, are minimally affected. We live in suburbs far away from the smouldering discontent.

The government talks of 'black on black' violence between the Inkatha Freedom Party, a conservative nationalist Zulu grouping, and the 'comrades' who support the African National Congress (ANC). It all plays into the hands of the ruling party.

Who cares about some black schools being burnt down? We will simply rebuild them. Buses can be replaced. South Africa is a rich country. And the South African Police have a specialised unit trained in containing and quelling 'riots', as the uprisings are termed. As long as the violence doesn't spill over into white territory … This is the mindset of the ruling white minority party.

I don't dwell too much on the unrest. There are specially trained cops doing that. I have my own particular little world wherein I operate. Or so I thought.

As I enter my office one windy autumn morning, I'm summoned to the acting branch commander's office. He's standing in for our official commander, who's on a stint of leave. The deputising commander is a young lieutenant whom we inherited from the now defunct South African Railway Police. He's an extremely likeable fellow and totally approachable.

'Got some news for you, Max,' the lieutenant tells me. 'I'm not sure that you're going to like it. Anyhow, papers have come through authorising your transfer to the Riot Squad in Soweto, Johannesburg. It's a temporary move until

the havoc subsides.'

I stare at him blankly. Is he fucking mad?

The lieutenant reads my thoughts.

'Comes from the top, Max. It's out of my hands. You report in 48 hours. The train leaves tomorrow at 5 pm. Make sure you're on it.'

I make my way to the brigadier's office, fuming. The brig senses my mood.

'Max, it's beyond me. I reckon that someone at the top feels that you're being too hot-headed about the Allen investigation. Maybe they think you need time away from the case. Time to reflect. Go and do their bidding for a while. Let things simmer down over here in the meantime. Our hands are still tied with regard to the investigation. Just take it on the chin, boy.'

I leave his office without uttering a word. There's no need to hang around the cop shop any longer. I've officially been transferred. I head off to the pub.

Bernie and George are surprised to find me waiting for them to open the bar. My news does not go down well with Bernie.

'Until the havoc subsides,' she scoffs. 'Is that what the pricks are saying? It could take a bloody year, Max.'

I let her fume on her own. I spend the rest of the day getting totally pissed. By the time we leave George's pub, Bernie's anger has subsided. She sees me off at the train station the following afternoon.

I bring a bottle of whisky with me on the train so the journey won't feel so long. By the time we pull into Joburg station seventeen hours later, my hangover is playing havoc with my head. I flattened the whole bottle.

I spot a group of guys gathered at the entrance of the station. I recognise them as fellow cops all sporting the same police-issue travel bags. Greetings are brief as a short sergeant dressed in riot gear calls us to attention. We're then herded into the back of a police vehicle. The space is totally enclosed, no windows. After a lengthy rugged ride, the vehicle comes to an abrupt halt. I climb out and see a row of tents before me. Police buildings fill the empty spaces in the distance. Welcome to Soweto, I say to myself.

The base camp lieutenant instantly dislikes me. That's possibly because of my

shoulder-length hair and the piercings in my left ear. He personally marches me to the barber. Ten minutes later I'm brandishing a well-shaven head. But I leave the earrings in place. Fuck this lieutenant. He's a prick.

From there it's off to the quartermaster to get our riot gear. We get a quick look at which bed we'll be occupying in one of the tents, and then we're hustled back to the parade ground. These boys don't mess around over here. Everything gets done at a hectic pace.

I receive my work schedule. It's not too bad. I only start tomorrow morning at 6 am, working twelve-hour shifts. That's twelve hours on, twelve hours off, alternating weekly between day and night shifts.

Nothing much happens during the day. There are, however, sporadic night-time clashes between ANC and Inkatha supporters, which results in us having to collect the corpses the next day.

The action stories come from the guys doing the night shift, since ANC cadres prefer to operate at night. It renders them nearly invisible and the darkness aids their escape. They're willing to chance their arms against us under the cover of darkness. For their part, the day-shift boys are starting to get bored with the endless patrolling. But eventually our time will come.

A week has passed before we get our chance to taste some night-shift action. It starts off with a briefing. As a section leader (I was promoted to warrant officer shortly before departing to Soweto), I'm automatically briefed on the plan of action for the shift.

Info received from the Security Branch suggests it's going to be an exciting night. And so it proves to be. My section consists of ten members: me as leader, a driver and eight squad members.

We climb into the Casspir – the armoured vehicle assigned to us – and proceed to patrol our sector of Soweto. It's not long before the excitement begins. Patrolling along a street that has no lights, we are suddenly entertained by the beautiful staccato of an AK-47 rifle firing on full automatic. We hear the rounds thud into the side of our vehicle. The night sky is lit up for a few brief seconds, betraying the position of the shooter. And then he's gone.

No worries, man. We're not concerned. A rifle bullet cannot penetrate a Casspir's armour. We're like adrenalin junkies, eager to have a go at the cadres. Our eyes carefully search the darkness – we're hoping to spot any hint of movement that will give us cause to fire. With itchy fingers on the triggers of R1 rifles, we're dying to lock and load and ultimately spray a burst of 7.62mm projectiles into the dark night. But there's no cue to fire, which means disappointment all around. The cadres have used the surroundings to their advantage. We're in their back yard, which is foreign territory to us.

Then the radio alerts us to a situation where cops are in trouble, possibly being overrun. We radio in that we will respond, but the Casspir is slow and bulky, and difficult to navigate through the narrow township streets. Making a U-turn is an absolute nightmare. Granted, it's the price we have to pay, sacrificing mobility for safety. But it means we arrive at the scene too late.

It didn't end well for one cop. He's already on his way to hospital suffering from severe acid burns to his face. He was a passenger in a Land Rover patrol vehicle working in what we call a green zone, which is meant to be a friendly area. But apparently someone ran up to the vehicle and threw an acid-laden tennis ball at the passenger window. Wire mesh covers the window as a form of protection for the occupants of the vehicle, but it doesn't offer much protection when the window is down. The ball hits the mesh and sprays the liquid acid all over the show.

The cadres use other tricks to slow us down, such as placing burning tyres in the road. That effort proves to be futile. We just bash our way over them.

The aim is to get us to slow down to a snail's pace, affording the cadres an opportunity to lob a grenade through the opening of the roof of the Casspir. We're always on the alert for this. Provocation is part of the game. By firing indiscriminately at our vehicles, they're hoping that we will stop, hop out and attempt to face them head on. But this would be tantamount to committing suicide. The cadres are well dug in, securely concealed, and their eyes are accustomed to the dark. As night slowly morphs into day, the cadres fade away.

The next evening some serious brass are hanging around the parade ground.

These are genuinely high-ranking dudes – colonels and brigadiers. Castles and stars line the epaulettes of their uniforms. The briefing brings everything to light and I'm not amused.

We're going to move into a hostel occupied by miners who support the Inkatha Freedom Party. The government uses Inkatha fighters in a clandestine way to attack ANC supporters, all in an attempt to weaken and derail the liberation movement. Money and weapons are channelled to Inkatha to assist them in destabilising their perceived 'foe'.

Now we're commanded to conduct a search of the compound. Why? They're meant to be our allies, these Inkatha guys. It's all politics, I guess.

We move out in convoy style. Very impressive – until we reach the hostel. Waiting to greet us in full battle dress are more than a thousand impis, Zulu warriors armed with traditional assegais and shields. They heard that we were coming and are now demonstrating that they disapprove of our entering the compound.

It's a Mexican stand-off. Some Inkatha leaders and our top brass begin exchanging words in no-man's-land. Zulu warriors assume their traditional battle crouch and raise their spears, shields covering their torsos. Chanting begins. Cops are on edge, fingers on triggers. Rifles at the ready, we're waiting for the command that will surely unleash untold bloodshed. There can be only one winner.

Eventually, the discussion between leaders comes to an end. The Inkatha guys allow us to enter the hostel. We search for hours and find nothing – no guns, not even a little bit of marijuana. All's well that ends well. We depart, both sides happy.

What a load of bullshit, I think to myself. The Inkatha fighters knew we were coming. That's why there was nothing to find. It was all just a show to prove to the ANC that it's not only their compounds that get searched. A sham display that allows local politicians to score some brownie points in the outside world.

A briefing on the sixth night sketches out a plan of action to be carried out by a select few. Intelligence reports indicate the possible looting and burning down

of a liquor store. A plan is devised to place a couple of cops armed to the core inside the store – in other words, an ambush. This is a death sentence for any would-be looter. The shooters are chosen from the Soweto Riot Squad. The rest of us are instructed to proceed with normal ‘anti-riot’ duties.

To me, this plan of action does not seem right. We are cops, not executioners. The cops lying in wait inside the liquor store are going to have the drop on the looters. And I know that no warning shots are going to be fired once the unsuspecting looters are inside. It’s going to be one helluva turkey shoot, nothing more than that.

True to my prediction, the call comes over the police radio at exactly 4:30 am. My unit labours its way to the scene in our clumsy Casspir. It is difficult to get more than 100 kilometres per hour out of her.

I enter the liquor store, which is well lit by this stage. The shooters are standing around like heroes eyeing their beastly work. The floor is covered in a million shards of glass. Lying on the glass-strewn floor are the bodies of seven victims. They had no idea what was coming their way. One victim appears to have been shot right out of his North Star tekkies, an outcome possibly aided by the fact that the sneakers had no laces.

I’m not impressed by any of this. As cops, we have sworn to uphold the law. In my view, this is a very bad day in the annals of the history of South African policing. This slaughter is simply going to be recorded as justifiable homicide. My fucking ass.

23

Big mistake

I’m into my fourth week at the Riot Squad in Soweto and there is no sign of hostilities subsiding. In fact, things are getting progressively worse.

Needless to say, unnecessary action on the part of many cops has ultimately led to further incitement of an already tense situation. The liquor store ambush is a particularly glaring example.

On one night shift, I’m instructed to perform duty in a Land Rover. This vehicle is not armour-proofed. No problem; my area of work is in a supposed green zone. They assign a young constable as my partner. He introduces himself as Etienne Schmidt – a nice lad from Pretoria, about twenty years old.

Etienne volunteers to do the driving, which is fine by me. Once he fills in the vehicle register relevant to our mode of transport, we’re ready to rock and roll.

As passenger, I make contact with the control room using the vehicle’s police radio. They give me the go-ahead to speak. In accordance with police regulations, I state the name, rank and force number of the designated driver. I follow this up with my particulars as the passenger.

It’s a cold, dark and miserable night. Patrolling a green zone entails the visiting of strategic points such as power stations, electricity boxes, railway depots, and so on. These points are all heavily manned by armed cops serving as guards. We make a notebook entry after visiting each and every site.

After two hours of driving, Etienne says he’s tired, so I take over the wheel. We don’t radio this switch in drivers through to control. Once Etienne is over his tiredness, I’ll hand the wheel back to him. It’s been a quiet night so far.

We’re three hours into our shift when radio control instructs us to proceed to a residential area not far from base camp. Someone has called in what appears to

be an illegal gathering of people.

By now this area is well known to us. It's generally free of violence simply because it's so close to our base. We're there within minutes and head to the given address, a block of flats. We see nothing unusual; there's not a soul in sight. In fact, the night is eerily still. It's calm and very cold. We peer into the darkness. Still nothing to see.

I bring the vehicle to a standstill. The noise of the diesel engine turning over is the only sound to be heard. And then the unmistakable crack of rifle fire breaks the deathly silence.

I'm still alive, I know that. If you hear the shot, it's a given that you're still alive. My partner's also still alive. I know that by way of his incessant howling and cursing. My instinct is to put as much distance as possible between the shooter and us – as fast as I can. I'm off like a shot, driving the Land Rover as if it was a Formula One racing car.

I notice a small hole on the left side of the windscreen as I drive like hell to get out of the area. I stop only once we're inside the safe surroundings of our base camp. Only then do I notice Etienne clasping his right ear.

I turn on the vehicle's cabin light and pull his hand away. His ear is covered in blood. A lot of blood has also run down the side of his neck, staining his green camo police shirt.

Medics are on the scene within minutes. Once the wound is clean, the injury doesn't seem to be that bad. Blood always seems to exaggerate things. The lobe of the ear has been shot off – or sheared off by glass fragments flying in his direction. Etienne will be fine, but the medics still insist on carting him off to hospital. It's a precautionary measure, I suppose.

The incident marks the end of our shift and I make my way to the control room to submit a report.

The following evening I'm back on the parade ground reporting for duty. I notice that Etienne is absent. For this shift they put me back in charge of a Casspir, and I'm okay with that. I don't fancy going out in a Land Rover twice in succession. The shift produces no noteworthy incidents. We book off knowing

that we have a 24-hour break before resuming day shift again. I wake up late in the afternoon.

After booking off my shift the next day, I find a note on my bed. Bernie needs me to call her. This makes me worry. She knows the conditions under which I work and would only contact me if it were absolutely necessary.

I make my way to the canteen and call her from a public phone booth. I'm apprehensive as the phone in George's office at the bar seems to ring for ages. Eventually Bernie answers.

She starts crying at the sound of my voice. Eventually she composes herself and relates to me an incident that turns my body cold. I realise that I need to act, and now. I've been blind to everything that has been happening around me lately. Bernie's story has opened my eyes.

I don't tell Bernie about the shooting incident that occurred two nights earlier. This would do her more harm than good in her current frail psychological state. Instead I assure her that she'll be seeing me in a very short space of time. And then I hang up.

I start weighing up what happened to me two nights ago along with what happened to Bernie at around the same time, and I come to the conclusion that these incidents are not a random coincidence. Someone's having a go at us in a serious way.

And whoever it is has made a big mistake.

24

The call

Bernie’s in danger and I know I need to get back home. I can’t protect her from my current location. I devise a plan. It’ll take one call, that’s all.

The following morning I report in sick, although there’s nothing wrong with me. Among the day’s sick, lame and lazy, I march to the medic building. The doctor asks about my problem. I pull a trick I learned long ago and tell him it’s back pain. It’s difficult to tell if someone is faking back pain – even for a medical specialist. The doctor examines me. I grunt in so-called distress at the right moments.

‘Muscular spasms in the back, Warrant Officer. Happens all the time. Too many hours spent in those damn Casspirs. I see it every day. Take a couple of these after meals and you’ll be fine in no time,’ he says to me, handing over a box of pills.

I read the inscription on the box – Ibuprofen. I’ve taken this stuff many times before when I’ve really had to.

‘Next!’ he calls.

I’m out of his office and now have time on my hands to put my plan into action. I have to ensure my exit from this place.

Etienne, the lad who had part of his ear shot off, has still not reported back for duty. I’ve heard that he’s holed up in a psychiatric hospital somewhere in Pretoria along with a couple of other cops. There’s bugger-all wrong with any of them. They’re playing the new card – post-traumatic stress syndrome. Doctors at the hospital are only too keen to admit a patient, especially if he’s a cop. Cops have brilliant medical aid, which ensures big bucks for the hospital. Some cops have been garnering six months’ sick leave on full pay by claiming PTSS.

I call the brigadier back in Port Elizabeth and explain my circumstances to him.

The brig understands my situation fully. I'm not having a go at him; I'm having a dig at the system. He'd rather have me fully fit performing duty, albeit in my hometown, than pulling six months' sick leave on full pay. I also sense that he's concerned about Bernie. He assures me that he's got everything under control. I hang up feeling confident that my plan will succeed.

Six days later I'm sleeping in my bed after a night shift. The base camp lieutenant wakes me. It's only 10 am.

'Pack your bags,' the lieutenant tells me. 'You're going home. Today.'

I look at him sleepily, managing to fake a look of disbelief. But he's not conned.

'Got some big brass to pull strings for you, not so, Warrant Officer Max?'

I give him an unconcerned wry smile.

The train pulls out of Johannesburg station at exactly 5 pm. I'm on board. I'm going home.

* * *

When Bernie meets me at the station, I see fear and uncertainty in her eyes. As I hold her close, I assure her that I will make things right. She's using George's car and drops me off at my office. My head is clear – I didn't touch a drop on the train. I make my way to the brigadier's office and the old man seems delighted to see me.

However, I'm not in the mood for niceties. I get straight to the point, no messing about. Lives are at stake here. I paint the picture.

My deduction is that my posting to Soweto was organised by someone who wants me out of the way permanently – preferably dead. Sending me to an area where people were supposedly 'gathering illegally' was a ruse, a set-up. An opportunity for some designated sniper to have a shot at me. Had their plan

worked – and I had been killed – blame would have been placed on ANC cadres.

The bullet that smashed through the windscreen entered on the passenger's side of the vehicle. That bullet was meant for me. No one knew that I was driving. And then there's the fact that the vehicle that Bernie was driving – my car, to be exact – mysteriously went up in a ball of flames when she tried to start it. Makes one wonder.

Both acts were carried out at about the same time. The only thing that saved Bernie was the sudden appearance of smoke pouring out of the vehicle's dashboard. She managed to get out of the car in the nick of time. There was no insurance on this cheapie – I bought it from a colleague for R900, paying him off in instalments. The bastards destroying my car as well also pisses me off no end. They really are determined to scare me off.

All of this smacks of the handiwork of the Civil Cooperation Bureau (CCB), a covert military unit engaged in secret operations against enemies of the government, especially ANC members, purely in an attempt to lengthen the tenure of the National Party. The CCB snuffs out anyone or anything that points untowardly or negatively in the government's direction. It's a bunch of murderers, contraband dealers and pimps, in my book.

I've had my say. The brigadier nods in agreement. Now it's his turn, and I'm about to receive the shock of my life.

25

Out in the cold

The old man is gathering his thoughts. The silence is deafening. I'm desperate to know what's going on in his mind. Finally, he speaks.

'Max, my son, I need to choose my words carefully so that you fully comprehend the precarious situation we find ourselves in. I was responsible for your transfer to Soweto, although at the time I did not realise it.'

He informs me that after our last discussion regarding the Allen/Wiley/Wingnut investigation, he had sought advice and assistance from an officer at the head office in Pretoria. It was this man, the brig tells me, who had requested to see the case docket.

'That's when they conveniently removed the items from your office,' he says. 'Soon after that you were shipped out. After hearing nothing from this particular officer for a while, I took it upon myself to contact him again. He literally jumped down my throat for simply enquiring about the docket. He let me know in no uncertain terms that the case had been buried on instructions from the very top.'

'Where's the case docket now?' I interject.

'Still with them. We're not getting it back, Max.'

'Fuck them. This isn't right!' I exclaim.

'Max, stop being so stubborn and short-sighted. Think with your head and not your heart. I have, and everything's crystal clear to me. Your only remaining suspect in this case is Wingnut, not so? You'll need to find a prosecutor who'd be willing to question him. Then there will need to be a magistrate or judge who'd be prepared to preside over the case. It's not going to happen, son. You're talking about careers here.'

‘So what you’re basically saying is that our court officials are all a bunch of pussycats,’ I retort. ‘None of them have got any balls?’

‘They’re aggressive tigers when need be and wise pussycats when the obvious stares them in the face. I only wish that you’d be a wise pussycat right now. Damn it, Max, look at what’s happened to you recently – and to Bernie as well. The bullet through the windscreen in Soweto. Your car burning out. These are not simple coincidences. They’re bloody warnings, son. Can’t you get it into your thick head that someone wants to shut you up?’

The brig’s getting angry now. Is it because I’m simply refusing to let go of the case or are there other reasons? I’m not sure. I need to tread carefully.

‘And why is it that you can’t let things be, Max?’ the brigadier continues. ‘Why this crazy incessant drive to go after one of the most powerful men in the country? It’s a bloody suicide mission, that’s all.’

He stares at me sternly. But my answer almost knocks him stone cold.

‘Because it also happened to me, Brigadier. I was raped at the age of twelve. I’ve lived with it all my life. Haven’t told a soul until now. Two bastards had their way with me. The case never went to court. I know what those youngsters are going through.’

I return his stare. Tears well up in my eyes. This is not happening, I tell myself. I refuse to cry. I push the memories of that horrible day to the back of my mind. I’m in control again. And that’s a good thing. I cannot appear to be a weakling in front of the brig.

This is how I’ve lived ever since that black day. Pushing everything out of my mind.

The brigadier looks uncomfortable. Awkwardly, he invites me for lunch in the cafeteria. It’s a good tactic on his behalf. I need a change of scene to recover my composure.

* * *

After lunch we return to his office. The brigadier turns back to our previous discussion.

‘It’s on good authority I’ve been told that they want you out, Max. At least for a while. People are nervous. Hell’s bells, son, you know what I’m getting at. The president of the country is actively involved in keeping this story under wraps. You need to understand the seriousness of this situation.’

He tells me that a scandal of this nature would rip the National Party apart. The Progressive Federal Party is making great strides in unseating the Nats, and an impropriety of this magnitude could tip the scale in favour of the PFP in the next election. And apart from that, there is the disgraceful depravity of it all. That these powerful men who claim to be protecting the country are child rapists shatters the illusion of their superiority.

‘And another thing, Max,’ the brig adds. ‘Don’t breathe a word to anyone about what happened to you personally so many years ago. The bastards will use it against you. They will paint a picture of an unstable cop who’s manufacturing lies. They have the power to do it and they will ruin you.’

Reality sinks in. I’m on the losing side here. I feel sick to the core, absolutely gutted. There will be no justice whatsoever. I took on a case and now I’m being targeted. What the fuck?

‘So, where to now for me, Brigadier?’

‘Don’t worry, Max. We will never throw you to the dogs. It’s all been worked out. You officially resign. We make a thing of it. Let the word spread quickly that you’re out. The scoundrels will then rest easy. They’re already comfortable with the fact that the case docket is no longer in our possession. More than likely it’s already been destroyed by their lapdogs. Anyhow, you’ll be out, but not really out. Officially, you’ll no longer be a cop. But you’ll be working for me instead. A new brainwave has come out of Pretoria. Head office wants to implement it nationwide.’

‘What brainwave is that?’ I ask.

‘The establishment of a clandestine network of operatives supplying info to the cops from ground level. Ex-cops with decent records from all over the

country are being pulled in to get this baby off the ground. Career cops do the follow-up investigations and prosecutions,' the brigadier explains with a hopeful smile on his face.

'So I'll be a bloody pimp at the end of the day,' I retort. 'Out in the cold.'

He's disappointed at my response but refuses to give up on his attempts to convince me to accept the deal.

'You'll be an informant, Max. Nobody will know what you're up to. You'll be given a handler to whom you pass on your information. Any info relating to drugs, prostitution and liquor offences – your field of expertise. The handler will also be responsible for handing you your salary at the end of each month. We can't offer benefits. However, the amount of cash you'll be receiving monthly will be sufficient to cover a new medical aid, pension, and so on. And you can always return to the fold once the dust has settled.'

'So how much am I looking at each month in terms of pay?' I ask.

'R3 300,' the brig replies.

Well, my take-home pay at the moment is R1 000 per month, including benefits. Not a bad proposition at all. And, like he says, I can always 'return to the fold …'

'What's happened to the tape recorder, Brigadier?'

'They obviously still have that as well,' he says.

'So my three witnesses, as well as innocent Suzie, are all in danger. Possibly the matron and doctor as well.'

'The bastards won't go down that road, Max. There's too many players to take out now. You're their major concern because you have a voice, a platform to retaliate from, simply because you're a cop.'

Not for bloody long, I say to myself.

Before leaving his office, I assure the brigadier that I'll play it his way. He's happy.

Bernie is ecstatic at my news, although it's difficult for me to comprehend her elation. I take some comfort in the fact that this is my birthday month, so I'll get double salary in the form of a bonus. I decide that I'll resign at the end of the

month, to make sure that I get what's due to me.

I've got two weeks left as a cop. I start drawing up a plan of action in my head. It's going be a busy time for me on the outside. Do they really think that I'm going to let matters rest? All they're doing is supplying me with more than enough time to get to the bottom of things. This could be a good deal for me. I'm actually looking forward to my time as a *haasman* (Afrikaans slang for 'civilian').

On my last day as a cop, I head to my office with a heavy heart. The quartermaster is ready and waiting. He takes possession of my firearm, serial number 338199, handcuffs and police appointment certificate, Force Number W84320E. I sign the necessary documents.

'That's it, Max. You're free to go,' he utters with an expressionless face.

I turn and walk away.

26

Life as a civilian

I’m finding it difficult to adapt to my new life. I come and go as I please, but there’s no routine. No conformity. No mates. Little wonder my head’s been permanently buried inside a whisky bottle for the past two weeks.

Bernie’s pissed off – massively.

I really can’t blame her. I haven’t been intimate with her since the day of my discharge from the force. I’ve also been avoiding messages from my handler. He must be in panic mode by now. I need to give him something in the line of information in order to justify my soon-to-be-collected monthly salary.

So the time has arrived to pull myself together. A cold shower and strong cup of coffee should clear my hangover. A quick glance in the mirror and I realise that I look like hell. My eyeballs resemble a road map and my cheeks are taking on a yellowish colour. The old liver is obviously in a state of revolt. Enough of this bullshit.

The shower does wonders for me. I feel almost like a new man. A little self-reflection has given me an agenda again, and that’s making me feel better about myself. Reality has finally come to the fore.

I have a mission to complete and my personal circumstances are favourable with regard to what I need to do. No more wallowing in self-pity; let me make a fresh start in a new life. My goal remains the same, however – namely, the pursuit and ultimate incarceration of Wingnut.

I call the handler and he’s overjoyed to hear my voice. We agree to meet at a prearranged safe house in Kragga Kamma, a residential area quite a distance from my home. But that’s no problem for me. The second-hand Suzuki 1100 motorcycle I’ve recently purchased gets me there in no time at all.

I pass on information relating to corrupt Uniform Branch cops who are shaking down a known drug dealer. The dealer approached me some time ago stating that the cops were going overboard in their demand for payment. Since he was operating in their area of jurisdiction, they deemed it convenient to collect money from him on a weekly basis. Call it protection money, if you like: the dealer pays the cops and they protect him from arrest and prosecution.

It was fine in the beginning, until the cops' financial demands became exorbitant. They were wanting to collect more than the dealer was able to rake in. Eventually the dealer felt that he had no option other than to approach me with his problem. I felt somewhat obliged to listen to his complaint purely because he was instrumental in helping us put away a 'big boy' in the drug world approximately three years ago.

The kingpin I'm referring to is pushing a twelve-year stretch at present. This is how the crazy world of drugs works. You remove one major player from the game, only to have him replaced by another. It's a war the cops cannot win. 'Control' is the key word in the war against drugs. In any case, this info should keep the cops busy for a while. And there's enough clout in it to justify my R3 300 for the first month.

I decide to pick up on the Allen/Wiley/Wingnut investigation again.

From memory, I start compiling a new dossier. I do it in bullet-point form. Names and addresses of witnesses who need to be re-interviewed are neatly laid out. Important facts pertaining to specific events are highlighted. I'll get this case rolling again, easy as pie. A few calls to my narcotics agent mates in Cape Town reinforce the discrepancies I've identified related to the Wiley 'suicide'.

The narcotics agents drink with their Murder and Robbery Squad counterparts in the police canteen. A lot gets said during these gatherings. Wiley's body was apparently discovered in a locked bedroom. However, no door key was ever found. Tests for gunpowder residue on both hands also proved to be negative. In addition, the firearm responsible for the demise of the deceased was found resting in the wrong hand. Finally, there was no suicide note. This guy was apparently well known for meticulous note-taking.

My mind is cast back to the Allen suicide. There are also plenty of discrepancies there. Were both dudes given a helping hand in meeting their Maker?

The good Samaritan still employed in the heart of the Allen business empire continues to give me leads. The man likes to speak in riddles, though. For instance, his tip to ‘follow the money, Sergeant’. What fucking money?

Did Uncle Dave discover gold bullion aboard the two wrecks he salvaged? Did his cohorts deep inside our current government assist him in smuggling the contraband out of the country? Who the hell knows? But I’m going to try to find out, that’s for sure. One thing Uncle Dave can’t riddle his way out of is the identities of fellow perpetrators linked to his paedophile ring.

He confirmed the two powerhouse names I have at my disposal. These men are alive and kicking, solidly entrenched within the party ruling our country. Wingnut is one such dude. Then there’s the minister William identified, and whom Allen also named. My reconstructed dossier is compiled in such a manner that even the dumbest of cops would be able to proceed with the investigation.

My journalist friend at *Die Burger* informs me that the government blocked editors who attempted to publish articles about this case. Reporters at *The Star* were prevented from publishing anything regarding Minister Wiley’s personal life. Martin Welz, a journalist at *Rapport*, ignored these government threats until the whole cabinet came crashing down on the editor, automatically ending the story.

The *Cape Times* published a very weak version of events. Although their reporters, including Chris Steyn, did a sterling job in their attempts to make this filthy state of affairs known to the public, they were barred from publishing information relating to orgies with pre-teen boys.

Two months later I learn from my handler via the telephone that the cops executed a successful sting operation with regard to the corrupt policemen who were dusting down the drug dealer. The operation depended on info I had supplied to him at our very first meeting.

Good! I think to myself. That dealer owes me one and I know exactly how I’m

going to collect. I dial his number and he answers almost immediately.

‘I heard that your problems regarding those corrupt cops have been sorted,’ I tell him.

‘Yeah, Sergeant Max. I was a bit surprised to see that you were absent throughout the investigation. Then I heard that you had left the force. Anyhow, I know that you had a hand in setting things up. I just want to say thanks.’

‘No problem, mate. But now it’s my turn to knock on your door. I need your help with regard to a certain matter.’

‘Just say the word, Sergeant. I owe you big time on this one.’

I proceed to inform him that I’m on the lookout for a young boy who used to be a street sex worker and is rumoured to have been shot in the anus by one of his clients. I also fill him in on all the info I have on the boy. The dealer says he’ll see what he can find out and come back to me.

The South Africa of this time is a strictly segregated society. Whites live together in their demarcated areas, and the same applies to other races. It’s only the Chinese who are struggling to ascertain their racial identification in South Africa. The bloody government is confused as hell about where they should place the Chinese.

The young boy and the drug dealer are of the same race classification. This is why I’m pressing on the dealer for assistance. It’s a long shot, but it’s all that I have at my disposal for now. I hope that it works, but I’m not banking on anything.

Two weeks later, while I’m watching a football match on the television, my phone rings. I reluctantly answer, only to find that it’s the ‘grateful’ drug dealer on the line. He has news that excites the socks off me. He has managed to trace someone whom he strongly believes is the youngster I’m looking for. The kid is apparently in a juvenile detention centre, serving time for stabbing another youngster who brazenly referred to him as *Ore se wyfie* (Wingnut’s bitch). Youngsters can be cruel.

I hang up after jotting down in detail what the dealer has to say. I’m finding it difficult to contain my excitement. I immediately start planning how I’m going

to approach the kid and offer him police protection until Wingnut is dragged into court. I fantasise being the person who locks the cell door behind Wingnut as he starts his period of incarceration.

But when Bernie arrives at my place after work, I'm suddenly brought back to reality. She immediately picks up that I'm in a happy mood. Hardly taking a breath, I rattle off to her the reason for my current elated condition. I spell out to her what I plan to do. When I'm finished, she gatecrashes my party.

'Max, I'm happy for you, baby,' she says. 'But you're missing an important point here. All of these wonderful things that you want to do for the youngster, along with your intended arrest of Wingnut, none of this is going to materialise.'

'What do you mean? Are you fucking crazy? I have the bastard by the balls now!' I throw back at her.

'Fuck, Max! Your brigadier was right all along. You have blinded yourself to reality in your incessant drive to bring down Wingnut. It's not going to fucking happen. Not by your hand in any event,' Bernie replies angrily.

'And why not? Why not? You tell me!'

'Because you're no longer a cop. You can't question the young boy. You can't make him any promises, and you sure as hell can't arrest Wingnut, you moron. I wish you would just let go of all this shit so that our lives can return to normal.' She storms off to the bedroom.

I respond by smashing my fist through the television cabinet. Fuck! Wrong thing to do. But the energetic release of anger seems to calm me at least somewhat. I sit down and think through what Bernie has said to me. As hard as it is for me to admit, I realise that she's right.

I'm no longer a cop. I have to accept this. All I can do is hand over what I know to the brigadier. What the cops do with the info from there is out of my control. I pacify Bernie with a nice cup of hot tea and the reassuring words that I'm withdrawing myself completely from further investigation into this nightmare case. She's happy once again and rewards me with something I'm absolutely crazy about.

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The end of the beginning

I’ve made up my mind. It feels as if a huge weight has been lifted from my shoulders. I sense a feeling of exhilaration as I weave my way through the traffic along Cape Road. I simply love this motorbike. For the first time in ages I’m experiencing a feeling of freedom. And all of this due to one decision I made only a short while ago.

The brigadier seems surprised to see me. I also detect a fleeting moment of annoyance on his part.

‘Wasn’t expecting you, Max,’ he says. ‘And it also goes against all protocol. You’re not meant to be seen around a police station. Could blow your cover as an informer.’

Yeah, that’s all that I am to this establishment at the moment, a bloody informant. I remove the new Allen/Minister/Wingnut dossier from my rucksack and drop it on his desk.

‘It’s all there, Brigadier: lock, stock and barrel. Let’s hope that someone at head office has the balls to do something about it. I’m giving them Wingnut on a plate,’ I state disdainfully.

‘Careful now, Max, my son,’ he replies. ‘That tone of voice and choice of words will do your chances of coming back to the fold no good at all.’

Does he think I’m an idiot? There was never meant to be a comeback for me. The bastards at the top are only too happy that my voice has been silenced. They get to continue with their merry lives while the rest of us lead a hand-to-mouth existence. Privileges are afforded only to the rich and powerful. Lesser beings are meant to be trampled upon. But not me, not any more.

‘That’s just it, sir. There’ll be no coming back to the fold on my part,’ I throw

back at him. ‘And you can remove my name from your list of paid informants.’

‘Just what exactly do you mean by all that, son?’ the brig asks.

‘I’ve crossed the line, sir. I’m done.’

I make my final exit from his office, glad to leave the smell of cherry tobacco behind me.

CHRIS

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Untouchables

In 1995 Mark Minnie spoke to *Playboy* magazine for an article published in May of that year. ‘Unspeakable Acts’ was written by Gavin Evans – a journalist and End Conscription Campaign (ECC) member whose own name once featured on the hit list of a South African military death squad, the Civil Cooperation Bureau (CCB).

Evans recounted how newspapers had ‘burrowed’ at the John Wiley story for three months. He detailed some of the attempts at stopping the press:

> Reporters at *The Star* received a message on their computers advising them to steer clear of controversies surrounding Wiley’s personal life. At *Rapport*, Martin Welz was given a freeish hand until he began to uncover details relating to Wiley’s business and personal life which were embarrassing to the government.
>
> The entire cabinet came down on the editor, and the story was killed.

Evans added that ‘the *Cape Times* went furthest, but not far enough for the reporters who worked on the story’. He quoted a senior *Cape Times* staff member as saying: ‘We later heard a certain cabinet minister “had words” with a certain editor.’

Wiley, the country’s sole English-speaking cabinet minister at the time, was also portrayed as a racist in the *Playboy* article:

> … the most cursory glance at his record shows that even by white political standards of the day, he was a right-wing racist. Even as a minister after the

> ill-fated tricameral parliament came into existence, he ranted against the notion of blacks in Parliament. He also opposed the presence of blacks on white beaches, resigned from the Anglican Church when it elected Desmond Tutu as its first black archbishop, and resigned from the United Party in protest against the influence of ‘left-wingers’.

Evens recounted how, in an interview the previous month, Wiley’s former cabinet colleague and ‘close friend’, defence minister General Magnus Malan, had put the blame for Wiley’s suicide on drugs and depression. In Malan’s words, Wiley ‘was on pills and that sort of thing’. According to Malan, talk of sexual relations with underage boys was ‘baloney’. In a further stringent defence of Wiley, Malan had stated: ‘I knew John very well. He was not that type of man.’

The article also quoted my former colleague Geoff, Dave Allen’s brother, on Dave’s close friendship not only with Wiley, but also with Malan as well as another former minister:

> He and Magnus Malan seemed close. It was always ‘my friend Magnus’, or ‘I’ll get Magnus to do that’, and he and [the other former minister] got on like a house on fire. He knew them all, but Wiley was the closest.

As for the three of them – Wiley, Malan and the other former minister – visiting Bird Island in 1986 for what was later described as business and recreation, the *Playboy* article included Malan’s response to a question in parliament about a particular two-day trip. Malan had confirmed that the three men had been flown there by SADF helicopter. He said it had been an official visit but confirmed that he had taken his rod along to do some fishing. He avoided questions about the purpose of the visit, the date, and the length of time spent there.

The article continued:

Asked last month to elaborate on these questions, Malan again insisted that he was on ‘official SADF business’, and that they were there for ‘a day or two’.

Asked about his friendship with Allen, Malan said: ‘I met him once’, and then confirmed he had been aware at the time that the diver was a paedophile.

‘Yes, I heard of these allegations concerning Allen. I heard a lot of things in my position. The next thing you’ll ask is whether I was involved in paedophile activities.’

Following the publication of the *Playboy* piece, the Wiley family complained to the Press Council of South Africa about suggestions in the article, and on the front cover, to the effect that Wiley had been a homosexual and a paedophile. *Playboy* was ordered to publish an apology, which read in part: ‘*Playboy* accepts that the article may have given the impression that it was founded on fact, whereas it was founded on hearsay, allegation and rumour.’

*Playbo*y apologised to the family of the late Wiley and said it regretted ‘any hurt that may have been caused’. *Huisgenoot* and *You* magazine also had to apologise to the Wiley family for a similar article it had published in its 18 May 1995 issue.

Years later, in August 2006, I devoted an entire chapter to the Wiley story in my book *Publish and Be Damned*. The chapter was titled ‘Sex and Death in the Cabinet’. The Wiley family did not take any action after publication.

Writing for this book, I contacted Mark to inquire about the apologies in *Huisgenoot, You* and *Playboy.* He replied that he had not seen either, but added: ‘*Playboy*, *Huisgenoot* and *You* would have apologised simply because they only had my word to go on, [but] many sources in Cape Town stated that Wiley Snr was gay … I have powerful evidence proving that Allen was a paedophile.’

In a follow-up e-mail, Mark stated: ‘I can’t retract what I said regarding Dave Allen’s admission to me about John Wiley.’

I had asked him for Allen’s exact words to him as the investigating officer at

the time of Allen's arrest. Mark wrote:

> Allen's exact words were: 'I'm not going to take the fall for this on my own. There are other people involved as well. It's not only me. Cabinet minister John Wiley, amongst others, is just as guilty as me when it comes to this. If they are not prepared to help me, I'm going to open the whole can of worms.'

I then contacted a retired member of the intelligence services. I asked the man – who had read *Publish and be Damned* – whether, in retrospect, he thought there was any chance that Allen had lied when he implicated certain cabinet ministers in paedophilia. My contact said he didn't think so. He said he thought that what Allen had said happened, did in fact happen.

Another former intelligence arena figure who had read that chapter in my book with great interest was General Witkop Badenhorst, the retired chief of staff intelligence for the old SADF. We met for breakfast one morning to talk about a book he was thinking of writing. He told me that a certain well-known SADF general only got his promotion after going on a weekend 'hiking' trip in the mountains with Malan.

Luckily, in July 2006, about a month before *Publish and Be Damned* appeared, I got the unexpected opportunity to ask Malan about his Bird Island days when I met him for the first time. I had gone to the Pretoria home of the retired general to interview him for my research into SADF-trained Inkatha hit squads for a possible book. After a lengthy discussion on that topic, and just prior to my departure, I decided that I could not possibly leave without bringing up Wiley and Allen.

By then Malan was already gravely ill, and I felt it would probably be my only chance to broach this subject with him. Despite me phrasing my questions as diplomatically as possible, he responded with a classic 'death stare'. He had obviously not expected me to bring up this topic, and he was visibly straining to

control his rage at my temerity.

After composing himself somewhat, he admitted to me that he had been ‘a great friend’ of Wiley’s, that he had travelled to Bird Island ‘where Wiley was doing experiments’, and that he had met Allen. Malan went on to volunteer the fact that he had been asked about Allen’s paedophilia by someone once before. He said that his response had been, ‘What is a paedophile?’ And that was the end of the discussion.

About a year before my interview with Malan, a former police detective had told me that it should have come as no surprise that Wiley’s death was never properly investigated. According to him, a well-known and highly controversial senior police officer – who later advanced to within an inch of the commissioner’s chair, but eventually retired with the rank of lieutenant general – had also been a visitor to Bird Island.

Contributing to the success of the cover-up was the fact that some of the original state documents and files on the case were apparently among the countless papers deliberately destroyed in the run-up to the country’s first democratic elections in 1994. Many of those precious historical records were incinerated in Iscor’s furnaces in Pretoria on the orders of General Johan le Roux, the chief of the Security Branch. This probably meant that any high-profile island trippers who were still alive were not lying awake at night trembling in fear of exposure.

Once again, the case went cold.

Then Malan died in 2011, and my memories of the case came flooding back. I was no longer working as a journalist, but I could not help hoping that another reporter had established the whole truth – and would report it. But that did not happen.

However, Chris Barron did allude to the case in his obituary on Malan, published in the *Sunday Times* on 24 July 2011. The obit was headlined ‘Vile, venal enemy of the people’ and carried this subhead: ‘Magnus Malan was a scowling bully who treated the armed forces as his fiefdom.’ The obit read:

> Magnus Malan, who has died in Cape Town at the age of 81, was for 10 years arguably the most powerful man in South Africa.
>
> PW Botha might have been the president, but Malan was the man he listened to.
>
> Malan, who was Botha's most trusted general before becoming his defence minister in 1980, told him that South Africa faced a 'total onslaught'. Borrowing heavily from books he had read and passed on to Botha about the British experience in Malaya and the French experience in Algeria, Malan told him the only response that stood a chance against this was a 'total national strategy'.
>
> This involved handing power over every facet of life in the country – social, political and economic – to the military. This power was exercised through the National Security Management System, which brought policing, intelligence and civic affairs under the control of Malan's generals and later the State Security Council, which incorporated a few cabinet ministers whom the generals listened to when it suited them.
>
> The State Security Council generally met just before meetings of the cabinet. There was never any doubt about who called the shots. It was not those in the cabinet room. The power relationship was amply demonstrated when the SADF launched its murderous raids on ANC bases in neighbouring states. Minister of foreign affairs Pik Botha was often informed, if not after the fact, then too late for him to object.

Malan, wrote Barron, was contemptuous when Pik Botha discovered that the SADF was continuing to support the Mozambican rebel group Renamo in defiance of the peace treaty South Africa signed with Samora Machel in 1984:

> Supposedly central to Malan's total strategy was winning the hearts and minds of the black population, something only the military could do, he believed. Ideally, this involved building houses, schools and hospitals. The

> revolution was about ‘getting a roof over your head, having food to eat, having education for your children, having a job to do and medical services’, he said.

But when the townships went up in flames, it was Malan who sent in the army, with guns rather than spades and trowels. And it was Malan who had set up the CCB, a secret SADF hit squad, and among the assassinations he had authorised were those of University of Witwatersrand academic David Webster and Namibian lawyer Anton Lubowski. The obit continues:

> He also authorised Project Coast, which involved giving Dr Wouter Basson hundreds of millions of Rands to develop a chemical and biological warfare capacity. Drugs were tested on Swapo [South West African People’s Organisation] captives, who were then dropped into the Atlantic from army helicopters.

Malan’s real power, said Barron, was his control of a seemingly bottomless secret SADF account, which cost the taxpayer between R4 billion and R10 billion a year:

> Parliament had no oversight over how it was spent. Indeed, parliament, and the governing party itself, had little knowledge and less control over anything that Malan and his ‘securocrats’ got up to. In the name of ‘total strategy’, he presided over a system of corruption on a truly epic scale. By the time the auditor-general was granted access to the relevant documents in 1991, most of them had been shredded. How much was stolen, by whom and where it ended up will probably never be known.

The Attorney General found that, between 1988 and 1990 alone, R12.5 million had been spent on unauthorised CCB projects, much of it doled out to agents in

great wads of cash to do with as they pleased. But Malan didn't stop spending:

> Even after FW de Klerk supposedly shut down the CCB in 1990, Malan continued making unauthorised payments to operatives, R9 million, for example, in just one three-month period.
>
> After the 1977 arms embargo, Malan boosted the capacity of domestic arms manufacturer Armscor with money from his secret fund. By 1985, it was South Africa's largest exporter of manufactured goods. It used 1 500 private-sector subcontractors, making fortunes for favoured businesses and individuals. Untold billions from the secret fund were spent on South Africa's nuclear weapons programme.
>
> Hundreds of millions from the fund had gone into training and arming Inkatha hit squads to kill those aligned to the ANC and the United Democratic Front.
>
> In 1995, Malan and 19 of his generals[2] were charged with the 1987 massacre of 13 people in the KwaZulu-Natal township of KwaMakhutha by these hit squads. The high court ruled that the prosecution had not proven a link between the killings and Malan and his generals.

Barron went on to describe how Malan

> regarded the resources of the SADF as his to dispose of as and when he liked. He arranged for a Puma helicopter to pick him and his sons up and fly them to Namibia for a spot of hunting.
>
> He had also used military helicopters and other equipment to go on fishing trips with fellow cabinet minister John Wiley and a mutual business friend, Dave Allen, to Bird Island near Port Elizabeth.
>
> Two coloured boys were said to have been sexually assaulted on one of these trips. In 1987, Allen was arrested for paedophilia and committed suicide. Wiley shot himself soon after.

Malan found his star waning when PW Botha resigned in 1989. In 1990, FW De Klerk packed Malan off to the Department of Water Affairs, where he sank without trace, emerging in 1993 only long enough to accept De Klerk's suggestion that he resign rather than be fired:

> He [Malan] regarded De Klerk with contempt. The feeling was mutual.
>
> Malan, who died of a heart attack, is survived by his wife, Margot, two sons and a daughter.

The reference in Barron's obituary to Malan going on trips to Bird Island so incensed an intelligence agent and retired SADF colonel by the name of Maritz Spaarwater that he wrote a lengthy – and impassioned defence – of Malan. In a letter to the editor, Spaarwater, who later authored a book titled *A Spook's Progress*, stated:

> . . . I would never have thought that Chris Barron, whose incisive interviews in your newspaper I try never to miss, would be capable of producing such an ill-considered, dishonest and vindictive article, for whatever reason overflowing with his personal resentment and vitriol, and that in an apparent obituary.
>
> The most unspeakable of Barron's innuendo is to my mind his scandalously gratuitous attempt to associate Malan with the alleged paedophilia of John Wiley and Dave Allen. Is dubious journalistic ethics the sole prerogative of *News of the World* reporters? I and many other life-long readers of the *Sunday Times* will find you seriously amiss if you do not publish an apology or preferably a retraction of Barron's truly despicable article.

The piece was signed 'Maritz Spaarwater, Col (retd) SADF'. A shortened version of his letter was published by the *Sunday Times* on 31 July.

Once again it looked like the proverbial can of worms had been opened. But no exposures followed. Nothing – until 2016, when the publisher of this book located me while I was in Hong Kong and shared the news that the investigating officer in the Allen case had decided to write his story.

This was something that I had never expected. By then I had mentally archived the Wiley story in the drawer containing the unfortunately unfinished reports that many journalists have to live with. Stories like those have a way of lingering in one's journalistic subconscious, prodding it ever so often with questions about how much more one could or should have done to ensure justice for victims. In the case of the Wiley story, I always felt that I could have done more.

The news that the cop had a story to tell gave me a second chance to explore my own unfinished story. I was inspired to start asking questions again, and to look at it with fresh eyes. Most of all, I wanted to obtain further corroboration of the identities of the ministers who had visited Bird Island together.

In the process, I managed to trace a couple of people who were able to recall some of the flight arrangements for certain cabinet ministers travelling to Bird Island. In October 2017, one of these individuals wrote to me as follows.

> In early 1986, a tasking was received by 16 Sqn Command Post from Air Force Command Post at HQ (Pretoria) to ferry three (3) VIP passengers to Bird Island by PUMA helicopter. The movement of any VIP could only be authorised by the said AF Command Post. Normal State Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) require a VIP protection team to collect such passengers from the civilian side of an airport, move them by vehicle to the AFB/Squadron HQ where they would embark the helicopter(s) and be ferried to wherever the mission tasking had dictated.
>
> On that particular day, the tasking specified to position the helicopter at the commercial airport at PE, land on the said flight-line in close proximity to the incoming SAA flight and collect the VIP passengers. As this request would expose the transfer of the VIP party to scrutiny during a sensitive

political period, the aircraft commander protested but was briefed to comply as the instruction had been issued by the VIP party.

The VIP passengers arrived by commercial flight from Johannesburg and the helicopter landed next to the SAA Boeing. The 3 VIPs who hurried to the helicopter were MM, JW and [a Third Minister][3]. They each carried their hand luggage and fishing rods with them. They were ferried across to Bird Island and the Puma returned to base. The said VIP party were picked up again five days later.

Some months earlier, in March 2017, I had tried to find out whether the names of passengers to Bird Island had been recorded on South African Air Force (SAFF) flight logs. An individual who made inquiries on my behalf wrote back to inform me that 'all instructions communicated via SAAF HQ would only state something to the effect of: "Passengers, VIP x 5". The name lists of such passengers would be kept by SAAF HQ.'

When I asked whether the logs could be obtained from SAAF HQ, I got this reply: '… [he] very much doubted it as the entire filing system within SAAF – in so far as record keeping is concerned – has collapsed.' As to whether any civilians – in particular, youths – were also flown to Bird Island by SAAF, I was told that no non-military or non-government person was flown there by military helicopter.

It was pointed out to me that military aircraft were not the only helicopters flown to the island in those years. Helicopters belonging to a private company – contracted by the Department of Sea Fisheries – were used to fly out crew and technicians every six weeks to service lighthouses along the coast.

In addition, a former close friend of Allen's, who did not want to be named, told me that apart from the SAAF aircraft and choppers hired by Sea Fisheries, Allen had also used private aircraft. 'Dave used other private choppers. Dave used helicopters a lot,' he said.

I was told that the other mode of travel to Bird Island was by boat, and that at least one of the boats used for trips to the island – and to transport civilians there

– belonged to Allen. ‘It was approximately 6 metres long, had powerful twin outboard motors. It was fully seaworthy, equipped and licensed to conduct salvage and sea-rescue operations,’ a source recalled.

A former business associate of Allen also confirmed the names of the cabinet ministers who visited the island. The first such visit he was aware of was a fishing trip organised in 1984. Malan and Wiley as well as two other politicians were present. The business associate himself was also there, and told me that the expedition had been nothing more than a fishing trip.

However, he did recall that a second ‘fishing trip’ – which he himself did not go on – was then organised. He told me that Malan, Wiley and the Third Minister went on that jaunt. He further recalled that Malan had gone out to the island more than once after that. But he was unable to provide details about the other trips as he was operating from Johannesburg at the time.

During an off-the-record meeting in 2017, someone who spoke to me in passionate defence of Wiley – whom I shall refer to as ‘Mr X’ – insisted that Wiley was on Bird Island only three times. He told me that on two of those trips a close family member was invited along, but could not go. Mr X claimed that Wiley would not have asked a family member to accompany him if he was going to be doing anything untoward on the island. He also told me that on two of the occasions Wiley was flown there in a private helicopter by a company involved in the guano business.

Mr X said Malan had heard that fishing off the island was fantastic, and a military Puma helicopter was used to ferry them to the island. But, according to this source, that trip led to a big falling-out between Wiley – a keen rod fisherman – and Malan, who caught a shark and had a trophy photograph taken. Mr X said Wiley was so horrified that he passed a regulation to ban great white shark hunting. That led to a rift with Malan. According to Mr X, Wiley did not have a good relationship with Malan at the time of his death. Adding to the tension between them, he said, was the fact that, Malan – a conservative – was not in favour of opening up the country.

This man insisted that what had been written about Wiley was so at odds with

what his family knew of him, so left-field, that it was beyond comprehension – and that none of it was possible. He described it as blatant character assassination by people who were too gutless to say anything while Wiley was alive.

For example, Mr X said, the day after Wiley had died, Roger Hulley of the Progressive Federal Party had started a rumour that Wiley had AIDS. But, according to Mr X, Wiley was not homosexual. He described Wiley as an honourable individual, and a single father who went out of his way to make a good life for his children. In this man's opinion, Wiley's relationship with Allen was purely professional. He insisted that the claim that Wiley was 'deviant' was not borne out by fact.

Mr X told me that the Wiley family had even gone to the then minister of police and had asked for a re-investigation of allegations against their father. After that, a senior police officer spent a week re-investigating and informed the family that he had found no substantiation for the claims.

I also spoke to someone who admired Dave Allen. The man described himself as a 'good friend' of the late police reservist, and was very forthcoming in sharing some of his good memories with me. But after I sent him the notes from our telephone conversation to fact-check and he spoke to a family member about it, he called me in a state of agitation to tell me that he did not want to be identified.

Earlier he had told me how he had gone diving off Bird Island with Allen. 'We went to Bird Island on his ski boat, the *Plus Ultra*. He showed me the cannon of the *Sacramento* at Schoenmakerskop, where he later died.' The man also told me how much he had admired Allen for the work he did as a marine conservationist. In that respect Allen was his 'hero'. And, according to him, Allen also did good work 'rounding up criminals'.

As for Allen's secret life, the man stressed that he only found out after Allen's death that he had 'fiddled with some guys – and that he had been involved with kids'. He went on to say: 'He was my friend and I admired him, but I had nothing to do with his sex life. That was a dark side I did not know about. It only

came out afterwards.'

The only time this man could recall personally seeing Allen in the company of a 'kid' was when he went to Bird Island with him for a weekend's 'diving and seafood'. 'Dave had a youngster there,' the man said. 'He was about fourteen. Dave asked me to teach him to dive.'

Recalling Allen's death, the man said: 'Dave must have been up all night. Apparently, he looked very scruffy. He knew the undertaker, and he wrote him a note. He still asked him to handle his body with care.'

Information also came from a pilot who revealed to me that Allen's body was picked up from the beach by a military helicopter. Approached on my behalf, the pilot of that helicopter recalled making the pickup. He said he was not exactly sure why an SAAF helicopter had been called, but it may have been 'because Dave was a police reservist'.

Another pilot also thought that Allen's status in the police might have been the reason why his body had been ferried by SAAF helicopter. This pilot stated that Allen had been a police reservist and the South African Police had not yet received any helicopters for such missions. He also said that the SAAF still conducted many body-recovery and search-and-rescue flights, especially in isolated or remote areas, so the pickup had not been viewed as strange at the time.

In another twist, two pilots remembered that one of the cabinet ministers who had visited the island had another place not far from Port Elizabeth. In an e-mail sent to me, it was stated that this minister 'owned or rented a beach house near Eerste Rivier. As they [the two pilots] had never visited the place, they did not know its location.'

This meant nothing to me until I learned from Mark during the writing of this book that Allen had also taken young boys to Witelsbos near Eerste Rivier. Mark said one of the boys told him that 'Uncle Dave' had taken him and various other boys to 'a farm' in Witelsbos on numerous occasions to sexually gratify older men. It was the first time that the ex-cop and I were able to compare notes.

A couple of days earlier, Mark had arrived with a bunch of flowers and a card

that read: ‘Dear Chrissy, I apologise for being rude to you so many years ago. Mark Minnie.’

I used the opportunity to pass on to him a tip-off I received from a man who claimed to have a top-secret job in intelligence during the apartheid era. That man had told me that, according to a Port Elizabeth diver, young ‘coloured’ boys were offered ‘jobs’ on Bird Island in the eighties. The diver further claimed that two of those boys – with whom he was friends – never returned.

Mark – who was returning to Port Elizabeth for the rest of his holiday in South Africa – spent two weeks following up that claim, but was unable to find the diver or unearth any further information on the possible disappearance of young boys who had gone to the island.

By then I had located the surgeon who was believed to have carried out the operation on the young boy who ended up in the hospital after a trip to the island. The doctor had retired and become a wine farmer. On 7 August 2017 I wrote to him:

> I am the co-author of a book on Bird Island.
>
> I would like to include any comments you may have on a life-saving operation you performed on a young boy injured there about 30 years ago.

The next day the retired surgeon replied:

> Dear Chris
>
> I am sorry, I cannot comment on this subject as this violates patient confidentiality.

That meant the survivor – who has not broken his silence in 30 years – could not be traced and asked for his side of the story.

Meanwhile, there are other burning questions that beg an answer. First, if Wiley and Allen did not kill themselves, who did – or who assisted or coerced

them to do so? Second, who had the power to order the ‘suicides’ of a cabinet minister and a police reservist who was a multimillionaire businessman?

In search of possible answers, I turned to people with knowledge of state-sanctioned killing during the apartheid years. Among those I spoke to were two former high-ranking members of the government-sponsored death squad that operated under Malan’s authorisation during his time as defence minister. One former operative detailed the process that was usually followed for state-sanctioned murder, indicating that ‘any assassination carried out by covert units of either the South African Police [SAP] or the South African Defence Force [SADF] had to be authorised at the very highest level’.

Typically, he said, a target would be identified. This target would have to be someone viewed as a major threat to the national security of the state:

> He/she may have belonged to a so-called liberation or terrorist movement, or be someone who knew something that could severely embarrass the state, or compromise members of the ruling party, but could not be trusted to keep his/her silence. In the latter case, the assassination would have been authorised by either the minister of police or the minister of defence [Malan at the time].

This contact told me that if the target resided in South Africa, the assassination would usually have been carried out by a covert SAP unit such as the security police or even C-10 (the police death squad also known as Vlakplaas). But

> in extremely rare cases, the order would have been given to an SADF covert unit. The reason for this is that the SADF was, at that time, not authorised to conduct covert operations within the borders of SA without the SAP’s knowledge. However, despite this fact, the SADF did on very rare occasions conduct covert operations within SA – but never without ministerial approval and the SAP’s knowledge.

It is possible, said this source, that the SADF could have intimated that a person resident in South Africa was a major threat to national security and, in so doing, convinced the SAP to carry out the operation on their behalf. This would be done if the target's death was bound to be investigated – as all suspicious deaths were subject to SAP investigation. The source went on to say:

> If the SADF carried out the operation, it would have been done by the unit that later became known as the Civil Cooperation Bureau [CCB], formerly D40 and [Project] Barnacle [also known as the Section of Pseudo Operations].

The former operative also described why this unit – in its various incarnations – would have been among those favourably considered for the task of getting rid of someone as important as a cabinet minister. Recalling the unit's history, the ex-operative said that it was part of Barnacle's operational mission 'to manage extremely sensitive operations', and that the unit's functions included 'eliminations'.

He referred me to an 18 February 1981 classified directive authorising the neutralisation or elimination of certain identified 'enemies of the state'. That directive, approved by the State Security Council, meant that Barnacle had in effect become a 'political elimination' squad. That was followed swiftly by another directive, which gave Barnacle the responsibility of eliminating any own forces members who were deemed to be a threat to the state or to Special Forces operations.

Barnacle would eventually morph into the CCB – which, according to a former Brixton Murder and Robbery Squad detective, was not above violent elimination of its own members. This ex-cop told me, in April 2017, that CCB members had 'staged' the 'suicide' of former Military Intelligence (MI) agent and CCB member Eugene Riley in 1994. The ex-cop said he believed Riley had had his drink spiked prior to his death:

> First they took off his spectacles while he was sitting slumbering on the couch … Then they popped him through the head close to the ear on the right side. Then they opened the cylinder of the .38 Special revolver and dropped out one bullet. They turned the cylinder so that two bullets were protruding so it could look like they were about to fall out. The spent one was still in the cylinder. They used silver-tipped bullets. They put the revolver in his hand, and they put his specs back on. These okes did it is as subtly as they could, but they were not as subtle as they thought. The local cops registered it as a suicide, but the next day a detective looked at the inquest docket and said: 'This is not suicide,' and opened a murder docket. But they took him [the detective] to The Ranch [an escort club] and videotaped him [and a colleague] and blackmailed them to neutralise them.

According to this source, Riley had probably signed his own death warrant by arriving – armed with a shotgun – on the smallholding of former kick-boxing champion, dragster racer, brothel boss and gangster Corrie Goosen to question him about being done out of his cut by Goosen and CCB member and gangster Ferdi Barnard in one of their criminal operations.

Although the test for gun residue on Riley's hands came back negative, the ballistics were inconclusive. The murder docket was closed, and an inquest concluded it could not be determined whether Riley had killed himself or whether he was murdered. 'It was another murder they got away with,' the ex-cop stated.

That former policeman's version of events confirmed some of what I wrote when I reported on Riley's death back in 1994. My story published on 2 February was headlined 'Ex SAP-man with Webster link found shot dead'. The first two paragraphs read as follows:

> Ex-policeman Eugene Riley, who was implicated by two witnesses at an inquest into the assassination of Wits University lecturer Dr David Webster,

> died of a gunshot wound to the head at his home in Brixton early Monday morning, police said yesterday.
>
> Speculation was rife in police and legal circles yesterday that Mr Riley was the victim of a staged suicide.

In a follow-up story on 14 February – headlined ‘Brixton Unit investigating Riley death’– I wrote:

> People who have maintained that Mr Riley was either murdered or coerced into killing himself said he had been in the process of buying himself a second shotgun for self-protection shortly before his death.

That is not the only ‘unsolved’ case linked to the CCB, but most of its operations remain shrouded in secrecy to this day. However, the CCB could certainly be described as Malan’s pet hit squad. It was Malan himself (and SADF chief General Jannie Geldenhuys) who had approved its inauguration in 1986. Although the CCB was originally conceived for external operations, an internal section had been added by 1988, and was fully functional by January 1989.

The Harms Commission, charged with investigating clandestine operations by security forces, heard that the CCB eventually had a vast network of almost 300 members operating in 40 cells within nine regions. And the final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) states that there is evidence that the CCB was involved in a number of killings. Apart from Webster and Lubowski, CCB victims include anti-apartheid political activist Dulcie September, Jacob ‘Boy’ Molekwane and Matsela Polokela in Botswana, and Tsitsi Chiliza – the wife of an ANC member – in Harare.

Other information available to the TRC linked the CCB to the killings of community worker Florence Ribeiro and her husband Dr Fabian Ribeiro and former KwaNdebele cabinet minister Piet Ntuli, as well as the attempted killings of Godfrey Motsepe, the ANC’s representative in Brussels, Jeremy Brickhill in

Harare, exiled lawyer (later Constitutional Court judge) Albie Sachs in Maputo, Comrade Che Ogara in Botswana and cleric Frank Chikane. There were also plans to kill South African Communist Party (SACP) member (later housing minister) Joe Slovo in London in the mid-1980s, ANC president Oliver Tambo in Harare in 1987, Namibian journalist Gwen Lister, South West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO) members Daniel Tjongarero and Hidipo Hamutenya in South West Africa, as well as Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) secretary general Jay Naidoo, white ANC member Roland White, and lawyer and senior ANC member Kwenza Mhlaba in South Africa.

The TRC also found that the CCB had participated in elimination missions with other security force elements, such as the security police and the more overt Special Forces wing. One such joint mission was the 1988 attack on the ANC transit house in Phiring, Botswana, in which Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK) regional commander Patrick Vundla was killed.

In my attempt to at least clear some of the informational fog surrounding the deaths of Wiley and Allen, another ex-state assassin, who was with the former Military Intelligence (MI) Counter Intelligence and Counter Espionage Division, was also asked for an opinion. 'I think it was CCB,' he said. 'Vlakplaas was too amateurish.'

A high-ranking former member of the CCB also dismissed the possibility of Vlakplaas involvement. He told me that Barnacle (later CCB) rather than Vlakplaas would have been called in for that type of operation.

The only other possibility, according to the MI assassin, would have been the Security Branch, members of whom he was with on an 'assassination course presented by NI [National Intelligence]'. He pointed out that 'assassination teams co-operated and liaised' with one another.

The involvement of members of the Security Branch – at least in the death of Allen – was a possibility also mentioned to Mark Minnie by a former Selous Scout of the old Rhodesian era, who himself later worked for the branch.

A retired Brixton Murder and Robbery police officer, whom I contacted in April 2017, said he also believed that the Wiley and Allen 'suicides' were

staged, either by military or police operatives specialising in ‘dirty work’. However, he too felt that it was more likely to have been a military operation.

Another former police officer – who described to me how the police were used to get rid of political opponents by being given false information that their targets were dangerous criminals – had this to say:

> The dynamic of the time was such that anyone could be used for anything – even unwittingly. The reality is that there were so many role players that the people who needed things done, could choose … Also sanctions-busting led to good relations with many people on the outside who were available for that kind of thing …

That possibility was also mooted by a former military and police operative who knew Malan quite well. He thought that the minister would have preferred to use ‘a total outsider’ or ‘ex-operatives’ rather than ‘an operational unit’. He told me: ‘Magnus was a good strategic militarist. He would have used his expertise to ensure they could never be traced back to him. And whoever was involved would never have been linked to Wiley.’ To make the swamp even murkier, I was told that it was ‘very easy for the police to make the military look guilty and vice versa’ in the carrying out of such operations.

The bottom line is that Malan – or another member of his circle – would have been spoilt for choice when it came to hit squads and hit men.

I also pursued this question: if Wiley and Allen did not die willingly, who would have given the order to eliminate them?

Of the people I spoke to, two ex-military operatives and one retired policeman thought that the order for the ‘suicide’ of Wiley, and possibly Allen too, would most likely have come from Malan himself.

However, one of them pointed out that the role of the third, still-living minister who was accused of paedophilia should not be discounted. ‘Don’t underestimate him. He was tipped to be president,’ the source reminded me. But he also did not

mince words when he warned me that I was not likely to get to the ultimate truth in this case. He told me: '… nobody is going to come forward and confess. Nobody is going to put himself on the spot like that. It is his life.' This view reflected the experience of a former TRC investigator who wrote to me in August 2017: 'As you might know the Defence Force was not that cooperative [during the TRC hearings] and nothing of real substance came out from the top leaders or any foot soldiers. They were very tight and only bits and pieces of information came out.'

So, at the end of a series of meetings with men who killed for the state, I was left with this suggestion by one of them: 'Maybe you should write a book titled *Men Who Can't Talk*.' Perhaps that complicit silence was one of the reasons Malan could behave like a man who was absolutely certain that he would never be held accountable for his actions.

During the writing of this book, I learned that Malan once gave an order for a test vehicle to be blown up with a soldier still inside. A former military officer sent me this story in 2017, describing how angry Malan got with him when he did not follow his orders:

> In 1983, whilst attending a course at Army Battle School, Lohatla, I was called on to blow up a new Mine Protected Vehicle [MPV] that was under development by ARMSCOR. Given the use of landmines and IEDs [improvised explosive devices] by PLAN [People's Liberation Army of Namibia], the armed movement of SWAPO [South West Africa People's Organisation] against the South African forces deployed there, constant research was being done to ensure the survivability of motorised South African troops.
>
> The vehicle in question was developed as a possible replacement vehicle for the MPV known as the 'Buffel', a good vehicle but one that could have been improved on as new information on mine blasts became available. The new vehicle was to be driven over a landmine in full view of the invited guests, i.e. foreign military attachés and diplomats. They would witness the

vehicle being blown up with a driver inside, watching this from a safe overlook.

My job was to lay and arm the landmine. Carrying the mine off to the designated blast area, I decided that there was no way in hell I was going to lay a mine and watch a South African soldier drive over it, no matter how much faith I had in our MPVs. As the vehicle came lumbering along, I stopped it, ordered the driver to get out and told him that I did not want him in the vehicle whilst it was being blown up. His relief was very clearly visible and I instructed him to stay with me at all times.

I placed the landmine under the front left wheel of the MPV – very close to where the driver would have been seated – and detonated the landmine. The driver kept thanking me, even while the dust, smoke, and noise was still settling. Had the driver been inside the vehicle cabin, he would at best have been severely maimed. At worst, he would have been killed by the blast. Walking back to re-join my class mates, I noticed General Malan looking distinctly unhappy. After all, according to my instructions, I had to blow up the vehicle with the driver inside of it. Perhaps that was why such a large visitors crowd had been brought along? Malan called me over and, in the presence of all the dignitaries, gave me a severe dressing-down for not following my instructions.

That was the nature of Magnus Malan.

In an ironic twist, the name of a close friend of one of the cabinet ministers who visited Bird Island could be attached to a progressive amendment to South Africa's Sexual Offences Act. He was Sydney Frankel, the billionaire stockbroker, friend of politicians and alleged paedophile accused of sexually molesting eight children more than twenty years ago.

Before he could face justice, Frankel died of cancer in April 2017, but if a bid – inspired by his victims – to legally overturn the prescription on sexual assault

is successful, it could become known as ‘Frankel’s Law’.

The case was brought by eight men and women who filed a civil lawsuit in 2013. The applicants challenged the validity of section 18 of the Criminal Procedures Act, which imposes a twenty-year statute of limitations on non-penetrative or digitally penetrative offences. (Criminal charges for rape can be pursued at any time.)

In June 2017, Acting Judge Clare Hartfort in the South Gauteng High Court declared the prescription regarding sexual assault offences in the Criminal Procedure Act unconstitutional. The judge stated that ‘the law must encourage the prosecution of these nefarious offences, which are a cancer in South African society, and must support victims in coming forward, no matter how late in the day’.

That means that the twenty-year time limit on reporting sexual offence cases will have to be scrapped, and that both children and adults will be allowed to lay charges at any time after offences occur. The ruling must first be approved by the Constitutional Court, and then the National Assembly has eighteen months to change the Criminal Procedures Act.

Following the ruling, Michiel Jacobsz, the media and advocacy liaison for Women and Men Against Child Abuse / Kidz Clinics issued a press statement saying that the ‘Frankel 8’ had successfully struck ‘a massive blow’ to sex offenders. Jacobsz noted: ‘It may take decades for survivors to be in an emotionally strong enough position to confront their abusers, who, in cases of late disclosure, have more often than not until now not been held accountable in a criminal court for their heinous crimes.’

MARK

29

Here and now

All I ever wanted to be was a cop. But I was denied this because of the Allen/Wiley investigation and where it took my life.

When I walked away from the police force I became a registered informer. I operated an escort agency that ultimately served as a front for the cops. With my permission, they bugged the phone lines of the business in an effort to gain leads and information with regard to criminal activities, but eventually I shut up shop. I had had enough.

Upon leaving South Africa in 2007, I found it necessary to hit the academic books again at the ripe age of 47. In 2011, I acquired certification for teaching English to speakers of other languages (CELTA) through Cambridge University, London. In the same year, I successfully achieved status as a certified English examiner (IELTS). I worked for the British Council and Cambridge University as an English examiner for a period of five years in China. I then swopped over to the teaching profession, lecturing at various universities throughout southern China and specialising in the art of academic writing. It was my job to prepare university students for written examinations.

Working on the Allen/Wiley investigation altered my view of the world. I could never fathom the reason why adults would willingly harm young children in such a vicious manner. What those men did to those children has haunted me for over 30 years. The children caught in this net had simply disappeared. Justice never served them.

I hope this book will honour their lives.

I often wonder about the boy who was secretly treated in hospital. Did he survive, and if so is he still alive? I hope so. I also hope that if there is anyone

out there who has any knowledge of him or any of these missing boys, the Lost Boys of Bird Island, that they will come forward.

Any victims who suffered at the hands of Dave Allen and company, let your voices be heard. Do not remain silent any longer.

To members of the previous tricameral parliament who spoke in whispers about young boys who were lured to Bird Island under the pretext of becoming divers, but instead failed to return home and were never heard of again, please come forward.

I would like to continue this mission and I would like to take up the fight together with others. Great states like America, England and Australia have swept similar crimes committed by government officials under the carpet. Let us make sure this does not happen in South Africa by listening to these victims of heinous crimes perpetrated by people in high office.

To the Lost Boys, I am sorry. I am sorry that you were failed by society and the system. We can never be forgiven. Nor can we allow these adults, these men who abuse children, to carry on living without fear of being found out, caught and convicted. We must never give up.

Endnotes

1 William Hart is a pseudonym. A number of pseudonyms are used in this book to protect the identity of victims and sources.

2 Barron erroneously referred in his report to “19 generals” charged with Malan. Malan’s co-accused were seven Zulus, a SAP brigadier and eleven officers of the SADF, amongst them five generals.

3 Based on legal advice, Tafelberg has decided not to identify the third minister.

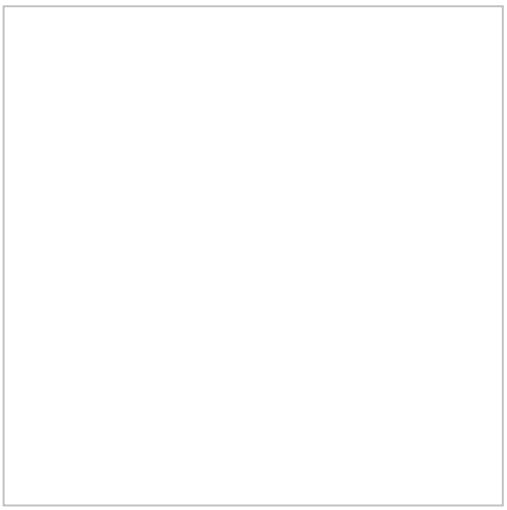
Summary

It is the late 1980s. Serious allegations surface against three prominent National Party cabinet ministers, one of them the second-most powerful man in the land. They are, it is said, regularly abusing young boys on an island just off the coast of Port Elizabeth.

From opposite ends of South Africa, a brave cop and a driven journalist investigate. Mark Minnie and Chris Steyn independently uncover evidence of a dark secret. But the case only surfaces briefly before it disappears completely.

Thirty years later, the two finally connect the dots to expose this shocking story of criminality, cover-ups and official complicity in the rape and possible murder of children, most of them vulnerable and black.

About the authors



Chris Steyn (left) and Mark Minnie.

MARK MINNIE is a former cop who worked as a Narcotics Bureau officer for the South African Police during the 1980s. He left South Africa for England in 2007, and acquired a CELTA qualification for teaching English as a foreign language through Cambridge University in London. Shortly thereafter he began working as an English examiner for Cambridge University and the British Council in China. He is currently employed as an English teacher at a university in Guangzhou, China. Watching sport with expats, especially games involving South African teams, is his favourite pastime in a country far from home.

CHRIS STEYN is a writer and former journalist. Over the years she has worked for the *Rand Daily Mail*, *The Star* and the *Cape Times*. In 1986 she went into exile to avoid imprisonment for refusing to testify against a source. When she returned to South Africa, she was arrested and tried for protesting against an apartheid government proclamation that drastically curtailed press freedom. Chris later became editor of the investigative unit of the Independent Newspapers group. She is the proud co-owner of a bookshop in the seaside village she now calls home.

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