

RANDOM HOUSE  BOOKS

---



# Primal

Robin Baker

# Contents

Cover  
About the Book  
About the Author  
Dedication  
Title Page  
Prologue

## Ysan's Story

One  
Two  
Three  
Four  
Five  
Six  
Seven  
Eight  
Nine  
Ten  
Eleven  
Twelve  
Thirteen  
Fourteen  
Fifteen  
Sixteen  
Seventeen  
Eighteen  
Nineteen  
Twenty  
Author's Note

## Aftershocks

Ten Missing Months

Causes of Death

Clarabel's Baby

The Raft

Slippery Slope

Getting Pregnant

Pain and Pleasure

In Memoriam

Chimp Wars

Hidden Treasure

Keeping Quiet

Murder?

Sacrifice

The Gardener?

The Fugitive

Better than Porn

Stature

Taking Over

Meeting People

Sledge and Rose

Alexi

Danny and Alexi

Abi

Ian

Jill

Pete

Henry

Max

The Messenger

Nerves

X-Rated

Infamy

Perspectives

Ghosts

Resolution

Last Words

Acknowledgments

More from Virgin Books

Copyright

## About the Book

No clothes, no shelter, no hope of rescue. How did they survive the dark side of Paradise?

A group of naked and ragged survivors emerges one year after going missing on a field trip to an uninhabited Pacific island. All but one of the women have conceived and three of the party, including the group leader, are missing and presumed dead. In the glare of the world's media, each survivor sticks to the same unconvincing version of events.

Through one man's determined investigation the true story emerges of what happened on the island - a *Lord of the Flies* scenario driven by rivalry and sexual tension. But are there signs of something more monstrous at work to confirm the group leader's theory that there is no beast more savage than man?

## About the Author

Robin Baker is an international best-selling author in the field of sexual biology. His titles include the now classic text *Sperm Wars* as well as *Baby Wars*; *Sex In The Future* and *Fragile Science*. He is a writer, lecturer and broadcaster with over a hundred scientific papers and journalistic articles to his name. He now lives in the south of Spain.

# PRIMAL

Robin Baker



*To Liz*

*For the Scott Bar moment, and everything since*

## PROLOGUE

Even after two inquests, I felt we knew little and understood less. In June 2006 nine science students and five staff from the Orwellian University of Manchester embarked on a four-week field trip to a remote unnamed island in the South Pacific. The professor leading this Pacific trip, my good friend Raúl López-Turner, was an experienced traveller and explorer. As a world-renowned expert on apes, he had spent much of his adult life in Asian and African jungles and during his distinguished career had led numerous research expeditions into the most remote and unspoilt regions of the earth. As so many hopeful students had applied for Professor López-Turner's Pacific expedition, the nine finally selected were absolutely thrilled at their inclusion and were undeterred by the exhaustive and intrusive medical examination they each had to undergo prior to the trip.

But at the end of the four-week expedition the party failed to return home. Enquiries revealed they had not even arrived back at the main island (known as 'the mainland') let alone reached its airport for the return flights to Britain. Guided by maps left behind by Professor López-Turner, the hastily assembled rescue party failed to find any survivors, or even evidence of their occupancy, on the island designated as the location of the field trip. A search of each of the surrounding atolls produced the same mystifying results. It was as if the group had never even landed on firm ground anywhere in the region. Despite no evidence of a distress call, or even of wreckage, an inquest could only conclude that their vessel sank during its voyage to the

island, leaving no survivors. Health and safety arrangements were described as inadequate and the coroner declared that had the deceased Professor López-Turner been available for trial he would have been charged with criminal negligence. The grieving parents immediately sued his employer (the university) and an undisclosed out-of-court settlement was quickly agreed.

But the group had not perished at sea. A little over a year after the expedition departed from England, and six months after they had been declared dead, two of the students - Ysan Nelsen and Danny Forsyth-Blake - were found adrift in a small and barely seaworthy yacht by a passing passenger ship, one hundred kilometres from the mainland. They were naked and unconscious. Ysan was also suffering from head injuries and a broken ankle, and was airlifted to the mainland's tiny hospital. As soon as she was well enough to travel, she was transported back to England where the university hospital treated her for a blood clot on the brain and other injuries. Meanwhile Danny directed a rescue boat to pick up their remaining companions, not from the island where the original search had been focused, but, incredibly, from another island over two thousand kilometres distant. This huge discrepancy became a key issue in the second inquest into the affair. How had everybody associated with the rescue been mistaken about the destination of the field trip? And was it possible, as some suggested, that the university authorities had been deliberately misled?

It emerged from Danny's testimony that a week into the group's projected stay on the island a fire caused by a faulty generator had broken out at the expedition's base destroying all supplies and possessions, including clothing and medication. In a separate incident on the same evening, the vessel they had arrived in was lost at sea during a storm, removing their only means of both travel and communication. In a single night, their island paradise

had become a hostile hell and their life a struggle that some did not survive. When a rescue was eventually made of the remaining group, three of the original expedition were missing and presumed dead. This number included Professor López-Turner, who had drowned on the night of the fire while trying to save the boat during the tropical storm. Later in their tenure on the island, Duncan 'Dingo' Hughes became the second fatality. He died courageously in a failed attempt to save the third casualty, fellow student Maisie Muir, from drowning.

One of the surviving students, Clarabel Morris, elected to stay behind on the mainland with a local man, Antonio Navarro-Díaz - the captain of the vessel that transported them to the island, before he too became marooned with the group after the storm. When rescued, Antonio was suffering from severe lacerations to his torso and limbs and was taken immediately to the mainland hospital. It was claimed he had been savaged by an ape.

Of the original fourteen people who had set off from the university in 2006 only ten returned to England, and in the summer of 2007 their homecoming was headline news. The media dealt with details of the group's story with a variety of approaches (tabloids and broadsheets giving emphasis to particular details in their own fashion), but the essential story was that young lives had been lost and the surviving complement of the expedition had been forced to fend for themselves, without clothing or supplies, on a remote island because of the irresponsible group leader, Professor López-Turner.

On their return, lecturer Salvador 'Sledge' Peterson was nominated as the group's main spokesman. TV and radio news teams from around the world were quick to offer him an opportunity to tell the story. According to Sledge, under his leadership, and with the nursing skills of PhD student Rose Stewart, and Antonio's local knowledge, they all spent their time supporting each other to manage their ordeal.

Only Maisie's adventurous spirit and Dingo's bravery tragically thwarted their intention to bring every student back alive. And as a natural consequence of the group remaining in isolation for so long, couples formed and the small community passed its time working together to survive. Despite the tremendous obstacles they faced and the diminishing hope of rescue as each month passed, the group still maintained a spirit of camaraderie, companionship and conjugal harmony.

Often, Sledge was joined in news interviews by Danny, who would describe his and Ysan's attempts to sail to freedom, and by fellow student Abigail Hunt, who would give a woman's perspective on the year. Danny and Abigail, each blessed with good looks and charisma, quickly became popular figures after their appearances on breaking and leading news stories around the world. But after the initial flurry of cooperation with the news media, the survivors, in a united act, turned their back on all future publicity engagements and even rejected several lucrative offers for the film rights to their incredible story. It was a complete, unexpected, and for our times most unnatural disengagement from the media. An official statement declared the survivors just wanted to get on with their lives, not least the women who had returned to the UK either pregnant or with a newborn baby. They would allow, however, a definitive version of their story to be told in a book, with all proceeds going to the families of the lost members of the group. And to my surprise at the time, though not later, the co-authorship of that book was offered to me.

In such an acquisitive and materialistic world, obsessed with fame at any cost, the stand taken by the group did nothing but increase the esteem in which they were held. The survivors were deemed a credit to their university. And despite the exotic and erotic nature of their castaway experience, they were seen as examples of humanity at its

very best – theirs was a story of bravery and resilience, and of the ordinary becoming extraordinary.

To me, and I was not alone in this feeling, the story from the survivors was conspicuously improbable. Such a tale of social and sexual propriety immediately seemed to me more suited to a Puritan enclave in North America than to a group of naked adults on a remote but eminently habitable tropical island. They were hiding something, and the carefully targeted and stage-managed appearances on the news did nothing but increase my suspicions about their story and their motivation for a sudden retreat from fame, or was it scrutiny? It was as if a different kind of survival instinct had kicked in following their rescue and return to the modern world. So what were they hiding and why?

Even as I write, eighteen months after the group's rescue, the account of their island adventure remains nauseatingly unchallenged whenever it crops up in connection to those members of the expedition who have slowly drifted back into the public eye. Because, despite their vow not to profit directly from their tragic and noble story, a few of their number have enjoyed significant compensation for being a surviving member of the group. Danny now presents a yachting show on satellite TV; Abi is well on her way to becoming a successful glamour model; and Clarabel's bark sketches of life on the island have appeared in a Sunday broadsheet's colour supplement for an undisclosed fee, and will soon tour galleries as the only permanent visual record of the year on the island.

It was a combination of my suspicion and curiosity, and eventually a regrettable emotional entanglement with one of the survivors, that led me to conduct enquiries of my own beyond the brief of the book that I was asked to write by the group. That first collaborative book was to be the official definitive version and my co-author the student closest to Professor Raúl López-Turner: Ysan Nelsen. But while writing the 'official' version of their story, my

eagerness to get to the heart of what happened on that island eventually led to my writing a different kind of book for a different publisher from the one intended. Because Ysan, whatever her reasons, gave me glimpses into what I believe was the real story of that year on the island. A story the survivors had gone to great lengths to reinvent. But the only story I wished to tell.

I first met Ysan in September 2007, six weeks after her dramatic escape from the island. She contacted me initially with an e-mail via my agent. The proposition, made on behalf of the survivors, was for me to collaborate with her in writing the exclusive story of their year on the island. She explained that I was their first choice not only because of my friendship with Raúl but also because some of the members of the surviving group were familiar with my published work and considered that my scientific background and understanding of field work, and the subjects related to their expedition, was sound. At all costs they wished to avoid a 'tabloid' approach, and in any case they would make all final editorial decisions on content.

Although I now live in Spain, I often need to visit the UK and I arranged to meet, first with Ysan, and then the rest of the group on my next trip. Ysan and I met at a café in Manchester just a few days after she left hospital.

She laughed as we introduced ourselves because I called her 'Why-san', having only seen her name written. 'It's pronounced Eezaan,' she said. But I struggled even to smile. She looked unkempt and seemed nervous and withdrawn. Her fair hair wasn't just short from her operation, it was also uneven, and above her left ear the scar, complete with stitch marks, was still clearly visible. Most women would have worn a wig, scarf or hat. Her clothes looked quite old and were scruffy, but perhaps with reason. A loose shirt may have made it easier to use her crutches, and baggy jeans accommodated the plaster

engulfing her left ankle. She wore no earrings – her ears weren't pierced – and I could see no sign of make-up. Her eyes, though, were amazing. They were clear blue, and seemed to shine. And she had an undeniable aura, an endearing mixture of physical fragility and inner strength. I liked her immediately. But she was nervous and said little. When she did speak without a prompt, she only fed me questions about Raúl and listened intently to my answers and reminiscences. It became immediately clear to me that Raúl had made an enormous impression upon her.

As arranged, I met the others from the island the same day at what Ysan described as a 'sort of party'. It was supposed to be a reunion party, she said, but the university organised it and arranged for journalists and a *Manchester Evening News* photographer to be there, as well as their own press officer, so I wouldn't be the only outsider.

The party was held in a private room above the university refectory and, although I accompanied Ysan to the gathering, I was soon on my own. She was the last of the group to arrive and not having seen most of the others since leaving the island, she was immediately besieged by kisses and hugs. Four people were missing: two were still in the Pacific; a third was on remand for a knife-attack on his father; and the fourth had left the university, the city, his home and his marriage to start a new life. It was six weeks to the day since Ysan had arrived on home soil, but just over four for the others.

There were two tables: one laid out for a formal meal for those from the island and another with drinks and buffet food for anyone from the invited media. Ysan occasionally caught my eye and smiled, but most of the time she was deep in conversation with those around her.

It wasn't difficult to understand why the university was making so much of the group's reunion. It had been a bad year. A social science postgraduate had been gang-raped and murdered while interviewing down-and-outs. Two

professors had been sacked for sexual harassment. Three students had thrown themselves off the roofs of halls of residence, and another had been savaged by a Rottweiler. The island group being found alive was the best thing to happen all year – and the press office was hoping to bleed the event for all the good publicity it could get.

I didn't get the chance to say more than a few words to any of the group. As soon as the meal and formalities finished they all rose to retreat to Sledge's house for a private reunion to which I wasn't invited. And even the few words I did have were exchanged in mutual discomfort. Sledge was positively hostile.

"Sledge", I said to him as an opening gambit. 'Where does that come from?'

He held up his right fist. 'From this. I used to box. Heavyweight.'

'I don't follow.'

'As in Sledgehammer.'

'I suppose that explains the scar.'

The mark across his right cheek, not far from his eye, was conspicuous. It was still discoloured and must once have been very deep.

'A word of advice,' he said deliberately. 'Write the book as Ysan tells it. *Exactly* as she tells it and we'll all be grateful to you. The university too.' He took a step closer. 'But friend of Raúl's or not ... If you dare fabricate even one tiny thing, you'll have more than lawyers to deal with. *Comprende?*'

He must surely have had a major say in the group's decision to ask me to write their story in collaboration with Ysan, so I didn't understand his hostility and it shook me. The group had been through a lot, but was intimidation the best method of impressing your official biographer? Minutes later I watched him usher the others out of the room. Only Ysan turned to give me a tiny smile and wave.

I was unperturbed and reeling anew from the idea that I would be the writer to tell their story. Ysan's reticence, my unease about Sledge, and the editorial restrictions placed upon me, were easily suppressed because they ultimately served no purpose other than to intrigue me and reinforce my curiosity.

The prospect of writing their story would alone have been thrilling enough, but secretly I had begun to find even more in the project to excite me. To me and others who considered Professor Raúl López-Turner a first-rate scientist and now a much missed friend, the damning indictment of the media jury that he was 'incompetent' and 'guilty of manslaughter' was based on hearsay and unjust. The dead cannot speak, but now I had the chance to speak for him; writing the book would give me an opportunity to clear his name. The collaboration would also allow me to get to know the intriguing Ysan.

Much as I'd been looking forward to my first long weekend with Ysan at her family home in Manchester in mid-October 2007, it was unproductive. Ysan was still nervous, even defensive, which made progress slow and disappointing during the initial interviews. Everything she said simply matched or paraphrased the party line Sledge and the others had already fed to the media. I told her I wanted much greater detail to bring their extraordinary experience alive, and to understand the characters. I needed depth. She said there was no more depth.

When it became clear to her that I did not believe her, and insisted on her total candour, she grew uncomfortable. She became agitated by any direct questions about the days before Raúl's death, and even distressed at times by my scrutiny. Admittedly, her narrow escape from drowning and her physical injuries immediately prior to her rescue would have caused some trauma at having to recall her ordeal, but I intuitively felt it was my interest in Raúl's

demise and my first questions about the apparent harmony of life on the island that were the chief causes of her reluctance.

Making matters more complicated her mother Molly clucked around us like a mother hen. I don't mean that unkindly. It's not that I took a dislike to Molly. On the contrary, in her early forties and with a young face and a brilliant figure, she was very alluring. She was slightly shorter than her daughter, but like her had striking eyes and - until Ysan lost it to surgery - long fairish hair. She had a wide-eyed expression that could pass from intelligent through vacant to confused and back again in the blink of an eye. But she did chatter. If she wasn't chattering at us, we'd often hear her elsewhere in the house talking to herself.

Ironically, if I gained anything from that weekend - apart from e-mail addresses for everybody in the group - it was from Molly. She asked if I'd like to watch the TV interviews that Sledge, Danny and Abi had given soon after their rescue; she'd recorded them, which I hadn't. Ysan reacted strangely, saying that of course I didn't want to watch them; she was going to tell me everything I wanted to know in person. When I contradicted her she left the room and went for a shower.

I settled back with Molly to watch. I wasn't particularly interested in listening again to Sledge's considered but brief statements or Abi's coy descriptions of public nudity, but I was interested in Danny's description of his and Ysan's escape. It was the only part in which Sledge gave Danny free rein. The rest of the time he would cut Danny short or rephrase something on his behalf.

According to Danny - his boyish face, cultured good-looks and cocky manner branding him a TV natural - he and Ysan had gone exploring for the day, and deep in a tall cave they'd chanced upon an ancient-looking yacht. Only about five metres long, it was designed for pottering

around the coast, fishing in the bays, but not for ocean travel in strong winds and high waves.

‘What the hell was an old yacht doing there?’ I asked Molly.

She shrugged. ‘Everybody seems to think it was abandoned by some previous field trip, but nobody really knows. And I don’t care. I’m just glad it was there, otherwise Ysan might never have got off the island.’

With some sailing experience behind him, Danny decided to cast off immediately and sail the yacht to the others at Orchard Bay, but a sudden gale hurled them out towards the open sea. Ysan was thrown across the deck, breaking her ankle and hitting her head and losing consciousness, and Danny panicked. He knew he couldn’t control the yacht single-handedly in such conditions and Ysan looked seriously hurt. He had to act fast so, rightly or wrongly, he decided to risk sailing for the mainland. But, after a few days, starvation and dehydration took their toll and he joined Ysan in semi-consciousness. The next thing he remembered was waking up wrapped in a sheet on the passenger ship.

Pausing the DVD, I said to Molly, ‘It must have been a fantastic moment when you heard Ysan had been rescued.’

‘Unbelievable! But then they mentioned her injuries, and I started worrying all over again. Broken ankle, blood clot on the brain. I was all set to fly out there, but they said they were sending her home for the operation. I couldn’t believe it. I was convinced she’d die on the way.’

‘Could have been risky with such a fresh injury.’

‘That was the strange thing. They said that although the broken ankle was only a week old the clot was older, maybe a fortnight or more, and stable enough for the risk to be worth it for the better treatment she could receive here. But Ysan insists she only fell once, and that was on the boat. Mind you, the poor thing was pretty confused. When

she came round from the operation all she could talk about was missing Maisie, and about Clarabel and her bark.'

'Mum, shut up!' said Ysan, who'd been listening from the doorway.

Then, as if embarrassed by her sharp tone, she added, 'I haven't told him about the bark sheets yet. You'll spoil the surprise.'

'How long did the confusion last?'

It was Molly who answered. 'About a week. Though I still think she's got some memory loss. But she was over the worst when Danny came to see her, and definitely by the time Sledge and Rose visited.'

Ysan turned to me. 'I *was* badly disoriented. Walls, ceilings, grey skies, pollution, the sound of traffic, sirens, the endless droning of TV. I thought I was going mad. Clothes and bedding felt suffocating, and as for the dreams ... Terrifying! And the food ... Salty, artificial; I could hardly eat. And so many people everywhere. I just wanted to be naked again, in the sun and wind, listening to the sea, the insects, the birds, everything fresh, everything blue and green and bright. The yearning still hasn't gone.'

'Probably never will,' said Molly with impatience.

When Ysan and I parted that weekend, she promised that next time I visited she'd suggest her mother went to stay with friends.

But my second session of interviews with Ysan in mid-November 2007 was no more productive than the first. Molly had scorned her suggestion that she should visit friends, and Ysan still related little of consequence. We were going nowhere. I heard the bare bones of the group's story again, up to and including the loss of clothes that had been shed for some kind of party, then listened to endless minutiae about life on the island: how Antonio made fire; the food they ate, including how they found and prepared it all; how they cleaned their teeth, combed their hair, coped with periods, maintained private toilet areas; how they

never built shelters, preferring to sleep under the palms or, during storms, in the caves on the beaches. All fascinating enough, and much of which I could use, but I still suspected this was another device to avoid telling me a deeper story. Her testimony lacked spontaneity, and felt too considered, like something rehearsed. In the end, I asked her directly if she was hiding anything. Without hesitation she insisted there was nothing.

‘Look, Ysan, this just isn’t working,’ I said as we wound up the session. ‘There’s no substance, no colour. No emotion here. No passion, conflict, drama. These things must have arisen. I need to get inside you all. Otherwise I’m not sure it’s worth carrying on.’

‘I’m sorry. I don’t know what you’re after.’

‘I think you do.’

Judging by her expression, it was just about the worst thing I could have said. So I quickly took a different approach. ‘Look, I’ve got a suggestion. When does term finish?’

‘Eighth of December.’

‘Why not fly over and stay with me on the Costa Del Sol. We could have a whole fortnight and you could still be home for Christmas.’

She seemed wary, so I improved my pitch by telling her she could relax, speed her recovery, we could talk about her postgraduate future too – I still had contacts – and at the same time I could learn a little more about my friend’s last expedition. I wanted her to see the project as a chat between two friends in a therapeutic and relaxing environment. From this we would write a much better book.

To my immense relief, Ysan agreed.

During that balmy fortnight in Spain from 9 to 23 December, we became close. Foolishly close, I now realise. But although I compromised my neutrality, intimacy led to

a kind of confession I don't think Ysan ever intended to make.

Surrounded by trees, no neighbours for a kilometre, mountains behind and a drop-view down a valley to the Mediterranean, the setting for my villa is beautiful and very private. But my hopes that a day or two in such tranquil surroundings might seduce Ysan into divulging the real story behind the PR - if that's what it was - were soon dashed. If anything, she seemed more defensive and anxious than she had been in Manchester.

At one point she clammed up completely, so I stalked off to prepare us a light lunch. Through the kitchen window I watched her standing stiffly in the sun, frowning. The next moment she was manically stripping, throwing her clothes in a pile on the patio as if in anger. Nakedness and a few deep breaths seemed to calm her; she began wandering around the garden, pausing to smell the scented pink roses, to finger the intricate flowers of the bird-of-paradise plant, to dip her toe in the unheated swimming pool. I stepped out with our lunch to find her framed by an arch covered with purple bougainvillea. 'Comfortable now?'

'I shouldn't be here. I should be back on the island. I've left it too long.'

Back to the island? This struck me as an odd desire. And further evidence of how much was potentially being concealed from me. But considering her vulnerability, I decided this was not the moment to interrogate her about attachment to the island.

'You're still in recovery. And what about your degree?'

'I don't care. The first opportunity. Absolutely the first opportunity, I'm going back.' She then glanced up at me. 'Is there a beach we can go to?'

There was, about thirty minutes away. In summer it is packed with families, naturists from all over Europe. In December it is almost deserted, the domain of the occasional solitary man, an illicit encounter between a boss

and his secretary, a gay coupling. Although Ysan and I weren't entirely alone on any of the days we visited, each time we found a cove which gave a sense of privacy.

The effect on Ysan was immediate. In the sun, sitting on the sand, with a little food and the best part of a bottle of rum (her idea), she started to unwind. Which was a pleasure to watch, until she began to unravel.

After her breakdown by the swimming pool, I knew this was another symptom of the powerful unrest and instability buried inside Ysan and caused by more than a blow to the head. And if I wasn't mistaken there was a rage inside her too. A deep-rooted anger with someone as yet unnamed that she could not possibly resolve, even if her silence was for the benefit of the group, or the 'others' as she began to refer to them at times with an uncharacteristic sneer.

At first she only hinted that there really were a great many secrets about the island. But day by day this implication grew into a willingness to open up. She told me about their swift 'regression' to living in the most primitive conditions and her 'fascination' at seeing everybody naked following the loss of their clothes. She followed this with details of the 'confusing and terrifying' night of storm and fire, and how Raúl's drowning left her 'black in mind' and 'empty'.

On the third day she began describing the growing rivalry and hostility within the group, giving details about an escalating 'war' she had with Abi, and even let slip a story about Sledge being unfaithful to Rose and how she fell out with Danny who then attacked her.

Terrified she might suddenly stop and go into denial again, I sat tense and quiet and did nothing to break her reverie. Her words were slightly slurred by drink, but she was not insensible. And through her stories of the early days of being marooned I detected a clear ratcheting up of tension within the group and an inevitable progression

towards events she could barely stand to remember, let alone describe.

‘So after this fight, when did you and Danny make up again?’ I asked her, hoping not to betray my own unease at her involvement with Danny. ‘Because by the end of the story in circulation, you were happily going off exploring the bays and caves together.’

She patted my knee and smiled. ‘I’ll tell you when I get there.’

In the heat of the day on our fourth visit and with both of us pleasantly drunk, she told me the intimate details of an early relationship she had with Raúl. From this the talk of sex escalated to descriptions of the spread of sexual frustration and experimentation within the group; of things she’d seen people doing; things she had only ever thought about before the trip.

Following these more salacious disclosures, I didn’t understand why she suggested we should go to the water’s edge to see who could be first to make a pebble bounce ten times on the water; but almost before I knew what was happening, on the sand just beyond the reach of the Mediterranean waves, we were having sex for the first time.

For the next two days, our work alternated with pleasure. And if those days marked the peak of our relationship, the descent arrived only too soon. And it began with her sudden confession. ‘You ought to know. I should have told you ages ago. I’m pregnant. It happened on the island. Do you mind?’

I minded very much but managed to mutter that I didn’t. ‘Danny?’

She nodded.

‘How many months? It doesn’t show.’

The answer was about five; she’d conceived right at the end of her time on the island. My immediate thoughts on the matter were more depressed than analytical. They had

nothing to do with the book, but everything to do with my feelings for Ysan and the hopes I'd started to nurture.

The following day she broke down while describing a meeting she had with the now deceased student Maisie, and suddenly everything was over, including the good weather. Trapped by wind and rain inside my villa for the last three days of her visit, she became morose, fractious, even hostile. But not towards me, towards Raúl.

Her hostility was a huge shock. Until then she'd always described the man and their relationship with such warmth and tenderness. Yet from no apparent motive, with December rain lashing the window panes, she was now berating him. She spoke about Raúl not really being dead. Talked almost incoherently about naked pantomimes, winking lights, testes measurements, breeding experiments. Said how much she hated Raúl. There'd been no hint of such venom before, and I grew concerned that she was having some form of serious emotional breakdown, and that if her judgment was impaired then her testimony would be flawed.

I tried to be gentle. 'I can't write any of this. You'll look stupid.'

Her blue eyes flashed with anger. 'No I won't. Why should I?'

When I pushed her gently to elaborate on some of these claims, she began to cry and shake with anger. And then made even more provocative but unspecific suggestions of there having been 'some serious trouble' among the group, and implied there had been moments of 'crisis, that you haven't got a clue about. You wouldn't believe me if I told you.' But no firm details about these events were ever forthcoming, though it was obvious that the mere mention of them was causing her considerable distress. So much so, that once her tears had dried she began to stall and I could see a visible regret taking over - even fear once she

understood she had told me far more than was ever allowed.

On those three final days, there were calm spells when I thought normality and affection, even passion, were returning. But they were interspersed with further displays of her eccentricity, or something much worse: her standing and shivering in the driving rain, crying and moaning for Maisie, who had a particular significance to Ysan that I could not determine; begging me at night to whisper to the baby in her belly; calling me Raúl. And it was with some unease that I drove her to the airport at the end of her stay, my worries for her mental health mingling with concern for our book that had so recently begun to look promising. Really promising.

In the departures hall at Málaga Airport, where I kissed her goodbye, I pleaded with her to open up to me totally the next time we met. She had to. For the sake of her conscience and for the families of the deceased, and for the truth. But she would not meet my eye and her hands trembled until her flight was announced. All she would offer me was an assurance that she would think 'long and hard' about next time and 'how far' she was prepared to go.

The last thing we needed was the publication early in January of photographs of us on the beach, complete with captions that played on the titles of my past books and on her being a 'naked ape watcher'. Clearly our cove hadn't been as private as we thought.

At the time, I blamed those photographs for causing Ysan to end our collaboration, her decision arriving by e-mail in January 2008. In it, she requested that I abandon the book and never try to speak to her again. She was too busy studying for her degree. And she had nothing further of interest to say. Additional correspondence from the group's legal representation and the publisher confirmed her withdrawal and my removal from being the co-author of

their story. The group had decided that in everybody's interests there would now be no book.

But feeling frustrated, thwarted and even betrayed, I couldn't stop there. The notes and tapes from our discussions at Ysan's home in Manchester, and on the beach and at my villa in Spain amounted to a thorough, fascinating, provocative and tantalising account through Ysan's eyes of the first three months on the island - from 1 July 2006 to the last week of September that year - and that account now forms the first part of this book: 'Ysan's Story', a dramatisation of those events, moods, and atmospheres that she related to me. Inevitably, I have had to fill in a few gaps and place some words in people's mouths, but I have tried to stay faithful to the story Ysan told me and not to be influenced by any of the horrendous things I discovered later.

Ysan had let slip that there was more, much more, to be unearthed about events on the island for the ten months that followed the end of her account and which she hadn't, wouldn't, or couldn't describe to me. I was determined to find other ways to dig into what really happened out in the Pacific. A desire that I was eventually able to satisfy by means of a careful and extensive examination of the remarkable physical evidence that had been created by some of the survivors during their occupation of the island. Material that came into my hands in a variety of ways. And it was this material that really compelled me to complete this book, without Ysan and without official cooperation.

'Aftershocks', in the second half of this book, is the story of my attempt to make sense of the evidence, and to piece together a faithful account of the real events that occurred during the year the group was lost to the world. My record in Aftershocks is directly contrary to the testimony of the survivors, and I make no apology for my disturbing conclusions. But it is my belief that the group was transformed on that island. Their behaviour altered in a

way that was wholly alien to them - unthinkable in their lives before the expedition, and just as incongruous now they have rejoined the civilised world. But I am positive I uncovered evidence of the most animalistic, shocking and, to modern eyes, unacceptable behaviour - conduct scarcely distinguishable from that of the apes they were living alongside upon that remote island in the Pacific.

So I present here my account, from 'Ysan's Story' to the missing ten months accrued from secondary evidence and new testimony, leading to my own eventual and traumatic visit to the island. And until a time when an individual from that group steps forward to refute or endorse the claims I make, it is up to the readers of this book, and later the courts, to assess the facts and judge the characters therein.

RB

*January 2009, Fiji*

## YSAN'S STORY

# ONE

*1 July 2006, morning*

AT MIDNIGHT THE half-moon slipped into the western sea leaving only the star-peppered sky to light the boat's journey - not bright enough to pick out the escorting dolphins, but just enough to show the outline of occasional distant islands. A few hours later, in the ruby glow of the not yet risen sun, scattered shapes began to emerge on deck from the darkness.

*Fifteen people. Eight men, seven women ... Or nine students and six advisers ... Or one-and-a-half Spanish, twelve-and-two-halves English and maybe half an Australian (unless Dingo's accent and nickname were an affectation) ...* Ysan was counting. It was the sort of thing she did - at bus stops, in lecture theatres or cinemas - for no other reason than she liked numbers, enjoyed the satisfying way they subdivided, then reassembled themselves in so many different ways. Four people had black hair, four brown, four fair, one blonde, one red - and one, none.

Unable to sleep on the cramped and fish-tainted deck, Ysan was sitting up, her lower half inside a sleeping bag. Although desperate for the loo, she couldn't face picking her way between her recumbent companions to visit the filthy seatless bowl. For a fleeting moment, she wished she were male, licensed to pee over the stern. The boat lurched, creaking the chains of the lifeboat suspended overhead and bouncing her against the wooden fixtures behind.