

MATE
GET TO THE POINT

||||| BY MARA WOLFORD |||||

I get up, make a coffee, light a cigarette and scroll Facebook in order to remind myself that a world outside of my lonely workshop actually exists. The trailer for *Chasing Mavericks* has been posted two dozen times. I scroll down. One of the freeze frames someone posted brings a hit of nausea that catches in my throat. It's a wave sweeping the Point at the Lane on huge swell. I comment, "I did that at age 16, but it wasn't by choice and it wasn't pretty". Comments follow to the tune of NFW, but I don't absorb them or bother responding. I'm mesmerised by the image of something I lived, but could only see from my point of view, without understanding what really took place.

It was a second-into-third reef day at the Lane. Stormy, mushy, rainy and ugly. I was with Artie Deans and Anthony Ruffo. We'd most likely been on a bender for two or three days and needed to refresh our ideas. I can't think of any other reason we decided to surf that day. The lads decided to paddle out from The Stairs; it was Victory-at-Sea, really high tide and smashing against the rocks. I knew that even if I managed to get away from the rocks I'd be swept down to Trees in three minutes flat and would spend the next two hours paddling against the current in the Steamer Lane. I decided to be

cavalier, jump the Point alone, and meet them out there.

I jump the rail and headed out to the Point. Not knowing better than to watch the sets, just march straight ahead. At the highest point of the peninsula, I look up to see Poseidon crashing down. Ground wet from rain both saltwater and fresh.

I'm swept off the 60 ft cliff. Throw my board in front of me and jump to distance myself from the rock. Bump and bangle my way down, into the vortex of the crashing wave that slaps me off my feet. I surface much later, pushed into the toilet bowl that, any other day at the Lane, you strain to notice. The tide is so high that the backwash is bouncing and crossing.

I hear a cry. I look up to the cliff. There's only one person who's witnessed this occurrence. There he is - Squirrel - on the cliff above me, motioning to me what I should do. There wasn't much of anything I could do, but I deeply appreciated his presence. We saw his truck in the parking lot, but typically, he'd be doing the nasty with a wayward blonde in the back cab and not checking the surf on such an inhospitable day. I'm not alone, I tell myself, and even if he can't do a thing to help me, a friend has at least witnessed my final moments.

I punch under one macker, a second and a third. My internal sensory realises that the water is faster than my mass, that I won't hit the cliff because the water will be rebounding by the time I get there. All I have to do is go with the flow until I'm flushed out of purgatory by the River Styx of a current, Squirrel cheering me on from the cliff, set after set. I take the Point, the Slot and the Left on the head before I make it out to Third Peak, where my companions await me.

"What took you so long?" they ask. Nothing, I said, just clearing my thoughts. I got scared on the Point. They had seen everything, and wanted to see if I would break down. I would not.

What makes this recount so personally dramatic is that the mates involved are all now gone: Squirrel OD'd in a sordid hotel room in Buenos Aires last year. Arthur Deans succumbed to a brain tumor after a lifetime of coke-induced epileptic fits in June. Anthony Ruffo will spend the following years on a jail farm, a third conviction for dealing meth. This isn't the fodder for cheesy Hollywood movies, is it? No O'Neill bumper stickers with Live Like Ruffo or anything.

Somehow, I'm glad I did the cliff-fuck for their eyes only. □

MATE
BIG DAY FOR THE CREW

||||| BY JOHN MCGRODER |||||

Rags Rights, 2001. The surf's perfect. Myself, Horto, Leo, Bob and Leroy are getting the shacks of our lives. Anyone who surfed Rags before the earthquakes and tsunamis changed the reef will know that it was a world-class barrel with dire consequences. Come off and you're guaranteed to hit the reef.

This day has size. Six-foot sets. Well overhead and an arm-span wide and tubing. It's the day I score one of the barrels of my life.

Three times I lose sight of the exit and think I'm a goner. On the third time I manage to find the way out and shoot into flat water, heart pumping, adrenal glands on overload. I watch Horto and Leo on their own tubefests and Leroy, Horto's 16-year-old son, score some magnificent tubes on his lid. We're all high on the buzz. I return to the yacht where my best mate, (not to mention beloved future wife) B, is looking on. She seems agitated.

"What's wrong, honey?" I ask as water runs out of my nose.

"I know you're having fun, but, where's my adrenalin rush?"

Try answering that after a session of six-second-plus barrels.

I gaze past her towards the sea in a valiant attempt at searching for an answer. There's a mighty splash in the distance. Dolphins?

"You see that?"

We both watched. Splash again. Dolphins?

"C'mon then, let's go check it out!"

We jump into the tender - 14 functional feet of canary-yellow engineering affectionately known as the Torana - and fang across the body of water between Rags and Thunders. The ruckus was about a mile away. As we approach the scene, a rather large creature sticks its head out of the water. An Orca!

It's hoisted half its body out of the water and is definitely checking us out. After a moment it falls back down and we're left buzzing towards the whale's footprint. There's still whirling in the water as we search for its next likely appearance.

"There!" yells B - clearly having overcome the no-adrenalin-blues - as two Orcas surface, spout air and dive. We race the Torana to the spot, all the while trying

to video the scene. This goes on two or three times before all becomes quiet.

We're sitting still in the water when right next to us, one of the Orca surfaces. This appointed spokes-whale gives a rather loud grunt that we feel more than hear. It's meaning is as clear as if someone's hand delivered a message to us.

"Leave us alone!"

It turns on its back and dives under us. Far bigger than our measly boat. We had no doubt whatsoever it could have flipped us out of that vessel. Both Orcas surface a bit beyond us and it's then we see the baby.

I turn to B and ask, "Is that enough adrenalin for you, sweetheart?" We head back to the yacht. Shaking with rush. The video we shot shows lots of water with the odd shaky glimpse of the whales surfacing and diving. The best part is the squeakiness of my voice. B reckons I sound like a girl. I have read that Orcas pass through tropical zones. It's only the second time I've ever seen them in Indo. The first being off Roti Island.

We recount the story back on the yacht. Everyone's happy for us. But the barrels are still firing, so we

venture back for the arvo session. Horto catches the first wave of the set, then Leo. I watch to see them exit. Only Leo does, then I notice him paddling into the whitewater and know Horto's down.

He drifts into the channel where Leo's holding him. We call for the Torana. Blood's seeping from beneath the footy helmet he's wearing.

Back onboard the yacht we remove the helmet to reveal a serious six-inch gash in the top of his head. It's the kind you look at and think, whoa, where's the doctor?

Horto goes to another place, sort of zens out while I go to work on his noggin. B is both nurse and mother-type figure to Leroy, who's not really dealing with the situation.

I put 10 stitches in and we plan to head back to port straight away, but after a day of rest Horto seems to be OK. He even ends up surfing again by the end of the trip.

Horto tells me later he'd been to a clairvoyant before the trip, who had warned him not to go as there was a good chance he wouldn't come back. □