for very long – when I looked up and saw a ship on the horizon. There was no mistake. It was the long bulky profile of a supertanker.

Chapter 6

Abunai!

In an instant I was on my feet, shouting at the top of my voice and waving frantically. I leaped up and down screaming for them to stop, to hear me, to see me. ‘I’m here! Here! I’m here!’ Only when my throat was raw and I could shout no longer did I stop. The tanker crept tantalisingly slowly along the horizon. It
did not turn, and by then I knew it would not turn. I knew too that no one would be looking, and that even if they were, this entire island would be little more than a distant hazy hump on the horizon. How then could they possibly see me? I could only look on, helpless and distraught, as the tanker moved inexorably further and further away from me until it began to disappear over the horizon. This took all morning long, a morning of dreadful anguish.

As I stood watching on the summit of Watch Hill, my despair was replaced by a burning anger. If I had been allowed to have my fire, there would at least have been a chance they could have spotted the smoke. True, the old man had brought me a sleeping mat and a sheet. He was looking after me, he was keeping me alive, but he was also keeping me prisoner.

As the last vestige of the tanker sank from my view, I promised myself that I would never again let such a chance go by. I felt in my pocket. I still had my precious fire glass. I determined I would do it. I would build another fire, not down on the beach where he could find it, but up here on Watch Hill, behind the rocks and well out of his sight, even if he did have binoculars – and I now had to presume that he did. I would gather a great beacon of wood, but I would not light it. I would set it all up and wait until the moment I saw a ship. If this one had come, I reasoned, then another one would come, had to come, and when it did, I would have my fire glass ready, and a cache of paper-thin, tinder-dry leaves. I would make such a blazing inferno of a fire, a fire that would send up such a towering smoke signal that the next ship that happened along would have to see it.

So now I no longer spent my days just sitting on Watch Hill and waiting. Every hour I was up there I spent building my beacon. I would drag great branches up over the rocky scree from the forest below and pile them high, but on the seaward side of the hilltop – the perfect place for it to be seen by ships, when it was lit – but, in the meantime, not by the prying eyes of the old man who I thought of now as my captor. And he would be watching me – I was quite sure of that now. Through all the fetching and carrying, I kept well out of his sight. Only eyes from